

**GERMANY & THE PRUSSIAN
SPIRIT (REPRINTED FROM THE
SPECIAL WAR NUMBER OF THE
ROUND TABLE OF SEPTEMBER,
1914)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649740512

Germany & the Prussian Spirit (Reprinted from the Special War Number of The Round Table of September, 1914) by Anonymous .

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ANONYMOUS .

**GERMANY & THE PRUSSIAN
SPIRIT (REPRINTED FROM THE
SPECIAL WAR NUMBER OF THE
ROUND TABLE OF
SEPTEMBER, 1914)**

Germany & the Prussian Spirit

*(Reprinted from the
Special War Number of THE ROUND TABLE
of September, 1914)*

LIBRARY OF
CALIFORNIA

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1914

Price Sixpence

11119

G4.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

GERMANY AND THE PRUSSIAN SPIRIT

*“And yet deliver thou, O Father Zeus, the Sons of the
Acheans from under this cloud, and make clear sky above
them, and grant to their eyes to see; that so, if it be thy will
to slay them, thou slay them in the light.”*

*Thus spake he, and Father Zeus looked down upon him in
his sore travail. And forthwith he smote the mist, and drove
away the murk from heaven; and the sun shone forth, and the
whole face of the battle was made plain.*

THE PRAYER OF AJAX IN THE BATTLE
OF THE SHIPS. ILLAD, XVII, 645-650.

AN endeavour is made in the following pages to trace the modern history of the German Empire, to indicate the main ideas which have taken shape in its institutions, and to mark the causes which have brought it into conflict with its three great European neighbours, in particular Great Britain. The method is of necessity summary, and the conclusions rough. No pretence is made of an exhaustive inquiry into the ethical foundations of modern German Imperialism.

It was essential to Europe that the disunion and instability of the German States should be overcome by some effective system of political union; it may have been inevitable, when that union was achieved, that it should lead to a new disturbance in the European

Germany and the Prussian Spirit

equilibrium. Such questions are incapable of answer. All that is suggested here is that the German Empire of to-day, so far from co-ordinating the older tendencies of German character and intellect, has taken rather the shape of a reaction against what was best and strongest in German culture, its idealism; that the political institutions of the Empire were framed too completely on the autocratic and militarist model to permit of adjustment to the growth of democratic ideas; that the generation bred and disciplined under those institutions has developed, as part of its training, a standard of national conduct and a belief in the national goal which were incompatible from the outset both with the British view of international relations and with the peace of the civilized world; and that the two Empires, British and German, have come in consequence to a life-and-death struggle which is, in part, a conflict of interests but also, above and beyond all questions of interest, a heroic conflict of ideals.

I. GERMAN IDEALISM

THE name of Germany calls to mind two dissimilar human types. The one, sanctioned by a moribund tradition, is a genial wool-gathering professor in a formidable pair of spectacles, untidy of habit and far from athletic in form, the dedicated slave rather than the possessor of several large notebooks and a collecting-box. We have all laughed at that German professor in our infancy. Like John Bull or Uncle Sam, he is an established type. He was the only kind of German who figured in boys' books of adventure, at any rate till the end of the nineteenth century, and we gave him our affectionate patronage—the sort of patronage a public-school boy in the first eleven would bestow upon an amiable bookworm.

The other type of German is in spirit the absolute

German Idealism

antithesis of the professor, though he conceals a strong touch of the professor under his uniform. He is a military figure of imposing build, helmeted, cuirassed and spurred, with upturned moustaches, a commanding eye, and a powerful arm encased in mail. This warrior type has come into existence, so far as the British public is concerned, only during the present century. We have regarded it with increasing dislike and anxiety, as a somewhat uncivilized *parvenu* in the comity of nations. It has, to our eye, an outline of primitive and almost brutal suggestion, like the rudimentary masses favoured by modern German architecture. Contrasted with the public school type which we prefer, it calls to mind a strong and clever, but ungentlemanly, bully.

Like John Bull or Uncle Sam, these two German figures are, of course, merely the rough types of popular caricature; but like all such types they represent an instinctive popular judgment which is seldom very much astray. In the case of Germany, as in other cases, the two figures are founded on broad truth, and they epitomize together in a very significant way the origin and character of the new German Empire. The transformation of the one into the other is one of the most remarkable events in history. Even so Faust, calling in a dangerous doctor for the trouble of his soul, abandons his study, his books, his tubes and retorts, his doctor's gown, in order to live the worldly life he has hitherto despised.

Since Europe emerged from the Reformation and entered the era of modern history, German union has always been a living cause with the great majority of the German peoples, but the ideals aspired to through union have undergone a fundamental change in the last half-century. In the new blossoming of European mind which came with the Renaissance the German share was intellectual rather than practical. Coleridge's phrase, "fundamental brainwork," describes better than any other the special bent of the German temperament. Its first great manifestation was in religion.

Germany and the Prussian Spirit

Then, after a period of slow or interrupted growth, it showed its power once more in philosophy, in science, in history, in scholarship; and, combined with a noble strain of imagination and romance, it produced the greatest musicians of all time and some of the greatest writers and poets. The traditional words of Hans Sachs's "Hymn Before the Dawn"—chosen by Wagner with the insight of genius as the keynote of the culminating scene in that most German of all German works, *The Master Singers of Nuremberg*—bring with them the very atmosphere of the Germany which emerged in little centres of intense life from the shadows of the mediaeval Empire.

"Awake, 'tis close on dawn of day.
I hear amid the budding may
A nightingale full-hearted sing;
O'er hill and dale her voice doth ring.
The Night sinks downward in the west,
From eastward, lo, the Morning makes;
And Dawn in flaming splendour dress'd
Athwart the shadows on us breaks."

The strange passion of romance in the simple old German words will not bear translation; but even the English version, doggerel though it be, may perhaps suggest the touch of symbolism, the visionary aspiration towards a daylight for the eyes of the mind, which lies behind the original. It is significant that Wagner, finishing *The Master Singers* in the decade which saw the German Empire made, begs his countrymen, in Hans Sachs's final exhortation to the citizens of Nuremberg, to forswear foreign and princely influences and hold by the German masters of art.

"The Holy Roman Empire, let it part.
Our strength and stay is Holy German Art."

That, in even looser doggerel, is the last couplet of Hans Sachs's address. To an English audience the sentiment—

German Idealism

Art for Empire!—would seem merely ridiculous. To a German audience, even in 1914, it is a natural tribute to the German genius and a stirring reminder of Germany's creative past.

There was nothing of this visionary temper in Elizabethan or in Puritan England any more than in the Great Britain of to-day. With all her poetic and literary achievement, England from the Reformation onwards was turning her chief forces into the practical business of extending and defending her liberties—a severely political object which led step by step to worldwide power. Milton abandoned literature in order to slave as Cromwell's secretary, and returned to poetry only in his old age. There was no "fundamental brainwork" in the methods which established English freedom and British power. Englishmen have always seemed to settle their political affairs, like their legal code, by a kind of rough instinct, meeting practical necessities by practical expedients as they arose. In due course the sum of these practical expedients became the British Constitution and the British Empire—a process which suggests to many historians, especially the German ones, that we achieved our greatness partly by fraud and partly by mistake, and that we are entirely unworthy of it, now as in the past.

This political and practical capacity Germans, with their other great gifts, unfortunately lacked. They have always been creatures of intellect rather than of instinct. Their contribution to European progress, so great in religious and philosophical thought, and in the pursuit of knowledge, has been weak in the practical business of statesmanship. The Reformation—in England very largely a political movement, ending (like everything English) in compromise—was in Germany a profound convulsion of soul, leading to a new intellectual life. Dr Busch, Bismarck's Boswell, when he wishes, in the preface to his diaries, to fix his master's greatness once and for all, says: "In a hundred years the memory of Prince Bismarck will take a place in the minds of our people next to that occupied by the Wittenberg doctor." Bismarck and