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## Treitschke and Young Germany

John Adam Cramb<sup>1</sup>

### LECTURE III: TREITSCHKE AND YOUNG GERMANY

[...]

An enemy of England? [...] it is assuredly a fair description of the man concerning whom I have to speak to you this afternoon, Heinrich von Treitschke.

Almost the last time we see Treitschke, those noble features of his lit up, as they always were instantly lit up by any enthusiasm, whether of love or hate almost the last time we really see him is on an evening in 1895, when, returned from a visit to England, he poured out to a company of friends all the vitriol of his scorn, antipathy and hate for England and for the English, enduring no

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<sup>1</sup> One of the lectures of Cramb's *Germany and England*, which Cramb had held in 1913 and was preparing for publication when he died. The author, a fervent British patriot, had been Professor of Modern History at Queen's College, London; his chatty exposure of Treitschke's chauvinism and influence did much to project him as the very exponent of German belligerence. [SPIN note; all subsequent notes are Cramb's own]

word of comment or contradiction, until someone quoted to him Heine's malicious "Englische Fragmente," in which Heine discusses the question how it is that so ignoble a nation as England can possibly have produced a Shakespeare. And so the meeting ended in agreement and laughter. But all who listened to Treitschke that night seemed to hear in his words, as they had heard in his lectures again and again, the first dark roll that announces the coming dreadful storm, the coming war the war that he regarded as simply inevitable between these two empires, both the descendants of the war-god Odin, and yet, because of that, doomed to this great conflict.

Within six months Treitschke was dead.

### II

How can one best present Treitschke to an English audience? How can one explain to an English audience something of Treitschke's position and the place he fills in German life right on from 1858 until his death, and to the present hour? The seventeen volumes of his collected writings on history, on literature and on the science of politics, his speeches on present-day questions and his political pamphlets, have not been translated and are therefore a sealed book to the majority of English readers.

Yet at once in his own personality and as a governing force in German thought, Heinrich von Treitschke ought to be deeply interesting to us; for more than any other single character in German political life he is responsible for the anti-English sentiment which blazed out during the Boer War, which still reigns in German society and in the German Press, which in the Reichstag reveals itself in the frigid or ironic applause with which any references to "our amicable relations with England" are greeted. The foundations of that sentiment, of course, lie



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deeper than the creative power of an individual intellect or will. They are, as we have seen, beyond the control of any passing generation, rooting themselves in the dark forces which determine the destinies of peoples and of the universe itself. But Treitschke, beyond any other German, stands forth as the interpreter of these forces. His interpretations have sunk deep into the German mind; his fiery challenges and impassioned rhetoric have coloured German thought. Though his greatest book deals only with the record of thirty-two years, it is spoken of sans phrase as “the History of Germany”,<sup>2</sup> and “our great national historian” has become a familiar periphrasis in newspapers and on platforms for Treitschke’s name. The real and abstract principles of German history seen and reinterpreted through Treitschke’s medium that for many men in Germany has become their faith. These are arguments of a unique and immense influence. And what are the feelings towards England which this great historian and orator expresses? He incessantly points his nation onwards to the war with England, to the destruction of England’s supremacy at sea as the means by which Germany is to burst into that path of glory and of world-dominion towards which, through all the centuries of her history, she has deliberately moved. The Ottonides in the tenth century sketched the plan; it has been reserved for the Hohenzollern in the twentieth to fill in the details.

Discussing in a former lecture the question whether the persistence of war accused humanity of self-contradiction or some secular hypocrisy, I suggested that in the laws governing States and individuals the highest functions transcend utility and transcend even reason itself ; that in the present stage of the world’s history to end war is not only beyond man’s power but contrary to man’s

will, since in war there is some secret possession or lingering human glory to which man clings with an unchangeable persistence, some source of inspiration which he is afraid to lose, uplifting life beyond life itself, some sense of a redeeming task which, like his efforts to unriddle the universe, for ever baffled yet for ever renewed, gives a meaning to this else meaningless scheme of things.

A Greek orator has recorded an incident in the life of the Emperor Julian, when, confronting certain Teutonic tribes along the Rhine, he remonstrated with them on their restless, predatory and warlike habits, and one of their ambassadors, answering the charge, summed up his defence with the assertion: “But in war itself we see life’s greatest felicity.” And five centuries of almost uninterrupted war forged the unity of England. But no English historian or thinker has spoken of war quite as Treitschke has spoken of it. I do not recollect a single passage in his writings in which the conventional regrets are expressed, or where conventional phrases such as “the scourge of mankind,” “the barrier to human progress,” occur as descriptions of war. From an early period in his literary career, on the other hand, phrases of a quite different order abound in his writings, phrases in which war appears, if not as “the supreme felicity of mankind,” at least as a great factor in the onward strife towards perfection; whilst any attempt at its abolition is characterized as unwise and immoral.

When General von Bernhardi, in a pamphlet published in February last, (“Unsere Zukunft: ein Mahnwort an das deutsche Volk”), puts before his countrymen the alternatives of world-dominion or ruin, when he speaks of war as a biological necessity and as an extension of policy, and the manliest extension, he is expressing, perhaps not in the happiest literary manner, Treitschke’s ideas. The poet Liliencron, Treitschke’s contemporary, has expressed them

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<sup>2</sup> The subject of Treitschke’s “Deutsche Geschichte” is the transformation of the German Confederation into the Empire; but he had only reached the year 1848 when, at the age of 62, he died. His “History” may be regarded as the analogue of Pertz’s “Life of Stein”.



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much more happily, much more fervently; and Liliencron was a poet with a sword by his side. He fought at Koniggratz in 1866, at the age of thirty-two, and at Worth and Mars-la-Tour in 1870. And what is a governing thought of Liliencron's battle-sketches, of "Der Richtungspunct," for instance, or of "Eine Sommerschlacht," except the thought of Faust:

O selig der, dem er im Siegesglanze  
Die blut'gen Lorbeern um die Schläfe windet.<sup>3</sup>

There is no greater contrast in literature than between the emotion which pervades Tolstoi's "War and Peace," the scene, say, on the redan in the description of Borodino, and the emotion which pervades Liliencron's descriptions of Worth and Mars-la-Tour. And, again I must remind you, Liliencron not less than Tolstoi knew what he was talking about.

### III

In his own country Treitschke is sometimes described as the Coryphaeus of the Prussian School, that group of historians of whom Droysen, Hausser and Sybel, Pertz, the biographer of Stein, and Delbruck, the biographer of Gneisenau, are perhaps the best-known names in this country. The greatness of Prussia and the fate-appointed world-task or world-mission of Germany under the sacred dynasty of the Hohenzollern is the inspiration of all these men.

Treitschke's "History" is characterized by punctilious research and by reliance on original documents and original documents only.

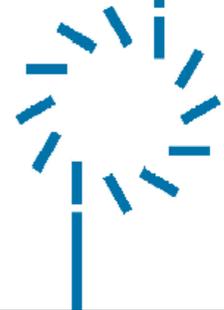
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<sup>3</sup> "O happy he for whom in victory's splendour  
Death wreathes the blood-stained laurel round his brow."

There are brilliant chapters on literature and the interconnexion of literature and history. Here he suggests Taine, his contemporary; and, had he lived another ten years, his book might have been styled "The Foundations of Contemporary Germany." English critics have sometimes compared him with Macaulay. Treitschke himself would have resented the comparison; for he has frequently expressed his unreserved contempt for the historian of the Revolution of 1688, arraigned his accuracy, derided his estimates of men, challenged his appreciation of facts, and stigmatized his philosophy and his outlook upon human fate. He has Macaulay's hates and prejudices, his vituperative energy; he has his power of fervent admiration. Yet as a master of words, a stylist, Treitschke is much inferior to Macaulay. His portraiture is often an accumulation of minute details which have never coalesced into a living personality. A Titian portrait beside a Bronzino that is the quality of Macaulay's style beside Treitschke's: for instance the portraits of the Whig Junto beside those of the men in whom Frederick William IV put his trust. Treitschke at one time had wished to be a poet, and he had considerable metrical skill. Yet in speaking of poetry he is rarely a poet; and a comparison of his patriotic verses with "The Lays of Ancient Rome" is a fair measure of Treitschke's inferiority to Macaulay as a writer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche as a stylist might have taught Treitschke much; but against the creator of Zarathustra Treitschke was bitterly and irreconcilably prejudiced from the very beginning of the former's career, when Treitschke wrote of him to Overbeck as "that rum fellow Nietzsche." He even quarrelled with Overbeck because of the latter's sympathy with his young colleague at Basle. His roughness to Nietzsche in 1872 is not worse than Stein's roughness to Goethe, and arose from similar causes. Treitschke divines in the author of *Unzeitgemasse Betrachtungen* "the good European" of later works; and therefore the bad Prussian, the bad German.



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On the other hand, one may more justly compare Treitschke's immense and enduring influence, not only in Prussia but throughout the German world, with the influence exercised by Carlyle upon England since 1858.<sup>5</sup> And Treitschke's influence has gone on steadily increasing throughout Germany until the present day. Treitschke and Carlyle resemble each other in their high seriousness, sincerity, downrightness and deep moral strength. Do not imagine, however, that there is any further resemblance between them. For instance, there is not in all the seventeen volumes of Treitschke any hint of that broad human laughter which you find in very nearly every page of the thirty volumes of Carlyle. In all Treitschke I doubt whether there is a single laugh. You may say, if you like, that this is because Germany has obtained free political institutions so recently and therefore has not yet acquired the power to take them humorously!

Treitschke, observe, is nothing if not a politician. Carlyle, in a sense, has no politics. Certainly England never took Carlyle's politics seriously. England listened wondering, sometimes amazed, but always reverent, to his moral teaching. Every book he wrote seemed to prove the truth of Goethe's diagnosis of his character "a new moral force, the extent and effects of which it is impossible to predict." But England has ignored absolutely Carlyle's politics, whether in his attitude towards the American War, or again in "Shooting Niagara," or in "Latter Day Pamphlets," or in his view of the careers of Cromwell or Frederick that exaltation of beneficent despotism. Treitschke's political principles, on the other hand the doing of great things greatly, heroic action,

the glory of war, and the day of reckoning with England are the very essence of his power over Germany. These principles underlie some of the soundest German, and, above all, Prussian thought at the present hour, as they have for the last thirty years.

A further contrast between these two men is this. Treitschke is ethical rather than metaphysical. He has none of those dazzling gleams of profound metaphysical thought which constantly uplift Carlyle. Nor do you find in him the poetry of Nature which you find in Carlyle that feeling which gives Carlyle the power to turn from the massacres there in the streets of Paris to the fall of the autumn evening over French meadows. You do find, however, something of Carlyle's vivid insight into character, especially when Treitschke has the power of loving his characters (and unless a man loves his characters he should not write about them). This is noticeable in his incursions into English history, and even more in his studies of English literature. His sketch of Milton is still one of the very finest of that great man; and his sketch of Byron might quite easily be placed with that of the Spanish writer, Nunez de Arce. But, again, that which appeals to Treitschke in Milton is the great political rebel. It is not the writer of the fourth book of "Paradise Lost," or of the first, or of the ninth, or of the eleventh; it is the author of that noble pamphlet, "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates," which Milton sat writing in the very week when Charles I was being tried and doomed to death, Milton feeling it incumbent upon himself as an Englishman, though he is not a member of that high court of justice, to sit there day by day and night by night trying Charles I, as he maintained that every Englishman should try the king. So again, to Treitschke, with his deep Teutonic moral nature, it certainly is not the Byron of what, from a literary standpoint, is Byron's masterpiece, "Don Juan," nor is it the poet of "Childe Harold" that fascinates him. It is Byron's admiration and enthusiasm for

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<sup>5</sup> Carlyle was born forty years before Treitschke, but Carlyle's influence was slower in making itself felt; he was very late in coming to his own in English life, very late in acquiring his reputation. The first thing that gave Carlyle a grip upon English people was not "The French Revolution," published by him at two-and-forty, but his "Cromwell," published at fifty. Treitschke's influence at the universities dates from fifteen years after that.



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liberty; and to Treitschke Byron's greatest verses are these:

Yet, Freedom! yet, thy banner torn but flying,  
Streams, like the thunderstorm, against the wind;  
Thy trumpet voice, tho' broken now and dying,  
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind.

IV

Let me now sketch rapidly the life and career of this astonishing man.

Like many notable Germans of the nineteenth century, above all that German who is now beginning to arrest the attention even of Englishmen for as a rule it takes at least half a century for any true German thought to cross the North Sea! like Friedrich Nietzsche, and perhaps like Ranke himself, Heinrich von Treitschke was Slavonic in origin. His ancestors were Czechs who migrated from Bohemia during the turmoils of the Thirty Years' War and, seeking refuge from the Jesuit plague, found security under the Protestant Electors of Saxony. During the eighteenth century they gradually rose in the favour of the ruling House. Under the last Elector of Saxony a Treitschke became a Privy Councillor. He sent his sons into the army, secured for them in 1821 the syllable von, and before his death had the pride or the vanity of seeing one of them commandant of the fortress of Konigstein, which still rises in grey and impressive solitude on its tall rock above the Elbe. This was Eduard von Treitschke, the historian's father.

Treitschke was born at Dresden in September, 1834, one of the darkest and most disconsolate periods in modern German history. The old ideals were sinking; the new had not yet arisen. The despotism of Metternich lay like a dead hand upon Austria and the South; the princes clung to their privileges; Frederick William III still reigned in Prussia. Schelling died that year, sunk in obscurantism; Arndt was a professor at Bonn; Tieck had ceased to

write; Wilhelm von Humboldt still lived in honourable retirement at Schloss Tegel; but Goethe had died two years before, and, a year earlier than Goethe, Hegel and Niebuhr had both passed away; Stein had died some months after Niebuhr in solitude and estrangement from his times, seeing not only Germany but Europe itself rushing upon the abyss. Schleiermacher preached for the last time in 1834. The heroes of the War of Liberation were long dead, or lived, an embarrassment and a reproach, amid a generation which, apathetic and indifferent, half wished to forget their heroism. Scharnhorst had died of his wounds at Prague (1813), in the very hour of Germany's glory; Bliicher, in 1819; Yorck in 1830; and Gneisenau (just when entering upon the Polish campaign), a Field-Marshal at last, had died in 1831, like Hegel, of cholera, then raging throughout Europe. Who was there left to represent the past splendours? And in the deep night there was not a star to hint the coming dawn. Such was the world into which Treitschke was born.<sup>6</sup>

In his childhood everything seemed to mark him out as a Saxon, as destined, that is to say, to follow a career in that country. Treitschke, however, early discovered something that alienated him from the career contemplated for him by his father. His mother, who was of pure German origin, was a reader of Willibald Alexis, above all of those tales the scenes of which were placed in the heroic times of Frederick the Great; and when Treitschke's own tastes began to form they led him as instinctively to the Wars of Liberation as Rousseau's tastes had led him to Plutarch, or Mirabeau's to Livy or the Rome of the Gracchi and of Sulla. He took to the study of history; and he discovered in that study the conduct of Saxony in the past,

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<sup>6</sup> Treitschke himself has described this period in the third volume of his "Deutsche Geschichte."



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the conduct of the Saxon dynasty perhaps the stupidest royal House in Europe. He discovered the part played by Saxony at Leipzig, and the yet more despicable part played at Waterloo; and all that was German as distinct from all that was particularist in that history took possession of his imagination.

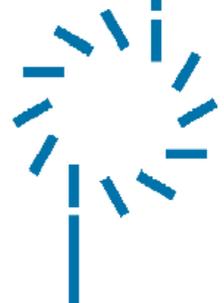
While he was still a boy his great heroes were not the heroes of Saxony; they were all Prussians. Just as in the eighteenth century the men of the French Revolution found their inspiration in the heroes of Plutarch, Caius Marius and Sulla and Brutus, so Treitschke found his inspiration in the Prussian heroes of the Plutarch, in those magnificent figures which fill and adorn the pages of Prussian history between 1809 and 1813. His heroes are Gneisenau, Blucher's aide-de-camp, he who really controlled Blucher's actions in all matters of diplomacy; and Scharnhorst, of whom he has left one of the most powerful sketches that German literature possesses. Again, his hero is Stein, or the philosopher Fichte, or Moritz Arndt the poet, the son of a serf, author of the famous song, "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" And there is significance as well as authenticity in the anecdote which depicts him as a boy of fifteen reading aloud in the presence of Beust, one of Metternich's most repulsive satellites, an essay in the dithyrambic manner rejoicing in the downfall of the princes and exalting German unity, a unity which is to be accomplished "by a race into whose blood has passed in their youth the free and bracing winds of the Baltic strand."

It is while he is a boy also that there overtakes him a disaster which tries the steel and stoicism in him. He has described it for us in a volume of verses published in 1856 the coming upon him of a fever, his slow recovery, and, at last, his astonishment at the persistent sorrow on his mother's face, despite his recovery. He describes his being taken out into the garden on an early summer's day, lying on a bench in the sun, seeing the bright skies for the first time after what seemed months and years. And then a strange

thing happens. A singular feeling comes over him of a vast and unnatural silence. He sees the mounting lark; he hears no song. It is a silent universe. Terrified, the child rushes back into the house, and there he discovers the cause of the persistent sorrow on his mother's face. He is nearly stone deaf, incurably and for ever.

His description of the fight within himself back to courage, stoicism, and acceptance of life is a very remarkable passage in the poem; and in this passage something of Treitschke's temperament throughout life is revealed. "There are men who are doomed to pass their lives on broken wings," he wrote later of Heinrich von Kleist, "because some malevolent chance has excluded them from that sphere in which alone they could accomplish the highest that is in them to do." To him in his youth that "highest" seemed his missed career of action and war. For it is certain that Treitschke, compelled to be a writer of books, would, but for this disaster, have been a soldier.

His course of study was the usual course of a young German of the time. Perhaps the greatest moment in it was when he came to the University of Bonn in 1851. There, amid the romance of the scenery, the mountains, the distant view of the spires of Koln Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchior, the Three Kings the river, the castle from which Roland had started, he knew the happiest period of a university life. "He who is not a poet in Heidelberg or Bonn," he writes, "is dead to poetry." The intellectual activities of the place rapidly absorbed him. The aged poet, Moritz Arndt, was still teaching history; and one can imagine the thrill indeed he himself has helped us to imagine it with which the young Treitschke, with his enthusiasm for the heroes of the War of Liberation, first looked upon those high and noble features. Each successive phase of that heroic action Arndt had witnessed; his own songs had been part of the action; he had been the companion and



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confidant of the great minister von Stein. Even more powerful was the influence of another of the Bonn professors Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, the historian of Denmark. He too, like Arndt, had played his part in the War of Liberation, and at four-and-twenty he had walked across Germany with the poet of Arminius, determined to fight in the ranks of Austria, since Prussia was still too timid or too weak to strike at the tyrant. In the young student Arndt kindled memories and sentiments ; but Dahlmann was at once an inspiration as a lecturer and in private a friendly adviser. Next perhaps to the influence of Arndt and Dahlmann upon him was the influence of the Rhine. It is hard for us in England to understand what the Rhine really means to a German, the enthusiasm which he feels for that river. Treitschke himself says of it, for instance, when he has to leave Bonn: "Tomorrow I shall see the Rhine for the last time. The memory of that noble river" – and this is not in a poem, observe, but simply in a letter to a friend – "the memory of that noble river will keep my heart pure and save me from sad or evil thoughts throughout all the days of my life." Try to imagine anyone saying that of the Thames!

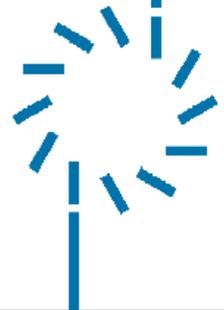
When Treitschke becomes a teacher himself and a professor at Freiburg these are the influences governing his teaching. His own career as a teacher began at Leipzig in 1859, and he inaugurated it in a striking enough manner by his treatise on "The State." This treatise might be described as an abstract justification of monarchy, just as Rousseau's famous Essay might with fairness be described as an abstract justification of democracy. Like every sincere attempt in the field of abstract politics it is full of inconsistencies and contradictions; but it reveals the central tendencies of the author's mind. The friend of Bismarck, the apologist of the Hohenzollern and the eager admirer of Prussian bureaucracy already announces himself. The essence of the State, he argues, is power; but it is a moral power, and in virtue of this moral nature the authority of the State over the individual is supreme and

without appeal.

Four years later, at Freiburg, he gave for the first time the lectures which developed afterwards into the two volumes entitled "Die Politik. "But the stress of the period speedily tears Treitschke from abstract speculation upon the State to living politics and to the study of the actions of men in the concrete. Bismarck's struggle with the Prussian parliament is at its height. The safety and prestige of the Prussian monarchy is not yet assured. The dispute about the Duchies is at hand, and behind it rises the war of 1864, and behind the war of 1864 and the Convention of Gastein loom the war of 1866, and Koniggratz, and the creation of the North-German Confederation; then the insulting half -maniacal jealousy of France, and the war of 1870.

It is a new Germany, almost a new Europe. Since the rise of the Spanish monarchy under Ferdinand and Isabella and its liberation from the Saracen dominion, and, at about the same period, the rise of the French monarchy under Louis XI and his successors, no event has so revolutionized the European State-system.

Treitschke had originally been destined for the army, and it is as a soldier of soldiers that we see him in each phase of those momentous nine years. "Lay on my coffin a sword," the dying Heine wrote in 1856. But the war in which Treitschke fought was less vague than that dim war for the freedom of humanity in which Heine imagined himself a fighter. Treitschke was an enthusiast for freedom, as his essays on Milton and Byron as well as scores of passages in his other writings attest; but he plunged into the struggle to assert the Prussian ascendancy over Germany with all the ardour with which, in an earlier age, Fichte and Dahlmann had plunged into the War of Liberation. At Freiburg, Kiel, and finally at Heidelberg, his own enthusiasm communicated itself to hundreds of students who



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heard him, and ultimately to thousands.

His appearance at this period was striking: a tall, rather slim figure, marked nobility of feature and bearing, dark eyes and masses of thick dark hair. He was sparing in gesture, abrupt and effective, more chary of pure rhetoric than Droysen, more regardful of fact than Hausser. His voice was harsh, the Saxon accent unmistakable, and he had often to pause for a word. He seldom mixed with his audience after his lectures; his deafness made this difficult, for, to a man of his sensitiveness, an ear-trumpet in general company was abhorrent. But this was no real drawback; it rather invested the speaker and his impassioned utterances with a touch of prophetic remoteness.

“Is Treitschke an orator at all?” an English admirer of his writings once asked a member of the Reichstag. “In the sense in which Mr. Gladstone was an orator,” was the reply, “certainly not. In the Reichstag he is always listened to with respect; he never kindles enthusiasm; and yet, if the art of the rhetor is to compel men to action, how many greater orators are there in modern Germany, or, for that matter, in modern France or England, than simply Heinrich von Treitschke? When I first heard him many years ago I had been reading Palacky’s History of Bohemia. You know the book? Well, in the thick of Ziska’s tremendous duel I constantly saw young Treitschke for at that time he was not more than thirty pass between me and the page like a Hussite warrior, authentic, irresistible, a spiritual fatalist, like Racine’s Joad girding on his sword in the name of the Lord of Hosts. And see, yonder he comes.”

The excitement, the momentary pallor on the speaker’s face, proved to the Englishman more powerfully than words the dominion which intellect united to moral greatness exercises over other men. He pointed to a solitary figure walking with a stick slowly down the shady path of the splendid street Unter den Linden. He walked as the deaf always walk, glancing rapidly from

side to side. It was impossible to resist the melancholy if penetrating strength in the dark and luminous eyes, eyes of a type which one seldom meets in England, full of meditative depth and integrity, trust-winning. Once, where the crowd was less, he raised a soft grey felt wide-awake hat, for the day was hot, and the noble forehead was for a second visible. Involuntarily the Englishman raised his own hat with an instinct of reverence. That was in the summer of 1892.<sup>7</sup>

The years in which Treitschke wrote his greatest book are also the years of his greatest fame as a lecturer. Probably no German professor, not Fichte, not Schlosser, not Droysen, has ever commanded such audiences. His lecture-hall in Berlin did actually suggest a concourse such as, in the Middle Age, met to hear an Abelard, or, in the Renaissance time, thronged around Giordano Bruno or Pico della Mirandola.

And it was a true message, a “gospel,” which they came to hear, a gospel which the commonest could understand, which the most cultured could not disdain. His subject, of course, was History, or it was Politics; but through all the mazes of historical narrative, carefully documented, fact on fact torn from hours in the Berlin archives, and amid all the mazes of political speculation, close and stern reasoning, sometimes repellent by its accumulation of apparently redundant matter and irrelevant illustration amid all this a man’s soul was wrestling almost visibly to bring home to his hearers his own burning conviction of the greatness of Germany, her past, her present, and the unfathomable vistas which open out before her in the future.

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<sup>7</sup> Treitschke's influence in the Reichstag was much greater than that of men like Lecky or Jebb or other university members in the British Parliament. It was more akin perhaps to that of John Stuart Mill when he was returned for Westminster, or to that of Macaulay.



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That is Treitschke's central theme. It is the informing thought of each of his distinctive books or collections of writings the five volumes of his History, the two volumes of his "Politik," his two series of "Deutsche Kampfe," his "Bilder aus der deutschen Geschichte," his political essays and literary portraits, above all, his magnificent full-length portraits of Dahlmann and of the poet Heinrich von Kleist.

V

Treitschke has no philosophy of History in the sense in which Hegel or Buckle or Cousin has a philosophy of History. He has come too late into the world for that. But in a wider sense, like every true German historian, he has a philosophy of History. There is nothing in which German historians more completely differ from English historians than in this respect. No German historian is ever satisfied that he has the right to teach history until he has acquired for himself by individual vision, or adopted from another, whether Kant or Hegel or Lotze or Nietzsche, some general view, some theory of the working of God in History. To him History is a drama in which God is the supreme actor. And Treitschke has such a vision or theory.

What, then, did that audience, consisting of princes and officials, of soldiers and diplomats and sometimes the most prominent figures in the Berlin fashionable world, come together to hear? They came, indeed, to hear of the greatness of Germany in other years and in other centuries. They saw pass before them in rapid sketches the grandiose or tragic forms of the Suabian and the Saxon dynasties. They were made to thrill with patriotic pride or admiration when, in speaking of a yet later age, the orator described in mordant words of contempt or denunciation the desperate conflict of France, Spain, England and Holland for exterior wealth and power, seeking a dominion upon which the sun shall never set, whilst, solitary, deep-thinking, Germany is

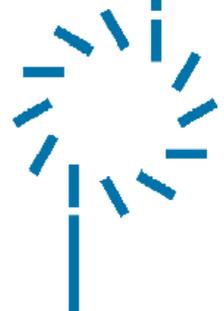
sunk in moral and religious absorption, pursuing the freedom of the spirit, poring over the abyss of absolute ideality, founding a spiritual empire. Or the gates of Sans Souci were flung open and it was the great privilege of Treitschke's hearers to behold its builder painted with a Velasquez-like realism and a Velasquez-like sympathy, with profound imaginative insight and vision. But before all and above all that audience came together to hear the story of the manner in which God or the world-spirit, through shifting and devious paths, had led Germany and the Germans to their present exalted station under Prussia and the Hohenzollern, those great princes who in German worth and German uprightness – *Aufrichtigkeit* – are unexampled in the dynasties of Europe or of the world. Treitschke showed them German unity, and therefore German freedom, lying like the fragments of a broken sword, a magic sword like that of Roland, or of Sigurd, or the Grey-Steel of the Sagas; and these fragments Prussia alone could weld again into dazzling wholeness and might.

This is Treitschke's governing idea the greatness of Prussia, the glory of an army which is a nation and of a nation which is an army.<sup>8</sup>

A great Greek historian, Dion Cassius, writing of the Roman Empire – a Greek historian, observe, – writing of the Roman Empire said that his conception and vision of the supreme end

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<sup>8</sup> To Giesebrecht also Germany is the nation of nations, the people of peoples. Droysen is even more explicit. At the period of the Schleswig-Holstein war he declared that to the Hohenzollern belonged the throne left empty or occupied by usurpers since the death of Konradin. His "History of Prussian Policy," based on lectures at Jena, is governed by a similar idea. The last volume appeared posthumously in 1886. It is a pamphlet, and false as a pamphlet. It is impossible to read without a smile the portraiture of the early Electors of Brandenburg as "creators of the German idea, following, as mariners a lodestar, the conception of German unity."



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of humanity was the whole world governed by the divinely-appointed State of Rome. Similarly I should say that this conception of the German Fatherland, the whole German kindred, governed by Prussia and by the House of Hohenzollern is the underlying theme of the Saxon Treitschke addressing a Prussian audience. And just as it had been necessary that Rome should first conquer the world in order to rule it in justice, so it had been necessary' that Prussia should dominate Germany in order to give to Germany present unity and future grandeur.

When Treitschke turns from Prussia, when he turns from the War of Liberation in 1813 and casts his glance backwards across German history, that history catches fire under his pen from the power and the illumination of this same idea. The whole movement of Germany from Charlemagne, the House of Hohenstaufen, the great heroic past of the Holy Roman Empire, from the time of the Reformation and of Frederick the Great to that of Gneisenau and Stein, is towards this consummation a united Germany under the supremacy of Prussia. And now upon what a career of high-uplifted glory shall not that mighty nation start! Once united, who shall set bounds to this Germany? What dream of the mediaeval emperors, what dream of a Frederick II, "the Wonder of the World," of a Barbarossa, of an Otto I, but shall be surpassed by this Germany that he, Heinrich von Treitschke, sees arise within the frontiers of his imagination, scanning the future, brooding on things to come!

And Fate was strangely kind to Treitschke. Though dwelling in that silent universe of the deaf, and threatened in age with the darkened universe of the blind, he lived just long enough to see upon the silver horizon of the North Sea, and upon the more mysterious horizon of the Future, the first promise of the German fleets of the future. He saw Germany thus fitting herself for that high task which he had marked out to one generation after another of students the day of reckoning with England, the day of

reckoning with the great enemy for whom he had nevertheless that kind of regard which every great foe inspires, which England's strength inspires. And yet his imagination pierced beneath the semblance of her strength, which to his imagination was but a semblance.

## VI

What are the origins of this antagonism or this antipathy in Treitschke to England and to things English? The question is worth asking; for there is no disputing Treitschke's immense influence not only upon his own generation but upon the whole of modern German thought.

This attitude of mind does not begin with him; it is present in the Heidelberg School, in Hausser, for instance, and in Schlosser; and Dahlmann's "History of the English Revolution" is capable of many interpretations. But in Treitschke the antagonism reaches a height and persistence of rancour or contempt which in so great a man is arresting if not unique. To him the greatness of England passes with the seventeenth century, with Cromwell and Milton.

The origins of this sentiment are partly historical, partly moral, and, in Treitschke, must be sought in his character as a man and as a patriot. Britain's world-predominance outrages him as a man almost as much as it outrages him as a German. It outrages him as a man because of its immorality, its arrogance and its pretentious security. It outrages him as a German because he attributes England's success in the war for the world to Germany's preoccupation with higher and more spiritual ends. But for her absorption in those ends and the civil strife in which that absorption resulted, Germany might, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have made the Danube a German river and established a German



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predominance from the Bosphorus to the Indus.

The sentiment has also its roots in history, recent and remote. "France," said Bismarck in September, 1870, "must be paralyzed; for she will never forgive us our victories." And in the same spirit Treitschke avers: England will never forgive us our strength. And not without justice he delineates English policy throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as aimed consistently at the repression of Prussia, so soon as English politicians discovered the true nature of that State and divined the great future reserved for it by destiny. Had not England been Prussia's treacherous but timid enemy in 1864 and 1866, and again in 1870-71, and, above all, in 1874-75?

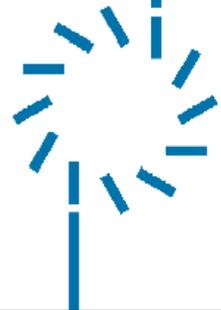
But the strongest motive is the conviction, which becomes more intense as the years advance, that Britain's world-predominance is out of all proportion to Britain's real strength and to her worth or value, whether that worth be considered in the political, the social, the intellectual, or the moral sphere. It is the detestation of a sham. "In this universe of ours the thing that is wholly a sham wholly rotten may endure for a time, but cannot endure for ever." This is the protest of the stern apostle of reality. He frequently rings the changes on the "nation of shopkeepers," pointing with aptness and justice to the general meanness and gradually increasing sordidness of English political life. That which Treitschke hates in England is what Napoleon hated in England a pretentiousness, an overweening middle-class self-satisfaction, which is not really patriotism, not the high and serious passion of Germany in 1813 and 1870, but an insular narrow conceit; in fact, the emotion enshrined in that most vulgar of all national hymns, "Rule Britannia"!

The nations not so blest as thee  
Must in their turn to tyrants fall,  
Whilst thou shalt flourish, great and free  
The dread and envy of them all.

Consider the world-picture which that upcalls ! A single island usurping the glory of freedom, surrounded by a world groaning beneath tyrants, whilst she sits in lonely grandeur!

For Treitschke it is not genius, it is not valour, it is not even great policy, as in the case of Venice, which has built up the British Empire; but the hazard of her geographical situation, the supineness of other nations, the measureless duplicity of her ministers, and the natural and innate hypocrisy of the nation as a whole. These have let this monstrous empire grow a colossus with feet of clay. Along with this he has the conviction that such a power can be overthrown. And with what a stern joy and self-congratulation would not the nations acclaim the destruction of the island-State, "Old England," old, indeed, and corrupt, rotten through and through !

The sincerity as well as the intensity of Treitschke's anti-Englishism is attested by the spontaneity and variety with which it finds expression. The indignation of Schlosser, judging his contemporaries as Dante judged his contemporaries, is a dispersed indignation; Treitschke's is concentrated upon England only. His inventiveness is astonishing. Here he takes up a phrase of Montesquieu, who in "The Spirit of Laws" makes England, so to speak, the hero of that great and perfect book, and he turns Montesquieu's judgment into an occasion for a diatribe not only against French character in the eighteenth century, but against the whole character of English history. At another time he attacks the private character of the English in a manner that recalls Nietzsche's witty apophthegm, when, speaking of the part played by danger and suffering in the heroic life, he observes, "Man, after all, does not really desire happiness; only the Englishman does that," thus adroitly placing the Englishman outside the pale of humanity altogether. But Treitschke is seldom witty, though often grossly if unintentionally offensive. He is as unable as Heine to see



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anything fine in the English character.

“Foreign critics do not like my books? That is natural. I write for Germans/ not foreigners,” he answered with impatient contempt when an admirer pointed out to him the injury he did to his chances of a European success like that of Ranke or Mommsen. And in the love and measureless admiration of his own nation he has had his reward.

One final question. When, by the light of what is called “impartial history”,<sup>9</sup> one considers the events of the last century in their bearing on Treitschke’s theory of Germany’s future, whither does Germany in that century, at once in politics and in thought, really seem to be moving? In the first place, if we contrast the Germany of the present day with the old half -idyllic, half-despotic Germany of Goethe’s great youth and early fame,<sup>10</sup> of Lessing’s manhood, of Schiller’s early years, of Herder and the Jacobis that Germany, almost patriarchal in its simplicity, quite clearly has passed away for ever. Its exclusive ideal was culture, not patriotism, and the first word in culture always is Mankind, Humanitas, Humanity. It was essentially, that is to say, a cosmopolitan Germany. Goethe, for instance, when his whole nation, convulsed by the war against Napoleon, is looking to him for guidance how does the great poet of Germany act? He turns aside altogether from the present and resolutely fixes his imagination upon Persia! Upon Persian poetry, the Persian Divans, the beauties of Jallal’ud’din, of Hafiz, of Sa’di! And in regard to Napoleon he said to a German friend, “That fellow is far too strong for you; you’ll never do anything against

him.” But men can now no longer say with Jacobi, “I hear on every side nowadays the word ‘German’, but who is a German? I strive in vain as yet to attach any precise meaning to the term”; or with Lessing himself that patriotism is nothing but an heroic weakness that he for one is glad to be rid of; or with Herder, “Of all kinds of pride I hold national pride the most foolish; it ruined Greece; it ruined Judaea and Rome.” Gone, too, are the days of Karl Immermann, who could never follow a political debate because he could form no image of such abstractions.<sup>11</sup>

There you have that earlier, and, if you choose to call it so, that greater Germany. But what Treitschke sees underneath that is the Germany of the War of Liberation, Prussia renascent, and her steady advance throughout the nineteenth century to the present day. And as Treitschke, casting his eyes back to primitive German history, sees arise there the religion of the valiant, the religion of Valour, so now, with this informing thought in the mind, we can trace in the Germany of 1913 like a dawn upon the horizon, piercing like a sun through all the transient mists of industrialism, socialism, militarism, the vision of that same religion returning to Germany that Religion of Valour.

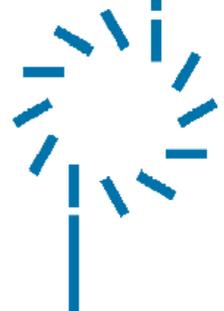
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<sup>9</sup> Of course there is no such thing as “impartial history,” and even if there could be impartial history it would be the dullest, stupidest thing on this earth of ours.

<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the period in which he writes “Werther,” the First Part of “Wilhelm Meister,” and the First Part of “Faust,” and those great dramas “Iphigenie” and “Tasso.”

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<sup>11</sup> That was the Germany very largely of Hegel; it certainly was the Germany of Kant. And to him also, I daresay, though we have no record of it, it would have been difficult to associate, there at Konigsberg, any particular meaning with the words “German patriotism.”



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