

POLITICS

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
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INTRODUCTION

UNTIL the late Professor Cramb published his *Germany and England*, Treitschke was scarcely even a name to the British public. Even now his name is much better known than his books. This is partly due to the fact that his main work was an unfinished history of modern Germany, and that much of this dealt with the period which began with the peace of 1815, and ended with the Bismarckian era,—a period rich in scientific, philosophical, and musical achievement, but politically barren and, to the foreigner, dull. It is also due to the fact that the full significance of the political theories to which the following lectures are devoted has only recently been made plain. Political theories, from those of Aristotle downwards, have ever been related, either by harmony or contrast, to the political practice of their day : but of no theories is this more glaringly true

than of those expounded in these volumes. They could not have been written before 1870. Nothing quite like them will be written after 1917. They bear somewhat the same relation to Bismarck as Machiavelli's Prince bears to Caesar Borgia:—though no one would put Treitschke on a level with Machiavelli, or Borgia on a level with Bismarck.

Their author, born in 1834, and twenty-seven when William I. became King of Prussia, with Bismarck as his Minister, is thus qualified by age to represent the generation which, in its youth, sought in 'Liberal principles' the means of furthering its national ideals; found them utterly impotent and ineffectual; and welcomed with patriotic fervour the Bismarckian policy of 'blood and iron.'

It is permissible to conjecture that if the political creed of Treitschke's youth had borne the practical fruit which he so passionately desired, the subsequent history of the world would have been wholly different. If 'Liberalism,' in the continental sense,¹

¹ It is hardly necessary to observe that I use the words 'Liberal principles' and 'Liberalism' in their continental, not in their British, meaning. We borrowed them from abroad, and have used them to designate a particular party, or, rather, a particular section of a par-

had given Germany empire and power, militarism would never have grown to its present exorbitant proportions. The greatest tragedy of modern times is that she owes her unity and her greatness not to the free play of public opinion acting through constitutional machinery, but to the unscrupulous genius of one great man, who found in the Prussian monarchy, and the Prussian military system, fitting instruments for securing German ideals.

The main interest then of these lectures to me, and perhaps to others, lies in the fact that they represent the mature thought of a vigorous personality, who, in early manhood, saw the war with Denmark, the war with Austria, and the war with France, create, in violation of all 'Liberal' principles, that German Empire for which German Liberals had vainly striven. War, it was evident, could be both glorious and cheap; absolute monarchy had shown itself the only effective instrument for national self-realisation; a diplomatic and military policy, carried through in defiance of public opinion,

particular party, But 'Liberalism' as used in its original home is a name for principles of constitutional liberty and representative Government, which have long been the common property of all parties throughout the English-speaking portions of the world.

had performed in months what generations of debaters had been unable to accomplish.

It is useless, of course, to look for impartiality in the political speculations born under such conditions. Forty or fifty years ago the ordinary British reader sought in German historical research a refuge from the party bias so common among British historians. Hume, Lingard, Alison, Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude, Freeman, all in their several ways looked at their selected periods through glasses coloured by their own political or theological predilections. Mitford and Grote carried their modern prejudices into their pictures of classical antiquity. But the German historian, though his true course might perhaps be deflected by some over-ingenious speculation, was free (we supposed) from these cruder and more human sources of error. He might be dull, but he was at least impartial. With the development of German unity, however, German impartiality vanished. To Ranke succeeded Von Sybel and Mommsen. Political detachment could no longer be looked for; learning was yoked to politics; and history was written with a purpose. In no one does this patriotic prejudice produce more

curious results than in Treitschke. His loves and his hates, his hopes and his fears, his praise and his blame, his philosophic theories, his practical suggestions, all draw their life from the conviction that German greatness was due to her military system, that her military system was the creation of Prussia, and that Prussia was the creation of Hohenzollern absolutism.

Consider, for example, his abstract theory of the State which colours all his more important political speculation. An English writer who wished to set forth his views on Education, Local Government, Military Organisation, and so forth, might perhaps regard an abstract theory of the State as a superfluous luxury. But then, as Treitschke explains in another connection, the English are shallow, and the Germans profound, so that this difference of treatment is natural; and certainly the English reader has no ground for regretting it. For though the theory itself is neither very profound, nor, indeed, very coherent; though its appeals to history are unconvincing; it gives the key to all that follows; it explains and justifies modern Germany. The State, says Treitschke, is Power. So unusual is its

power that it has no power to limit its power; hence no Treaty, when it becomes inconvenient, can be binding; hence the very notion of general arbitration is absurd; hence war is part of the Divine order. Small States must be contemptible because they must be weak; success is the test of merit; power is its reward; and all nations get what they deserve.

A theory of politics entirely governed by patriotic passion is not likely to be either very impartial or very profound. Even the most dexterous literary treatment could hardly hide its inherent narrowness. But Treitschke, to do him justice, attempts no disguises. He airs his prejudices with a naïveté truly amazing. I will not say that he wanted humour. Many things struck him as exquisitely comic;—small States, for example, and the Dutch language. He occasionally enlivened his lectures, we are told, by a satirical imitation of a British ‘hurrah.’ He clearly, therefore, possessed his own sense of fun, yet he remained sadly lacking in that prophylactic humour which protects its possessor against certain forms of extravagance and absurdity.

In nothing does this come out more

clearly than in his excessive laudation of his own countrymen, and his not less excessive depreciation of everybody else. Partly no doubt this was done for a purpose. He had formed the opinion, rather surprising to a foreigner, that the Germans, as a nation, are unduly diffident;—always in danger of “enervating their nationality through possessing too little rugged national pride.”¹ It must be owned that very little of this weakness is likely to remain in any German who takes Treitschke seriously. Nevertheless, it should have been possible to explain to the German people how much better they are than the rest of the world without pouring crude abuse upon every other nation. If the German be indeed deficient in ‘rugged pride,’ by all means tell him what a fine fellow he really is. But why spoil the compliment by lowering the standard of comparison? It may, for example, be judicious to encourage the too diffident Prussians by assuring them that they “are by their character more reasonable and more free than Frenchmen.”² But when the Prussian reader discovers that in Treitschke’s opinion the French are excessively unreasonable and

¹ I. 19-20.

² I. 66.

quite incapable of freedom the effect is marred. If, again, it be needful to remind the Germans of their peculiar sensibility to the beauties of Nature, is it necessary to emphasise their superiority by explaining that when resting in a forest they lie upon their backs, while the Latin races, less happily endowed, repose upon their stomachs?¹

Inordinate self-esteem may be a very agreeable quality. Those who possess it are often endowed with an imperturbable complacency which softens social intercourse, and is not inconsistent with some kindly feeling towards those whom they deem to be their inferiors. But it must be acknowledged that with Treitschke this quality does not appear in its most agreeable form. With him it is censorious, and full of suspicion. Unlike Charity it greatly vaunteth itself; unlike Charity it thinketh all evil. Rare indeed are the references to other nations which do not hold them up to hatred or contempt. America, France, Austria, Spain, Russia, Britain are in turn required to supply the sombre background against which the virtues of Germany shine forth with peculiar lustre. The Dutch, we are

¹ I. 206.

told, have "deteriorated morally and physically."¹ Americans are mere money-grabbers. The Russians are barbarians. The Latin races are degenerate. The English have lost such poor virtues as they once possessed; while their "want of chivalry" shocks the "simple fidelity of the German nature."² Cannot the subjects of the Kaiser realise "the simple fidelity of their German nature" without being reminded how forcibly that "simple fidelity" is impressed by "the want of chivalry in the English character"? But, when Treitschke allows his statements of fact and his moral judgment to be violently distorted by national prejudice, his errors become more serious. We need not quarrel over these opinions. They are made by a German for Germans, and doubtless they suit their market.

Nor do I here refer to his wider generalisations, though I often disagree with him. I think, for example, that he exaggerates the absorption of the individual by the community in the city States of antiquity; and his classification of various forms of government has not much to recommend it. On such questions, however, judgments may

¹ I. 50.

² II. 395.

differ, but what are we to say of the mis-statements of bare historical fact in which he indulges without scruple? Some of these no doubt are mere slips, as, for example, when he places the activities of Titus Oates in the reign of James II.¹; others are unimportant exhibitions of ignorance, as when he assures his readers that in England there are no Crown lands²; others, again, are mere exercises of the imagination, as when he tells us that, "after Henry the VIII.'s hymeneal prodigies, it was enacted by Parliament that its assent was necessary to the validity of any Royal marriage."³

These blunders are presumably due to want of memory or want of care. But others are the offspring of invincible prejudice. When he tells us that England "turns a deaf ear on principle to generous ideas,"⁴ the judgment may to an Englishman appear absurd, and, in the mouth of a German, even impudent. Yet it must to a certain extent be a matter of opinion. Character cannot be tested in retorts or weighed in balances. But what excuse can there be for such a particular historical statement as that "England's first thought

¹ II. 473.² II. 490.³ II. 165.⁴ II. 614.

in abolishing slavery was the destruction of Colonial competition,"¹ for there was not, and could not be, any possible competition between British manufacturers and the producers of slave-grown sugar, so that the charge is not even plausible.

Again, there is something peculiarly absurd in the statement that "no sooner had the French Revolution broken out than Pitt eagerly began to urge a reform of the Franchise."² This is not merely a mis-statement of fact. It is a mis-statement of fact which shows an utter want of comprehension of English political history at the period referred to. There is no reason why even a Professor of Modern History at the University of Berlin should know the details of Pitt's abortive efforts at Parliamentary reform; but he ought to know enough of the subject to prevent him mistaking the whole significance of the facts to which he refers. Treitschke's blunder is not merely one of chronology; it shows a complete misapprehension of the true relations between the French Revolution and English constitutional development. So far from the outbreak of the French Revolution having

¹ I. 162.² II. 157.

very midst of his envious indignation, he cannot shake off the ambition to follow in their steps ; he must imitate those whom he affects to despise.

I do not know whether there is anything in real life corresponding to this fancy picture ; but in the commonwealth of nations the part is aptly played by the German Empire as Treitschke would have it. Consider, for example, his views on colonisation. It is not easy to see why colonial possessions appeal so strongly to his imagination ; for he dislikes new countries almost more than he dislikes every old country except Germany. The notion, for example, that the culture of the new world can ever rival the culture of the old seems to him absurd. He observes, though not in these lectures, that a German who goes to the United States is "lost to civilisation"—an amiable sentiment which seems hardly consistent with the passion for acquiring new countries. But the real reason for these ambitions becomes plain on further examination. While Germany was in the throes of the Thirty Years' War, or slowly recovering from its effects, England, the detested rival, was laying the foundations of

the English-speaking communities beyond the seas ; and while Frederick the Great was robbing his neighbours, and his successors were struggling with the forces let loose by the French Revolution, the hold of English-speaking peoples upon regions outside Europe increased and strengthened.

This was quite enough for Treitschke. What Britain had must be worth having. If there was something worth having and Germany had it not, this must be due to the bad luck which sometimes pursues even the most deserving. If Germany had it not and England had it, this must be due to the good luck which sometimes befalls even the most incompetent. But such inequalities are not to be tolerated. They must be redressed, if need be by force. The "outcome (he tells us) of our next successful war must be the acquisition of Colonies by any possible means."¹

It would seem, however, that Treitschke was dimly aware that even to a German audience such a doctrine might seem a trifle cynical. He therefore advances a subtler motive for these colonial ambitions. Germany, he tells us, should bear a part in the

¹ I. 119.

improvement of inferior races. She should become a pioneer of civilisation in savage lands. To outside observers, indeed, it does not appear that either the practice of his countrymen, or his own theories, suggest that Germany has any particular qualifications for this missionary enterprise. What is likely to be the fate of coloured races under German domination, when men like Treitschke frankly avow that "in Livonia and Kurland there is no other course open to us (the Germans) but to keep the subject races in as uncivilised a condition as possible, and thus prevent them becoming a danger to the handful of their conquerors."¹

Here we come back to the fundamental thought of Treitschke, the State as Will to Power, and to his patriotic corollary that a Prussianised Germany under a Hohenzollern dynasty should enable that thought to be realised. In supporting this view there is no extravagance, historical or moral, from which he shrinks. He tells us, for example, that Frederick the Great was the "greatest King who ever reigned on earth."² He accordingly finds in him the most unexpected virtues. Frederick's dominating

¹ I. 122.² II. 68.

motive towards the end of his life was, it seems, "the desire to execute ideal justice."¹ A noble desire truly; but surely not one which would find any sufficient satisfaction in the first partition of Poland. Do you ask the reason for this extravagance of laudation? The answer is that Frederick was the greatest of the Hohenzollerns, that the Hohenzollerns created the Prussian State and the Prussian Army, that the Prussian State and the Prussian Army created Germany. Treitschke positively gloats over Prussian supremacy. "The Will of the German Empire," he observes, "must in the last resort be the will of Prussia."² All small States are ridiculous, but the most ridiculous of small States are the Kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony, and Würtemberg. "The German Army, not the German Parliament, is in Germany the real and effective bond of national union."³ And the German Army is a Prussian creation.

He does not, of course, pretend that a Hohenzollern can do no wrong. He goes the length, indeed, of accusing one of them, Frederick William IV., of "deadly

¹ II. 69.² II. 375.³ II. 390.

crime.”¹ And what was this deadly crime? It was, that after sending in troops to assist the Kings of Bavaria and Saxony to restore order, he withdrew them without destroying the independence of the States he had gone to protect. He behaved like a gentleman, but he sinned against the law of force.

But in spite of this lapse from patriotic virtue, and notwithstanding that it is difficult to say much in favour of any of Frederick the Great's successors until we come to William I., Treitschke holds firmly to the belief that the Prussian Monarchy is a thing apart, and that Hohenzollern royalty is not as other royalties. Sometimes, indeed, this sentiment shows itself in a somewhat ludicrous fashion. For example, Treitschke vigorously defends the use of classical studies in the education of youth. There is no way, according to him, in which intellect and taste can be more successfully developed than by a thorough study of Greek and Latin.² So far, so good. But a little further on the lecturer has to deal not with the education of ordinary mankind, but with that of a German Prince, and we find to our

¹ I. 95.² I. 375.

surprise that in the case of a German Prince the marvellous advantages of classical study are quite unnecessary. He must learn French and English. Why should he do more? “Why on earth should he be bothered with Latin, let alone Greek?”¹ We rub our eyes and ask what this outburst can mean. Are intellect and taste of no value to a German prince? Or is a German prince privileged by the Grace of God to acquire these gifts without education, or by an education inapplicable to the common herd? We may be sure that none of these alternatives represent Treitschke's considered views. I hazard another guess. I suggest that the lecturer must have known some young Hohenzollern Prince well acquainted with modern languages, but with no pretensions to classical scholarship.

From these brief criticisms the reader will be able to form some conjecture as to what he may expect to find in the following pages. He will find many acute observations forcibly expressed, and presumably accurate, upon German history, contemporary and recent. He will find many observations forcibly

¹ II. 72.

expressed, but certainly inaccurate, upon foreign history, contemporary and recent. He will throughout find himself in the presence of a vigorous personality, with clear-cut views about the future of his country and the methods whereby they are to be realised, but he will not find breadth of view, generous sympathies, or systematic thought. In Treitschke there is nothing profound, and his political speculations are held together not so much by consistent thought as by the binding power of one ruling passion.

The result is curiously interesting. Treitschke was a man of wide, although not apparently of very accurate, knowledge. Fragments of Christianity, of Ethics, of Liberalism, are casually embedded in the concrete blocks out of which he has built his political system; but they are foreign bodies which do nothing to strengthen the structure. Power based on war is his ideal, and the verdict of war not only *must* be accepted, but *ought* to be accepted. The sentimentalist may regret that Athens fell before Sparta, that Florence dwindled before Venice, but the wise man knows better. Art and imagination do not contribute to

Power, and it is only Power that counts. On it everything is based, by it everything is justified. It even supplies a short cut to conclusions which reason may hesitate to adopt. It required, as Treitschke observes, the battlefields of Bohemia and the Main to 'convince' the German people that Prussia should control their destinies.¹

It is not surprising that a man who held these views should regard with something like disgust and dismay the attempts of well-meaning persons to bring peace on earth. The whole tribe of pacifists who would substitute arbitration for war fill him with loathing. Like them he has his ideals, but they are of a very different order. His Utopia appears to be a world in which all small States have been destroyed, and in which the large States are all either fighting, or preparing for battle. "War," he says, "will endure to the end of history. The laws of human thought and of human nature forbid any alternative, neither is one to be wished for."²

Deeply as he despised those who, in his own phrase, "rave about everlasting peace," there are transient moments in which he

¹ I. 66.

² I. 65.

almost seems to fear them. Even the most robust faith will sometimes weaken; for a moment even Treitschke trembles at the thought that men may cease to cut each other's throats. "What," he pathetically asks, "if war should really disappear, and with it all movement and all growth?"¹ What if mankind should deliberately deprive itself of the one remedy for an ailing civilisation?

The thought is terrible, but, supported by religion, Treitschke's confidence remains unmoved. "Are not the great strides civilisation makes against barbarism and unreason only made actual by the sword?"² Does not the Bible say that "greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend"? Are we then going to be seduced by the "blind worshippers of an eternal peace"?³ No. Let us reject these unworthy thoughts: being well assured that "the God above us will see to it that war shall return again, a terrible medicine for mankind diseased."⁴

Since these lectures were delivered the longed-for medicine has been supplied in overflowing measure. Even the physician

¹ I. 68.² I. 65.³ I. 65.⁴ I. 69.

himself could hardly ask for more. Yet were he here to watch the application of his favourite remedy, what would he say of the patient?

A. J. B.

March 1916.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

POLITICS must be counted among the Arts. It moves in the world of historical facts, and is continually changing and taking new forms. Every theory must therefore remain incomplete, and there is besides another cause why unbiassed political reasoning is very difficult for us men of the present day. The life of modern peoples has a strong social tendency. Nowadays, unless a man is a Government official, he devotes most of his labour to scientific or industrial interests, and he takes no practical part in the State except by exercising his vote, or at most by administering some unpaid office.

In order to understand the dignity of the State, a modern citizen must free himself from a great many preconceived ideas. What we call political opinions are generally coloured by private interests, either social or economic.

Only in time of war does the importance of politics really come home to us. In a life of peace and quiet most people give little thought to the State, and are therefore willingly disposed to underrate it.

Just as Art and Science only renewed their truth and greatness through plunging into the life-giving streams of classical antiquity, even

