

A HERETIC LOOKS AT SOME HISTORY

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THE mills of the gods grind too swiftly for the eye of man. Gradual as are the changes brought by time, our view of things yet generally lags behind present reality. The Middle Ages were for long under the illusion that they represented a continuation of the Roman Empire, and, in turn, Renaissance politicians hardly realized how far from the Medieval spirit they had moved until Machiavelli pointed it out to them. The historian who would write of his own times is, indeed, faced with almost as proverbially difficult a task as the doctor who has himself for a patient, or the lawyer who is his own client.

So we have hitherto regarded the last four centuries as one continuous historical period. Accepted orthodox interpretation separates history into three main divisions, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, the last named extending from about the years 1450 or 1500 to the time of the interpreter, and no one has yet suggested that we live in a different—a fourth—era. Is it not time that such a suggestion was seriously considered? Has not the significance of events since the French Revolution, in large measure, escaped us? Ought not 1450—1789 to be called Dynasticism, and will not 1789 to some unknown future year be more properly known as Nationalism?

Nationalism revolutionized the world order as profoundly as Democracy revolutionized the individual state. Just as Democracy broke the monopoly of power formerly enjoyed by the possessing classes in favour of the previously negligible, so has Nationalism lessened the power of great states and increased that of peoples who would, under Dynasticism, have been inconsequential. And just as the classes prepared their own downfall by giving important aid and leadership to the masses, so the great historic states have prepared their decline by giving essential support to mendicant Nationalism.¹ For, like all emotional excitements, Nationalism can be as easily roused to maudlin charity as to selfishness and

1. "The motive force of each nationality movement is made up of two factors—a native force of revolt and a foreign force of sympathy and support."—*Nationalism and War in the Near East. By a Diplomatist.* (George Young). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1915.

hatred. Indeed, its benevolent activities have appeared so laudable and reasonable that they have escaped critical notice.

Poland and India raised for the eighteenth century the same relative difficulties which the Ottoman Empire and China raised for the nineteenth and twentieth. In Poland, as in the Balkans, the misgovernment of a vast territory was a constant source of disturbance to the rest of Europe. In India, as in China, the decay of a great Oriental empire seriously impeded, and threatened to annihilate, a highly important commerce. Yet the Powers most interested settled the Polish and Indian questions to their own satisfaction with comparatively little effort. The diplomacy of Dynasticism was concerned solely with making the status of states correspond to the realities of power. Had it been concerned with Wrongs-That-Should-Be-Righted, Poland would have been as much entitled as Serbia or Rumania to plunge civilization into a series of destructive crises culminating in a Great War. India would have been as much entitled as China to the liberty of remaining, for an indefinite period, parcelled out among a succession of weak and ephemeral tyrants. But whereas during former ages the ability to exploit foreign sympathy could never compensate for lack of military, social, and economic strength, now military, social, and economic strength can never compensate inability to exploit foreign sympathy.

Advanced eighteenth century thought foreshadowed this. The enthusiasm of French dilettanti for America and Franklin, of British dilettanti for Corsica and Paoli, prophesied that the impending era would usually give heart and hand to any people who appeared as fighting for freedom against odds, a promise borne out by the French Revolutionary frenzy for the liberation of oppressed nations.² Sentimental benevolence had become a practical factor of major importance in international relations, although it did not develop an effective technique until the nineteenth century. Then a whole series of new states appeared in quick succession upon the map of Europe. Each had overcome powerful opposition by invoking foreign aid. Foreign sympathy could never resist the Romantic or the pseudo-Scientific Appeal.

The Romantic Appeal was sounded to perfection by the Italian national movement. Its blatant sentimentality, attuned to contemporary nineteenth century romanticism, retains its vitality even to-day. Do not our textbooks still speak feelingly of the *Risorgimento*, the Resurrection, and solemnly quote Victor Emmanuel's

2. Decree of the National Convention, November 19th, 1792, offering the aid of France to all peoples who would recover their liberty.—*Cambridge Modern History*, vol. VIII, p. 300.

"Italy will do it herself"? But what actually was "resurrected" in the Kingdom of Italy? The realm of Theodoric the Ostrogoth³ perhaps? Modern Italy, so far from being a "resurrection" of anything, is an entirely new and unprecedented phenomenon, with no genuine historical antecedents whatever. To urge that the "resurrection" was spiritual is to admit the obvious propagandist usage of the word, a usage sufficiently controversial to find the head of the most ancient Christian Church on the opposing side. As for "Italy will do it herself", that must rank equally with the *Risorgimento* theory as an unsupported flight of romantic rhetoric. The intervention of France was the decisive factor in the accomplishment of Italian independence.

Balkan Nationalism favoured the pseudo-Scientific Appeal. Greek, Rumanian, Serb, and Bulgar attempted to justify their respective demands on historical grounds. Much of the evidence which they presented was rejected. Some of it was too patently the propagandist falsification⁴ of venomous bookworms. Some, as for example, the supposed kinship between classical and modern Greeks, belonged too obviously to the Romantic rather than the pseudo-Scientific category.⁵ But even after the admitted forgeries and extravagances had been cast aside, there still remained a great body of alleged facts, the validity of which was firmly believed in by influential and responsible foreign opinion. Each Balkan national movement had its coterie of foreign sympathizers, and savants of established reputation did not disdain explaining to a bewildered world just what was the "historical" foundation of these conflicting claims. At the same time, Pan-Germanism excited no sympathy abroad, presumably because it was unable to satisfy the lachrymose yearnings of revolutionary sentimentality. Nevertheless, Balkanism was not one whit less unreasonable. The following deadly parallel, which could doubtless be made longer, will, perhaps, suffice:

3. In the preface to his *Theodoric the Ostrogoth*, Thomas Hodgkin mentions the despair which overcame those who sympathized with Italian nationalism, after 1848. A friend pointed out that Italy, having been so divided in the past, must remain so in the future. "I, who was on the side of hope, felt the weakness of my position, and was driven backward, through the centuries, till at length I took refuge in the reign of Theodoric." He afterwards learned that Italy's unity, "even under Theodoric, was not so complete as I then imagined it."

4. "—the practice of forging historical documents or monuments has been adopted by every race in the (Balkan) peninsula at one time or another." Seton-Watson, *Rise of Nationality in the Balkans*, p. 81.

5. However, such views still have supporters. *The Balkan Review*, vol. I, 1919, p. 216 and seq., contains an article on Greek claims to Thrace by "Diodorus," (described as "an eminent historian"). As evidence, Diodorus submits that Thrace was colonized by Greeks in the 7th century B. C., and that "Miltiades,—had already married a Thracian princess."

BALKANISM.

(As interpreted by an internationally known authority).

"The frontiers of the Serbian state—have never included, and do not even to-day (1917) include the whole of the race; indeed—that they do not is one of the causes of the present war."—Seton-Watson, *Rise of Nationality in the Balkans*, p. 25.

"Even to-day the claims of rival propagandists are based upon the doubtful and fluctuating frontiers of Medieval times. But even upon a perfectly sound historical basis it is possible to make out a good case for at least three mutually exclusive and irreconcilable programs."—Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 5. (The three programs referred to are inspired by the first Medieval Bulgar Empire, which reached its zenith under Simeon, 893-927; the second Rumano - Bulgar - Asenid Empire, greatest under Ivan-Asen II, 1218-1241; the Medieval Serb Empire, overthrown at Kosovo, 1389).

CRUDE PAN-GERMANISM.

"In the German Empire live at present (1897) 47 million Germans and 4 million non-Germans. Outside its frontiers live, in Europe alone, 21 million Germans, of whom 2 million are in Switzerland, 10 million in Austria-Hungary, 1 million in Russia, and 8 million Low Germans in Belgium and the Netherlands." Fritz Bley, *Die Alldeutsche Bewegung und die Niederlande*. Alldeutscher Verband, München.

Many Pan-German claims rest upon a sounder historical basis than those set forth opposite. Luxemburg remained part of the Germanic Confederation until its dissolution in 1866. Belgium and Holland were still parts of the Holy Roman Empire at the death of Maximilian I in 1519, when, according to Bryce, the Empire had already become consciously German. Bohemia and Switzerland were still, at that period, nominally members of the Empire; Switzerland continued to be so until 1648. After the Napoleonic Wars, Hardenberg wanted the Netherlands and Switzerland attached to the Germanic Confederation, illustrating, writes W. Alison Phillips, (*The Confederation of Europe*, 2nd edition, 1920, pp. 102-103), "aspirations which have never been abandoned."

All Nationalism, whether German, Balkan, or Irish, which violates the Historical Statute of Limitations, is only pseudo-Scientific. The claims of nations, as of individuals, lapse with the age which gave them birth. Medieval conditions offer no suitable foundation for a modern state. The fact that the Middle Ages represented the furthest development of Balkan problems gives no right to exception. For an analogous situation we must suppose that France and Britain, having had virtually no history from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, should then attempt to recon-

stitute themselves as modern states and renew the issues of the First Hundred Years War at one and the same time.

The Historical Statute of Limitations has cultural as well as political application. The language and culture of a bygone day are adequate only to express the civilization of their day. Those whose nationalistic ardour impels them to discard an established language in favour of some half-forgotten tongue would be better advised to substitute for the latter Esperanto or Volapuk. A language which died when wheeled vehicles were a rarity has no place in the age of motor cars. As well might the America of skyscrapers and slang determine to revive the truly national beauties of the wigwam style of architecture, and the glories of the ancient Choctaw language.

But both the Romantic and the pseudo-Scientific Appeals are already out of date. The nationalistic movements, whose purposes they served, carried on their struggles at a time when demands had still to be accompanied by some show of reason. Liberty, grievances, were then the pretences of Artificial Nationalism. Pretences repulsive to those who urged them! Mazzini, in an unguarded moment, declared that liberty was of secondary consequence to Italian Nationalism,⁶ and Mussolini has confirmed him. Virtually every one of the states which Western Europe created to satisfy Nationality and Liberty now violates the former and travesties—or rejects—the latter. All contain large and discontented national minorities of their own; nearly all fluctuate between burlesques of parliamentarism and frank dictatorships.

In truth, Artificial Nationalism cares nothing for freedom, justice, historic right, or other idealistic values. Essentially it is simply egotism, the determination of an aggrieved group to seize power regardless of right and wrong, just as Communism represents a similar tendency in the degraded individual. However, egotism can be legitimately met with egotism, and in any such frank clash the older and physically stronger powers would easily have gained the victory. Therefore the new movements always made their causes appear justified by Liberty-Equality-Fraternity, and that part of Europe which had been won by the Revolution could not withhold its sympathy, and when necessary, its active aid. So successful was this policy that to-day Nationalism is looked upon as an integral part of Liberalism; it is as unquestioningly accepted by Liberal opinion as majority rule or mass education. The

6. "Italy alone... can boast that her children arose for an idea. They sought a country; they looked to the Alps. Liberty, the goal of other nations, was for ours only a means."—Mazzini, *Life and Writings*, London, 1864-70, vol. V, p. 41. The conciliatory government of the Austrian Archduke Maximilian in Lombardy-Venetia alarmed Cavour. He bade his friends force Austria to restore the state of siege in Milan.—*Cambridge Modern History*, vol. XI, p. 374.

Nationalism of Saklatvala, the Parsee Communist, is not less orthodox than that of George Washington.⁷

Thus, automatically assured of powerful support, Nationalism need no longer dissemble its true character. Frankly contemptuous of Romance, pseudo-Science, and the other old dodges, it stands forth in all its arrogant egotism, best summed up by a Filipino Nationalist leader: "We prefer a Government run like hell by Filipinos to one run like heaven by Americans."⁸

Great historic forces, Dynastic, Nationalistic, or Democratic, attract, when they become dominant, imitation from those who have been unable or unwilling to keep pace with them in process of development. But to assume the superficial trappings is not to possess the reality. The present views with derision the petty princelings who aped the external glories of Versailles under Louis XIV. Will not the future be equally scornful of the artificial imitators of genuine Nationality?

7. When the United States refused to admit Saklatvala to the Washington conference of the Interparliamentary Union, Mr. Howard, member of Congress from Nebraska, declared that Saklatvala was being penalized "for championing for India the same freedom which the patriot fathers championed and won for the United States."—*New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1925.

8. *New York Times*, March 9, 1926.