

AN  
INTERNATIONAL  
OILMAN

BY

SIR HENRI DETERDING

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there is nothing like dragging whatever worries you into the daylight. Only bring the Sun of Simplicity to shine on your troubles and they soon melt away.

### II

SIMPLICITY, when you come to think of it, is the hall-mark of almost every man who achieves. Only a small man has time to be complex.

The big men, it seems to me, are nearly all simpletons—not simpletons, of course, in the general acceptance of the word as a term of derision, but what I would call “the Higher Simpletons,” meaning that it comes to them by instinct to conform to this Gospel of this Higher Simplicity by which I set so much store. Among these Higher Simpletons who have left their impress on recent times, let me cite four examples, even though I seem to digress.

In Italy, not long ago, it fell to my lot to talk with Mussolini, a man who, regard him as you may, has shown a driving force almost unparalleled in running a country—though from such outward manifestations as are seen in the present-day world, I wouldn’t say that the running of a country was at all the same thing as the running of a business. Too often, the men who run countries have never run businesses, as the results of their government so painfully show. But that is by the way.

My talk with Mussolini proved that there were several points on which we saw eye to eye. We both agreed that the coping-stone of Education is a sense of discipline and respect for prestige, lacking which no youth can be considered to have been properly educated at all. Speaking as the father of a family, myself, I told the Duce of my conviction that the right and only way to bring up young people is to teach them the difference between seeing and observing. A child should be taught not merely to see a thing but to realise the nature of the thing he has seen, and if he doesn't understand it, to ask himself, and seek to know, just why that thing should be. On subjects of this kind, Mussolini showed that he had thought deeply. To people unacquainted with the Italian character his manner in public may seem at times to be a trifle theatrical, but what chiefly interested me at our meeting was that he seemed so direct. One felt that, if faced with a difficulty, he would get out his sledge-hammer and strike straight at its root.

Shortly after this meeting with Mussolini, I had the privilege of an audience with Pope Pius XI. Few people of the workaday rank and file pause to reflect, I suppose, on just what manner of man the Pope is, apart from his sacred office—especially if, like me, they do not belong to the Roman Catholic faith. Personally, I must admit that, until my actual contact with him, I had regarded the Pope with aloof respect, almost as if he were an institution instead of a man.

had warned the Agent-in-Chief at Singapore repeatedly of the unreliability of this man, I felt angry at being recalled to investigate trouble which would not have arisen if heed had been paid to me.

The sequel is told in a letter of mine lately unearthed from some old business files, which says : " I would rather not work with the Netherlands Trading Society if I am never to share in the profits of Penang but am called back, notwithstanding, when something goes wrong in my absence." Discourteous tones hardly reflecting credit on the writer ! I now feel as I look back. Yet, obviously the letter of one who felt that he was wronged ! So, while still in a temper on my return to Penang, I got into immediate touch with Mr. J. B. A. Kessler, Managing Director of the Royal Dutch Oil Company, and reminded him of an offer of employment he had made to me several times in the preceding six months. He engaged me forthwith.

## VI

I JOINED the Royal Dutch Company on May 15, 1896—a memorable date for me since it marked my beginning in the Oil trade. I knew next to nothing of Oil, but Mr. Kessler had obviously formed a liking for me even before my start. Perhaps this was for that very good reason why most business men grow to like one another ; while sub-agent at Penang, I



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slipped through the danger zone into the Bristol Channel, undetected. When it was landed, its conveyance to Portishead, near Bristol, where it was immediately erected, caused the rail traffic *en route* to be completely held up. The various mechanical parts were so huge that they hung out like gargantuan wings from the luggage trains conveying them, and while they were in transit no other train could pass by. We also helped the French to erect a similar factory at St. Louis de Rhone. But now Peace reigns, so do not let us disturb harmony by further war memories. To-day, how much better to remember that, like good sportsmen, both combatants did their utmost—each for his own side !

## XIII

To turn from the general to the particular in our various international transactions, Russia, of course, provides the gloomiest side of our picture. The wresting from us of our Russian Oil properties—and just when the infinity of time, money and labour we had spent on them was beginning to make itself felt in highly efficient production ; all this is now a matter of common knowledge. Hoping to cover up the chaos into which they have plunged practically every industry in Russia, the “ Bolshies ” are constantly crying out loud of their prowess in Oil pro-

duction. But at least I have the consolation of knowing that in the comparatively short period we worked in Russia we consistently improved the business we acquired there, whereas—what have they done? In the Caucasus they have not so far discovered a single new field, and whenever they point to anything which looks like definite progress and achievement, they are simply “stealing the glory” for what we discovered and had considerably developed before they assumed control. The fact is that they took over from us in those Russian properties a thoroughly well-equipped, efficiently organised working machine, of which they had but to turn the handle to bring forth results. And as for these much-vaunted results which they have since claimed as their own, I guarantee that with only twenty-five per cent of the money they have spent in the Caucasus, we could have produced better results still, had we remained in possession. That it takes time as well as money to buy experience is one of the many truths not yet grasped by the Bolshevik mind.

To-day in Russia, I am the most execrated man alive. My effigy is burnt in public places. I have an amusing collection of pictures they have circulated, depicting me as a human monster in all shapes and sizes.

Such ludicrously violent methods show how great is the Soviet's fear of me. But why are they afraid? Simply because they know that I see through them for what they are—a set of bluffing bullies. And the