

**BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE
REICHSTAG; SIXTEEN YEARS
OF PARLIAMENTARY LIFE IN
GERMANY**

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Behind the scenes in the Reichstag; sixteen years of parliamentary life in Germany by Abbé E. Wetterlé & René Doumic

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ABBÉ E. WETTERLÉ & RENÉ DOUMIC

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BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE REICHSTAG

SIXTEEN YEARS OF PARLIAMENTARY
LIFE IN GERMANY

BY THE

ABBÉ E. WETTERLÉ

EX-DEPUTY AT THE REICHSTAG AND IN THE ALSACE-LORRAINE CHAMBER

WITH A PREPATORY LETTER BY

RENÉ DOUMIC

MEMBER OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

GEORGE FREDERIC LEES

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE

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A PREFATORY LETTER

Dear Abbé Wetterlé,—

It is a pleasure to me to have the opportunity of saying what all of us in France think of you, why we love and admire you, and what a place all that your name personifies occupies in our hearts.

Do you recollect one of the first lectures which, at the beginning of the war, you delivered in Paris? The Société des Conférences had invited you to speak on the subject of the dear provinces towards which all our hopes are directed. When, well before the hour, I went to our hall on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, I found the approaches obstructed by a compact crowd, which desired at all hazards to enter the overerowed building. It became necessary to promise this disappointed but obstinate audience that you would deliver your lecture a second time. You might have reappeared thrice, nay ten times before our honest and responsive Parisian public. It would not have grown tired of coming to hear you, and I say not only to applaud you, but to drink in your

words. Those were magnificent gatherings, penetrated by a sacred thrill.

What you represent in our eyes is the fidelity of Alsace-Lorraine. To whatever trials that stubborn fidelity has been submitted, it has never flinched. Even when France seemed to be absorbed in sad interior quarrels and to follow up with less impatience the imprescriptible claim, you persevered your faith intact. Not for a moment was your thought turned from us. And that thought has been your whole thought—the thought which has inspired your whole life—your unique thought.

And what you also represent is the determination to become French once more, you who in your conscience have never ceased to be French, among the best French of France. For you did not confine yourself to platonic protests, you did not content yourself with the vagueness of touching regrets and hopes. Vain home-sickness is not the thing for you. To will, is really to employ all the means which lead to a given end; and under the most oppressive yoke, face to face with the most inventive tyranny, you have never let slip an opportunity, you have never neglected a means of hastening the liberating end.

Fidelity and determination make up the whole of you. One has only to look at you. Thick-set,

strong in the back, square-shouldered and round-headed, you are strength itself. You were cut out for strife, and in the midst of strife you are in your element. You have striven for the common cause. You have suffered. You have braved persecution and undergone imprisonment. Your prestige is the result of that, and thence, too, comes your authority. To speak and to write is in your case to act. It is much the fashion nowadays to extol action, in words. And from the way in which some people celebrate it, I cannot help thinking of those comic-opera singers who interminably repeat "Let us be off! Let us be off!" whilst stamping about on the stage. What they call action is mere talk about action. You, on the other hand, are not a maker of phrases; deeds alone are to your fancy. Beneath each word you utter there is a reality; every one carries, every one is a shot.

You write in the same manner. You have written thousands of articles. There is not one of them which was written with the mere object of producing an article to occupy or amuse the gallery. No. Every one—precise and direct—was aimed at an immediate object. That was a part of your action. Since the beginning of the war you have published several books, but there

is not one of them which was not evolved from an idea bearing within it an active virtue.

Thus it is in the case of the present volume.

The idea which has guided you, around which your recollections—illustrated by your narrative—have crystallised, is as follows.

As a member of the Reichstag, you have seen German politicians close at hand. You know what you are to believe about them. You have been present at their debates and have seen them, as in all Parliaments, divide themselves into parties. As Conservatives, Socialists, or members of the Catholic Centre, you have observed them following different conceptions. Only, what you have also seen—seen with your own eyes—is that there was always, in any and every case, a point at which all divisions ceased as though by magic, a ground on which all could meet, an object to which all strained in common. The feeling with which all were in accord was their hatred of France. The object towards which all strained was the destruction of France. The thought in which all collaborated was the preparation of war against France.

During forty-four years they combined, arranged, strengthened, perfected the formidable machine which was to be directed against us. And we, during that time, continually and stubbornly

closed our eyes and stopped our ears, unwilling to see or understand anything. We worked uninterruptedly—in that case only, alas! uninterruptedly—to weaken ourselves. We complacently welcomed, forbearingly diffused everything which disarms a nation and betrays it to the enemy. . . . Such is the painful parallel which the mind evokes when one reads your well-informed pages. . . . War broke out at the hour the Germans had chosen. So it was necessary, in the magnificent reawakening of the race, that French heroism should rebuild, but at the price of what a sacrifice! all that our improvident leaders had criminally undone.

Thus your book teaches a lesson—a lesson for the present and the future. For you have not written these recollections merely with the object of reviving a dolorous past, nor in order to recriminate against our faults of yesterday. You would bar, in advance, the road to fresh errors, guard against fresh weakness. What Germany was before the war she is during and will remain after the war. Nothing will turn her from her object, which is to destroy us. She is aiming at it to-day on the battlefield; to-morrow it will be in the economic arena. By violence or perfidy, one after the other or both together brutal and cunning, she strains towards the same end, which is