

**PRUSSIAN  
MEMORIES:  
1864-1914**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649275427

Prussian memories: 1864-1914 by Poultney Bigelow

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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## INTRODUCTORY

**B**ETWEEN the time of penning this little book and securing a courageous publisher, my sixtieth birthday arrived and brought me into the ranks of the elders. Henceforth I may claim the right to be reminiscent, not to say garrulous. I have crossed the ocean ninety times, three of the trips being under sail. Four times have I circumnavigated the globe—once under sail. I have been in three shipwrecks and as many times have been pronounced dead by expensive men of medicine. My studies have drawn me to every tropical colony, and my travels have been largely afoot, on horseback, or in a canoe. My adventures have been few because it has been my practice to give careful study to the history of the countries I was about to visit. That is probably one reason why my dealings with natives have been uniformly satisfactory—whether in Zululand or Borneo; China or New Guinea; the Black Sea or Baltic. Age has modified my views on many matters, notably on the relative value of man in

different climates. It is hard for me to see that one race is superior to another save for a short time under exceptional conditions.

Patriotism is based largely upon the conceit that we are mysteriously gifted with a larger share of virtue or intelligence than has been given to others; that we must conquer other countries, in order to diffuse our wisdom and virtue; that we must plague them with missionaries and commercial travellers until the happy day arrives when all shall rest happily under our flag and the millennium be proclaimed.

We Americans are an almost offensively patriotic people, so far as words and symbols are concerned. We scatter insults and missionaries with wasteful zeal and assume that our high opinion of ourselves is shared by the world at large. Our school children learn this doctrine, which is perpetuated by our colleges, our preachers, our papers, and our seekers after office. We have admitted negroes to citizenship; yet while we have branded as undesirables the disciples of Confucius, our slums are crowded with immigrants from the Mediterranean who constitute a menace to our political future; and we bar our gates against the Japanese, who make a religion of cleanliness and whose lives make their country a byword for chivalry. We

have flaunted in the face of Europe a so-called Monroe Doctrine, which forbids the great Powers from introducing stable government among the Latin-American States; and we threaten these Powers with war if they take steps to collect their debts, while we ourselves do nothing to command either fear or sympathy south of the Rio Grande.

There are no surprises to him who studies history and this great war has surprised no one save those who seek their light from the Priests of Pacifism.

The United States has been on the verge of war, for which there has been abundant provocation with Germany,—to say nothing of our neighbours across the Pacific. But had we been as meek as Belgium, our peril could be none the less real. We are a country piled high with dollars and no one to guard them. England so far has acted as our big brother and Germany dares make no move until John Bull is asleep. We should have a permanent peace footing of one million men; and these should be organized, after the Swiss method, as a force of reserves. Every voter should be qualified to take his share in the defence of his country, while he would be called away from his civil pursuits for not more than a few weeks in each year.

The American lad who can not read and write

and shoot and ride and swim and do his soldier duty should be barred from the polls and his name posted in public places. There is no good reason why from being a nation of "minute men" under Washington, we now should become so degenerate that in a moment of national danger even the graduates of our naval and military colleges are forbidden to discuss the matter for fear of annoying our enemy.

Germany has her plans for the invasion of this country. She has had these plans for a number of years past, and I have been called visionary each time that I have referred to the matter. It is our duty to be ready, for when Germany makes her raid across the Atlantic she will first exhaust every effort to secure the services of such patriots of the type of William Jennings Bryan. These "prophets of peace" preach peace and disarmament, and when their talking is over they will disappear with the money from their lectures and may next be seen on the Rhine or the Danube carrying in their buttonhole a Red Eagle order of the third class.

When this war closes, Europe will have many soldiers but few dollars; and no nation will need those dollars more than Germany. America will have billions of dollars but very few soldiers.



History teaches that sentiment counts for little in war and diplomacy—but it is a soporific for unthinking voters. In these past twenty years Imperial Germany has loudly proclaimed her desire for peace, yet has been the only one of the great Powers to decline flatly any proposition looking towards either disarmament or arbitration. She has feverishly pushed forward a naval programme out of all proportion to defensive needs, and in her diplomatic intercourse has assumed more and more the tone of a bully. This statement can be verified by any one who will take the pains to read the interchange of letters between the cabinets of Berlin, Paris, and London during these past few years.

What share William II. has had in this crowning crime I know not—for I have not seen him since 1896.

But Court is not everything save to such as have never been there; or, have known but one. My business is to be an American and the business of William II. is to be a German Kaiser. Towards him, as a man, I feel gratitude, and for his talents much respect; nor am I conscious of having ever uttered in word or print anything that could not be repeated in his hearing and with profit to the listener.

Certain Americans, including some officers of the army and navy, have become so unbalanced from once appearing at the Imperial Court, that they are now pro-German, and they feel that to prove their social superiority, they must fill their rooms with Imperial photographs. But a little wider experience would cure this malady.

We Americans hold that Government by the people means Liberty and Justice. This is not necessarily true. Democracy gives us ten thousand bosses, each one more costly than a single average monarch of Europe. England is nominally a monarchy. Yet in London the American can find more home rule and common law justice than in New York or Chicago. For my part I prefer a decent despot to a presidential demagogue. There are no more popular and patriotic representatives of national ideals today than the Kings of Belgium, England, and Italy, while each has practically less political power than the American President. Yet each is nominally ruler by divine right. These kings work for the nation's tomorrow, while our presidents must work for —votes!

William II. is popular at home, and the fact that he is so, in spite of having inaugurated a war unexampled for trickery and barbarity, shows us

that an absolute monarch, by skilfully manipulating the press, the university, the schools, and the vast machinery of public patronage, can in the course of one generation produce a public sentiment ready to condone any act provided it be labelled patriotic.

It has been the favourite toast of Academic Germany, that Martin Luther emancipated the nation from intellectual bondage. It will henceforth be her dubious glory that after these centuries of struggle for freedom she has once more succumbed to the dual despotism of Pope and Kaiser.

P. B.

MALDEN-ON-HUDSON, September 23, 1915.

