CHAUVINISM

By

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Chauvinism is a dangerous epidemic which is unfortunately spreading throughout the civilized world. In many countries to-day nationalism is only another name for chauvinism. Everything good and bad immediately makes its influence felt in the domain of culture. Nationalism which has become chauvinism must eventually lead to the decay of art and science. We are even told that every country ought to have its own culture and science as if art and science, which are universal, could be fitted into the narrow frame of nationalism.

But who would undertake to deprive art and science of their universal character? As a Russian I can speak on Russia, which has never known of chauvinism either in the past or present. We should always remember how hospitable Russia always was, not only in the great days of Kiev, but in the post-Petrian period, and always ready to assimilate foreign cultures.

In the Tretiakov Art Gallery, Moscow, there is an important foreign section. The Hermitage which contains a splendid collection of old masters is one of the treasure places of the world. The collections of Stchukin, Morozov, Terestchenko, Princes Tenishev and a host of other Russian collectors contain many masterpieces of foreign art. No one ever objected to this influx of foreign art, on the contrary, the younger generation rejoiced at the opportunity to study foreign masterpieces from both East and West.

Nor did Russian art suffer from this abundance of foreign art. Where the soul of a people is strong there is little danger of imitation or loss of character, for being in itself creative, it is able to assimilate almost anything.

Like a healthy organism it will come to digest everything that is given it and, at the same time, express the soul of its people. On the other hand chauvinism must be considered as the hallmark of envy or timidity.

The name of Siam has recently been changed to Maung-Tai because Siam is a foreign word. Perhaps the new name carries with it magical powers for the good. Maps are now altered almost every year and students have a hard time to
keep up with all the changes that are going on. Greece may come to change its name to Hellas, and if thus could produce artists and philosophers as in classic times we should not object. If such changes are due to chauvinism then they are deplorable like so many other manifestation of our time. In ancient times Paris was known as Lutetia and many English cities bore Roman names. We cannot imagine, however, the name of Paris being changed to some ancient Gallic name just to satisfy some political prejudice.

Fortunately the word ‘chauvinism’ has never been much in honour and like those other ‘isms’—alcoholism, narcotism, it always arouses a sense of shame.

It would be interesting to discover in what circumstances and by whom the word ‘chauvinism’ was invented. We have heard that the guillotine was invented for the sake of mercy. Perhaps chauvinism was created then, in order to promote the triumph of Culture.

During world reconstruction beware of chauvinism!