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EDITORIAL

WHAT SAVES THE VAILLANTS.

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EDOUARD Vaillant is one of the oldest, most trusted and beloved Socialists of France. The cable despatches, announcing his withdrawal, together with the rest of the bona fide delegates, from the bogus “Socialist Unity” Congress held at Lyons, while provoking applause, suggests the question: “How came Vaillant at all to go to such a conclave?”

There are men so constituted that they resist the recognition of disagreeable consequences. Their sanguine temperament makes them vault lightly over facts that are distasteful, and to hope for results that can not flow from given causes. Not infrequently these men are honest at the start. Usually they wind up as fakirs. A long-continued illogical conduct has finally its demoralizing effect. They start expecting pears from bramble bushes; they wind up pretending that thorns are pears; self-love then comes in for its share, and the man is gone. Vaillant started on this downward slope some seven months ago. He stopped in time. What is it that saved him?

The consolidation into one body of the several Socialist parties of France, that had so far reached perfection two years ago as to effect a joint national convention, was suddenly threatened last year with being turned into a scheme for scuttling the Socialist movement in France. The development taken by the acceptance of a Cabinet portfolio by the Socialist Millerand, a member of one of these parties, the “Independents,” was the corroding acid. Protested against, from the start, by the most powerful of the French Socialist bodies, the French Socialist Labor Party (Parti Ouvrier Français), and also by the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Revolutionnaire), of which Vaillant is a distinguished member, the evil grew and gathered shape, until it became intolerable. The murderous conduct of the Cabinet toward workingmen on strike; the appearance of such ominous figures as the Anarchist Aristide Briand, in the “consolidated” plan as zealous supporters of Millerand; the close connection of the banking interests with the Millerandists; the suspicious mushroom growth of “independent groups;”—these and more such

incidents warned the Socialists of breakers ahead. Accordingly, when last year's second joint national convention was held, and the evidence of treason became palpable by a palpable packing of the Convention with fraudulent delegates from imaginary Millerandist groups, the Parti Ouvrier Français quickly caved in the treason's head by walking out of the hall and planting its own standard as the rallying point of all bona fide Socialists in the land.

Vaillant did not go out with the Parti Ouvrier. He and his party admitted the justice of the Parti Ouvrier's premises, and the wrongfulness of the Millerandists, now furiously captained by Jaures. But his sanguine temperament blinded him to the recognition of the consequences, inevitable from the facts that his intelligence recognized. He saw treason clear enough, yet hoped that its fosterers might not be traitors. Accordingly, he adhered to the opinion that "unity" was still desirable. Thus it came about that he appeared at the Lyons convention, which was called by the Millerandists to "unite the Socialist forces." The expulsion of Millerand from the movement Vaillant recognized as imperative; he also recognized that the expulsion was the condition precedent to the perfection of unity. His intellect was clear enough for that, but it was not strong enough to remove the illusion that such a thing could be accomplished at Lyons. When, by actual experience, he failed in this, credulity was at the end of its tether. He then perceived the connection between cause and effect, the traitor as the source of treason, and, perceiving it, realized that unity with Jaures and his Millerandists spelled the destruction of the French Socialist Movement. Vaillant forthwith withdrew, and fully clasped hands with the longheaded Parti Ouvrier.

The moment was critical for Vaillant. It was the point where the Vaillants pull up sharp, the intellect being active enough to regain its ascendancy over sentiment; while, on the other hand, the torpid intellect continues under the ascendancy of sentiment, and is for ever after lost to the cause that it would promote.

What saves the Vaillants is the shortness, with them, of the dangerous tether of sentiment:

Less harm is wrought
By lack of heart
Than lack of thought.