

Periodical
F77

40063
45



The Forum

JANUARY, 1923

A LOST FORCE: M. JOSEPH CAILLAUX

By STEPHANE LAUZANNE

THERE is something tragic in the destiny of M. Joseph Caillaux, and to trace his picture faithfully, it would be necessary to call upon the genius of a Sophocles.

Here we have a man who had in his favor youth—he is still a comparatively young man—fortune, renown, a remarkable intelligence, and a name respected and loved in France by all who were for order and Republican traditions. He also possessed an extraordinary capacity for work. In short he had everything to be happy and popular, and to have a brilliant political career. Yet, he is the most unhappy, the most hated of all men in France. His name is pronounced with affection by the partisans of anarchy and disorder only. His career is but a suite of drama and ruin. He has been ostracised in his own country and has become a sort of pariah. What mysterious fatality, then, has been conjured upon him? It is that that I would like to discover in an unbiased manner, without hate or passion.

Let us first consider his past—that is, the tragedy of his existence.

M. Joseph Caillaux made his political debut with the dawn of the present century, in 1900. He made his first bow under the wing of one of the greatest statesmen of the Third Republic, Waldeck-Rousseau. He entered public life as Minister of Finance. His father, who had been a member of the Government headed by Marshall MacMahon, was most moderate and conservative in his policies. He had himself been brought up in a bourgeois family, and was considered by all to be both conservative and moderate. All Frenchmen, therefore, who stood for moderation and conservatism, were glad to see him in the public eye. And, it may be said, that during the two years that he administered the finances of the nation under the Premiership of Waldeck-Rousseau, he gave not even the slightest indication that he would one day turn his back on these principles.

It was only four or five years later that he showed his true character—that of a radical, breaking loose from former traditions. A grave fiscal problem faced the French Government; should it or should it not adopt the income tax? M. Caillaux had long studied the system in vogue in England and in the United States; and he was seduced by the theoretic justice of the tax on incomes. He pronounced himself strongly in favor of applying it in France. But, in France, a great majority were against the income tax. France is a country, which, in the matter of taxes, has a very particular spirit. There is perhaps no better taxpayer in the entire world than the French bourgeois. He grumbles a bit, it is true, but he always pays. He even pays with better grace if what he must pay is dissimulated; and that is why indirect taxation is so successful in France. He even pays more voluntarily if he isn't worried, if his private business isn't meddled with, if no one endeavors to gauge his fortune. One formality in particular went against his grain in the application of the income tax—the necessity of declaring his income. In France, a father does not even tell his son the amount of his income, nor do brothers confide this matter to each other; it can therefore

BOUND
AUG 9 '90

A LOST FORCE: M. JOSEPH CAILLAUX 1089

be very well imagined that a Frenchman has no desire to confide it to the Government. Three-fourths of France therefore rose in anger against the application of the income tax.

M. Caillaux's fault lay not in the fact that he presented and defended an unpopular law: it is the duty of every statesman to brave unpopularity, when he considers a reform just! His fault lay in the fact that he presented the income tax without consideration for the feelings of those he offended. He presented it aggressively—brutally almost. The demagogues and the Socialists acclaimed him wildly. "At last!" Jaurés exclaimed, "We shall have a census of fortunes in France." And, in the mouths of Socialists, the word "census" is a mere camouflage of the word "confiscation." On the other hand, the middle-class, the peasantry, and all who possessed small fortunes—the majority in France—were afraid. All looked askance at the young leader, who, although he himself possessed a comfortable income, menaced the incomes of others. Everyone felt anxious or angry with this conservative who had suddenly become the idol of the radicals. He was called "*the plutocratic demagogue*." And this was the first falling out that M. Caillaux had with public opinion in France.

Another misunderstanding—more grave this time—occurred. M. Caillaux had been Minister of Finance under several Premiers, notably under M. Clemenceau, who used to say, "I have two Ministers with whom I can do nothing: one is Briand, and the other is Caillaux. One thinks he is Christ; and the other thinks himself Napoleon." In 1911, M. Caillaux became Premier. Suddenly, he found himself face to face with one of the gravest crises that France had experienced before the war—that of Morocco. Eight days after the new Premier had come into power, the Kaiser sent the "Panther" to Agadir. It was a warning and a menace at the same time. It was necessary to negotiate with Germany—a negotiation that was arduous, painful, and replete with thorny difficulties.

M. Caillaux showed himself to be resolute, active and courageous. He maintained the cause of France and disputed every step. But, instead of negotiating with Germany through the usual channel, that is, his Minister of Foreign Affairs, and through the duly accredited ambassadors, he negotiated through his own agents: a business-man by the name of Fondere; an advertising man by the name of Alphonse Lenoir; and a banker named Spitzer. When this was aired it caused some scandal.

I remember how one evening, in August, 1911, I personally called M. Caillaux's attention to the emotion engendered by his use of such strange negotiators.

"I am working in the best interests of peace and of my country," he replied rather harshly. "I have the right to choose the instruments I think best suited to the purpose."

And, at the same time, the Quai d'Orsay, ignoring everything, continued its negotiations through the usual diplomatic channels. Disastrous in itself this state of affairs proved to be even more disastrous in that it created an incident of extreme gravity, that later weighed heavily on the political career of M. Caillaux, affecting his very destiny.

For many years, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs had been in possession of the secret code used by the German diplomatic service. When a telegram was therefore sent by the German Embassy in Paris to the Wilhelmstrasse at Berlin, the Quai d'Orsay knew its contents at once, just as if the message had been written out plainly. It was of incalculable advantage to French diplomacy, as it was thus able to see all the cards. One day, in the course of a secret conference with Germany, through the agency of his financiers, M. Caillaux, either negligently or in a moment of forgetfulness, exclaimed; "Why should Germany refuse me this concession? I know that the German Government has already instructed its Ambassadors to grant it." It was a bad slip, as he thus showed that he had deciphered the correspondence that had been going on between Wilhelmstrasse and the German Embassy in Paris.

The repercussion was terrible. First of all, Germany naturally changed the code, and the Quai d'Orsay lost an important advantage. Then, all Frenchmen who were aware of this incident were logically indignant, accusing M. Caillaux of having, through his carelessness, compromised one of the most important of his country's defenses.

This was the second misunderstanding to occur between M. Caillaux and his countrymen. And, the consequence of this misunderstanding was tragic indeed.

Among the men who were aware of all the details regarding the arduous negotiations of 1911, and particularly the code incident, were M. Gaston Calmette, managing editor of the *Figaro*. When, in the spring of 1914, M. Caillaux came into power for the third time as Minister of Finance in a cabinet presided over by M. Doumergue, Calmette and the *Figaro* opened a violent campaign against him. We know how it ended—in blood.

One evening in March, 1914, as M. Caillaux entered his office in the Ministry of Finance, the telephone bell rang. He took up the receiver and heard this terribly laconic message: "Monsieur le Ministre, your wife has just killed Calmette."

Calmette died several hours after he had been shot by Mme. Caillaux, Caillaux was obliged to resign, and Mme. Caillaux, arrested, was tried and acquitted. . . . That is common history. But what is less known, is that on Calmette's body were found several secret documents on green paper—the very documents that established the fact that M. Caillaux had by his imprudence apprised Germany of France's knowledge of her diplomatic code.

Six days after Mme. Caillaux had been acquitted, in July 1914, another drama surged upon the world stage—a drama that has left the peoples of the earth panting with exhaustion—the Great War. In the immensity of the drama that unrolled itself, the Caillaux case would have been easily forgotten. It was enough that M. Caillaux secluded himself and kept quiet. But, it had never been in M. Caillaux's

nature to remain in seclusion and hold his peace. A sort of fatality has ever pushed him to seek the limelight, and the noise of crowds. He had ever wanted to advance the hands of the clock of destiny and sound his own hour. And, as every time, instead of rising to the surface he engulfed himself more and more.

In the midst of the War, he gave rise to all sorts of unpleasant incidents, as in Paris, where he sported the uniform of Army paymaster on the Grands Boulevards; at Vichy where he went for the season; and in Argentina, where he was sent on an official mission. But, the drop that caused the cup, already full of boiling water, to overflow, was his trip to Italy.

In December, 1916, M. Caillaux, accompanied by his wife, arrived in Rome; and there, at the most critical moment of the War, spoke in such a manner to the Italian statesmen that M. Aristide Briand, then Premier of France, who is one of the most indulgent and conciliant of men, was forced to send the following telegram to the French Ambassador at Rome; Christmas night:—

Paris, December 25, 1916.

"I beg you to inform M. Sonnino that M. Caillaux is in no way authorized to speak in any manner in the name of the Government, Parliament, or French opinion. If what you have been informed with regard to his statements is true, they strictly represent his own personal opinion, and should what he said be known in France, it is certain to cause general reprobation."

Signed: *Aristide Briand.*

The effect was tragic indeed. M. Caillaux, according to what was later brought out as his trial before the Supreme Court, had declared that France could not continue the War after the Spring of 1917, and that France ought to conclude first peace and then an alliance with Germany. In the proposed peace treaty, M. Caillaux was ready to sacrifice to Germany those heroic little nations, who like Serbia fought in defense of their liberty.

A second telegram sent out on December 26, 1916, was even more energetic. M. Briand advised the French Ambassador at Rome to tell the Italian Government "*that it is free to act as it sees fit with regard to M. Caillaux,*" that is, free to arrest him; and that if rigorous measures were to be taken against him, his papers were to be confiscated. If M. Caillaux was ready to deliver the Allies of France into the hands of Germany, M. Briand was ready to deliver M. Caillaux to Italy. Italy confiscated all of M. Caillaux's papers which the latter had placed in a safety vault in Florence, and put them at the disposal of France.

Two of these papers have since become famous, as these, as much as the statements he made in Rome, caused his condemnation by the Senate sitting as the Supreme Court of France. These two papers in M. Caillaux's handwriting, were entitled, respectively, "*The Rubicon*" and "*The Suspects.*" Those at least were the titles given them by M. Caillaux when he edited them in the course of a rather singular hour of meditation.

"*The Rubicon*" was nothing more nor less than a project to overthrow the legal Government. The author endeavored to show how, with the aid of several Corsican regiments, he figured on overthrowing the existing Government established by the Constitution, and with several friends assume the dictatorship. The list of "Suspects" comprised the names of men in the public eye, politicians, members of Parliament, newspaper managers, whom it would be necessary to arrest or exile.

In self defence, M. Caillaux claimed that these documents were but the result of his intimate dreams, which he had put on paper; and that no one had any more right to question him regarding these than regarding the intimate thoughts inscribed in his brain.

I don't know what opinion a free country like America would hold in this regard; but I imagine that if the Attorney-General of the United States were to be presented with documents conceived and written by an American politician,

in which he proposed the sending of troops against Washington, the overthrow of the Government established by the Constitution, and his assumption of absolute power, he would certainly set the wheels of justice in motion. This is exactly what the French Government did in 1917.

Before the Chamber of Deputies, as before the Supreme Court, M. Caillaux defended himself with extraordinary eloquence and ability, winning even the admiration of his judges. He complained that he had been the victim of snares that were ceaselessly placed in his path; the people who came to see him in Italy, and made him talk, were snares; adventurers like Bolo and Almeyreda who followed in his wake were snares; he had been trapped like a wild thing of the woods adventuring innocently along unknown paths.

"I may have," he exclaimed, "sinned unthinkingly, by a sort of aristocratic disdain with which I am often reproached, quite reasonably at times. But I have sinned more often through an excess of confidence and generosity. Do you think it mere chance that so many adventurers have converged towards me?"

As for his policy, he claimed ever to have leaned on the side of peace. What he desired was universal peace—peace for humanity. His formula was exactly that of President Wilson: "No annexation! No War Indemnities! And the right of self-determination for all peoples!"

Yet, by a small majority, the Supreme Court found him guilty, and condemned him to three years in prison, a ten years' suspension of his civic rights, and interdiction of residence for a period of five years. The suspension of his civic rights deprived him of his right to vote and to hold office; and the interdiction of residence forbid his living in Paris and several other large cities in France.

Several days after the verdict, M. Caillaux was liberated, having been in prison for almost three years. But he now leads a miserable existence. Every time that he shows himself in public, he is certain to be ill-treated and insulted. He

is always certain to find in his path a former soldier or the mother of a soldier who had made the supreme sacrifice for his country, who shower reproaches on his head. A cruel sunset indeed, for an existence that might have been proud and triumphant!

Thus runs the story of M. Caillaux's past.

I have given some space to this past, first because it helps one better to understand M. Caillaux's character, and again because it may help to prognosticate his future. The best means at hand to foretell the future has ever been the study of the past.

All may thus study M. Caillaux's character in the lines traced above. He is a man of exceptional ability and of exceptional faults. He is possessed of real courage; but this courage has ever pushed him to rub popular sentiment or the nation the wrong way. He is possessed of a remarkable intelligence; but his intelligence had never stood him in good stead when danger threatened. He is certainly honest; but he has ever surrounded himself with some of the worst adventurers and rascals on earth. Above all, he is possessed of a febrile impulsivity and a morbidness that causes him to lend an ear to the latest speaker, being unable to discern truth from lies and flattery.

I had the opportunity of judging him myself one tragic evening in the summer of 1911, when France was within an inch of war. I came to see him, as I had come to see him every evening, at his office, where I found him nervous, agitated and anxious.

"May I," I inquired, "Ask you the trouble?"

"You may," he replied, and handing me a paper, he exclaimed tersely, "Read this . . ."

It was an alarming report on the military situation of France. The writer pointed out that the troops which were at the time executing a series of manoeuvres in the East, were not well trained, that the war material was bad, that the aviation of the country was mere child's play, and briefly that, if war broke out, France would surely be defeated.

"Who sent you that?" I asked. "Does it come from General Headquarters or from some high military authority?"

"No," he replied, "It has been sent to me anonymously. Don't you consider it rather disquieting?"

That was, and that is Caillaux. He was then Premier, having at his beck and call every possible source of information, and every power of investigation; yet he believed an anonymous communication. An anonymous letter was enough to shake his judgment and trouble his calm!

He seems to suffer from the mania of persecution. His great leit-motif is that he is surrounded by enemies. He has, in fact, a most implacable enemy—*himself*. Here we have the enemy that caused his downfall. It is this enemy that has kept him from getting to his feet once more after the peripetics of his career and the tragedies in which he figured. It is the enemy that will keep him from coming to the surface to-morrow.

Those who predict that M. Caillaux will soon play an important part in the destinies of France, know neither M. Caillaux nor France. They first forget that the Supreme Court has suspended M. Caillaux's civic rights for a period of ten years, which means that he can neither vote nor hold office before 1930. They also forget that even if France is at times fickle in her affections, she is less so in her antipathies. When a man is popular in France, it is seldom for very long; but, once he becomes unpopular, he often remains so as long as he lives. They forget, above all, that M. Caillaux has, for a democracy, one of the gravest of all faults, that of causing it to fear for its safety. Democracies often allow themselves to be fooled, and even violated—but never forgive those who alarm them. And M. Caillaux is alarming because of his lack of ponderation. He is like a powerful locomotive without brakes. One never knows what he is liable to do! He has already derailed several times—and there is nothing that people fear more than to travel in a train with an unreliable locomotive.

A characteristic sign of this fear was recently remarked

at Marseilles in the course of a meeting of advanced liberals. M. Caillaux is a member of this party. It is composed of proved partisans of M. Caillaux. Several friends proposed the organization of a campaign throughout France to protest against his condemnation and to prove that his policies during the war were sound. But M. Herriot, Mayor of Lyons, who today heads the party, put his hand down on this proposition.

"You may protest against his condemnation as much as you wish," he declared, "but we must never accept his policies. I make all reservations in his regard; I can never agree with his '*Rubicon*'!"

The congress ranged itself on the side of M. Herriot, almost unanimously. And, if the old stalwarts of M. Caillaux themselves repudiate the policies of their erstwhile chief, who will support him?

No! M. Caillaux will not come back to power in France, neither tomorrow, or after tomorrow. God only has the right to say *never*. M. Caillaux is one of the innumerable forces that lose themselves in the universe. And, all lost forces are not always the best.



OLD BURDEN

By KAY BOYLE

Laid fingers upon a thought as it sped past me—
This, finally, that the thing comes clear
Under the hot quilt of night. Blood red on the tree
Of birth and long conception. Drawing near
To the white marble of fact, and the harsh sting
Of concrete hands on spirit hands.

In the short breath of noon I do not know the thing.
It is something that darkness cleaves and understands.
It is something I can feel with my fingertips.
It is not a thought and it is not the touch of lips.