European Empire, Fractured

by Theodore Dalrymple



Shortly after the results of the Brexit referendum were declared and Mr. Cameron resigned as Prime Minister, the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, published a little cartoon. Two French peasants are looking across the Channel towards England, and one says to the other (or words to this effect), "They do things differently over there. They pay attention to referendum results."

Well, yes and no. There is little doubt that a large part of the political class, the upper bureaucracy and the intelligentsia did their very best to prevent, or at least obstruct, Britain's departure from the European Union. The Prime Minister who followed Mr. Cameron, Mrs. May, was herself in favour of remaining, and yet she was put in charge of the negotiations on the British side. This was like putting an ardent pacifist in charge of an army, and indeed she managed to negotiate a deal that (from the British point of view) was the worst of both worlds.

It should have been obvious from the first that Brexit was an

existential question for the European Union, as well as for Britain, of course. If Britain prospered, or simply failed to suffer greatly, after Brexit, this would have been a disaster for the European Union, in the populations of which there was significant and growing scepticism of or opposition to the "European Project" (it is the only project I know whose end is never stated, though I suspect it is a superstate in whose administration politics in the normal sense of elections, appeals to public opinion, etc., are not to be allowed to intrude). An example had to be made, and in effect has been made. No other member state will want to go through what Britain has gone through these last four years. The light must not be worth the candle.

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