

**THE MORALITY OF
NATIONS, AN ESSAY ON
THE THEORY OF POLITICS**

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The morality of nations, an essay on the theory of politics by C. Delisle Burns

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AN ESSAY ON THE THEORY
OF POLITICS

BY
C. DELISLE BURNS

“Remota iustitia, quid sunt regna nisi
magna latrocinia.”—*De Civ. Dei*, lib. iv.

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AT ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE, E.C.

1915

PREFACE

THE situation during the past year will probably result in changing many of the political ideas by which we are governed: for any intense experience has a tendency to produce new intellectual schemes, or at least to shatter the cherished idols of calmer days. We require new ideas in order to control new forces and direct them as far as we can in the course of which we approve; and the need of such new ideas becomes urgent at a time which may be either one of reconstruction or of renewed evil.

It has become obvious that although our political situation, both in domestic and in foreign issues, is unique and new, we have only the conceptions of our great-grandfathers with which to master it. But the tools made for simpler tasks are inadequate for the material upon which we must now use them. To deal with the modern State as though it were the *πολις* of Aristotle or the Leviathan of Hobbes is like trying to face heavy guns with a Macedonian phalanx or to pierce armour-plate with a cavalier's rapier. Our intellectual weapons are obsolete.

It is not my purpose, however, to establish a completely new theory of the State nor to deny the correctness of the greater part of what is embodied in our tradition ; but certain conclusions seem to flow from the situation which has been growing up during the past fifty years. These are of interest first because some German writers have seemed to imagine that German "Kultur" has its source in the German State or that the "expansion" of this State might cause an increase of Kultur among the unenlightened. The merely controversial situation may be put aside : for it is perfectly clear that even if "Kultur" could be attained by the extension of the activities of the German State, we do not propose to endure the benevolent imposition of such compulsory enlightenment. The main point is that our ideas of the State are changing, and that German State-worship is antiquated.

It was good journalism a few months ago to accuse Treitschke and Nietzsche of poisoning the German mind ; but clearly it is Hegel, and not either of these two, whose influence in State-worship and the Kultur-Staat is most pernicious. Treitschke was a good historian who accepted his political theories ready-made from the Hegelians, and no one hated the State more than Nietzsche ; but Hegel was the official guide for the Prussian bureaucracy, and his philosophy subordinated

every portion of social life to the State. It is known that he was ignorant of science, but it is not generally admitted that he was ignorant of history. His limitations, however, are not of great importance, since it is an idea and not a man which must be attacked. And again, our own philosophy of the State in the Utilitarians is as obsolete as Hegel's. Not all false ideas were made in Germany. Even Plato and Aristotle are inadequate for understanding the present political situation.

To all these, however, and to the commentators upon them, we acknowledge a debt, for we owe to them the reasoning which we must use against them. It might have been well if some of their dead theories had not been exhumed by diplomatists anxious to find reasons for what they did blindly. But many ghosts stalk the world and lead men on to battle too: such are "Evolution," or "Kultur," or "inevitable conflict," or the "logic of history," or the "Balance of Power," and many more which shall be nameless. Men are still as enslaved to dead ideas as when the barbarians followed the ghost of departed Rome. But these ideas once lived, and we owe to them, if we know them in history, the ability to see the new ideas which are now abroad.

In no section of political thought, however, will there be greater changes than in that which