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The Development of German Policy Through the Nineteenth Century

By Professor J. L. Morison.*

At a regular luncheon of the Canadian Club, held on the 23rd November, Professor Morison said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—As your Chairman started the Scottish line of argument, may I give this northern reminiscence? In a little village where we lived there was a clergyman who had among his friends many of the professoriate, and, when he wanted a Sunday off, he would call on one of the professors to officiate. One day a woman coming to the church asked one of the officials, "Who is it to-day, John?" "Another of the d—— professors," was the answer. (Laughter.) Now, gentlemen, that story has nothing to do with my subject, but I always speak with the criticism of the official in my mind.

I wish to take ten years of German history—ten of the most fateful in that history—and analyze them, so as to prove that at the bottom the present German policy is not any creation of the present Kaiser, or sudden spasm of Teutonic madness, but a thing older than the Prussian monarchy itself. The years I mention are those from 1861 to 1871.

Before coming to the accession of the man who became the first German Emperor I wish to take up the four great principles which seem to me to be at the bottom of German policy. In the first place we must remember that the Hohenzollerns are a dominant fact in Prussia and Germany. Few romances in history are so wonderful as that of this family. The policy of Germany is the policy of the family which governs it. This family began as rulers of a little State, then became Electors of a Province, then Kings of a kingdom, and finally Emperors of a united Germany. You in Canada know what an "Aberdonian" is. (Laughter.) May I say, that the

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Hohenzollerns are the Aberdonians of Germany, with the peculiar faculty for acquisition, for laying hold and keeping hold, which is one of the characteristics of that corner of Scotland, the same dour, common sense, varied in Aberdeen by—say, whiskey,—among the Hohenzollerns by outbursts of genius or madness. I say this not to criticize Aberdeen, but to praise the Hohenzollerns. Of this great Hohenzollern family hardly one failed to leave his mark in Germany.

Now, that family, struggling for existence, laying hold of new and ever new positions, that family developed individuality to a heroic, to a criminal extent. Further, that family as it gained power over provinces and peoples tended to regard them as its own property, for while for us of the British Empire it is natural to speak of the people and the land, it is just as natural for the Prussians and the Hohenzollerns to speak of the land and the people as belonging in a peculiar sense to the ruling dynasty, and to call that dynasty the makers of the Prussian State and the German Empire.

The second fact we must remember is that when struggling to get to the top, that family was forced to take possessions where it could. Prussian territory used to be scattered over the map of Europe in a strange, enfeebling way. In the 18th century there were three clear groups: the provinces near the Rhine, the heart of Prussian dominion around Berlin, and East Prussia, with a great gap between it and Berlin. Now, gentlemen, geography dominates national policy: you cannot avoid being pushed where your geography pushes you. The Hohenzollerns faced that weakness of scattered territory, and had to plan to fill in the gaps—in other words, they faced a position different from the British in their secure little islands.

The third fact one must remember is that these territories were islands in the midst of a sea of foes. From the 17th to the 19th century there were many warring German States. The Prussian Hohenzollerns had to fight their way to the top in spite of these, whether Hanoverians, Saxons or Würtembergers. They had to break them first, before making them into Germany. Again, there were not only these German enemies, but there was Russia to the east, a diplomatic thundercloud, bearing with it a fateful sense of something threatening on the eastern horizon. We have had our scares about Russia in India, but how would we have felt if we had just across our borders that active threat? And again there was Austria. Austrian control of Germany was the last fragment of one of the greatest dreams human history has ever seen. In the Middle Ages they thought of Christendom as united: the

Emperor was the partner of the Pope, in maintaining a great united Christendom. In the 18th and 19th centuries Austria, into whose hands the Holy Roman Empire had fallen, had relaxed her grip and was deficient in strength, but still had power enough to keep Germany from becoming one and truly German. And there was France. I believe the Entente Cordiale is something deep and real in our history; but I say this, that if I had been a German of Bismarck's time, as I am a Scotchman, with the traditions of hate and the sense of wrongs which French policy to Germany has generated in the past, I should never have rested until I had flung the Frenchman back on his own territory, and given Germany free scope. Think of it! The Reformation saw France begin her interferences. In the 17th century the greatest French statesman, Cardinal Richelieu, exploited the weakness of Germany, and Louis XIV. made his greatest gains at the expense of Germany. In the 19th century the greatest of all French leaders, Napoleon—of course he was Italian by race—prostrated Germany, trampled her in the dust, tore her to pieces. The Prussian Royal family remembered this, for one of their best loved Queens had died of a broken heart because of Napoleon's outrages on her country. If I had been a German, as I am a Scotchman, anti-French feeling would have been born with me, and I should have cherished it to my dying day.

You must remember this, that the Prussian State had enemies, insidious enemies.

The fourth great fact of German history is to be found in that curious system of guile and force, by which the Hohenzollerns met their other difficulties; that system of force and cunning which found its fullest expression in Frederick the Great. Becky Sharp, according to Thackeray, said, "it is easy to be virtuous on ten thousand a year." It was very hard for the Prussians to be virtuous on the little income they had. Frederick organized the Hohenzollerns' property in such a way that the world remembers the strokes he dealt. He determined that democracy might do for England, but Prussia must have an autocracy. Good faith! that was of no account. He would lie, would make treaties and break them, tear them up as "scraps of paper," if he might thereby advance Prussia. He looked around and saw hostile faces—he must have an army, and so he created a military force great without parallel in European history. And so came into existence that curious mixture of despotism, militarism, and Machiavellianism, which we can best explain as the product of the natural position of Prussia among the other peoples. Anyone who would

criticize German policy, or the policy of the great Bismarck, must remember this fact; he will not otherwise be fair to Germany.

Now, I come to my ten years. In 1861 the King who was to become Emperor William I. of a united Germany ascended the Prussian throne. There had been an interregnum since Frederick's death. The army had been allowed to stand on its reputation, but Napoleon had shattered it in a single day. After Napoleon the Prussian autocracy had weakened, democratic experiments were being made, and in external relationships, Prussia was at the beck and call of Austria. To the military humiliation of Jena was added the diplomatic humiliation of Olmütz. If we call the Germans despots to-day, we should remember that one of the supremely honest and moderate Hohenzollerns, Frederick William III., paid the penalty of his honesty and moderation by seeing Prussia reduced to a second or even a third rate State. The new King was bent on pursuing the fortunes of his house, and not allowing them to suffer damage at his hands.

Around him he gathered a little circle of men, the like of whom have seldom been seen in human history. One was Roon, Minister of War, and next Roon, Moltke, the greatest strategist of modern times. But it was a Prussian Yunker, Bismarck, whose virile mind, and relentless patriotism gathered into one what the others did, and made the modern German Empire. These four men then made the Germany we are fighting to-day. The lines on which they built modern Germany were conspicuously broad and sweeping. It was their first duty to rebuild the Prussian State; they were determined to make a united Germany, to make it really German.

All of them, but more especially Bismarck, saw that the people could not help them; they were not instructed sufficiently in practical affairs. Wherever Germany was democratic, Germany was weak. There was an old proverb, that Germany ruled the clouds, as France ruled the land. That was the old policy, but Bismarck saw that a Germany that ruled the coluds could not rule the land. It is easy for us to be benevolent with our channel and seas around us, but if our very physical existence was assailed would we not feel very different. We might be willing, perhaps, to do what the Germans did, according to the scheme of Bismarck, and accept autocracy. For Bismarck's principles were despotic.

Of the milder influences in politics he took little stock. "I have always felt distrust of politicians in long skirts, whether women or ecclesiastics," he once snarled. As for the

main system, this was not, he thought, a question of Liberal or Conservative of this or that shade, but rather of monarchical rule as against parliamentary government, and the latter must be avoided at all costs if even by a period of dictatorship. Along with this despotic system Bismarck, and his king, pursued a course of diplomatic Machiavellianism, if I may call it so. Now in Machiavellianism there was no place for moral ideas; with Machiavelli, whose Prince is one of the great political documents of the world, all state actions were judged by what they could do for Italy; he justified bad faith and all other things by that patriotic test. Like Machiavelli, Bismarck saw Germany, Germany united and saved, and it was easy to cover up a multitude of sins committed in her service. He made alliances, but alliances for Bismarck were worth just as much as they were worth to Prussia; when they ceased to be useful he broke them, tore them up; he made treaties and broke them as Frederick had done. He was the first of modern statesmen who planned wars beforehand, and brought the wars on, to have Europe settled to his satisfaction. At times one wonders whether this man is not the devil in German form; yet one recognizes that behind it all, behind the lying, the deceit, the intrigue, is the ideal of a united German territory, a Germany not scattered but united, and standing on her own feet.

Curiously enough, in that Bismarckian system, peace always had been made an ideal. Bismarck intended that when war had established the unity of Germany within possible limits, evidence would be given not only to the smaller European States but also to the great powers, which would convince them that German policy could be just and peaceful. And Bismarck kept his word. He brought wars on, but when the end was attained, he ceased to fight. I do not know any way in which German policy has degenerated so markedly as in the abandonment of that moderation which led Bismarck to say, "Strike, and strike hard, but when the need for blows is over, cease."

The other great note of Bismarckian policy was militarism. It was "Blood and Iron"—nothing else could do the work! So Roon and Moltke planned that invincible machine of theirs. They took the outlines from the man who helped to end Napoleon;—it is a curious fact that Scharnhorst started the modern German army on the lines of the British militia; and so the English "contemptible little army" gave the great German machine its first idea in the 19th century! Moltke and Bismarck took every scientific invention—railways, telegraphs,

all modern details and contrivances and brought them to great perfection, and wedded them to war. Consequently, when battle came, nothing could stand the shock. One may also add that it was Moltke's perfect system of war intelligence which by later degeneration has created the modern German network of espionage. It was the object of Moltke to provide for the chances of war. He had to know what his enemies were doing.

I have tried to show you, briefly, a little State growing great under a great family. It is easy seeing how that State, when it had a despot over it, when it had its policy settled and forceful, and when it had an army equal to its fears and its ambitions, could not but take a first place in Europe. This it had accomplished by 1871. The wicked flourish like a green bay tree, and when they die they sleep with their fathers. No doubt the reflections of Bismarck and of Frederick (if they are still permitted to have reflections) before this war started were those of high satisfaction.

And now, may I relate these facts to our present situation. The battle before us is more terrible because it is a battle of real great opposing principles. I go to your book shops, and see piles of literary slush—exaggerations, contortions, lies! The suggestion is that we are fighting fools and weaklings. Gentlemen, we shall never beat Germany along that line! (Hear, hear.) We must face facts: they are plain and straight before us. Those great ten years, the period of the Austrian and Franco-Prussian wars, were great because of their despotism, their Machiavellianism, their militarism. Does that mean that I assent to those principles? No! I am a democrat. I believe in internationalism; and Heaven save us from the horrors of continental conscription! But I say this, that in face of the German system with its reality we must provide a substitute as real! (Applause.) Gentlemen, we are all democrats here, whether Liberals or Tories, but has not our democracy been too often a thing flaccid or worse, tainted with graft, within grasp of the plutocrat? (Hear, hear.) I tell you, if that enfeebled democracy is to fling itself against the Prussian autocracy, it will be beaten! Nothing but absolutely true, stern stuff will bear the strain! (Applause.)

Gentlemen, we speak lightly of internationalism; I wonder if we realize our responsibilities therein. I thank Heaven Mr. Asquith has begun to define his position and future programme. In one of his recruiting speeches he hints at the creation of a general federation of peoples, wherein the old system of opposing alliances, and the balance of power will

have gone, and a new world of international agreements and arbitration will have taken its place. That such a dream is more than a mere dream Britain and America proved by that greatest of international agreements, the Geneva arbitration. Sir Edward Grey spoke, last July, of the impossibility up to that time of giving so Utopian an idea definite embodiment in a proposal. But the war has changed all that, and Britain at least, if Heaven sends her victory, will utilize her triumph for that high purpose, and not for self-aggrandisement. Now, whether that system comes definitely into existence or only begins to be when the war is over, the ultimate success will depend on the preachers, journalists, teachers, and lawyers of the Empire giving their soundest energies to build the new internationalism. In law it must henceforth be the aim of the most ambitious to civilize international relationships, and to invent courts, and laws, and create a legal temper, which will enable great nations to settle their disputes outside the battlefield. The teacher must remember that if peace, indeed, have her victories no less renowned than war, children must be taught the nature of these victories, and that the cheap and only too easily effective appeals of battle stories must have companion stories of heroic peace, as thrilling, memorable, and more moral. The new journalism must accept, as the old has never done, its moral responsibilities, and no longer egg men on by foolish passion, and cheap rhetoric, and exciting falsehoods. We must produce against Bismarck as notable a system, and must put ourselves on the side of good faith, treaties, and international law. (Applause.)

Gentlemen, we are denouncing, and rightly denouncing Prussian militarism; but I tell you, the democracies of the world, especially this Empire, must provide something as virile as that system which we are fighting! (Applause.) Our young men must be trained from their very boyhood to wise restraint, and the life of the open air, to be strong and clean, must put aside the lackadaisical, vicious habits which have been affecting us. (Hear, hear.) And that is not all, gentlemen. So long as the militarism of Prussia is in the world, that power must be faced. I do hate conscription, but our youth must be trained in habits of self defence. I want to see every man in the Empire trained till at the age of twenty-five he is able to defend himself and the Empire against any possible threat of militarism. (Hear, hear.)

I tell you this is a problem of our Empire, to steer between the Scylla of conscription and the Charybdis of unprepared-

ness. Don't kill the Kaiser with your mouth! Don't invent those silly fables about atrocities that never happened—some may have happened, but don't invent them—be Britons! (Applause.) Meet force with force as genuine, but more righteous. Only by basing your system on something as fundamental as "Prussianism" can you meet and conquer the power of militarism.

Let me close with these lines from Kipling, which describe for me the temper that will carry us safe through this crisis, without violating our old traditions and moral standards:—

If you can keep your head, when all about you
  Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you
  But make allowance for their doubting, too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
  Or being lied about, don't deal in lies; (That is, atrocities)
Or being hated, don't give way to hating;
  And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
  If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
  And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
  Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools;
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
  And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools.

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
  And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
  And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
  To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
  Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk to crowds and keep your virtue, (Pretty hard)
  Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
  If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
  With sixty seconds' worth of distance run;
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it.
  And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

And, gentlemen, if we play the game in the true British fashion, the flags will be flying (the Union Jack, not the German flag), five hundred years hence, as fearlessly as they are flying to-day, and the British Empire will be standing, as proof that German despotism, militarism, and Machiavellianism are not the last word in the history of the nation! (Long and hearty applause.)