Heinrich von Treitschke

WHEN Ernst Curtius, Heinrich von Sybel, and Heinrich von Treitschke died, within a few months of one another, Germany and Berlin lost three of the most distinguished writers who had devoted themselves to history. The first two, among the last survivors of their generation, could look back upon a long series of completed works. How different in this, as in all else, was the younger man, who was cut off by a premature death when the great task to which he had devoted his life was but half completed! What a contrast between him and the humanist who brought to Hellenic studies a dignity of mind and sweetness of style which made him a worthy representative of the great school of German classicists! The comparison with Sybel lies nearer, for in their work they touch each other; but how little do we find in the younger writer of that tact, discrimination, *finesse* with which Sybel illustrated the writing of diplomatic history! And yet in creative power, in originality of conception, in his influence on his nation, Treitschke stood above them, as above nearly all his contemporaries.

Little is known of him in this country, and that little is not favourable. He was the chief spokesman of a party which in internal affairs was opposed to all that Englishmen are accustomed to admire, and in external policy he preached hostility to England. To nourish a passionate hatred of England was the chief task of his later years; with singular industry he collected and perpetuated every hasty criticism or thoughtless insult against Germany, that those who learnt from him might remember and avenge. The destruction of British maritime supremacy was the aim he laid down for his nation. 'We have reckoned with France, Austria, and Russia,' he wrote in 1884; 'the reckoning with England has still to come; it will be the longest and most difficult.' England, he taught, had grown to greatness by the astuteness with which her statesmen had nourished war on the continent, that they might have a free hand to extend their power beyond the seas, and by the cunning with which they veiled their plans under noble pretences.

Never have English statesmen failed to find philanthropic party cries to cover the calculations of their trade policy: at one time they

¹ *Deutsche Kämpfe*, neue Folge, p. 395.

took the balance of power, at another the abolition of the slave trade, at another constitutional liberty, as their pretext. And yet their statesmanship, as all policy which aims at the unreasonable goal of a world supremacy, in principle always reckons on the misfortunes of other nations.

Against English claims, he taught, all the nations of Europe were bound by a common interest, and peace on the continent was the opportunity for this great work of civilisation.

Shall [he cried] the glorious many-sidedness of the world's history, which once began with the rule of the monosyllabic Chinaman, after running its joyless course, end with the reign of the monosyllabic Briton?

He did what he could for the cause, and he was able to implant in the hearts of too many among his countrymen a hatred of this country nearly equal to his own.

It is, however, not by this that he will be remembered, but by his writings on the history of his own country. They are, indeed, little known here; only one small pamphlet has been translated, though at least some of his essays and the first volume of his history would well repay the labour. The comparative neglect is chiefly due to the subjects with which he deals. Englishmen are not easily interested in continental history, and the years that elapsed between 1815 and 1848 are singularly barren in all that would attract the general reader. He has himself, in a characteristic passage, noticed the fact and suggested an explanation:—

I write for Germans. Much water will flow down our Rhine before foreigners allow us to speak of our fatherland with the same pride which has always distinguished the national historical works of the English and French. The time will come when other countries will have to accustom themselves to the feelings of modern Germany (vol. ii. p. v).

He was, however, amply compensated by the admiration of those for whom he wrote, an admiration that he well deserved. He was not only a great writer—he was a marked personality; the hearers who thronged his lecture room, from the day when he began his public career at Leipzig to the last years of his life at Berlin, came not only to learn history, but for political instruction and patriotic enthusiasm. Among a new generation accustomed to public affairs historians have stepped into the place formerly occupied by philosophers and theologians. The students listened to Treitschke as seventy years before they listened to Fichte and Schleiermacher, and his desk at the university was the pulpit whence he preached to the nation. He filled a peculiar place; for a generation brought up in the shadow of great events found in him, and almost in him alone, a man who gave literary expression to the tumultuous emotions with which they were filled; his hearers

left the room at least in the assured conviction that they were not as 'the fools who think that the sun rises in the west.'

He was not a man who buried his personality in the study of a past age: he wrote history, he tells us, in the spirit in which Thucydides and Tacitus wrote. He had none of the antiquarian spirit, the past had no interest for him, except so far as it influenced the present. He was, indeed, only secondarily an historian. A politician first, orator and journalist, every one of his writings is in the nature of a political pamphlet. Other German scholars—Niebuhr, Dahlmann, Sybel, Droysen, Duncker—have brought to political practice minds trained in the study of history; Treitschke brought to history a mind exacerbated by political controversy. It is characteristic of him that, with the exception of an early essay on Milton and two studies on the history of the United Netherlands and the early history of East Prussia, all his writings are concerned with the century in which he lived. No great historian of modern times has so small a compass; all his minor works may be looked upon as essays preparatory to the great work to which the latter part of his life was devoted.

The work he set himself was one in which success brings the highest reward. To write the history of one's own country in one's own time, when the scene is laid in the streets of the city in which we ourselves live, and the actors are the men whom we see about us—this is the noblest but the most difficult task an historian can undertake. It is one which in England too few have attempted; but in Germany the present century has become almost the chief field of historical research, and historians devote to the investigation of the events they have themselves witnessed, and in which they have played their part, as much critical ingenuity and learning as to the re-creation of a remote antiquity.

This has been made possible by the great liberality with which the German, and especially the Prussian, governments have opened their archives; Treitschke was allowed to use the Prussian records to the year 1848, and Sybel to the year 1866. If to this we add the innumerable biographies and memoirs, private and public, authorised and unauthorised, the historian has now for German history in this century a wealth of information which leaves few doubts for future generations to unravel. We have a far greater mass of material than is available for the history of England. Treitschke lays stress on the contrast between German and English practice:—

To states, as to individuals, contemporaries are seldom just; some states are always better, others worse, than their reputation. To the former belong those young powers which do not as yet rule the public opinions of Europe, and still have to prove their right to exist. To the latter the old powers, especially England, which by the unveiling of its

diplomatic history can only lose, and therefore guards the treasures of its archives more carefully than any other state.

The real cause of the difference seems to have escaped his notice. England is, with the exception of Russia and Austria, the only great European power which has enjoyed a continuous existence. The policy of Prussia before 1866, of France before 1870, of Piedmont before 1860, is separated by a broad gulf from all questions of modern statesmanship; the questions which were discussed then are not the same as those which occupy the minds of the present government, and men can look back on them with a certain aloofness. In England, on the other hand, the discussions of a generation ago often directly govern present action. We may, at any rate, be glad that in England there have been few of those indiscreet publications which have added so much to our knowledge of continental history; for there is no fact in English life so honourable as the strict observance of the code of honour by which cabinet secrets are observed, and the severe reticence on public affairs of those who have held positions of responsibility, even when it is at the expense of their own reputation.

Before we consider Treitschke's historical work we must for a moment turn to his life; in him less than in any other man can they be separated.² It is curious to notice that the most ardent apologist of Prussia was himself a Saxon by birth, and the spokesman of German patriotism of foreign origin. Were we to adopt his own style, and attribute the peculiarities of individuals to moral qualities inherent in the race from which they spring, we should say that his Slavonic blood is shown in the want of intellectual control, and the intensity of passions which often break out, and notice how these more barbaric qualities are strangely mingled with that mental power, that fundamental honesty of character, the accuracy and diligence which tell of his Teutonic blood. In the life of most men who take an active part in affairs there is some event which gives a character to their whole career. The climacteric of Treitschke's life coincided with the crisis of his country's history. What the Reform Bill was to Macaulay the year 1866 was to him; in his earliest works he anticipated the events of this year; he helped, so far as a writer could, to bring them about, and he never outgrew them.

Born in the year 1836, the son of a Saxon officer, when the revolution of 1848 broke out he was still a lad at school, too young to be drawn into the confused vortex. Fortunate for him that it

² For the facts of Treitschke's life I have depended chiefly on the biographical notices which appeared after his death, especially the admirable account of his early life by Theodor Schiemann (*Heinrich von Treitschkes Lehr- und Wanderjahre*, Munich, 1896), and a collection of letters published in the *Deutsche Rundschau* for 1896.

was so, for the year of revolution was fatal to the career of almost all who took part in it. Had he been a few years older he would have plunged into the struggle; fiery-tempered, unrestrained in speech, with his incomparable power of invective he would have soon become a leader, at a time when the leaders were nearly all poets, journalists, and professors; even if death or exile had not befallen him, he would have begun life a defeated and disappointed man. It would not have mattered what side he chose. There were three parties; the republicans, the national liberals, the reactionaries: all tried to save their country, and all failed; none more so than the last, who seemed for the moment to be successful. The result was that men lost confidence in their leaders, their party, their principles, and themselves. Even those who were not driven from their homes, to begin a new life in dreary exile, saw themselves surrounded by former friends from whom they had parted, or old enemies with whom they could make no sure alliance.

From all this Treitschke was saved. He was living in Dresden. He saw the barricades rising in the streets of the city, he watched from the windows of his house the flames rising as the three days' struggle between the soldiers and the insurgents took place. One of his school comrades found his death from a bullet on the barricades; more than one of the masters was wanted by the police; but he remained quietly at home. Letters from him to his father, who was in command of the Saxon contingent in Schleswig-Holstein, have been preserved. They deserve notice; they show a genuine reality of feeling, very remarkable in a lad of fourteen. After the struggle was over he writes—

Peace, peace! Joyfully the white flag waves from the tower of the Kreuzkirche. Peace at last, after six days of terrible conflict! God did not wish entirely to destroy the unfortunate city. Had it not surrendered to-day at two o'clock, it would have been bombarded. But dearly has the peace been bought, and it still may bring with it great misfortunes. The first danger is, thank God, over, but if only the peace shall bring a blessing with it! If only an agitation does not arise in the country more terrible than the struggle itself! All this the king could avert by accepting the constitution. May God enlighten him to think of Saxony and of Germany!

And again—

Wretched, wretched is it to see how Saxony waits and waits till the decision comes, in order then to set her sails to the wind and humbly join the victorious side.

We may perhaps find in the events of this year some explanation of the bitter hatred he afterwards showed to Saxony. He was as a boy ambitious for the state to which he belonged, he was prepared to give it love and loyalty; but the action of the govern-

ment seemed to him dishonest and unpatriotic, so that at last he shook the dust from off his feet, and of his own freewill ceased to be a Saxon, that he might become a subject of the house of Hohenzollern.

He grew to manhood during these unhappy years of reaction, when Austria was again supreme in Germany. He studied at more than one university, reading history and cognate subjects; but already he suffered from that cruel deafness which, the result of a childish malady, grew upon him with advancing years; his letters and poems show how bitterly he felt the infliction, all the more that he was early attracted to social and political life. At this time he published a small volume of verses, 'Vaterländische Gedichte,' and, like so many other young men, talked of becoming a poet. But if he sought for a time to find consolation in his own troubles and those of his country by singing of other days, he was of too active a nature to be long content with this; the fancied greatness of the past could not atone for the misery of the present; even as a student he was never a romanticist. His deafness debarred him from the service of the crown. His keen interest in politics attracted him to journalism; more than one flattering offer was made to him by the leaders of the press, but he decided for learning, and qualified as a *Privat-Dozent* at Leipzig. As the son of a distinguished Saxon officer it was natural that he should choose the great Saxon university, but he never liked the place. He missed the beauties of the Rhine, with which he had become acquainted during the time he spent at Bonn; the mercantile surroundings were uncongenial to his fresh and breezy nature; but, above all, in Saxony he found himself in the very camp of the enemy, against whom he believed himself called to fight.

It was the time of the 'new era'; the days of despondency were over, the old king of Prussia had retired, and Prince William assumed the regency. The cloud had lifted, events in Italy were hastening to a climax, and men asked one another when Prussia was going to do what Piedmont was doing. The *National-Verein* was founded to further the cause of united Germany under Prussia, and in the press the Prussian party came forward. No one threw himself into the agitation with more energy than the young teacher. The pages of the *Grenzboten* and the *Preussische Jahrbücher* were open to him; he quickly became befriended with the liberal leaders, whose headquarters were in Leipzig. Among the students his fervid patriotism and eloquence won him a leading place. His success as a lecturer was almost unprecedented: he had to turn away listeners from his doors, and one day he had the satisfaction of seeing no less a person than the minister of education take his seat among the audience. It was, however, something more than love of learning which had brought him.

Treitschke's attitude on public affairs had already aroused comment and displeasure at Dresden. What his political principles were he tells us in a private letter :—

There is only one salvation ; a single state, a monarchical Germany under the dynasty of the Hohenzollern ; expulsion of the princely houses annexation to Prussia. That is, in clear and definite words, my programme. Who believes that this can be done peacefully ? But is not the unity of Germany under the emperor William I an idea which outweighs 100,000 lives ? Compared with this idea my life is not worth a farthing.

He was, indeed, more Prussian than the Prussians. The object of the party to which he belonged was the union of Germany under the leadership of Prussia ; the almost universal feeling recognised that in no other way could any permanent reform of the Diet be effected. There was much variety of opinion as to the exact nature of the new organisation, but it was generally assumed that the union between the states would be some form of federation—what the Germans call a *Bundesstaat*. From this view Treitschke differed. He desired not a federation, but a single state ; he wished not for an alliance of the other states to Prussia, but their annexation. And among them was Saxony. The king, ministry, army, and parliament—he wished to see them all swept away.

The strong opinions he held and the vigour with which he gave expression to them could not fail to influence his career. It soon became apparent that there was no prospect of his receiving a permanent appointment at Leipzig. For what government would appoint to an important post a man whose whole life was avowedly dedicated to the destruction of the state which he would have to serve, and the ejection of the king ? His position was, indeed, very inconvenient. His father had been promoted to the highest posts in the Saxon army—military governor of Dresden and governor of the Königstein. He was a personal friend of the king ; and Treitschke's own home lay in the virgin fortress which had more than once afforded a refuge to a Saxon king when driven from his capital by a Prussian army, and which was even now being armed for another war. General von Treitschke repeatedly besought his son at least to place some restraint on the public expression of his opinions ; but the son was a man who never stopped saying a bitter word for any one. It does credit to both that their private affection remained undisturbed by their political differences ; but Treitschke's reputation as a man and a writer would have been higher had he taken his father's advice.

In 1864 he was offered and accepted a post at the university of Freiburg by the duke of Baden, who had now collected round himself a liberal ministry. The next few years Treitschke spent in the charming little city on the borders of the Black Forest. His

sojourn here enabled him to become better acquainted with the catholic south, and it confirmed his affection for the protestant north.

It was in regard to the affair of Schleswig-Holstein that the difference between him and his party first became apparent. Down to the year 1864 he had been bitterly opposed to the internal policy of Bismarck. He went even beyond the leaders in his condemnation of the minister, and broke off his connexion with the *Preussische Jahrbücher* because the editor refused to join in his uncompromising denunciation. Treitschke was at that time no believer in 'the good intentions of Herr von Bismarck.' So angry was he that he would, we are told, gladly have fought on the barricades against the obnoxious administration. It was, indeed, characteristic of him that the opinions he held he always held violently. When, however, the war of 1864 was over, he was the first to applaud the policy of the man who, having by the sword torn Schleswig-Holstein from the Danes, instead of helping the re-establishment of the state under its own dynasty, began the process of annexation. Anticipating the action of the minister, he cried out that the basis of law must be abandoned, the rights of the dynasty be put aside, the claims of the duchies to vote on their own destiny be disregarded, and the states be annexed to Prussia. In this he was opposed not only to the policy of his own party, but to the general feeling of the nation. He complains much of the want of political insight in Germany, and the reluctance of his countrymen to form a bold resolution. 'You want,' he said, 'the unity of Germany, but you refuse to accept the only means by which it can be brought about.' He quotes with approval the old saying, that no German can wish for anything without wishing for the opposite at the same time. I think the instinct of the nation was truer than the reasoning of the professor. The question at issue was the future not only of Schleswig-Holstein, but of all the smaller states in Germany; for what Treitschke desired was that not only Schleswig-Holstein, but Hanover, Saxony, Baden, and Bavaria should be swept away and become provinces in the Prussian monarchy; the Germany of the future was to be not a federation, but a simple state; not *Bundesstaat*, but *Einheitsstaat*. This is the sacrifice by which, he always repeats, and by which alone, German unity can be achieved. In defence of this he exerts all his learning and all his eloquence. He proves from history that no federation can be strong or permanent; he proves from reason that no federation of monarchs can even exist.

The works he composed during this period of his life are of two kinds: we have, first, a collection of essays, all of which possess permanent scientific value; and by their side a mass of articles and pamphlets, written chiefly for the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, which

are immediately concerned with the political situation of the moment. A selection of these he republished in later years.⁹ It is always a bold thing to reproduce in permanent form articles written in the heat of controversy. But Treitschke could not avoid doing so; they are too much part of his life to be forgotten, and nothing that he wrote in later times displays so strongly his strength and weakness. But if it was bold to publish them, it is much more difficult to judge them. There are a few writers whose contributions to a momentary controversy have a permanent interest and universal application. To these he does not belong. But even if tried by a lower standard, they do not seem to me to be good controversy. Ability there is, courage and eloquence; his style was, indeed, essentially rhetorical. We see in it that union of thought and emotion which marks the orator: an amazing flow of words, a vocabulary rich and original, sentences terse, clear, and often epigrammatic, full of ideas which stir but do not satisfy the intellect. He has every quality of a great orator but one—that of convincing; and he fails in this because, fertile as he is in ideas, his ideas are too obviously subservient to his passions. He never persuades one that his reasons are pure reasons. More honest than writers whose prejudices are less carefully veiled, and less misleading, he never tries to deceive; but he also fails in communicating his own feelings to the reader, for he never touches the softer emotions, he has no pity, and even suppresses the sense of humour he undoubtedly possessed. He says in one of his articles that what the Germans want is a warm heart and a cool head. Of no one is this truer than of himself. He fails as a controversialist because he never puts himself into the place of those with whom he is contending; and he constantly falls into the vulgar blunder of hasty writers—that of attacking the moral character of those whose political attitude differs from his own.

The burden of all of these papers is the same—the evils which have been brought upon Germany by the existence of the small states. To them he attributes every material weakness and moral defect which his sharp eye discerns among his countrymen. And what an indictment it is he brings against them! Not the most irresponsible French journal has spoken with such bitterness and contempt of Germany as he has done. What a terrible picture would any one take away who did not know how untrue his description is! The coarseness of the working man, the shameful selfishness of the middle classes, the pride and narrow-mindedness of the nobles and the princes, the pedantry of the professors, and the political incapacity of the whole nation, are his constant theme, and to his opponents he attributes treachery, felony, lying, envy, jealousy, self-conceit. I have never read articles of equal ability which leave on

⁹ *Zehn Jahre deutscher Kämpfe* (1865-74). Berlin, 1874.

one's mind so strong an impression that the writer must be wrong, even when one knows that he is in the right. The most striking of these articles are those written during the year 1866. In that year he at last saw in prospect the realisation of his dearest hopes. Almost alone of his nation he looked forward to the war without regret and without fear, for he had no doubt as to the justice of the cause nor misgivings as to the result; he was, moreover, quite without that dislike of war which was so prevalent among the liberals of an older generation.

When the war broke out he was resident at Freiburg; he had already received an offer from Bismarck of a place under the government in Berlin, that he might with his pen defend the new policy. He had refused this, for he still disapproved the conduct of the ministry in internal affairs; he disliked the proposal to grant universal suffrage, and, above all, he truly felt that he could not sacrifice his freedom. He could never have placed himself under any master. When, however, the die was cast and war was declared between Prussia and Baden, he left Freiburg and travelled by a circuitous route to Berlin. He became editor of the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, and from that day he was a Prussian. With what pride did he feel that he now belonged to a great and glorious state! The result of the war had, in fact, more than justified his confidence in the strength of Prussia. 'Prussia to the small states is as strength to weakness,' he wrote. 'We see what all their boastful phrases hid—mere rust and decay. Their rottenness stinks to heaven.'

But his triumph was disturbed by the fear that the victory would not be fully used. The future of Hanover, Frankfort, and Saxony was at stake, and for a few weeks Germany was in suspense; it was a time when a wise man would have kept silent. Nothing that he or any other irresponsible writer could say would affect the result; it depended not on German public opinion, but on the policy of Russia and France. But he could not let the crisis pass without his voice being heard, and in two notorious articles he demanded in the name of Germany that the states should be swept away. He painted the sins of the courts against the German nation, and with all the fervour of moral superiority which he so readily assumes he depicts the deep demoralisation which will follow the restoration of the dynasties.

We should simply regard it as a disgrace for the name of Germany if, after the terrible judgment of God on the battle-fields of Bohemia, after the disgraceful bankruptcy of the system of small kingdoms, princes like the Guelph king, the elector of Hesse, the king of Saxony, who has been dragged in leading strings by a Beust, returned to the thrones which they have lost by their own accumulated guilt. We shudder at the gloomy demoralisation which must enter into these countries when, after the

small princes are restored to their thrones again, blasphemies resound, Austrian spies are rewarded, honest Germans persecuted, and troops decorated for the struggle against Germany (p. 103).

Above everything we fear from a restoration the demoralisation of the people by the spirit of lying, by the hypocrisy of a loyalty which, after the events of this summer, cannot be felt by the younger generation at least. We can paint to ourselves the scene—how King John marches into his capital, how the ever-loyal town council of Dresden receives the destroyer of his country with words of thanks and veneration; how garlanded maidens, clad in white and green, curtsy before the stained and dishonoured crown; how another Mahlmann rolls out the flabby songs of particularist poets. Truly the very thought is disgusting (p. 178).

Of course all this talk about disgrace is nonsense. The Saxons had not disgraced themselves; they had fought bravely with their allies, and been defeated.

Then he discusses the character of the rulers. Of his own king he says—

King John is doubtless the one of the exiled German princes who deserves most regard; but the extravagant praises which people are so fond of awarding to his intellect do not hold their place before a sharp eye. With a fulness of learned knowledge he remains a common man, of narrow heart, not free, philistine in his judgment of the world and the age; in this dry soul is nothing of that noble-hearted Maecenas trait which made his less learned brother appear so charming.

King John has of his free will become a vassal of the house of Lorraine. Let him remain so, and lead a careless life as a noble in Bohemia; he has saved his crown treasure. A change of persons will do no good.

The crown prince, a man not without rough good-humour, but coarse, and devoid of all political insight, was always a supporter of the Austrian party, and an admirer of the emperor Francis Joseph; and of Prince George, whose pride and bigotry cause offence even in a town as tame as Dresden, there is still less to be expected (p. 124).

And of the country he writes—

The agreeable politeness of the population must deceive no one. In the Saxony of Herr von Beust fresh manly courage finds no place. Narrow-minded self-content, petty rancour, jealousy, and untruthfulness have taken root in wide circles of the people, especially in the capital, and can easily be dangerous to the Prussian government if it is not watchful (p. 104).

Of the universities of which he had been a student and a teacher—

It is miserable to see what a wretched conceit has accumulated in the universities of the little states; how, called nobly to serve the whole fatherland, they have become breeding-places of the most pitiable *Particularismus*. The correct Göttingen *Hofrath* would despair of his God if

the Georgia Augusta ceased to bear the fine-sounding name *Juwel in der Welfenkrone*; the genuine Leipzig professor cannot comprehend the thought that he should cease to be a *Perle im sächsischen Rautenkranze*. Unnoticed the brutal facts of history rush past the closed eyes of the doctrinaire; if they disturb him in his own circle he gets cross and feels himself personally insulted (p. 119).

We have no space to quote more; but this will be enough. If we put aside the meanness and malignity of the man who would choose the hour of defeat and despair to insult his own king and his father's friend, how foolish this is and unpatriotic; it was impossible it could do any good; the decision had, indeed, been made before the second article was published. There was only one course which a patriotic and far-sighted writer could pursue—to attempt to heal the wounds made by the war, to reconcile again Prussia with Saxony and Hanover, whether the fate was to be alliance or annexation. He knew this himself. 'What we want,' he said in the same article, 'is a movement in Saxony in favour of annexation.' And this was the way in which he, the Saxon who had just become a Prussian, thought to influence those whom he had left behind.

Small things show the nature of a man. In an article written in September 1870 he discusses the arrangements to be made for the entrance of Bavaria into the German confederation. Among other matters to be settled were the privileges to be assigned to the Bavarian army. Speaking of this he says, 'If in Munich they wish to look on their ugly blue uniform as an inalienable peculiarity of their race, this will surely cause no difficulty.' What can we think of the man who could write thus within three weeks of Sedan, when the streets of Bazeilles were still filled with the corpses of the Bavarians; a man who claimed to be at heart a great patriot, who professed that he desired the union of Germany, and who as the advocate of military monarchy understood something of the pride with which a soldier regards his uniform? One begins to recognise that he would have preferred that the adhesion of Bavaria should have been brought about by conquest rather than by agreement. Had there been many men like him in Germany, it would not have been united to this day.

If we turn from the manner of his articles to the matter of them, we shall find that he is equally wrong in the policy he advised. It is always hazardous for a foreigner to express an opinion upon the internal institutions of other countries; but it is clear that he much exaggerates the evils which sprang from the existence of the little states. The word *particularist* is as much misused by a certain class of writers as the word *philister*. The constitution of the Germanic body before 1866 was indeed very inconvenient, and of course the inconvenience would in a way have been remedied by

destroying all the component parts of the confederation, but the chief evils seem to have arisen not so much from the existence of the smaller states as from the dangers that threatened their existence; it was this and the disproportion between their real power and their constitutional influence which produced the apparent conflict between their interests and the welfare of Germany. It was the work of a statesman to reconcile the two, and to alter the constitution so that loyalty to the whole country should not be inconsistent with affection for the peculiar institutions of each district. It was Treitschke's plan to intensify the opposition.

It is, indeed, instructive to notice how completely his predictions have been falsified. The continued existence of Saxony has not been a danger to the empire; Bavaria has not become, as he foretold, a centre of foreign intrigue. Looking back now on the years which followed 1866, we can see that the real danger to Germany arose from the annexations. The result of them was to create a party whose interests were clearly opposed to the ascendancy of Prussia. Saxony and the king of Saxony had nothing to gain by a war of revenge. Can we say the same of Hanover? Even if the people with the sturdy loyalty of North Germans resisted temptation, how much trouble did Bismarck create to himself when he laid the foundation for the Guelph party in the Reichstag! The truth seems to be that there was something in Treitschke's nature which prevented him comprehending that generous feeling by which an honourable enemy may easily become a faithful friend. He himself could not fight without hating those against whom he fought; he did not understand forgiveness, and never forgot. He speaks much of the exaggerated hatred of Prussia which prevailed in Germany; he does not see that this hatred would naturally cease as soon as Prussia had had the chance of annexing another state and had not used it. He could not foresee that the Saxon crown prince, who had fought so bravely and loyally on the side of Austria, would a few years later fight equally well on the side of Prussia against France. In later years he confessed that he had been mistaken, and that the princes had been more loyal to the empire than the people; but at the critical moment then, and again and again in later life, he showed his complete incapacity as a politician; for in every other political conflict in which he was engaged he displayed the same qualities.

There is something further. The policy which he advocated was a revolutionary policy; the forcible expulsion of the dynasties was as much an act of revolution as the conquest of Naples by Garibaldi or the *coup d'état*. It was, as he conceived it, the violent overthrow of established institutions in order to give to the nation a more perfect constitution. This was a means of reformation which the nation had fully discussed in 1848, and deliberately rejected.

They had rejected it because with the Germans as with the English the strongest feeling was that of respect for law. They knew quite well what they wanted; they desired a supreme authority above the princes, and some high court of appeal before which the governments which violated the rights of the people might be arraigned; they desired also a strong and vigorous direction in the common affairs of the whole nation. But the people of Saxony, of Hanover, and of Schleswig-Holstein demanded, and they were quite justified in demanding, that in the new Germany which was to be built these states should take their part as distinct and living communities, and they did not wish for the expulsion of the princes, for deeper than all questions of policy was the profound belief that no state can with impunity overthrow rights established by law and treaty. What the nation had refused to learn from a century of revolutions they were now taught by their own rulers—that obnoxious individuals and inconvenient privileges may be swept away, and that there is an appeal from law to a higher expediency.

It is a lesson which no government can teach with impunity. Treitschke was, like all other German thinkers, in his later years distressed and perplexed by the phenomenon of German socialism, the violence of the doctrine and the measures it advocated. He did not see that in their own way the working men had only learnt too well the lesson he had helped to teach. The sympathy between Bismarck and Lassalle was not purely accidental. It is often said that the events of 1866 have destroyed the idealism of Germany. I do not think this is the way to express it, for in politics idealism is often the excuse for violence; what they did was to destroy the belief in the rule of law. Men often discuss the difference between England and Germany; they generally say that the government of England is parliamentary, and the government of Germany monarchical. The characteristic difference rather lies in this, that in England the constitution is held together by a privileged class of lawyers, in Germany by the army. In an essay on socialism Treitschke himself writes—

The movement of the working men in England has been turned from the wild orgies of Chartism to practical ends, because the well-to-do have, with unflinching calm, shown the excited mob that not a single stone nor a single board can be broken out of the existing order. The brave sense of law of the higher classes was at all times the rock on which the blind belief of the masses who were misled struck their horns.

And no people has ever so urgently required clear ideas of law as the German nation to-day.

Why is this? Because Treitschke and men like him have taught the nation that *wir müssen den Rechtsboden verlassen*. He sees

with astonishment that even the peasants of Schleswig-Holstein have become socialists. Can he be surprised when for fifty years they had struggled with true north-country perseverance for rights—right of self-government by their own elected estates, which had been recognised by every jurist and prince in Germany—and they saw these rights put aside by that very power in whose name law is now administered among them? for Prussia never dared to summon the estates of Schleswig-Holstein.

In the formation of these opinions Treitschke was influenced not only by the profound contempt he felt for the rulers and peoples of the smaller states; he had formed an almost fanatical admiration for a particular form of government. It seemed to him that a nation which was not organised under a strong, self-reliant, central monarchical power was disgraced. Shall Germany alone of all nations of Europe, he asked, not enjoy a single national state? He disliked all complicated constitutions in which the sovereignty and power was hidden, whether it was the self-willed anarchy of the middle ages, the constitutional monarchy of modern Europe, or federal government. He often defended himself against the charge of Caesarism, and wrote a book to prove that he was not an admirer of Napoleon, but there was no statesman of modern Europe (except Cavour) with whom he had so much sympathy as Napoleon III. Of the power of the state he spoke with almost mystic veneration.

We stand before the humiliating thought how immeasurably great is the idea of the state, and how small is even the greatest human ability before the many-sidedness of the commonwealth. As far as the memory of history reaches, perhaps Julius Caesar alone has embraced all branches of the life of the state at the same time with creative power.⁴

And again—

Hegel was the first to press into the sanctuary itself. He understood the state as the reality of the moral idea, as the national moral will, and with one blow overthrew all the doctrines of natural law and political *Romantik*, which deduced the state from original contract or divine foundations. In this way the exaggerated idea of the state of classical antiquity acquired new life, and to the state was assigned an omnipotence which does not belong to it, since the Christian world has recognised the rights of conscience. But the deification of the state did little harm among a people which had so long sought its ideal in a stateless freedom. Only by overvaluing the state could the Germans attain to a powerful feeling for the state.

It was this strong feeling for the state which caused the first separation between him and the liberals. Liberalism in Germany was of two kinds, French and republican, and English and constitutional. In either form it was essentially individualistic; the

⁴ *Historische Aufsätze*, ii. 377.

object of both parties was to check and restrain the power of the government, and to destroy grades of society; they aimed at personal freedom and equality; they spoke much of the fundamental rights of man. Since 1848, as we can now see, liberalism had begun to decay; that was not recognised at the time, but to Treitschke, who had only grown up after that critical year, liberal doctrines had never come with quite the same intensity of conviction as they had to men whose opinions had been formed during the thirties and early forties. He was, as a matter of fact, really joined to the liberals only by a common enmity. Both were opposed to the actual political state; both hated the treaties of 1815. The liberals wished to introduce a system which would give greater freedom and be more democratic. Treitschke wished to see the smaller states destroyed and the monarchical power of Prussia put in their place. So long as the treaties of 1815 were maintained he and they were naturally at one; for the only other party in Germany was the party of conservatism, or rather the legitimists, who stood for the maintenance of the *status quo*, adhesion to treaties, defence of established rights. But while they put the struggle for constitutional government in the first place he set above it the effort after national greatness. 'First freedom, then power,' they said. 'That is impossible,' he answered; 'freedom must be in a state; political liberty is liberty in a state. You must build your state first; when it is firmly established then you may begin to struggle for freedom.' And in a review of Mill's book 'On Liberty' he says—

Mill and Laboulaye both live in a powerful, respected state; they look on this great blessing as a matter of course, and regard the state merely as the power which controls and threatens the freedom of the individual. For us Germans insight is given into the dignity of the state by the very fact that we do not possess one.³

In his later years his opposition to liberalism became more pronounced, and one of the most marked characteristics of his *History* is the polemic against the liberal writers who, during the middle of this century, had so much influence in Germany; he attacks with equal vehemence the doctrines of cosmopolitan constitutionalism, the dreams of eternal peace, and even social phenomena, such as the decay of duelling in England, a sign of the *Verwilderung der Gesellschaft*, as he called it, or the altered positions of women.

The world stood helpless before a 'Woman's question' which had been unknown to a simpler generation. Women with the fussiness of amateurs pushed themselves into men's professions, and just as in the days of moral decay in classical antiquity so now the doctrine of the emancipation of women arose from the slime of over-education (v. 508).

³ *Hist. und polit. Aufes. 111. 15.*

It does not appear that Treitschke was able to offer in place of the liberal creed any connected scheme of political thought. Never successful in systematic exposition, he belongs to no philosophical school, and it is to this that he owes so much of his greatness as an historian. His thoughts on political affairs are not parts of a theoretical scheme; they are the observations he has brought away from the study of the living world. His ruling passion was not obedience to a theory, but love of his country. He had no master; something he had learnt from Dahlmann, more from Fichte, but as no other German he was *nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*; and it is for this reason that, in his German history, partisan as he is, his narrative of events and his judgment of men are always so living. His tendency in thought is concrete, and the abstract language in which he often clothes his thought is due rather to the spirit of the tongue which he used than his own mental character. His direction is indeed more towards moral than intellectual observation; no word does he so often use, or rather misuse, as *Sittlichkeit*, and he easily works himself into a state of moral indignation which becomes very wearisome.

He stands outside the stream of public opinion; it is not for him, as for so many writers, a dæmonic force; it is merely the opinion of so many fallible men and women. As he says—

How thin and lifeless appears the history of political thought in most German works and lectures! Dealt with in a just and free manner it would be the deepest of political sciences. It should show how the development of ideas mutually acts and is acted on by political circumstances; how the apparently free work of thought, how even the abstract play of fancy of More's 'Utopia' is conditioned by the institutions, the party conflicts, the instincts of the age, and, again, how the ideals of far-seeing thinkers by long and circuitous ways enter into the feeling of the masses and the laws of states (iii. 778).

But he never rises to the highest pitch of objectivity, so as to realise that his own feelings and beliefs are as transitory and partial as any of those he criticises.

He is a close observer of life and a keen critic, but he never sees things in a clear white light, and though his writings are full of *obiter dicta* on political affairs they are not so lucidly conceived in his own mind as to become maxims capable of universal application. To take a single case, in speaking of Frederick the Great he says—

He was all his life accused of treacherous cunning, because he never allowed his right of self-decision to be taken away by any treaty or alliance (i. 52).

Does he mean by this to lay it down as a maxim that no great statesman will be bound by treaties when they have ceased to be

convenient? No, he has not Machiavelli's daring logic; he does not grant to other states the privileges he demands for Prussia, and he thereby (as repeatedly in all his books) violates the only safe principle of international morality, that each man shall apply to his own country the same principles that he uses in criticising the conduct of other states, and shall allow to others the same latitude he claims for himself.

When brought before the problems of modern society he was helpless. As editor of the *Preussische Jahrbücher* he, as before, took a prominent part in political controversy, and for a short time had a seat in the Reichstag; he wanted, however, the flexibility of mind and the tolerance which are necessary to make a successful politician; he never outgrew the thoughts of 1866; he was more at home in civil war than in civic discussion; an idealist, he could not understand that the new condition he had so long hoped for should be, when it came, marred by the clamour of party controversy. He was too ready to see in all who differed from him *Reichsfeinde*, and to demand the violent suppression of those he did not like, whether they were catholics, or Jews, or socialists, or capitalists; he had so often foretold the downfall of England as a new Carthage, owing to the power of money, that he could not without impatience see the prosperity of Germany associated with the increased influence of the stock exchange. He could not tolerate that the absolute power of the Prussian state, which had overthrown the house of Austria, should be questioned in its own dominions by the Roman curia, least of all that the excellence of military monarchy should be rudely and violently denied by the working man. From time to time he made attempts to find for his prejudices a more profound reason, but his essays on political economy and social questions, while they lack the vivacity of his more concrete studies, are distinguished neither by clearness nor logical power.

The chief work of his later years was his 'German History;' he had begun to work at it as early as 1862. His object then was to write a history of the German confederation from 1815 to 1848. The book was not to be based on original sources; in those days that would have been impossible; he intended by it immediately to influence his countrymen. 'I wish,' he writes, 'to show in what a sinful squandering of precious power this great nation passes its time. Naturally I am prepared to find that, at the end of the three years in which I hope to master the enormous material, the book will be superfluous and the German diet gathered to its fathers.' He found, as others have found, the immense difficulty of the work; his studies became deeper and deeper; when the year 1866 arrived the book does not seem to have been begun. Of this period we have only a series of brilliant biographical studies, much of which

was afterwards incorporated in the history. The book was taken up in later years and in happier circumstances; the 'History of the German Confederation' grew into the 'German History in the Nineteenth Century;' and when he died, more than thirty years later, the work remained but half completed, in five large volumes of nearly a thousand pages each.

Even in its unfinished form what a testimony it is to the industry and power of the writer! I know no book which lives as this does. If, as has been said, the history of England is too often written as the history of parliament, the history of Germany in the works of many writers seems to be confined to diplomatic correspondence. From this limitation Treitschke is quite free; not, indeed, that the diplomatic side is neglected; he has studied with success the archives at Berlin, Carlsruhe, and other capitals, and he is able to publish documents which throw new light on the diplomatic history of Europe, including many which are indispensable for the study of English history; but the history of diplomatic negotiations forms only a small part of the book. What he paints is the whole life of the nation; nothing escapes him; politics, religion, literature, learning, material progress—all is represented. Never has such a wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm, and learning been expended on perpetuating every side of the national life. Nothing is too great or too small to escape his notice. He deals not only with statesmen and princes, he takes us into the office of the editor and merchant, the study of the professor and theologian, the *Commerz* of the student. He is equally at home in every part of the country; in the civic aristocracies of the free cities, among the peasants of Frisia, in the small courts of the Thuringian duchies, in Munich and Berlin: and he gives a dramatic interest to the most tedious diplomatic negotiations. It was to him a labour of love, for, when he was not writing political pamphlets, he loved his country, with all its foibles and weaknesses, with a healthy and concrete love. He avoids, moreover, the great danger into which historians so easily fall; he does not give us ideas and tendencies, but men and women. He is completely free from the taint of Hegelianism; it is the men as they thought and felt and acted who interest him. It is, in fact, a book which could only have been written by some one living on the threshold of the period with which he is dealing.

Of English writers he reminds one most of Macaulay; he has Macaulay's strong rhetorical manner of approaching his subject, the same strong party bias, the same variety of interest. His style, however, differs much; it is less clear, more diffuse, and for English ears too adjectival. He lacks, moreover, Macaulay's genius of common sense, his fundamental sanity and generosity of mind. He often reminds one of Freeman, but it is rather Freeman the

politician than Freeman the historian; for he has little archaeological interest; but his patriotism is akin to Freeman's enthusiastic Teutonism, and his prejudices are as strong and often as unaccountable. Of his own countrymen he resembles no one so much as Mommsen, whom he admired above all other German historians. He is, however, without the very strong scholarly finish which Mommsen shows even in his more popular work, and there is nothing in Treitschke which we can compare with the 'Staatsrecht' or the 'Corpus Inscriptionum.' It is not that he has not mastered his subject, but in reading Mommsen one always feels that his judgments, even if one disagrees with him, are the result of his learning; in reading Treitschke one suspects that the learning has been obtained subsequently to the opinions. He is without the strong legal acumen Mommsen shows, and, in fact, on this side of his history he is most deficient; as in his practical politics so in his writings, he ignores law which is the framework of society, but then he belonged to a school which put the sword in its place and called the substitute progress.

He has, however, the true instinct of a scholar, though he never is a pedant: he spares no labour to investigate every fact, however unimportant; he takes nothing on hearsay. He had the inestimable advantage of being the first to use original materials of great interest; but he never falls into the common mistake of overestimating their importance, or attributing too much value to a fact because it was not known before, and those who have gone over the same ground testify to the honesty with which he has used his material.

The book has great defects. The arrangement is often confused; but how is it possible to write a history of Germany in which the narrative is always clear? But the absence of an index and table of contents is an inexcusable neglect. The great want of restraint which we noticed in his earlier works appears again; it is the book of a man who writes hastily, who seldom corrects what he has written, and says everything that comes into his mind; hence long digressions which might well be spared; the literary criticism which fills so disproportionate a space is generally commonplace, and in his desire to be lively he is often trivial; his taste is bad, and too often the old venom breaks out.

He writes best about those subjects in which he is least interested; he himself knew the defects of his style.

My blood is, alas! too hot for an historian, but the narrative in the second volume is quister than in the first; and I intend now to work hard at myself, to read Thucydides, and by degrees to get more into an historical style.

And in truth he is so interested in the moral of what he writes

that he will hardly allow us to get absorbed in the narrative. There is nothing in the History quite equal to his study on the United Netherlands, probably the most brilliant historical essay in the German language. His style at the best has no equal in his own language, but he is not often at his best. His descriptions are seldom rounded and complete; and he more generally gives a sketch than a picture; but I cannot resist quoting his description of the old age of Frederick the Great.

The great period of the old monarchy was going to its rest. Around the king it became stiller and stiller; the heroes who had fought his battles, the friends who had shared his laughter and his dreams, sank one after the other into the grave; solitude, the curse of greatness, fell upon him. He was accustomed to spare no human feeling; for all the bright dreams of his youth had been trodden under foot by his pitiless father. In old age his unrelenting severity became unscrupulous harshness. The stern old man, who in his few hours of leisure walked alone with his greyhounds past the pictures in the gallery of Sans-Souci or in the round temple of his park thought sadly of his dead sister, saw deep below his feet a new race of little men; it was theirs to fear him and obey; for their love he cared nothing. The power of one man lay like a burden on their minds. When from time to time he appeared in the opera house, then stage and singer seemed to sink away before the spectators; all looked to the seat in the stalls where sat the worn old man with the great hard eyes (i. 84).

It is only those who have had to go over the ground which Treitschke has covered that can know how completely he has done his work, and how irreparable a loss to learning is his premature death; irreparable, if for no other reason, because he did not live to write the history of 1848. It was a subject which would have suited him as no other, for no other historian delights as he does in painting the absurd and grotesque; and here as nowhere else would he have been able to display his critical acumen and his power of seizing the salient points of character. He looked forward to this after the dreary years which fill his volumes; on his death-bed it was in his mind.

Ah [he said] I have had little good fortune in my life, and if now—but that cannot be; God cannot take me away before I have finished the sixth volume.

The work which he left will never be completed; there is no one who can take his place; it could not be done except by one who had lived in and known Germany as it then was; no foreigner, no German of a younger generation could quite understand the contradictions, the mingled seriousness and absurdity of the year; and now that he is dead there is no one left who has his knowledge, diligence, or dramatic power.

J. W. HEADLAM.