

This article was downloaded by: [Universite Laval]

On: 03 March 2015, At: 11:21

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Royal United Services Institution. Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rusi19>

Military Metaphysics

Poultney Bigelow

Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Poultney Bigelow (1917) Military Metaphysics, Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 62:445, 1-4, DOI: [10.1080/03071841709419309](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071841709419309)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071841709419309>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

THE JOURNAL

OF THE

Royal United Service Institution.

VOL. LXII.

FEBRUARY, 1917.

No. 445.

[Authors alone are responsible for the contents of their respective Papers. All communications (except those for perusal by the Editor only) should be addressed to the Secretary, Royal United Service Institution.]

MILITARY METAPHYSICS.

By POULTNEY BIGELOW.

THE warrior of to-day is already sufficiently burdened without the addition of a volume of psychology in his bursting knapsack; but, as Nelsons and Napoleons are born psychologists, so war will ever be profoundly affected by commanders who have intuitive appreciation of spiritual forces no less than the material pre-requisites of an army. I am writing on this tenth of November, 1916, when the Presidential election has been more than forty-eight hours in doubt, during which the oldest and most experienced American politicians have been racking their brains to explain the almost tie-vote in this critical year. The so-called German leaders denounced Mr. Wilson because he protested against the "Lusitania" massacre; every American of British antecedents denounced him because he did not dismiss the German ambassador in Washington and range himself with the Allies. Our large Irish and Fenian electorate bombarded the White House with pleas for intervention on behalf of the traitor Casement, and the great vote of Labourites had been firmly counted upon to ensure a sweeping re-election. Yet all prophecies were brought to naught, and the closeness of this election forebodes, I venture to think, a healthier state of public opinion in regard to America's duty to herself and to the Allies.

For this we must thank Prussia in the first instance. That country has been studied by British military observers ever since the war of 1870. Her efficiency in all departments of material activity

has been ably reported to the proper authorities. No country ever had better light upon the cold-blooded military ambitions of Berlin, nor more intelligent and devoted servants, than the late Colonel Henderson, author of "The Life of Stonewall Jackson," the late General Grierson, not to mention half a dozen notable retired British officers such as General W. H. H. Waters—to speak only of the few it is my privilege to have known personally, not to say intimately.

Prussia was first heard of long after the rest of Europe and the Far East had achieved greatness as torch-bearers of civilization. When the cathedral of Rheims was a marvel in the days of Gothic perfection, the swamps and forests of Prussia were still the hiding-places of pagan tribes who owed their immunity to the simple fact that swamps and forests were not then a marketable commodity in the eyes of any Christian nation. But there came a day when the great buccaneering brotherhood grew weary of crusading against the Turk, or, rather, found that the rewards in plunder failed to recoup them for costly expeditions in the Mediterranean. Then the Pope bethought him of pagan Prussia, and presented to the Knights of Jerusalem an immense territory that did not belong to him with privilege to christianize the country much as Cortes and Pizarro christianized the Indians of Mexico and Peru not very long afterwards.

Then was born Prussian efficiency. Then was created that distinction between master and man, officer and private, conqueror and conquered, which is written not merely in the pages of Prussian history, but can be seen to-day by anyone with an eye to ethnological differences. Look down the line of Prussian Baltic recruits or peasant school-children, and you see the trace of the subject Sarmatic Slav with the mongrel nose and lips of the Calmuck, and a general indefinable manner which is rarely seen in British or French regiments but abounds in an army where non-coms, and even officers, strike their men in the ranks with impunity.

But look now at the officers who crowd about the Emperor when the "critique" is sounded and you see men of another race—composite as that of the buccaneers of the West Indies, crusaders of the Mediterranean, or gold-miners of California; composite but conquering. In their blood are elements various as those which have made the fighting aristocracy of Great Britain—Norse, Frisian, Viking, with a dash of Scythian or Magyar.

Prussia has not changed from the days of Chaucer to the days of Edith Cavell. The Prussian propaganda bureau has inundated neutral countries with plausible fabrications touching the kultural mission of the Kaiser's armies and the regret her Emperor feels at being forced into a war of self-defence. This is what we call "campaign literature" in politics, and has, so far, deceived no one in America. But Prussians themselves have ever been perfectly frank in advocating "frightfulness" as an essential element of successful warfare, and to me it has been the commonplace of conversation with German officers for more than a quarter of a century. Those who conquered Prussia did so by the same means that made a warlike nation of the Basuto, the Matabele, and the Zulu. But the conquerors

of Prussia were vastly more efficient, and, moreover, had less interference from British reformers and philanthropists.

God gave Prussia every element of a great conquering people save one—the element which made Edward the Seventh greater than all his compeers. Let me illustrate.

In 1898 Prussia stupidly sent Admiral Diedrichs to Manila during the Spanish-American War—with orders to do something disagreeable, which he proceeded to do. Dewey smashed all there was of the Spanish fleet in Eastern waters, but the Prussian admiral had a stronger fleet, and inaugurated a policy of annoying his American colleague so successfully that Dewey finally offered to fight him; whereupon the bullying ceased, and Berlin has been explaining and apologising ever since.

Great Britain at the same time had but one ship in Manila, commanded by the late gallant Admiral Chichester, and when a rupture between Dewey and Diedrichs appeared imminent, he silently asserted the doctrine that "blood is thicker than water" by drawing his ship into such a position that a shot from the German would have struck the English cruiser first. In Hong Kong the British bluejackets cheered the Yankee squadron as it steamed away to the mine-fields of Manila, and every American knows that the brilliant success that crowned that expedition was owing largely, if not wholly, to British assistance regarding supplies.

In that same year an American cruiser was ordered to the Pei-ho from Manila, but had to coal in Chee-foo. There was not a bucket of fuel to be bought. It was a year of revolutionary rumours in Peking, and Great Britain had a strong fleet at Wei-hai-wei under Admiral Seymour. The Yankee cruiser was in a dilemma, and the American consul in Chee-foo rent the air of the Club with his wailings at a Government with a navy and no coal. But that consul was not of the initiated, or he would have wasted no time in lamentation. He continued wailing until a casual initiate advised him to apply for coal to the British Admiral. He did so and the telegraphic answer came immediately to take as much as was needed and welcome.

Now for psychology.

Such little episodes can be multiplied by hundreds, but they are rarely in print, much less are they shouted from the hustings in Fourth of July effusions. The German blunder of 1898 was felt so keenly in America that William II. determined to make a glorious bid for popularity in the New World by ordering a yacht from a New York builder; by presenting some casts of Wagnerian heroes to a Boston museum; and, finally, by sending his brother over, who was ordered to preach the doctrine that Washington and Frederick the Great were of one soul and England the common enemy. Had this demonstration been done with tact, the results might have been gratifying to the Hohenzollern cabinet, but, fortunately for us, all these overtures savoured of the perfunctory banquets which precede the inauguration of a loan. Prince Henry did not fire the German heart; America took the whole thing as a clumsy apology for the behaviour in Manila Bay, and therefore it is no wonder that America

burst into one cry of indignation when the sack of Belgium commenced and war proceeded by means that would have been deemed dastardly even in the Middle Ages.

In other words, Germany from the outset forfeited, in this country at least, every shred of that sympathy which was hers in July of 1870. She has spent vast sums in a noisy propaganda, but her spokesmen have been characteristically tactless, and her apologists have never ventured statements in respectable journals without being promptly turned into ridicule by those who were equally well-informed and vastly more veracious.

Great Britain has had ample reason for going astray regarding the attitude of America in this war, because those who are most influential are not necessarily in American politics or interested in newspapers. You must take my word for it that the combination of dignity, tact, and, above all, silence, which has characterized official England during the past two years has not failed of making a profound effect on masses of Americans however hyphenate they may be in some respects.

It is time to close this little message which I have dictated with most discreet reference to possible censorship at a moment of great political concern. As an American whose English ancestors settled in New England eight generations ago I love the land of my birth, and believe that the United States should immediately prepare to join the Allies. Prussia has her plans for the invasion of this country no less complete than those which assisted her in the Belgium raid. There are millions who think as I think, but millions more who do not think at all, but will obey the orders to march just as they pay their taxes. The German propaganda has broken down completely in America, and from this day on the world may note a distinct diminution of German academic influence in our schools and colleges; a distaste for anything German on the stage and in music, and, *per contra*, a new respect for British scholarship and achievement in science.

All this is nothing but tact and psychology. Tons of Teutonic tracts keep pouring from a subsidized press, and every American is surfeited with reasons why he should agree with the Kultur of the Hun as against the inefficient Anglo-Saxon method. But we of the old stock persist in our ways and cannot argue more than to repartee: "What about Edith Cavell?"—"What are you doing in Belgium?"—and "Why do you keep lying about the 'Lusitania'?"

Malden-on-Hudson, N.Y.,
November 10th, 1916.