

The Barrage

A Study in Extroversion

By J. D. Beresford

My friend has a wonderful voice, a primitive voice, open-throated and resonant, the great chest roar of the wild. When he shouts he does it without visible effort. The full red of his face may deepen to the opening shades of purple, but that evidence of constriction is due solely to emotion. The lift of a major third in his tone is accomplished without any appearance of muscular effort. He opens another cylinder and lets the additional power find its own pitch in the reverberating brass of the fog-horn. And the effect is as if the devastating crash of the barrage had come suddenly and horribly near. Perhaps, for one instant, the attack of his voice ceases, and then while the room still trembles to the echo of his last statement, the barrage leaps forward and spills its explosion into the secret refuges of my being.

Behind that cover, the sense of the statements he gives forth with such enormous assurance creeps up and falls upon me while I am still insensible. It is as though his argument bayoneted me treacherously while I am paralysed from shock. If my mind were free I could defeat the simple attack of his argument; but should I be given one trifling opportunity for speech I can never take it. My mind is battered, crushed and inert. I dare not lift my head for fear of exposing myself again to that awful approach of the barrage.

My friend has described himself so conclusively in a term of the old free-trade dispute, that nothing could be added to enlighten his definition. He is, and prides himself vociferously on the fact, a whole-hogger. He gets that off on his lower register which is just bearable. There is no need for the barrage to defend the approach of that statement. It is self-evident. The great Welt of his boots, massive as an Egyptian plinth; the stiff hairiness of his bristling tweeds; the honest amazement of his ripe face; the very solidity of the signet ring that is nevertheless not too heavy for his hirsute finger—all these proclaim him as the type and consummation of the whole-hogger.

He adopted the label with pride some time in the middle 'nineties, when he was already a mature, determined and unalterable man of twenty-eight. He was a fervent patriot throughout the Boer War. He has, since December, 1905, spent a fount of energy that would have wrecked the physique of ten average men in denouncing such things as Education Bills, Old Age Pensions, the Reform of the House of Lords, Home Rule—in brief, the Government—or, as he always called it, 'this Government.' And since the beginning of the war he has demonstrated—proving every statement of the Times by the evidence of the *Daily Mail*—that there will never be any truth or sanity in the world until the whole German race is beaten to its perjured knees (his metaphors sometimes have an effect of concentration); until it is so thrashed, courged, humiliated, broken and defeated (a barrage is necessarily redundant) that the last remaining descendants of the Prussian shall crawl, pitifully exposed and humbled, about the earth, begging God and man for forgiveness.

My friend is, in fact, the perfect type of what is known to psycho-analysts as the extrovert. He has never questioned himself, never doubted the infallibility of his own gospel, never known fear. He does not understand the meaning of the word introspection, and feels nothing but pity for a man who halts between two opinions. He divides all mankind into two categories—splendid fellows and damned fools—although I have found the suggestion of a third division in

his description of a querulous Tory as 'a damned fool on the right side.' On the wrong side, however, there are no splendid fellows. As he says, he 'hasn't patience' with anyone who is either so thick-headed or so unscrupulous as to disagree with him in politics.

By way of a hobby he farms 800 acres of land, and he has never had any trouble with his labourers. I will admit that he is generous with a careless, exuberant generosity that does not ask for gratitude. But it is not his generosity that has won for him the devotion of his servants and employees. They bow before his certainty. He is a religion to them, a trustworthy holdfast in this world of unstable things.

And I suppose that is also why he is still 'my friend.' His conversation is nothing but a string of affirmations with none of which I can agree. He is an intolerable bore, and his voice hurts me. But I regard him with wonder and admiration, and when the terrors and oppressions of the world threaten to break my spirit I go to him for strength.

In the early days of our acquaintanceship I used to try, by facial contortions and parenthetic gesture, to indicate my paltry disagreement with his political and social creed. Perhaps I came near at that time to inclusion in the 'Damfool' category; but the nearness of my house, his generosity in overlooking the preliminary marks of my idiocy, and (deciding factor) the inappeasable craving for company which is his only means of expression, influenced him to give me another and yet another chance. He took to putting up the barrage at the least sign of my disapproval, and so converted me—outwardly. While I am with him I relax myself. I stare at him and wonder. I sometimes find myself wishing that I could be like him!

It was, indeed, the thought of so impossible and outrageous an ambition that prompted me to attempt this portrait of him. I have failed, I know, to convey his proper quality. Anyone who has never met my friend will find nothing but the echo and shadow of him in this sketch. But is there anyone who has not met him or some member of his family? Down here I associate him with tile land, but he has business interests connected with the Stock Exchange. And he has brothers, uncles and sons—any number of them—all of the same virtue. They are in the Army, the Law, Medicine, in the Pulpit, in Trade, in the House—in everything. They are all successful, said they have all given their services with immense vigour and volubility to the great task that my friend defines as 'downing the Hun.' They are all men of action, and their thinking is done by a method as simple as simple addition. A few sterling principles are taken for granted, principles that can be applied in such phrases as 'the good of the country,' 'playing the game,' 'Rome was not built in a day,' or 'what I go by is facts,' and from these elementary premisses any and every argument can be deduced by the two-plus-two method. It is the apotheosis and triumph of a priorism. They do not believe in induction, and what they do not believe in does not exist for them. Their strength is in loudness and confidence, and they are very strong.

Nevertheless, puzzling over my friend and his family in my own hair-splitting way, I have been wondering if this loudness is not a sign that the family has lost something of its old power? Their ancestors, also, were men of simple ideas and strong passions, men of inflexible purpose. But they were not, so far as one can judge from history, so blatantly loud. They bear the same kind of relation to my friend that Lincoln does to Roosevelt.

Is the type changing, I ask myself, or only the conditions? And if the latter, is the mail of intense convictions and rigid principles become so much of an anomaly in this new world of ours that the development of the barrage has become necessary as a means of assertion against a people who will question even such a simple premiss as that two added to two invariably produces four? For they do that. Your characteristic man of the age will warn you that the

mathematical statement is an assumption only, not a universal truth. He will probably add that in any case it is useless as an analogy, since it disregards entirely the qualitative value of 'two.'

From the over-conscientious mind such criticisms as this tear away the last hopes of stability. One loses faith in the Cosmos. But my friend smiles his pity for all such damfoohishness. His solid feet are planted on the solid earth. He knows that two and two make four. His ancestors have proved it by their actions. And if such silly questioning of sound principles is persisted in, he waves it aside and asserts himself in his usual effective way.

Nevertheless, as I have said, it seems that that form of barrage was once unnecessary.