

THE NEW PARTITION OF POLAND

(By G. K. CHESTERTON, in the *New Witness*.)

It is apparently the fact that Mr. George, or rather his cosmopolitan counsellors, have agreed to repeat the Prussian policy of the partition of Poland. It is by far the most enormous and sensational event since the outbreak of war, and perhaps since the crime which it copies. It is, therefore, characteristic of the journalism of the Newspaper Trusts, which is not only shallow but narrow and timid, that comparatively little notice has been taken of it; and that the newspapers have made a much larger display of some conversational platitudes by Mr. George, which were given to one French paper, and laughed at more or less delicately in most other French papers. He seems to have stated that there are no real differences at the Peace Conference; in the glow of that spontaneous impulse which always inspires politicians to say, quite needlessly, what everybody knows to be untrue. It is a kind of art for art's sake. For the rest, it has no point except a personal one; and only served to illustrate the one permanent characteristic of one unstable personality. The chief mark of Mr. George, apart from all moral names for it, black or white, is simply this: that the European War and the Russian Revolution, the victory on the Marne and the partial advance on the Somme, the disaster of Caporetto and the disaster of St. Quentin, the defeat of Prussia and the betrayal of Poland, are not incidents in European history, but simply incidents in the career of Mr. George; and are credited and debited to him and by him, exactly like the Marconi scandal or the Harmsworth scare. The fashionable press, always prompt to bring precisely the wrong charge against anybody, once gently complained that Mr. George was never at Westminster. As a fact he is always at Westminster; or on the sort of platforms that are carpentered by the caucus of Westminster. He is certainly never in Paris; and it would be the most charitable view of his action to say that he has not the faintest notion of what is really happening there.

Anyhow, what is happening there is treason; whether he is so ignorant as not to know it or so ignominious as not to mind it. The new partition of Poland is a policy adopted probably under the pressure of the German Jews, and certainly to the special advantage of the Germans. It takes a new and modified form, of course, from that originally given it by its famous or infamous founder, Frederick the Great. It uses the democratic excuses of the twentieth century, as he used the dynastic excuses of the eighteenth century. It pretends to make the old Polish port of Dantzic a free city, though it will obviously be under German influence; it pretends that the Poles will have every kind of easy access to it, though it is obvious that they can only have any access to it through their worst enemies, the Germans. It lugs in, with learned and heavy hypocrisy, the old statistical argument, which has already had to be abandoned in the case of Alsace, though it was equally applicable to Alsace, and might easily have been equally applicable to Antwerp. We do not know whether it is worth while when writing for an intelligent class of readers to expose the fallacy of the argument for the fiftieth time. It may be enough to state here the following elementary proposition: that when you have discovered as a fact and accepted as an axiom, as the whole basis of your argument and the sole excuse of your actions, the view that a certain empire has been extended entirely by force and fraud, by force in making war on real communities and fraud in packing their country afterwards with artificial communities, it is illogical to the point of idiocy to count the conquerors whom it is your whole aim to depose, against the conquered whom it is your whole aim to deliver. Such a policy can have no conceivable upshot except the encouragement of invasion: since any successful invasion will become a democratic possession. As a matter of fact, it will be worse even than this, for it will specially encourage the invasion, first when it is despotic and second when it is tyrannical; when it is despotic, because an arbitrary Power can order colonisation as it orders conquest; when it is tyrannical, because a bad government is more likely to drive the original natives

in exile, as happened in the case of Alsace, and has already received its only rational treatment in the case of Alsace. The only rational treatment in such a case is simply to restore; it is the only possible discouragement of aggression, because it is the threat that such stolen lands will always be restored. The remnant of the original conquerors, large or small, who are by our whole theory and practice people already in a false position and in the wrong place, have then a right on common Christian grounds to some consideration and provision, as if they were themselves exiles. They have no right whatever to vote as if they were themselves citizens. The Germans have a right to rule themselves in Germany; they have no right to all the forts and ports and outposts they have garrisoned or colonised, as part of an expansion which we are by hypothesis treating as an evil. The only way to prevent our award being a mere prize for loot, is to treat land upon the ancient moral principle of property, and restore to the heirs and representatives of those who suffered robbery the things of which they were robbed. The chief thing of which Poland was robbed was not merely her land, but her power, her position in Europe as a great nation, her capacity to play a great part. If we give her this port, we restore to her this part; if we deny her this port, we deny her this part. We shall hope up to the last moment to hear such a denial denied.

But of course it is idle to discuss such ideals, when the men who pull the strings of our politics are the enemies of all our ideals. We hope that most of us would defend our own ideals, even against our own interests; we should lament the injustice to so Christian and chivalrous a people, even if it were of some material advantage to our own people. We have risked many remonstrances among our own friends, by doing so touching the chief parallel to the case of Poland; the case of Ireland. But as a fact, in this case, we are so far from pleading for purely Polish interests that we might well be pleading for purely English interests. We might raise some protest even against an attempt to ruin Poland in order to aggrandise England. What are we to say of those Englishmen who attempt to ruin Poland in order to ruin England? Well, most people know by this time what is to be said of such Englishmen: that many of them are not Englishmen, and that the rest care for something else very much more than for England. Many of them do not appear by name in the discussion at all, many of them appear by names that are not their own. But the broad fact is that their motives are not explored, even when their theories are exposed. This thing is not being done that the Germans may rule themselves, or even that the English may rule the Germans; but rather that the German Jews may rule everybody, including the statesmen of England. It is done simply and solely because the Jews hate the Poles, and because the politicians fear the Jews. It means the union of Teutonic tyranny with almost Asiatic anarchy, and a new nightmare for all the nations of the west. It is long since small men, acting from small motives, have been able to do so great a thing.

Meanwhile, may we mildly wonder what our great patriotic press is doing, and whether it is saying anything at all adequate about this peril to all patriots? Where are all those eager journalists who were so bent on achieving British victory and power that they were driven to insult the conqueror of Khartoum and the glorious rearwards of Mons? Have they anything to offer except vacant gossip and hazy half-approval, when "the little Welsh attorney," whom they denounced at Limehouse, makes a surrender to Prussia, which is a direct threat to England? Was it necessary to placard our country with vulgar panic to win the war, in order to change the subject and talk about the weather while we are losing the objects of the war? We confess to a popular taste in the matter, and greatly prefer their previous vulgarity to their present exquisite refinement; for we think that the tone of moderation which has recently crept over our press is a moderation literally equivalent to madness. And we are at least resolved that, when the great Paderewski comes across Europe to the Council and finds the golden gates of usury shut in his face, one word shall be said in English which is not shameful to England.