

**THE WESTERN AND
EASTERN QUESTIONS
OF EUROPE**

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The Western and Eastern Questions of Europe by Elihu Burritt

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ELIHU BURRITT

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*With Respects of Burritt, Elihu.
The Author.*

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WESTERN AND EASTERN QUESTIONS
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BY ELIHU BURRITT.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Several intelligent and influential readers having expressed the opinion that the reflections herewith presented to the public were worth preserving in a more permanent form than the daily papers in which they first appeared, the Author submits them in a pamphlet and commends them to the thoughtful consideration of both American and English minds interested in the great questions that have come, or are soon to come, to the front before the civilized world.

NEW BRITAIN, CONN., March 20, 1871.

1871, Aug. 5.
List 1.
Hon. Jas. Sumner,
8 Boston.
(N. H. 1830.)

QUESTIONS OF WESTERN EUROPE.

The Cost of Small Nationalities.

The hyperbole of popular comparisons or measurements may exaggerate contrasts, but they make them impressive. It is common to hear even a poor man say this or that "is worth its weight in gold," sometimes even when the this or that is his bright and active boy of fifteen years, and weighing a hundred pounds avoirdupois. This simile exaggerates the relative value of the two things compared, but the estimate expressed is clear and impressive. The same simile reversed may be applied even more truthfully to entities in the political world, which have been held at a higher price than they are worth to themselves or to mankind. By the simile reversed, I mean that there are several small nationalities in Europe which cost their weight in gold, though they are worth virtually nothing to themselves as political communities, and less than nothing to the great family of nations. And this vast cost of their worthless being is not borne by themselves, but by outside Powers and peoples. Their present political existence is of no more value to their own subjects than each of seven kingdoms would be to its subjects if England were again resolved into the old Saxon heptarchy, or if France were reparaceled into as many independent States.

Let us glance at the status of these small nationalities as they appear in the scale of dignity. They are the "unprotected females" in the community of European nations. They themselves no more pretend to the ability of self-standing and self-defending powers than does a lone and defenceless woman sojourning or traveling among rude and stalwart men. Her very weakness is her safety. She feels and trusts it as such. She believes it will enlist some stout and gallant champion in her defense, should she be assaulted by a ruffian. This weakness may be safety, but it is not dignity. And this weakness is not the *raison d'être*, but the *pouvoir d'être*, of these small nationalities. And it is a wonder that en-

lightened patriotism can see in them a reason for independent existence. Their subjects are yet as patriotic as those of the Great Powers, and as intelligent, doubtless. But, with all this patriotism, they must at times see and feel how the pigmy stature of their little State dwarfs their own political status. What is their opinion, what is their political entity worth, when weighed against that of the same number of Englishmen, French, Prussians, or Russians? What is the weight of their Government's opinion or ability in a great "question" that moves Christendom?

Let us glance at the reason and value of these small States in the light of the freedom, the liberal institutions, and the general "rights of man," which they procure and maintain for their subjects or citizens. Take Ireland, for example. Could any form of independent nationality, under a constitutional monarchy, or a republic, raise an Irishman one political inch above an Englishman on the sister island, or in any quality or enjoyment of freedom to think, speak, move, or act in "the pursuit of happiness?" Would the "repeal of the Union," or a republic, cheapen a single acre of land, or even transfer one to a new owner without pay to somebody? Ireland elects and sends to the Imperial Parliament more representatives *pro rata* of her population than she would be allowed to send to Washington were she united to the American Republic. If independent, would she send more or better representatives to Dublin? If she could and did, could and would they be more unanimous at Dublin than in London, or make better laws for the best good of her people, than they could if equally honest and united in the British Parliament? In a word, could any form of national independence give an Irishman in Ireland a single possibility of freedom in "the pursuit of happiness" which he cannot enjoy or reach, as a subject of the United Kingdom, on the same footing as an Englishman in England?

We might go around the whole circle of would-be independent nationalities, and apply the same questions to them. Crossing the diameter of this circle, what, may we ask, can the subjects of the two Danubian Principalities be, enjoy, or hope more than they could if they were part and parcel of the Austrian Empire? What possibilities of progress, freedom, political dignity and material prosperity can the motley populations of European Turkey attain under the Mohammedan rule of Constantinople, which they could not possess under the Russian sceptre at St. Petersburg? What liberties do the few millions of Sweden enjoy, or pretend to, which the population of Denmark do not possess and use? What is the *raison d'être*? Wherein does it pay, in political privilege or status, to keep up two independent nationalities for Spain and Portugal? To use a term

more familiar to the American than perhaps to any other community, these old sovereignties do not pay, in dignity, strength, and freedom, for what they expend themselves to keep up their independent existence.

But, in some cases at least, where one of these small nationalities has paid out of its own pocket a farthing for its own deceptive and fruitless independence, the "Great Powers" around it have paid a pound sterling as their annuity on this life assurance policy. If any thoughtful reader thinks this an aggravated estimate, let him just glance at the causes of all the wars in Europe for the last two hundred years, at the "wars of succession," or wars to maintain a "balance of power." Let him analyze the composition of the English national debt, and see how much the nationality of Spain has cost the English people, and how they have been paid in ingratitude and indignity for their money and their blood. Why, a few days ago the English Chancellor of the Exchequer, in answer to a question in the House of Commons, stated that England's bill of costs in the Crimean War was £80,000,000 in money, not counting the blood she poured out like water in the struggle. Now \$400,000,000, besides the sacrifice of precious life, was a pretty large sum to sweat out of the incomes and industries of the English people in less than two years. It was a pretty large sum for them to pay for the sham *autonomy* of two Danubian provinces, or even for the existence of Turkey itself as an independent nationality. But this sum is small compared with the cost of Belgium to England. It involved a great expense to France and other outside nations to rive that small country from Holland, one of the freest and most solidly prosperous nations in Europe; one of the first maritime countries in the world, of which Belgium formed a part, and from which she could have derived as much advantage as any section of the Netherlands. Well, from the time this new nationality was first set upon its feet, its "protection" has cost England more than it has Belgium itself. Although three or four other Great Powers signed the guarantee papers with her, she knows that not one of them attached more obligation to the compact than to the old vitiated Treaty of Vienna; that not one of them feels bound to fight for Belgium, unless its own individual interests were involved. So England has virtually assumed the whole obligation and cost of defending that small nationality. From the date of the treaty, 1839, she has apprehended an attack upon the independence of her protégé, and she has felt bound to prepare to resist such an attack. For thirty years or more, the invasion of Belgium has been one of the front-rank probabilities for which she has provided in her armed peace establishments. It is a moderate estimate that these preparations for the defense of Belgium

have cost England £5,000,000 a year for the last thirty years. She has just now voted £2,000,000, as an extra appropriation, to provide against the increased peril of the hour. But this sum is only a small instalment of the amount involved in her military armaments in behalf of Belgium. If no outside Power touches that little Kingdom with its little finger, this new danger will cost England £20,000,000. But think of what would come if either Prussia or France should attack Belgium. England has just released all the other parties that signed with her the Belgian guarantee; she has engaged, single-handed, to enter into this tremendous struggle, and fight for France or against France for the independence of Belgium. Just think for one moment of the illimitable peril of blood and treasure involved in this obligation, whichever horn of the dilemma England shall be obligated to take. Suppose, at some desperate crisis of this conflict, Prussia should violate the territory of Belgium, and France should call upon England to fulfill the letter of her bond, and send her iron-clad fleet to the Baltic to shell the Prussian ports, bombard Berlin, and depose and capture Victoria's eldest daughter, and destroy Potsdam and all the royal palaces. Or pursue the alternative, and suppose that England should oblige herself, by this new bond, to join Prussia in the complete subjugation of France. In either case, when all that Belgium shall have cost England, from 1839 to the end of the chapter, shall have been computed, will not the total illustrate the cost of small nationalities?

The Balance-of-Power Regime.

In these weeks of centuries for days, Christendom is making history very fast. Changes of public opinion are worthy of being put in the front rank with the events which this history is to record. Does the general appreciation of these momentous events indicate a change of public opinion in reference to the policy in which they originated? The American mind never had much occasion to be exercised in regard to the balance-of-power régime on this Continent. Virtually, as a nation, we have no neighbors, in the European sense, or none to fear or oppose our growth and expansion. We would not admit for a moment that the neighbors we have on the north and south have any reason to fear insult or injury from us in consequence of this rapid and immense growth of our national territory and power. We believe, and would have them believe, that Canada and Mexico are just as safe from any violation of their rights on our part as

they were when we did not number ten millions. We have this full faith in ourselves in regard to our disposition and intentions toward our weaker neighbors. We will not now stop to inquire if we should have the like faith in them if the case were reversed, and they were growing at our rate and we at theirs.

One thing is quite evident: the American mind clearly sympathizes with Prussia in this tremendous struggle with France, and seems to throw upon the French the onus or responsibility of the war. It is true that, perhaps, three out of every four Americans charge Louis Napoleon with being the cause of the war, though nothing is more certain than that his fiercest opponents were the most eager to rush into it, and he the most reluctant to cast his all upon the terrible hazard of the sword. The whole English nation leans to Prussia as manifestly as the American does. Now, a common and equal suspicion or dislike of the French Emperor, doubtless has a good deal to do with this bias in both cases. But, I am confident that no fair-minded and intelligent American or Englishman, on second thought, would believe that if Napoleon had never been born, or if France had been a republic since 1848, this war would have been avoided. To believe that it would have been avoided, one must believe that the domination of the old balance-of-power régime over the sentiment and policy of nations has been broken. Does the sentiment of America, England, and of other countries that side with Prussia, indicate this belief? Does it show the progress of a great change in public opinion in regard to the free growth and expansion of nations? that one has no cause to fear the simple increase of territory, population, and power on the part of its neighbor? If this new and more hopeful public opinion is beginning to manifest itself in this way, is it inspired by a sentiment like our American faith in our own fair and honorable mind and intent toward our neighbors? Does it proceed from a new or increasing confidence in the disposition and policy of great and growing Powers? To bring it to a most practical actuality, is it the sentiment of outside nations that France had no cause of fear in the growth and power of Prussia, though it absorbed into itself and wielded the whole German-speaking empire on the Continent?

For one, I should be rejoiced to believe that the public sentiment of the great majority of Christian nations had reached this "consummation so devoutly to be wished." What a change such a sentiment must bring into the relationships and policies of the Great Powers in time to come! How different from the sentiment of those Powers which led to the Crimean war! Then Russia crossed the Pruth and threatened to hold two or three Danubian principalities as hostages or guarantees for the better