

## NOTE ON THE EUROPEAN WAR.

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THIS note is not meant to blame those responsible for the war. nor even—usually a stage reached long after this process—to find out who were responsible or to investigate the causes of the war. It is enough to say that all the people of Great Britain are thoroughly convinced that they have come into this war for two reasons and two only. The first is an obligation of honor: an obligation to protect the neutrality of Belgium. They believe firmly, and on good authority, that the German statements that France intended to violate this neutrality, and that Great Britain would have meekly allowed her to do so, are false. The second is a love of liberty, and consequent hatred of militarism. To the outside world, Britain may possibly appear to be a country largely governed by a king or queen and an aristocracy of birth. This is not true. When a king of England thought he was appointed by God and consequently oppressed his people, the people bore it much longer than reasonable people ought, but at last they cut off his head. Long ago, when peers were respected far more than they are now, a Lord Ferrers, in a high-handed way, murdered a servant of his. He was tried and condemned to death. To show proper respect to the aristocracy, he was allowed to drive to the gallows in his coach and four, . . . *but he was hanged*. Britain is a pleasant place: there is a court and gay ceremonies which cost a lot of money and an aristocracy which is toadied, and yet nearly all Britons are republicans; the rest are social democrats.

Then think how the British nowadays show that they know the value that others put on liberty. Look how properly South Africa and Australia have been treated lately. I think that all thoughtful British people would agree that *all* the British possessions will be made self-governing when they have shown themselves to be fit for it, even though it should cost the mother country some sacrifices. If

Britons and their nominal ruler had all been as sensible in the reign of George III, Britain would never have lost the United States. Britons do not believe that Germany has the ability, experience or broad-mindedness necessary for dealing with colonies. German ideals would, they think, be forced on German possessions as German military ideals are forced on the German people. And this brings me to the chief point of this note.

Let us consider one aspect of the war: the aspect of the possible spread of German civilization where Russian, French, Belgian or British civilization now is. Whether or no the necessity for this propaganda is, as General Bernhardt seems to think, a cause of the war, I am not concerned to inquire. If the Germans are ultimately victorious, the spread in question will certainly be an effect, and may possibly be an effect which is a fulfilment of an ideal that made the war seem a righteous one to the Germans. If so, the ideal is not worthy of the sacrifice of even a small part of a nation's honor or life or even prosperity. We can neither shut our eyes to the disgraceful brutalities that war must necessarily involve, nor to the fact that such brutalities are exaggerated by enemies and hidden or excused by friends. It is the custom of people to speak as if they were far more bloodthirsty than they really are. The British are usually supposed to be very reserved, and yet I have heard a wish expressed by a kindly old woman in an omnibus that a certain foreigner who attempted to shoot a policeman in London should be boiled in oil. Another story illustrates the essential calmness and good humor of the British disposition, in spite of alarming words. An American visitor was listening to a very high-sounding oration in Trafalgar Square. The speaker was referring to some one now dead and who was a prominent member of the English royal family. "E ought to be shot, the swine!", said the orator. The American visitor said in an awestruck voice to a policeman who was standing by: "There, do you hear that? What are you going to do about it?" The policeman just smiled: "Lor' bless you, sir," he said, "e don't mean no 'arm." The policeman's view was quite correct.

It is nearly always misleading to draw distinctions between national characteristics; at the bottom all nations are very much alike. The ability of doing noble things in an emergency is common to all; the willingness to make a great sacrifice and to bear it through tedious years without making a noise about it, is not confined to any particular nation or group of nations. All nations are riddled through and through with vanity and snobbery. Indeed,

broadly speaking, snobbishness seems to be the main thing that differentiates civilized peoples from uncivilized ones. We all have a love of home and comfort. In the upper classes and among men and women of genius, a straining after ideals is often a more powerful desire than the wish for comfort; but martyrs, musicians, poets and scientific men are not the monopoly of Teutonic or Slav or Anglo-Saxon nations. I do not suppose that good humor is a peculiarity of one's own nation. The only things that seem to be possibly a national peculiarity are jokes; but even here inability to laugh at the jokes of other nations does not necessarily mean that the jokers of one's own nation are the only amusing jokers there are. Probably Americans and Britons have more or less the same sense of humor, and this may be due to their common origin. The two sayings about the war which appeal universally to Englishmen's sense of humor were both, if I am not mistaken, first said by Americans. One is: "Nobody seems to be on the side of the Germans except God, and we have only the Kaiser's word for that." The other is: "There is only one thing that the Germans could do which would be worse than the destruction of Rheims Cathedral, and that is its restoration." As further evidence that the American and English senses of humor are fundamentally alike, these two facts should be remembered: first, Mark Twain is appreciated in England; secondly, no American laughs at *Punch*, . . . and no Englishman does either.

Since all nations have a good deal of common ground on which to build up a friendship, it is necessary that each nation should use that understanding which discovers the lovability of the people one knows to make the thought of each nation well understood by all other nations. It is a great mistake to imagine that any of us can do merely with that part of the civilization of a particular people which finds expression in print, music or pictures; and this truth, which, as it happens, Americans have grasped more firmly and put into practice more fully than any other nation, I shall try to illustrate by considering shortly those contributions of Germany to civilization, with which I am acquainted. I think that, if one wishes to say anything of the least value, it is to be recommended that one should not stray out of the narrow domain of what one knows.

I shall then leave out of serious consideration the realms of art and most of the realms of science. Most of us know, with some reason for knowing, that almost the whole of the art of music is due to Germany, and that hardly anything in the arts of sculpture

and painting is due to Germany. In literature, it is a platitude that Germany stands far below almost every other civilized European nation. In philosophy, it is a debatable point whether the Germans can be put above the British: they can undoubtedly be put above all other nations. We come to the sciences.

In the first place, every one must admit that the bulk of the tremendously valuable work of the organization of research and reports of researches during the last fifty years has been done by Germany. In mathematics, physics, chemistry and other natural sciences, it is to German industry, German talent and German organization that we are indebted for abridged and permanent records of nearly everything that has happened in science over the whole world, and which otherwise would probably have been quite lost. Also—and what is far more important—there have been many eminent Germans who have supplied the ideas that other men write about. In mathematics during the nineteenth century, the work of German mathematicians like Gauss, Grassmann, Dirichlet, Riemann, Weierstrass, Steiner and Georg Cantor is certainly more important than the work done by the mathematicians of any other nation. In physics, any candid inquirer must admit that the most important work has been done by the physicists of Great Britain. If any of the physical works of that original and open-minded man Ernst Mach be examined, we shall find almost on every page warm and unstinting praise given to men like Maxwell, Kelvin and Joule. And Mach's praise is worth having. As a critic, he is just and penetrating, as witness his estimate of Dalton's achievements in his *Principles of the Theory of Heat* or of Newton's achievements in his *Mechanics*.

In a branch of science which is now very closely allied to mathematics—I mean modern logic—the part played by Germany is extraordinarily unimportant. It is true that one of the greatest of Germans, Leibniz, may be said to have originated modern logic, but the majority of his writings on it remained unpublished for more than two hundred years. The beginnings of it were rediscovered about the middle of the nineteenth century by two Englishmen, George Boole and Augustus De Morgan; developed importantly by an American, Charles Peirce; and developed less importantly and systematized in a work of incredible prolixity by a German, Ernst Schröder. I omit all lesser names. Then came the truly great work of a German, Gottlob Frege, which only began to be appreciated about ten years ago, and is not yet properly appreciated by any German logician or mathematician. Schröder, indeed, quite misunder-

stood the purpose of Frege's work. Later on came the work of the Italians, Giuseppe Peano and his school. Schröder misunderstood them and showed a miraculous obtuseness in asserting over and over again that he could not accept a distinction of ideas pointed out by Peano. Peano's distinction is quite easy to see when it is pointed out. At present the chief cultivators of modern logic are English, but important parts have been taken by Americans, Italians and Frenchmen. Germany has hitherto taken no part in one of the most important philosophical movements there can be, giving as it does definite information about the foundations of the exact sciences.

These lines have served to show, by a very important example, that if we confine ourselves to German science we miss a very important part of what has been done. There is not even an intelligent account of the principles of the exact sciences published in the whole of Germany. In this respect the Germans have shown unexampled obtuseness. This is not national prejudice, nor is it my intention to depreciate the noble work the Germans have done in many other branches of science. But I merely wish to express strongly my feeling that discovery of the truth is only to be reached by promoting the mutual understanding of nations. One of the features of the science of the last ten years has been the growth of international journals devoted to the discussion of scientific subjects. To this end both *The Open Court* and *The Monist* constantly contribute; and only by the help of a growth of understanding between nations and the perception that we are all really very much alike and all seek very much the same ends can a lasting peace be secured.