

**POLITICAL SKETCHES:
TWELVE
CHAPTERS ON THE
STRUGGLES OF THE AGE**

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Political Sketches: Twelve Chapters on the Struggles of the Age by Carl Retslag

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CARL RETSLAG

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ON THE
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BY
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"SED DUX ATQUE IMPERATOR VITAE MORTALIUM ANIMUS EST."—
Sallust.

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1854.

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PREFACE.

THE present Chapters owe their origin to a Lecture which I gave in the spring of this year, on the present European Crisis.

I should, perhaps, apologize to the English public for having ventured to write in a language, my knowledge of which dates but from April, 1852, when the political events of my own country drove me to England. The quiet life of a small English town gave me, after some stormy years, the opportunity of reviewing the events of that troubled time, and of comparing the political condition of the Continent, and especially of my own country, with that of England. My principles have remained unchanged after this review, my opinion as to the means of realizing those principles is partly altered and corrected.

That I have paid special attention to Germany has not been caused merely by my being a German, but by

the conviction that the fate of Germany will decide the fate of Europe, a conviction which becomes daily more general.

Many important questions are but touched upon, and the historical dates are scanty; but I was obliged to restrict myself almost to the narrow limits of a pamphlet.

DR. CARL RETSLAG.

DONCASTER,
September 2, 1854.

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POLITICAL SKETCHES.

I. MARCH OF CIVILIZATION.

THE history of man is a revelation of the Divine Spirit itself. He who sees in history nothing but the arbitrary deeds of man, must consider it as a "chronique scandaleuse," as a record of much crime, and still more folly and perverseness. The few sparkling virtues disappear like a drop in the dark ocean of egotism and passion: the truth appears drowned in the flood of error. But history is more than a mere history of man, is more than a dry record of facts. Facts and actions are only the incorporation—the incarnation of ideas. To study history is to divest the facts of their terrestrial dress, and to glance at the world of ideas; to get at the principles, which as eternal, unchangeable laws, have ruled all the past, rule all the present, and will rule all the future events of the world; to comprehend the spirit not only of the age, but of *the ages*; to behold at once the creation and the Creator.

Thus even the egotism and passion of man become in the hand of Providence the greatest promoters of good, the strongest levers in the history of the world, as Mephistopheles says in Goethe's *Faust*, when asked who he is:

"Ich bin ein Theil der Kraft,
Die stets das Böse will
Und stets das Gute schafft."

The mythology of all nations has always seen in the life of this world the march of Divinity. In the splendid images of their fancy lies hidden a deep and earnest

truth ; and the opinion of the modern European divine, or philosopher, does not differ, in this respect, so very much from the cosmology of the ancient Asiatic sages.

It would lead us too far to explain the relation in which God stands to the history of man. Whether we see in this history the revelation of the Divine Spirit itself, or whether we, in a less scientific way, consider God as the supreme Guide of human affairs, according to the popular saying, "Man proposes, God disposes," it is generally acknowledged, that human affairs are influenced if not conducted by a higher power than the mere mind and will of man. But if the Great Spirit of all perfection influences or conducts human affairs, it is easily to be understood, that the history of man is in constant progress to that perfection, at which every individual aims for himself, and at which mankind at large aims in a thousand often opposite ways. Whether this perfection can be reached here in this world, on this theatre of human affairs or not, can as little influence our opinion of their constant progress, as an individual of sound morality is influenced by the objection, that, because he can never reach here to perfection, he ought not here to aim after it at all.

We understand by perfection, not only the moral perfection of man, but the full development of all his capacities, of all those talents and powers of mind and body, which form an essential part of his nature—a nature, which is termed in the Scriptures, "an image of God," and which the philosophers consider as divine. If the innate genius of mankind is ever to reach the highest pitch of glory, if it shall conquer those thousand deficiencies and faults, which stain in the present condition of man, the splendour of his possible glory, then we shall have regained "the lost paradise," and our eye will not be dazzled with the light even of the Absolute.

Man has lived already some thousands of years, and yet how far is he off from that state of perfection ! Has he subjugated nature, has he shown himself entirely master