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Types of Political Frontiers in Europe: Discussion

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Zurich in 1859, which ran down the centre of Lake Garda, and then due south immediately *west* of Mantua to the Po; and it was a fairly correct hinterland for Venice, though the actual frontier was stupidly kept inside the "Venetian" water-parting in both the north-west and the north-east in spite of the Commissioners having been instructed to pay special attention to "operations which might render the State separation more manifest." Here again, however, the general frontier lies parallel with the water-parting of the Isonzo, as in the west with that of the Var; and the nationality of the relatively few Italians of the coast east of the Istrian karst could not reasonably weigh as much as, still less more than, that of the vast non-Italian population of a hinterland which could reach the sea only on the Gulf of Trieste or the Gulf of Quarnero. Physical, climatic, and ethnic causes demand that the Italian frontier should include the Isonzo basin, and run along the Karst proper to the apex of Monte Maggiore (4600 feet) on the Gulf of Quarnero, thus giving both Trieste and Pola to Italy.

I will conclude by a single reference outside Europe. The essential incapacity of the Prussian to assimilate would of itself bar him from any hope of permanent empire, even in Africa, and to this incapacity is added a fatal political defect based on geographical causes. By origin and history a rigid patriarchal and military organization was imposed on Prussia, and the Prussian is normally, even on his utmost frontier, in the grip of the Government machine. On the scarp of an Asiatic plateau, or in the heart of an African jungle, the sentinels of our own far-flung frontier have been for generations beyond the paralyzing grip of the machine, and have learnt and handed down the lessons by which Empire is given to man—lessons of conciliation as well as courage, of initiative as well as industry, of patience as well as precision, of sympathy with local cultures as well as a serene conviction of racial superiority, and of self-control sufficient to prevent you even wishing to impair any genius loci, still less wishing to impose a political idolatry on alien and unwilling worshippers. Such lessons are not easily learnt by a patriarchal machinist trained within telephone reach of the headquarters of the Government machine.

The PRESIDENT (before the paper): It was announced, as you may remember, in the November *Journal* that we should have a lecture to-night by Miss Gertrude Bell on her recent adventurous travels in Arabia. Miss Bell has written to me saying she has gone to France to join in the search for the Missing. Under the circumstances we must excuse her, and Prof. Lyde has very kindly stepped in and offers to give us a lecture on a subject which is suggested by the great war: "The Types of Political Frontiers in Europe." Prof. Lyde is Professor of Economic Geography at University College, London. He is also the author of several excellent text-books, the most recent of which is one for advanced students on 'The Geography of the Continent of Europe.'

It may be suggested that a time of war is also a time of examination in geography, both for the public and for its teachers, the Press. I am afraid I cannot say we come out altogether satisfactorily. I have found in the last fortnight in Metropolitan

newspapers of reputation three statements which, I confess, surprise me. The first was that the action in which the *Goeben* was injured, which was fought a few miles off Cape St. George, in the Crimea, was fought off the coast of Anatolia—that is, on the opposite side of the Black sea. The second was a flight of quite oriental imagination. We were told that the Turkish fleet had bombarded Batum and Baku. That is to say, it had sailed across the Caucasian isthmus into the waters of the Caspian! The third was that Batum is “within easy reach” of Tiflis. These towns are more than 200 miles apart, about the same distance as London from York, but with a mountain range thrown in between. Such vagueness seems to indicate that the editor in Fleet Street does not always follow the excellent advice Mr. Rudyard Kipling gave us recently at the Queen’s Hall and have an atlas at his elbow.

In our subject to-night we may seem to be trespassing on the field of politics. We have here nothing to do with party politics, but when we come to the question of world-politics, and more especially to the facts and the principles that should underlie political action, it may be expedient that the opinions of experts should be put before the public. There is obviously a question which within the next few years, we would fain hope within the next few months, must come before statesmen, the re-settlement of political frontiers all over the world. To enter into details with regard to any particular frontier would be premature. But in any such discussion it is obviously desirable we should realize the facts to be considered and the principles which ought to be applied. We are most of us aware that in our own history political frontiers have often been laid down in very strange ways and not to the national advantage. We have known cases where a parallel of latitude or a degree of longitude has been taken for a political frontier before it had been ascertained where that line lay on the surface of the globe, *e.g.* in Uganda. We have known other cases where a river has been taken as a frontier before it had been agreed which of its headwaters was to be regarded as its true source. In other cases, either physical features or racial distribution have been disregarded. It is surely desirable that in these matters we should try to do better in the future than we have done in the past, and if Prof. Lyde can tell us anything to-night which will help to create an atmosphere in which such discussions may be carried on, with, on the whole, satisfactory results, he will not have wasted his evening, and we shall have spent a profitable one.

Prof. SPENSER WILKINSON: I came here to-night to learn, not to teach, and I have listened with the greatest interest to the lecture which we have heard, having also read it carefully beforehand. I am bound to say I think Prof. Lyde is a little bit theoretical. That is to say, when I approach the problem of how, in the future, which none of us exactly foresee, the map of Europe is to be redrawn, I think the question is much larger than one of mere geographical theory in the sense in which Prof. Lyde has laid down certain principles. It seems to me that in the reconstruction of frontiers the main consideration which ought to occupy the Governments concerned must be that of convenience or stability, and that the principle which one would wish to see adhered to is, that as far as possible the frontiers, the boundaries of states, should be so drawn as to distinguish between nationalities or nations, which, as you know, it is very difficult accurately to define. You will remember many years ago the famous French pamphlet of which the title was the question ‘What is a Nation?’ and the answer was that you could give no single criterion. You cannot lay down that merely community of speech makes a nation. There must be something more. I think, broadly speaking, we all understand what nationality is, and I think we should wish that if there are to be new borders in Europe they should be so drawn as to bring into one fold, under one Government,

those people whose whole desire and wish is to form a single nation together. This makes me disagree, until I have had further conversation with Prof. Lyde on the subject, with some of the suggestions he made. He showed us an admirable map of the Rumanian nationality, showing us Rumanians not merely in the two countries which used to be Moldavia and Wallachia, but also in that country between the Pruth and the Dniester which was, unfortunately, after the last Russo-Turkish war, annexed by Russia, as well as a Rumanian population extending into and covering a great part of the east of what is now Hungary. Several millions of Rumanians live in that region, and visiting that country I was amazed to find the strength of the Rumanian feeling of that population. Prof. Lyde would leave them out of Rumania and have the boundary at the Carpathians, because he sees in them the tendency to prefer to live on the plain rather than in the mountains. When travelling through Macedonia a few years ago, I had the pleasure of travelling a whole day with a Greek lady, with whom I discussed for a long time the question of the proper place of Macedonia, and she asserted that a very large part of Macedonia, and a much larger part than I could believe, was Greek, that the population was Greek, and that their country ought to belong to Greece. She referred to the peasants on her father's estate as being Greeks who talked Bulgarian, and I said, "Surely people who talk Bulgarian are Bulgars." "Not a bit," she said; "the test of nationality is the will of each"—*la volonté de chacun*—and I am bound to say I could not answer her. I assert with regard to those Rumanians who live in Transylvania that we must regard their will. I am not convinced by any of the principles which Prof. Lyde lays down, except the first, that it is of vital importance that the racial unit should coincide with the geographical unit. As soon as you get Professors of Geography talking about race they may take us a very long way further than we want to go. I am not prepared to follow the second part, as to the case when the racial unit is incapable of assimilation. The frontiers are going to be drawn, I hope, in a congress of the Great Powers. Whether you have a congress of a certain number of Great Powers or of all of them, is it possible for practical statesmen to say, "We shall draw your frontiers such and such a way because you are incapable of assimilating other people?" Nor am I quite convinced about the desirability of the frontier being the place where men naturally meet, nor altogether convinced, for instance, that it is a statesmanlike proposition at the present time that the future frontier of France should go up to the Rhine. I can see that in many ways it would be very desirable, but we have to be practical. At this moment I think we are rather in the air if we talk about frontiers at all, because, if we want to see such frontiers as we should like, the first thing we have to do is to be the victors, and I should like to see my way to that before I began to discuss frontiers. Has not it been a cause of very great trouble to Europe that for forty years a piece of territory, which, no doubt, was to a large extent German-speaking—Alsace-Lorraine—has been included in the boundary of Germany, and the Germans could not assimilate its population? Is it not desirable to avoid a repetition of that sort of thing in either direction, and though we may think it right, if we are able to carry it through, that France should recover her former boundary in regard to Alsace and Lorraine, should not we rather be disposed to warn our French friends against taking into France any considerable area of German territory with a German population?

I shall end with a small detail which for many years has interested me personally rather deeply. I have always been struck, in travelling on the border between France and Italy near the sea-coast, with the very peculiar and, I think, unfortunate line which was taken when, in 1859, not only Savoy but Nice was annexed. The frontier line at one point crosses the river Roja on to the eastern side, so that there is a little triangle of French territory, including the town of Saorgio, interrupting

what seems to me naturally an Italian valley, and I have always felt, if there were to be a redrawing of frontiers at all, it would be a gracious act on the part of France to agree to the cession to Italy of the very few square miles which would give Italy the whole valley of the Roja without giving France a frontier less defensible than that which she now possesses.

Mr. MACKINDER: I agree with Prof. Spenser Wilkinson in thinking that it is premature for us to be discussing frontiers. There are only certain things which one can say at the present moment with any advantage, and one of them, I think, is certainly that we shall not be able to settle the map of Europe according to our insular and more or less detached views. In his very interesting paper, may I venture to say that Prof. Lyde has neglected to point out the process by which frontiers actually are fixed. They are fixed by a process of bargaining. Now, there are some people—I don't say that Prof. Lyde is one of them—who think that at the end of this war you are going to set up a new Europe in accordance with scientific ideals. I am not so sure. I think you will find that the old idea of the balance of power will assert itself again in any congress of Europe, and that means that you will fix boundaries by the old process of bargaining. I always feel that there is no greater lesson in history than that of 1814. That year, at Vienna, there was a defeated Power, France, and there were two salient victors, the victor by sea, Britain, and the victor by land, Russia. But when they got into congress, Britain and France found themselves as one party in the bargaining, and Russia was supported by Austria and Prussia. The curious thing is that the parties were led, not by the chief victors, but by Talleyrand, the Frenchman, and Metternich, the Austrian. The result was the map of Europe which has, on the whole, held during the past three generations.

Just consider what the end of this war may be. You are not going to crush out the German nationality. That is impossible; nor would it be desirable, if it were possible. You have sixty-one or sixty-two million Germans in the German Empire, and you have to add to them, I suppose, some eight or ten million German Austrians. A nationality of seventy millions in the centre of Europe, with an intensely national character, will have to be dealt with. It will still be so strong a power that I question whether there will be very much of ideal map-making. If you conquer that power, the object will be to clip its wings for the future.

Let me point out two of the problems which, it seems to me, are bound to be before us. They will probably drive a coach-and-four through any of your theoretical settlements. One deals with the case of Poland. The region inhabited by the Poles lies wholly inland, but, as Prof. Lyde told us, all nations now strive for access to the sea. The sea-coast is the meeting-place of the world. It is probably because Servia had no coast-line that we have been plunged into this great war. Are you going to give Poland an approach to the Baltic, or are you not? If you are, then you will have to give her German land, and will set up a new Alsace-Lorraine. If you are not going to give her an approach to the Baltic, you are going to leave a sore, and, if she becomes strong, she will try to break the bars of her cage, in order to become the neighbour of the whole world, and not merely of the two or three Powers around her.

Or take the case of the enlarged Servia, the Servia of the Servians, including, let us say, Montenegro and Bosnia. Is Servia to include the Dalmatian coast and islands, or is it not? Ethnically it should include them. I am told that about 3 per cent. of the Dalmatian population is Italian, and the remainder are Slavs. But if you give that coast-land, so rich in harbours and sailors, to Servia, what will Italy say? She will be surrendering the control of the Adriatic. Italy cannot be oblivious of the strategical importance of the Adriatic any more than we can be of

that of the Persian gulf. These things will have to be settled practically by bargains in which strength will count.

My feeling is that Prof. Lyde has done a valuable thing in putting on record a number of factors which will have to be considered among others. No doubt there is a feeling in our country that we would like to remake the map of Europe according to certain principles which we think will make for peace in the future. If that is to be achieved, there will have to be sacrifices on the part of some far-seeing foreign statesmen. No bigger thing was ever done by Prussia than when, under Bismarck, she refused to annex Bohemia. Her present alliance is the consequence. No worse thing was ever done by Germany than when the military party forced the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and made the lasting enmity of France. Think what the Hungarians could do at the present moment were they to place themselves at the head of a great movement for the federation of South-Eastern Europe. They would have to start by surrendering the Rumanians of Transylvania to Rumania, and by coming to terms with Italy in regard to the Adriatic. By their example they might induce Servia and Rumania to act generously towards Bulgaria. In the end, Hungary would lead a great federal state, which would count in the bargaining of Europe, because it would be able to throw real weight in the scale. Then we might have some hope of a European settlement of frontiers which would be stable.

May I conclude by saying that I think there has of late been a tendency which seems to me rather deplorable in the teaching of geography? There are two kinds, of subject and of generalization. You may take fifty terms, and you may deduce a scientific law from them, and you may predict as to the fifty-first. That is possible in purely physical geography. But when our geographers go on to apply scientific generalization to human geography where human initiative comes in, the result is to make Colonel Close and others blaspheme and say that there is no such thing as geography in the large sense, but only map-making. To me the title of the paper this evening savours of this heresy. But let us not lose sight of that other type of generalization and of subject whose object is to tell you where you are in time and space, and to give you a sense of proportion and perspective. The result is to give judgment in practical conduct. If we try to obtain laws from our human geography, and especially laws which will guide our action politically, we are attempting that which I believe is doomed to failure. We shall cause both the scientific men and the historians to throw stones at geography.

Prof. LYDE: There are one or two things I should like to say. First of all, with regard to Prof. Spenser Wilkinson. I understood him to say that there are several million Rumanians in Transylvania; but that, I think, is wrong. In Transylvania, which is the only area I was discussing, my slide included about 1,500,000 Rumanians—*i.e.* four-sevenths of the whole population. Then as to the "cloven hoof," which peeped out in the words "a defensible frontier." That gives away the whole position; we are not looking for defensible lines, but lines along which men would meet naturally and peaceably. In any case, what about the other three-sevenths of the population? Mr. Mackinder also ignored them, and ignored the question of where the frontier is to run if it *has* to be inside the present Hungarian frontier. I quite agree with him about a bargain—you will have to bargain, but with the land as well as with the peoples. I spent days and days over that point, to see if I could not find an appropriate frontier; and there is none. You must have a line where peoples can meet naturally and in peace, and it is the business of a geographer to say what geographical feature makes such a line. Mr. Mackinder himself has, in his books, worked that very point out better than any one else; and his objection now is only academic. The Great Powers in the Berlin Treaty laid frontiers along features which

they not only could not name or describe, but which actually proved to be non-existent! In the face of such criminal stupidity or colossal impudence, I say that it is their business to consult geographical societies about frontiers. Such societies would say that there are certain lines all over the world along which people tend naturally to meet in peace, and a navigable river is one of them. Mr. Mackinder said our discussion was premature and presumptuous. But how can we give an answer when the practical settlement comes up, and we are appealed to, unless we have previously discussed the matter? I was, therefore, not wrong in suggesting the subject for discussion to-night. Again, Mr. Mackinder spoke of a single German empire of seventy millions at the end of this war. Whatever else there is, there will not be that. I believe that there will be four German kingdoms. Then he asked whether, sea-coast being so important, we would give the Poles the whole area to the Baltic. No. The Poles never were marine, and don't want to be; their objective is Cracow, not the sea. The same principle answers Prof. Wilkinson's question, "Who will decide the capacity for assimilation?" The answer is—an indisputable history. One final point. Supposing the Rumanians got Transylvania, would they be content? No, because half their grievances are really due to their own incapacity to assimilate themselves to their geographical environment. I half thought Mr. Mackinder to imply that I was looking at the question with political prejudice. I can assure you that I have really no politics. If I have any leaning, it is towards the Labour Party, and that is only because they are not run by lawyers.

The PRESIDENT: Where eloquent and learned professors differ I shall not be so foolish as to rush in. To-night, while very greatly interested, I have been in one sense a little surprised, because I thought we were going to discuss the principles which ought to underlie the selection of political frontiers rather than the actual frontiers that may be settled a few years hence. I quite agree with Prof. Wilkinson that it is premature, and not a little presumptuous, to discuss in detail what may be desirable frontiers after the war. There is another difficulty I feel, it is this: There are two ideals of frontiers, and the question is whether in laying down our plans, or conditions, for an ideal frontier we are to look to the past, when they have been either defensive lines or aggressive outposts, or to a problematical future, when they will be convenient parting-places between friendly nations, more or less racially and linguistically homogeneous, like the Italians, or held together by bonds of common interest, like the Swiss. I cannot follow Prof. Lyde when he recommends commercial meeting-places as boundaries, because it seems to me it would be extremely inconvenient to have the meeting-place between two nations with different laws and custom-houses running through a populous mart. It would never do, for instance, if the frontier between Italy and Switzerland, instead of running along the top of the Alps, ran through Turin and Milan, which are the natural meeting-places for all commercial purposes.

It may well be—and it is an ideal to be striven for—that military aggression between states may go the way of assault and battery between individuals, may become obsolete. State morality, though it limps sadly behind private, does, on the whole, advance. When this comes to pass strategic considerations will no longer take a foremost place in the delimitation of frontiers.

I had thought of running along the Alps, in order to point out how, in history, that great natural frontier has failed, from various causes, to remain a political frontier, but it would take too long. I must, however, confess that I was somewhat shocked at one thing in Prof. Lyde's paper—when he spoke of Lotharingia being divided in the ninth century into Lorraine and Belgium. The latter country only came into being in the nineteenth century, and, if one were to go into detail, we should find that part of it, that where the fighting is going on now, belonged not to

Lotharingia but to the West Frankish kingdom. The relation of Belgium to Caesar's Belgæ is, I think, too remote and academical for any but sentimental use. I also felt that were the ghost of Mr. Freeman with us, he would ask, how about Burgundy? Burgundy, like Savoy in later times, was one of the powers that spread right over the Alps. The reason why Switzerland still holds part of the Milanese is no doubt that the inhabitants of that region have realized that lesser taxation and a freedom from foreign military service, combined with very exceptional facilities for smuggling, render their present position economically advantageous. Smuggling is an important frontier incident which has been left out of sight to-night. Living in a county which lost its main occupation when smuggling to France ceased, the omission has naturally struck me.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the story of the Alps may lead us to the following reflection: While making allowance for certain minor divergencies between the political frontier and the water-parting which I have not time here to mention, and also for the two great exceptions of the Ticino and Trentino referred to by Prof. Lyde, we find that the tendency has been for the political frontier of Italy to approach the natural, for the national frontier to coincide with the racial. As wars cease, and dynastic influences decline, and democracy grows, this tendency is likely, I think, to be found at work elsewhere in Europe. There must, however, be not a few regions where the complex distribution of race will tax statesmanship to the utmost. In such cases large concessions of local government may prove the best solution of problems at first sight insoluble. Anything that geographers can do to foster and encourage this tendency will be a benefit to the future. Perhaps not in our time, but in our children's time, there may be a tribunal set up in Europe which will have the will and also the power to prevent such an extravagant waste as war. The lecture has raised extremely interesting problems, and has given occasion for a very bright and interesting discussion. I am sure you will all wish to join with me in passing a vote of thanks to Prof. Lyde for the trouble he has taken in preparing it and coming to us to-night.

THE EARTHQUAKE IN CENTRAL ITALY ON JANUARY 13.

By CHARLES DAVISON, Sc.D., F.G.S.

THE earthquake which destroyed Avezzano and the neighbouring villages on January 13 visited a district in which shocks have been rare and of no great strength in the past. Dr. Mario Baratta's history of Italian earthquakes* includes all those known during the first 1898 years of the Christian era, but he mentions only one strong shock (that of April 10, 1885) as having originated in the neighbourhood of Avezzano, and two (those of August 19, 1777, and May 9, 1891) in the district including Sora and Isola Liri. This is no doubt one of the reasons why the loss of life was so serious, for the old and wretchedly built houses (they were merely stones without mortar) have escaped destruction by former earthquakes. The narrow streets and the sudden onset and brevity of the shock also contributed to raise the death-rates, which, if the figures given be correct, are the highest known for any earthquake, in Italy or elsewhere.

The report issued by the Central Office of Meteorology and Geodynamics

* 'I Terremoti d'Italia' (1901).