

LEST WE MISUNDERSTAND

A FORTNIGHT ago, the Vice-President of the United States of America warned his countrymen of the danger of relapsing after the war into isolationism. A week ago, our own Prime Minister asked that nothing should be said in or out of Parliament likely to create misunderstanding of America. But the chief cause of misunderstandings is ignorance. In a recent attempt to dispel some of that ignorance, the "Sunday Times" (London), printed the following article by Allan Nevins, Professor of American History, Columbia University, New York. A second article by another observer will appear next week

AMERICANS and Britons, toiling, fighting, and dying together, must co-operate more closely than two democracies have ever co-operated before. This does not necessarily mean that they must like each other. History has its numerous instances of nations acting as effective allies while indifferent or chilly in their mutual regard. Still, as the hope of civilisation increasingly depends upon our firm partnership in peace as well as war, a warmer feeling than esteem is needed—a genuine and unforced predilection. Can it be achieved? Can ancient roots of dislike and distrust be plucked out and not merely covered over by hush-hush methods?

Little is to be gained in analysing this problem by running over the standing American complaints. Many of these

complaints are merely on the surface, such as Britain's bad historical record (as if Britain didn't also have a noble historical record, and as if our own were not equally mixed). The sordid Empire (as if that Empire had not held a fourth of the globe in peace, order, and ever-advancing civilisation to our own direct benefit). The Indian chapter in particular (as if for 40 years Britain had not sedulously developed self-government in India and had not guaranteed full freedom after the war). British superciliousness (as if Lowell had not hit the nail on the head when he wrote that Britons were supercilious because they found so many poor imitations of themselves in America, and as if Americans were not nowadays the more supercilious of the two). Such American complaints are, like certain similar British aspersions upon American his-

tory, American expansion, and American manners, not difficult to attack.

Mis-Education

What are the fundamental difficulties? While in part created by under-education on both sides of the water, they are more largely the product of mis-education. Of course, it is impossible to speak either of 47,000,000 Britons or 133,000,000 Americans as if they were uniform, coherent groups. They are composite bodies of highly diverse individuals. Some Tory Englishmen dislike America for its radical democracy; many Labourite English distrust it for its ingrained conservatism. The Virginia planter, the Pittsburgh iron master, and the Boston Irish-American have very different images of Great Britain. But when we confine ourselves to the great middle-class norm in both lands, or to the consensus of opinion, we can identify certain distortions which engender endless misunderstandings.

On the American side, one of the principal distortions is the tendency to regard Great Britain as still lapped in the Victorian age. Tens of millions of Americans still think of England as a

land of rigid class lines, complacent acceptance of the gulf between rich and poor; hierarchical snobbery and smug unprogressiveness; a land also of rampant Imperialist exploiting of inferior races under a hypocritical show of benevolence, a land, finally, where a grasping diplomacy uses the wealth of the City and the might of the Navy to gain its ends. That is, multitudes of us still think of Britain in terms appropriate to 1890 and Tennyson, Trollope and Alma-Tadema.

Actually, Britain is now a land of fierce and urgent economic democracy which makes Victorian modes seem deadlier than the dodo. Ideas thought to be radical in America appear conservative in England. While we talk of limiting incomes to 25,000 dollars a year, the British have done it. Alton Locke no longer looks with bitter envy at the gentleman in his Cambridge chambers. Going to Cambridge on a scholarship, Alton Locke has a good room and as much consideration in other ways as anybody.

Revolutions Without the "R"

The British always leave the initial "R" off their revolutions. They often keep the outward shell of the past while

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