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Why Germany is at War

By PROFESSOR G. M. WRONG, M.A.*

AT a special meeting of the Canadian Club, held on the 14th October, Professor George M. Wrong said:

Mr. President,—I am rather glad that you have just made a grave remark about being on the side of God in this war, because I had intended opening in a rather solemn vein. I have felt, in going about the country, that the Province of Ontario, like the other Canadian provinces, is beginning to realize the deep gravity of the circumstances with which we are face to face, and I hope the influence of the Canadian Clubs in all parts of Canada will be used to help the people to understand that we are confronted with the most vital problem of our whole civilization. We must try to understand the mind of the German nation. It is a very large order: there are a great many minds in the German nation, and all do not think alike. But we owe it to our adversaries in this war and to ourselves to try to grasp the causes which have brought us face to face with this awful catastrophe.

My friend, Sir John Willison, who is at my side, may remember the story he once told in my hearing, of the Tory child, brought up in the belief that all Whigs were bad. Once the innocent child asked its mother, "Mamma, are Whig children born bad, or do they grow bad after they are born?" The mother said with impressive gravity, "My child, they are born bad, and they grow worse." (Laughter.) Now, I dare say that we are tempted to take this view of the Germans, and certainly there are outrages in this war which fill one with profound indignation at the theory of civilization that can make such things possible. At the same time we have much in common with the German people if not with their rulers. Some pleasant days of my life have been spent in Germany, I have never been in a foreign country in which one became at home and enjoyed companionship with the people so much as in Germany. Therefore it is with profound anguish that one finds one's own nation at war with Germany.

* Professor George M. Wrong has been Head of the Department of History in the University of Toronto for many years, and is one of the best informed students of European history on this continent.

At the outset let us ask, what have been the real achievements of the German people? One hears a great deal about German culture. The London Times is constantly reproaching German writers for their everlasting shouting about "culture." Germany in one thing is unequalled. She has the supreme gift of organization. I fancy she surpasses even our American neighbors in this respect. It has happened to me within the past few months to have been in three capitals in Europe. In London the person to whom one went in the great hotel to make enquiries, who could direct one about everything, was a German. Again in the hotel in Paris, the person who told one anything one needed to know was a German. In Rome, too, the organizing personality was a German. The Germans possess in some supreme degree the capacity for organization.

I wish, however, to add that the Germans are lacking in genius for creation; that the boasted achievements of the Germans are really more in a technical development, which utilizes the ideas of other peoples, than the gift of profound imagination or insight, which would enable the Germans to be creators in respect to civilization. I don't know any great field of human knowledge other than that of music in which the Germans may be said to have done anything impressively creative. We have to look for the great creative conceptions, for our ideas of nature and the universe, to others than the Germans. Newton, Harvey, with his theory of the circulation of the blood, Darwin with his theory of evolution, were not Germans, but English. I think you will find that the gifts that require imagination, the fine insight into the mysteries of the universe, are denied to the German people. What they have done is notable, but German culture has not been creative.

The tragedy of Germany is chiefly in this, that the Germans, I think one may say without unfairness, have added nothing to the political education of mankind. They have helped to educate us in other ways, but there is no great conception in politics for which we are indebted to Germany. The cause is quite clear. The Germans attained unity at a very late period in their history. The attainment of this unity is within my own memory: I was not very old in 1870 and 1871, but I can remember the siege of Paris, and have some vague memory of the founding of the German Empire at Versailles. Germany's national unity is a creation of our own time. All through the Middle Ages, and almost until to-day, the Germans were divided. I need not elaborate this. Many of you have heard me lecture on the theory of the Holy Roman Empire,

and I am sure you remember keenly your sufferings of those days, when I tried to impress upon you that the old Germanic Empire was not a German Empire but a Roman Empire, ruled by a Roman not a German Emperor. I see some modern writers speaking of the German Empire as the "Holy German Empire!" The late Professor Freeman would turn in his grave if he heard of a "Holy German Empire."

That Empire involved a very shadowy union, and never attained any real national life. The result was that political development and political education were checked in Germany. Out of this two things have come, of vital influence, as it seems to me, upon the history of mankind. The first is, Germany has never gone through any profound political revolution. We had our political revolution in England in the 17th century: the King warred with the people, and you know what a struggle it was, how long it lasted; you know how in the course of that struggle England and Scotland were involved in war, that Ireland was drawn into that vortex, and that for many years our nation was torn by the conflict in respect to political education. The results of England's schooling in politics were achieved without embroilment in foreign war. France was not so fortunate in her training. We find that a hundred and fifty years after England had learned her political lesson, France had still to learn it. Then France's terrific revolution, involved practically the whole of Europe, and disorder and uncertainty lasted for nearly a hundred years.

My point is this: the political education of a people involves terrific upheaval. We have our own country and France going through a frightful period of civil war before the value of representative political institutions is really learned. Now Germany has not gone through that struggle. You tell me, Germany has a Parliament, that there are representative institutions in Germany. Well, so there are. But none the less in Germany at this moment there is a despotic ruler, the Kaiser, and a ruling class, in a sense probably even more real than there was in England prior to our revolution, and in France prior to its revolution. Have you ever studied the mode of election to the Prussian Landtag? It is a delightfully constituted body, as many of you know. Let me only mention how the members are elected. In each constituency a list of voters is drawn up in proportion to the taxes they pay; at the top of the list are the rich taxpayers, at the bottom the poorest. Those who make up the first third of the total taxes, those who make up the second third, and those of the remaining third, each forms a class. The three classes choose each

the same number of electors, and these electors choose the member. Three per cent. of the electors may be in the first class, ten in the second, yet the voting power of each class is equal to that of the 80 or 90 per cent. of the electors in the third class. You see the result of this system: there is no real representation of the people. It is almost impossible to elect a Socialist member of the Landtag, though the Socialist voters number millions. Such is the Prussian Landtag.

For the German Parliament, the Reichstag, there prevails a different method. There is practically universal suffrage, the members are elected on a free basis. There is, however, no real control in the Reichstag of the carrying on of government. The Upper Chamber, the Federal Council, is much more important than the popular house. I suppose the Federal Council is the most curious Second Chamber in the world. We are hearing much about Second Chambers in England, and probably we shall hear more—I hope so—about them in Canada some day. (Laughter.) It is not an uninteresting subject. In the Federal Council, Prussia, for instance, has seventeen members, and it makes no difference whether one of those members is present or the whole seventeen; the Prussian representation always votes as seventeen. You can't split the vote for it is cast by the voters—representing the King of Prussia, and even a King can't vote both ways. In this German Second Chamber each State always votes as a certain number, Bavaria six, Prussia seventeen, and so on, and the members are not representative of the people, but of their Sovereign. Yet this unrepresentative body, and not the popular chamber, controls German policy. Clearly there is no real authority in the people. Germany is governed by the ruling class. Who are the persons who govern Germany? Well, there is the Kaiser, the hereditary ruler of the German nation; surrounding him are the high officers of the German Empire, who might be taken to correspond, roughly speaking, in the English system, to the officers of the army and to the landed gentry. These persons have in reality the full resources of the German State at their disposal.

Having asked who these persons are, my next question is, what are they thinking about? The average German statesman is profoundly convinced that Germany is in danger from her neighbors. Whatever Germany has secured of territory in the past from her neighbors has been gained by making war; whatever she hopes for is to be gained in that way; and Germany with such designs is herself afraid that her neighbors are plotting against her. She is in a peculiar position, surrounded by powerful states. Every since the time of Fred-

erick the Great she has been developing her military muscles to become so strong that not one will dare to attack her. It is quite proper to build up the nation's defence. But modern Germany has passed beyond that. She has come to realize another tragic feature of her position, of which I have not spoken; that as a result of her late national union she has failed to get the share in the soil of the earth to which she feels her genius entitles her. The Germans think themselves as capable of colonizing as are the Russians or the English. Their late arrival has handicapped them, and they are determined to remove the handicap.

I must direct the last few minutes of my time to the mention of two men. You have been reading much lately of Treitschke and of Nietzsche. Treitschke was Professor of Modern History in the University of Berlin. When I listened to him in the 'nineties,—he died in 1896,—he was then getting to be an old man. As I remember him, he had a very harsh voice, due to his being almost entirely deaf. He thought and preached that Germany was being checked by England, while England was really weak and should be shattered. But England paid no attention to him. It is an astonishing fact that none of Treitschke's writings had been translated into English before this war. Why? Apparently the English thought that Treitschke's wild talk was that of an eccentric, an academic expression of jealousy. There is nothing finer in the English than the way they take abuse: they—shall I say "we"?—are so conscious of superiority, that nothing can disturb them. (Laughter.) They were not disturbed by what they regarded as an idealist's theory of the German Empire. One smiles at the lack of humor in such a teacher. A phrase he used quite simply was that the happiness of the world depends upon the dominance in the world of the German character. I wonder what you would think if an Englishman or a Canadian were to say such a thing of his own countrymen! He might think it, but he would never say it! (Laughter.) Treitschke's opinion was that his own type must predominate in the world for the happiness of the world. Germany, having been robbed on account of arriving late in history, must redress the balance. Bernhard's book is simply Treitschke repeated,—seven-tenths of it is based upon Treitschke and the rest upon Nietzsche.

Poor Nietzsche has had hard luck with the newspapers. He was not a typical German at all. On the contrary, he spent a great many years of his life outside of Germany, he delighted in opposing the Germans, he said that Germany had no real culture. The only European nation that had cul-

ture was France. Nietzsche looked facts in the face. He did what Machiavelli did in the 16th century. He saw that the feature which counted in politics was force. The great thing for a nation to do was to become strong. It might do anything to make itself strong. Nietzsche was the philosopher of competence. What is democracy, he asked, but the cult of incompetence. Nietzsche taught that the thing most vital in society is that the capable men should come to the front and sway all the others. His Super-man was just the competent man made by development so strong as to be able to hold sway over others. Nietzsche had not intended to bolster up German designs. But he did say that the strong are a law to themselves and this fitted in with the ideals of the German leaders. Our wishes mould our theories. It is odd to find how a business man—and I speak as one detached from politics—is a protectionist when protection furthers his interests, and on the other hand how he is a pronounced free trader when free trade conduces to his interest! (Laughter.) I appeal to you, is that no true? The German statesman adopted the philosophy of Nietzsche in so far as it furthered their aims. Nietzsche's teaching is often distorted. But pervading it is the idea that competence gives the right to rule. For the German leaders that was enough to make his philosophy true.

Now, I am going to stop here. (Cries of "Go on!") But before I sit down there are one or two things I want to add by way of comment. Here we are face to face with a supreme crisis. Some of us will be going ourselves to this war. We shall have sons and brothers and nephews going. I suppose it is most natural in this crisis that we should regret it, and ask, "Why should this terrible thing have come to our nation?" Let me urge that there be no vain regrets about the outbreak of the war. It is magnificent that humanity—let us press it home upon ourselves—should learn to stand together on broad human interests. War has come. I believe, myself, it was inevitable: I believe that the ambitions of Germany have for twenty years made this struggle a certainty. Amid the horror one thing is clear. The war is showing the solidarity of the nations. The victory for justice will place our humanity on a higher level than it was on before. We must stake in the struggle everything we have, all our resources, our very lives!

My other word is one of exhortation. You know a professor must exhort, or he feels he is not doing his duty. I once heard John Morley deliver a speech in this city, on the occasion of being granted an honorary degree at the University. It was surprising, when one remembered how in his early years he was so antagonistic to theism that he actually

printed the name of God with a small "g," to hear him say: "This afternoon I have just one message for you: this message is, Have faith!" "Believe," he said, "for one thing, that there is a difference between right and wrong; and for the other, that there is a relation between cause and effect." The relation between cause and effect in Germany to-day is shown in this: for cause you have the thought of war as the chief means of making a nation great, for effect you have the grim struggle that menaces us. But the other thing is to be believed, too—that there is a final and indestructible difference between right and wrong. The German leaders, following Nietzsche, do not believe it. We do; and our view shall prevail and be vindicated.

What about the future of Germany? Well, I wish the German people no harm; none of us wishes the German people any harm. But the German people must learn to accept the decrees of history, must learn somehow to put away the ambitions that have brought on us this evil, and to be content to go on and live as good neighbors within their frontiers in Europe. It is not time yet to ask what we shall do to the Kaiser: no doubt the Kaiser is thinking what he will do to us! This, however, we may say, that no nation can be tolerated in the position of a permanent bully. The security of Germany will be undisturbed if she will abandon this rôle. (Applause.)