

Heinrich van Treitschke, Extracts from *HISTORY OF GERMANY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY* and *HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL WRITINGS*

As nationalism grew in nineteenth-century Europe, it also changed. In the first half of the century, when nationalists saw conservative monarchical governments as the main obstacle to national self-determination, nationalism was linked to republicanism and liberalism. During the middle of the century, especially in Germany and Italy, nationalism was championed by pragmatic and moderate leaders who believed that hard-headed politics, not romantic gestures and lofty republican ideals, would bring about national unification and independence from foreign rule. By century's end nationalism was increasingly associated -with conservative if not reactionary groups that used it to justify large military outlays, imperialism, and aggressive foreign policies. It also would lure the masses away from socialism and democracy.

The German historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) represents this later link between nationalism and militarism, racism, and authoritarianism. The son of a Prussian general, Treitschke taught history at several universities, including the prestigious University of Berlin. He also was a member of the German representative assembly, the Reichstag, from 1871 to 1884. His best-known work is his seven-volume *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*. In this and his numerous other writings, lectures, and speeches, Treitschke acclaimed militarism, authoritarianism, and war as the path to German greatness. His views struck a responsive chord among many Germans who feared socialism and democracy and yearned for the day when Germany would be recognized as the world's most powerful nation.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What, according to Treitschke, is the relationship between the state and the individual?
2. Why, according to Treitschke, is monarchy superior to democracy?
3. What qualities of Germans set them apart from other peoples, especially the English and the Jews, according to Treitschke?
4. Early nineteenth-century nationalists believed that all nations had a contribution to make to human progress. What is Treitschke's view?
5. What, according to Treitschke, is the value of war for a nation?

ON THE GERMAN CHARACTER

Depth of thought, idealism, cosmopolitan views; a transcendent philosophy which boldly oversteps (or freely looks over) the separating barriers of finite existence, familiarity with every human thought and feeling, the desire to traverse the world-wide realm of ideas in common with the foremost intellects of all nations and all times. All that has at all times been held to be characteristic of the Germans and has always been praised as the essence or German character and breeding.

The simple loyalty of the Germans contrasts remarkably with the lack of chivalry in the English character. This seems to be due to the fact that in England physical culture is sought, not in the exercise of noble arms, but in sports like boxing, swimming, and rowing, sports which undoubtedly have their value, but which obviously tend to encourage a brutal and purely athletic point of view, and the single and superficial ambition of getting a first prize. (1)

ON THE STATE

The state is a moral community, which is called upon to educate the human race by positive achievement. Its ultimate object is that a nation should develop in it, a nation distinguished by a real national character. To achieve this state is the highest moral duty for nation and individual alike. All private quarrels must be forgotten when the state is in danger.

At the moment when the state cries out that its very life is at stake, social selfishness must cease and party hatred be hushed. The individual must forget his egoism, and feel that he is a member of the whole body.

The most important possession of a state, its be-all and end-all, is power. He who is not man enough to look this truth in the face should not meddle in politics. The state is not physical power as an end in itself, it is power to protect and promote the higher interests. Power must justify itself by being applied for the greatest good of mankind. It is the highest moral duty of the state to increase its power. . . .

Only the truly great and powerful states ought to exist. Small states are unable to protect their subjects against external enemies; moreover, they are incapable of producing genuine patriotism or national pride and are sometimes incapable of *Kultur* (2) in great dimensions. Weimar produced a Goethe and a Schiller (3); still these poets would have been greater had they been citizens of a German national state.

ON MONARCHY

The will of the state is, in a monarchy, the expression of the will of one man who wears the crown by virtue of the historic right of a certain family; with him the final authority rests. Nothing in a monarchy can be done contrary to the will of the monarch. In a democracy, plurality, the will of the people, expresses the will of the state. A monarchy excels any other form of government, including the democratic, in achieving unity and power in a nation. It is for this reason that monarchy seems so natural, and that it makes such an

appeal to the popular understanding. We Germans had an experience of this in the first years of our new empire (4). How wonderfully the idea of a united Fatherland was embodied for us in the person of the venerable Emperor! How much it meant to us that we could feel once more: "That man is Germany; there is no doubting it!"

ON WAR

The idea of perpetual peace is an illusion supported only by those of weak character. It has always been the weary, spiritless, and exhausted ages which have played with the dream of perpetual peace. A thousand touching portraits testify to the sacred power of the love which a righteous war awakes in noble nations. It is altogether impossible that peace be maintained in a world bristling with arms, and even God will see to it that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race. Among great states the greatest political sin and the most contemptible is feebleness. . . .

War is elevating because the individual disappears before the great conception of the state. The devotion of the members of a community to each other is nowhere so splendidly conspicuous as in war. Modern wars are waged for the sake of goods and resources. What is at stake is the sublime moral good of national honor, which has something in the nature of unconditional sanctity, and compels the individual to sacrifice himself for it. . . .

The grandeur of war lies in the utter annihilation of puny man in the great conception of the State, and it brings out the full magnificence of the sacrifice of fellow-countrymen for one another. In war the chaff is winnowed from the wheat. Those who have lived through 1870 cannot fail to understand Niebuhr's (5) description of his feelings in 1813, when he speaks of how no one who has entered into the joy of being bound by a common tie to all his compatriots, gentle and simple alike, can ever forget how he was uplifted by the love, the friendliness, and the strength of that mutual sentiment.

It is war which fosters the political idealism which the materialist rejects. What a disaster for civilization it would be if mankind blotted its heroes from memory. The heroes of a nation are the figures which rejoice and inspire the spirit of its youth, and the writers whose words ring like trumpet blasts become the idols of our boyhood and our early manhood. He who feels no answering thrill is unworthy to bear arms for his country. To appeal from this judgment to Christianity would be sheer perversity, for does not the Bible distinctly say that the ruler shall rule by the sword, and again that greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend? To Aryan (6) races, who are before all things courageous, the foolish preaching of everlasting peace has always been in vain. They have always been man enough to maintain with the sword what they have attained through the spirit. . . .

ON THE ENGLISH

The hypocritical Englishman, with the Bible in one hand and a pipe of opium⁷ in the other, possesses no redeeming qualities. The nation was an ancient robber-knight, in full armor, lance in hand, on every one of the world's trade routes.

The English possess a commercial spirit, a love of money which has killed every sentiment of honor and every distinction of right and wrong. English cowardice and sensuality are hidden behind unctuous, theological fine talk which is to us free-thinking German heretics among all the sins of English nature the most repugnant. In England all notions of honor and class prejudices vanish before the power of money, whereas the German nobility has remained poor but chivalrous. That last indispensable bulwark against the brutalization of society — the duel — has gone out of fashion in England and soon disappeared, to be supplanted by the riding whip (8). This was a triumph of vulgarity. The newspapers, in their accounts of aristocratic weddings, record in exact detail how much each wedding guest has contributed in the form of presents or in cash; even the youth of the nation have turned their sports into a business, and contend for valuable prizes, whereas the German students wrought havoc on their countenances for the sake of a real or imaginary honor (9).

ON JEWS

The Jews at one time played a necessary role in German history, because of their ability in the management of money. But now that the Aryans have become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of finance, the Jews are no longer necessary. The international Jew, hidden in the mask of different nationalities, is a disintegrating influence; he can be of no further use to the world. It is necessary to speak openly about the Jews, undisturbed by the fact that the Jewish press befouls what is purely historical truth.

(1) Treitschke is correct in drawing a distinction between English and German sports. The English prized competitive athletic contests, while the Germans favored group calisthenics and exercises.

(2) German for culture or civilization

(3) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Johann von Schiller (1759-1805) were poets and dramatists who lived before Germany became a unified state. They both spent much of their adult lives in Weimar, the capital of the Duchy of Saxe-Weimar.

(4) When Germany became a unified state in 1871, the king of Prussia, William I, became emperor of Germany.

(5) Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776—1831) was a Prussian civil servant and historian. He lectured for a time at the University of Berlin and is best known for his three-volume history of Rome.

(6) Today, the term Aryan, or Indo-Iranian, refers to a branch of the Indo-European family of languages, which also includes Baltic, Slavic, Armenian, Greek, Celtic, Latin, and Germanic. Indo-Iranian includes Bengali, Persian, Punjabi, and Hindi. In Treitschke's day Aryan was used not only to refer to the prehistoric language from which all these languages derive but also to the racial group that spoke the language and migrated from its base in central Asia to Europe and India in the distant past. In the racial mythology that grew in connection with the term and later was embraced by Hitler and the Nazis, the Aryans provided Europe's original racial stock.

(7) Treitschke is making a point about what he considers the hypocrisy of the British, professed Christians who nonetheless sell opium to the Chinese.

(8) Aristocratic males frequently settled disputes concerning their honor by dueling. To Treitschke, abandoning the duel for less manly pursuits such as hunting and horseback riding was a sign of decadence.

(9) Treitschke is again using examples from sports to underscore the differences between the Germans and English. English sports such as rugby and football (American soccer) were organized into professional leagues; the Germans were still willing to be scarred in duels to defend their honor.