

**A Collage of Impressions about Pre-World War One Europe --
(from *Voices 1870-1914* by Peter Vansittart)**

“Despite periodic international crises, people seemed more worried by poverty, strikes, birth control...sexual jealousy and free love ('Marriage,' reflected Robert Louis Stevenson, 'is sort of friendship recognized by the police') than by the likelihood of abrupt extermination.”

-- Peter Vansittart

SOCIAL CLASSES

"Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not -- some people of course never do -- the situation is in itself delightful... The implements of the little feast have been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country house in what I shall call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. The lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour. From five o'clock to eight is on certain occasions a little eternity; but on such an occasion as this, the interval could be only an eternity of pleasure." -- Henry James

"Manners were attended to with special care. When the young ladies were invited out to tea, they were set down to a meal of thick bread and butter before starting, in order that their appetites should appear elegant. They were commanded to leave something on their plate, however pleasing the dish."-- M. V. Hughes [British schoolteacher and writer]

"Ladies should cultivate an expression of languid uselessness." -- *Alexandra Magazine*

Undressing the Cocotte --"It was no small affair: full armour, shield, yoke, sheath, whalebone, shoulder-pieces--gauntlets, corselet, halters of pearls, shields of feathers, baldrics of satin, velvet and jewels, coats of mail -- these knights bristling with tulle, and eyelashes, these sacred scarabs armed with asparagus tongs, these samurais of sable and ermine, these dreadnaughts of pleasure from dawn to dusk harnessed and caparisoned by sturdy wenches--seemed strangely stiff in front of their host as if unable to extract from an oyster anything except its pearl...The idea of undressing one of these ladies seemed an expensive enterprise which would have to be organized like a household furniture removal." --Jean Cocteau

“For the fashionable beauty, life is an endless carnival, and dress a round of disguises. She does everything...She is a sportswoman, an athlete, a ballroom divinity. She is alternatively a horsewoman, a huntress, a bold and skillful swimmer; she drives a pair of horses like a charioteer, mounts the roof of a four-in-hand, plays lawn tennis, is at home on a race course or the deck of a fast yacht. She is aware of the refinements of dining and has a pretty taste in vintages. She is a power at the theatre or the Opera; and none is more brilliant at a supper party.”
-- *Graphic Magazine*

"The infant Keir Hardie shared a one-room cabin with his parents and nine siblings. Slum children, huddled together, could hide from some terrors, though perhaps developed others. Scores of children were raised in brothels, for abstruse sexual torments. In 1910, a twelve-year-old English boy got a birching and a seven-year sentence, ostensibly for stealing a fivepenny lump of coal. An eight-year old girl was the oldest of a group working fourteen hours a day in the fenlands, under an old overseer 'carrying a long stick which he did not forget to use.' "

-- Peter Vansittart

"The English were more interested in the inequality of horses than in the equality of man."

-- G. K. Chesterton

"Politicians might fear the extension of franchises [the right to vote], as likely to endanger property, but forgot that the poor do not despise property but merely wanted more of it for themselves. Proudhon complained that universal suffrage is a vote for counter-revolution."

-- Peter Vansittart

"It was in this house that I first noticed the extraordinary demeanor of good English servants, who move about with a sort of assured aristocratic manner of their own, and, far from objecting to being servants, or wishing to rise in the social scale as they do in America, they are proud of working 'for the best of families.' Their fathers did it before them, and their children will do it after them. " -- Isadora Duncan

She was poor, but she was honest,
Victim of the squire's whim:
First he loved her, then he left her,
And she lost her honest name.

The she ran to London,
For to hide her grief and shame;
There she met another squire,
And she lost her name again.

See her riding in her carriage,
In the Part and all so gay:
All the nibs and nobby persons
Come to pass the time of day.

See the little old-world village
Where her aged parents live,
Drinking the champagne she sends them;
But they never can forgive.

In the rich man's arms she flutters,
Like a bird with broken wings:
First he loved her, then he left her,
And she hasn't got a ring.

See him in the splendid mansion,
Entertaining with the best,

While the girl that he has ruined,
Entertains a sordid guest.

See him in the House of Commons,
Making laws to put down crime,
While the victim of his passions
Trails her way through mud and slime.

Standing on the bridge at midnight,
She says: 'Farewell, blighted Love.'
There's a scream, a splash -- Good Heavens!
What is she a-doing of?

Then they drag her from the river,
Water from her clothes they wrang,
For they thought that she was drowned;
But the course got up and sang;

'It's the same the whole world over,
It's the poor that gets the blame,
It's the rich that gets the pleasure.
Isn't it a blooming shame?' --Anonymous

OPTIMISM

"It seemed that human beings might really be on the point of becoming civilized...the forces of reaction and barbarism were still there, but they were in retreat...In the Zabern incident and the Denshawi incident, a new note began to be heard in what may be called world opinion. It seemed at last to be generally agreed that for a German officer to beat up an Alsatian cobbler was an outrage against law and order and decency and civilization. When at Denshawi, a British court passed savage sentences upon Egyptian villagers for killing a British officer who insisted on killing the villagers' pigeons, a cry went up, not against the villagers but against the insolence of the officers and the vindictiveness and savagery of the judges. For the first time in the history of the world, the rights of Jews, cobblers, colored men, not to be beaten, hanged or judicially murdered by officers, junkers or white men was publicly admitted; and it looked for a moment as if militarism, imperialism, and antisemitism were on the run." -- Leonard Woolf

"The Hapsburg Empire...was not an ideal State; but before the First World War, summary trials, witch hunts, torture, public executions, secret death-sentences, concentration camps, deportations and dispossessions were unknown there; so were slave labour -- Austria had no colonies -- and child labor." -- Oscar Kokoshka

"In a socialist society, the 'fragmented' man would be replaced by the 'completely developed,' he for whom different social functions are but alternative forms of activity. People would fish, hunt, or engage in literary criticism without being professional fishermen, huntsmen or critics."
-- Karl Marx

"To combat famine, all that is necessary is for men to do more good deeds. A good deed does not consist in handing bread to the starving, but in loving the starving as much as the over-fed.

Loving is more important than handing out food...Therefore, as you ask me what is to be done, I reply: arouse, if you can--and you can--the love of men for one another, not now when there is a famine, but always and everywhere."

--Leo Tolstoy

"The motor-car will help solve the congestion of traffic." -- A. J. Balfour

REACTIONS TO THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

"Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and D. H. Lawrence condemned Science for warping live human awareness, detaching humanity from the warmly primitive, mysterious, intuitive: for surrendering to the inorganic, materialistic, mechanical. This may have prompted Alexander Blok [a Russian poet]: 'The sinking of the Titanic has made me indescribably happy; there is, despite everything, an ocean.'" -- Peter Vansittart

"The tyranny of the majority, of which we have so much, as entered into our souls as well as our lives, and is insidiously transforming us into a very dull, highly respectable, and intensely monotonous collection of insignificant units. If manners have grown softer, we suffer from a stifling atmosphere of public opinion, in which any vigorous development of peculiar idiosyncrasies is fast becoming impossible...Originality is growing to be a term of abuse; and ridicule is becoming a more terrible instrument of oppression than was ever wielded by oppressors in the old days of persecution with fire and sword. We have ceased to grow forest trees, and are content with a vast growth of carefully clipped and preserved garden shrubs."

-- Leslie Stephen [Man of letters and father of Virginia Woolf]

CAPITALISM

"A desire for wealth is the source of all progress. Civilization comes from what men call greed."
-- Anthony Trollope

REVOLUTION

"Strikes have created in the proletariat the noblest, profoundest and most moving feelings that they possess."-- George Sorel

"Determined revolutionary action together with a deep feeling for humanity -- that alone is the essence of Socialism. A world must be overturned, but every tear that flows and might have been staunched is an accusation; and a man hurrying to achieve some great deed and who knocks down a child out of insensitive carelessness commits a crime. " -- Rosa Luxemburg

"Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for whoever thinks differently." -- Rosa Luxemburg

WAR

"From a European war, a revolution may arise, and the ruling class would do well to consider this. But it may also result, over a long period, in crises of counter-revolution, or furious reaction of dictatorships, of monstrous militarism, a long chain of retrograde violence." - Jean Jaurés

"In Europe, the epoch of conquest is over, and save for the Balkans and perhaps the fringes of the Austrian and Russian empires, it is as certain as anything in politics that the frontiers of our national states are finally drawn. My own belief is that there will be no more wars among the six Great Powers." -- H. N. Brailsford, political author, in 1913

