Book Reviews

Treitschke

IT is a peculiarity of human nature, particularly in times of stress and turmoil, to personify, individualize events and hatreds. This peculiarity expresses itself in the immemorial custom of choosing a scape-goat, a custom of great social significance. The Great War has produced scapegoats innumerable. Among these is Treitschke; and if we are to believe certain hysterical detractors of Germany, Treitschke is responsible for the war, if not directly responsible surely chief accessory before the fact—a mighty achievement for a man dead these twenty years!

The reactionary interpretation of history is a pivotal point in the repressive culture of to-day. In Germany history is more than that—it is a method of government, the justification and the faith of imperial policy, the answer of reaction to progress. "We invoke the men of the past against the present," says Treitschke. We should not be led astray by partisan denunciation ascribing great events to individuals, and the importance of Treitschke has been disproportionately emphasized. But Treitschke articulated the spirit of his age, and his philosophy is usually the philosophy of Germany's contemporary representatives. Bearing this in mind, the significance of Treitschke while not decisive bulks large, socially and historically.

It is unfortunate that Treitschke should have been introduced to the British and American public with a partisan bias and for partisan purposes. Nor is the available translated material[1] sufficient for a comprehensive and complete judgment. It is sufficient, however, for the purpose of a broad, outline sketch.

The Germany of Treitschke was a Germany awakening to material power and gradually becoming drunk with the power of material things. Treitschke says: "Germans to-day no longer, as in Schiller's day, escape from the stress of life into the still and holy places of the heart." This was a necessary and inevitable development, and it is absurd to regret "the Germany of Schiller and Goethe" and use the regret as a club to smite the Germany of to-day. It was a time of shattered republican ideals. The revolution of 1848 had ended in disaster and the exile of the bulk of the revolutionary class. Then came the victory of power—military power—and the unity of Germany. The German bourgeois became rapt in visions of power and profit, cast aside the remnants of its liberal ideals and adopted the policy of "blood and iron." Bourgeois, Junker and autocrat became the Holy Trinity of the new Germany, political Reaction and Power the Father and the Son.

Treitschke's intellectual development parallels this developement. Particular material facts produced a particular national psychology, and Treitschke was its expression.

Starting as a liberal and constitutionalist, Treitschke ended a complete reactionary and fervent devotee of the absolute monarchy. Hausrath gives a sympathetic and critical account of this change. Bismarck and Prussia were the chief transforming factors. Having grasped the purpose of Bismarck, Treitschke "frankly declared the strengthening of Prussia to be the supreme national duty." He became filled "with deep disgust" by the "meaningless mendacity of our average liberalism," and decided that "our fate will clearly be decided by conquest." His hatred of France seems to have been largely a hatred of French liberalism and its traditions. Hausrath has this to say about Treitschke's hatred of the French:

"In regard to our sympathy for France, which he reviled as the Rhine Confederation sentimentality, it would be difficult for him to place himself in our position. During the last century we had received nothing but kindness from France, namely, deliverance from the Palatine Bavarian regime, from Jesuits and Lazarists, from episcopal and Junker rule, from guild restrictions and compulsory service: all this and the very existence of the country we owed directly or indirectly to Napoleon and the Code Napoleon, from which the hatred of the French arose. This, it is true, I found quite natural, considering Napoleon weakened Prussia and abused Saxony."

Prussia, with its lust of power and conquest and its conscious use of war as a method of imperial policy, became Treitschke's ideal; and his history was, in Prof. J. H. Morgan's phrase, "a kind of hagiography of the Hohenzollerns." He created a philosophical and historical justification for Prussian policy, opposed universal suffrage, ridiculed parliamentary government, and expressed a metaphysical faith in the monarchy. "Roughly," says H. W. C. Davis, "Treitschke accepts the rule of Aristotle, that the people should be allowed to criticise, but not to originate measures."

The cult of power—the will to power—was dominant in Germany. Treitschke was the reactionary expression of this social tendency, as Nietzsche was its revolutionary.

The central tenet of Treitschke's teachings is the concept of the state as power. He concludes that "all the states known to history have arisen through wars." He seems to have had no conception of the evolutionary social and economic basis of the state. Germany in the seventeenth century degenerated, according to Treitschke, "through theological controversies and the coarse sensuality of a sluggish peace," and "left it to the Dutch to break the naval power of the Spaniards, and afterwards to the English to subdue the Dutch conquerors." In other words, had Germany at the time been possessed of the "will to war" and waged war instead of clinging to a "sluggish peace," she could have wrested world-supremacy from the Spanish. That Germany lacked the economic, social and political organization necessary to the task is unworthy of consideration in Treitschke's military interpretation of history.

His conception of history is defective in another sense—it is rigid and seeks to control the present and the future through the actions of the past. This and that happened in the past, so it must happen again. Civilizations developed along rivers and there have been struggles for these rivers, so Germany must seek full control of the Rhine—which would mean the conquest of Holland. War has been an instrument of policy and progress, and war is therefore necessary, inevitable, immutable. This is a denial of a fundamental law of history, that each evolutionary epoch produces new forms of progress and new forces, and either transforms or entirely supersedes the forces and forms of the epoch preceding.

The available material indicates that Treitschke was not a fundamental and

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[1] *Treitschke: His Doctrine of German Destiny and of International Relations.* Together with *A Study of His Life and Work*, by Adolf Hausrath. New York, Putnam's. $1.50.

Germany, France, Russia, and Islam. By Heinrich von Treitschke. With a Foreword by George Haven Putnam. New York, Putnam's $1.25 net.

The Confessions of Frederick the Great with Life by Treitschke. Edited, with an Introduction, by Douglas Sladen. New York. Putnam's. $1.25 net.

The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke. By H. W. C. Davis. New York, Scribner's, $1.50.

Selections from Treitschke's Lectures on Politics. Translated by Adam L. Gowans. New York, Stokes, 75c.

original historical thinker. The man was intensely, fanatically sincere, but he seems to have lacked vision and insight. He was a propagandist, the propagandist of a particular necessity, as was Macchiavelli; but where Macchiavelli considered transitory the necessity as well as the means—he favored autocracy as a means of unifying Italy, but simultaneously hoped that, Italy being united, autocracy would give way to the Republic—Treitschke considered means and necessity permanent. Marx was a propagandist, but while Marx based his propaganda upon history, Treitschke based history upon his propaganda.

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