

Chapter VIII - The Wrong Horse

In another chapter I mentioned some of the late Lord Salisbury's remarks with regret, but I trust with respect; for in certain matters he deserved all the respect that can be given to him. His critics said that he "thought aloud"; which is perhaps the noblest thing that can be said of a man. He was jeered at for it by journalists and politicians who had not the capacity to think or the courage to tell their thoughts. And he had one yet finer quality which redeems a hundred lapses of anarchic cynicism. He could change his mind upon the platform: he could repent in public. He could not only think aloud; he could "think better" aloud. And one of the turning-points of Europe had come in the hour when he avowed his conversion from the un-Christian and un-European policy into which his dexterous Oriental master, Disraeli, had dragged him; and declared that England had "put her money on the wrong horse." When he said it, he referred to the backing we gave to the Turk under a fallacious fear of Russia. But I cannot but think that if he had lived much longer, he would have come to feel the same disgust for his long diplomatic support of the Turk's great ally in the North. He did not live, as we have lived, to feel that horse run away with us, and rush on through wilder and wilder places, until we knew that we were riding on the nightmare.

What was this thing to which we trusted? And how may we most quickly explain its development from a dream to a nightmare, and the hair's-breadth escape by which it did not hurl us to destruction, as it seems to be hurling the Turk? It is a certain spirit; and we must not ask for too logical a definition of it, for the people whom it possesses disown logic; and the whole thing is not so much a theory as a confusion of thought. Its widest and most elementary character is adumbrated in the word Teutonism or Pan-Germanism; and with this (which was what appeared to win in 1870) we had better begin. The nature of Pan-Germanism may be allegorised and abbreviated somewhat thus:

The horse asserts that all other creatures are morally bound to sacrifice their interests to his, on the specific ground that he possesses all noble and necessary qualities, and is an end in himself. It is pointed out in answer that when climbing a tree the horse is less graceful than the cat; that lovers and poets seldom urge the horse to make a noise all night like the nightingale; that when submerged for some long time under water, he is less happy than the haddock; and that when he is cut open pearls are less often found in him than in an oyster. He is not content to answer (though, being a muddle-headed horse, he does use this

answer also) that having an undivided hoof is more than pearls or oceans or all ascension or song. He reflects for a few years on the subject of cats; and at last discovers in the cat "the characteristic equine quality of caudality, or a tail"; so that cats are horses, and wave on every tree-top the tail which is the equine banner. Nightingales are found to have legs, which explains their power of song. Haddocks are vertebrates; and therefore are sea-horses. And though the oyster outwardly presents dissimilarities which seem to divide him from the horse, he is by the all-filling nature-might of the same horse-moving energy sustained.

Now this horse is intellectually the wrong horse. It is not perhaps going too far to say that this horse is a donkey. For it is obviously within even the intellectual resources of a haddock to answer, "But if a haddock is a horse, why should I yield to you any more than you to me? Why should that singing horse commonly called the nightingale, or that climbing horse hitherto known as the cat, fall down and worship you because of your horsehood? If all our native faculties are the accomplishments of a horse--why then you are only another horse without any accomplishments." When thus gently reasoned with, the horse flings up his heels, kicks the cat, crushes the oyster, eats the haddock and pursues the nightingale, and that is how the war began.

This apologue is not in the least more fantastic than the facts of the Teutonic claim. The Germans do really say that Englishmen are only Sea-Germans, as our haddocks were only sea-horses. They do really say that the nightingales of Tuscany or the pearls of Hellas must somehow be German birds or German jewels. They do maintain that the Italian Renaissance was really the German Renaissance, pure Germans having Italian names when they were painters, as cockneys sometimes have when they are hair-dressers. They suggest that Jesus and the great Jews were Teutonic. One Teutonist I read actually explained the fresh energy of the French Revolution and the stale privileges of its German enemies by saying that the Germanic soul awoke in France and attacked the Latin influence in Germany. On the advantages of this method I need not dwell: if you are annoyed at Jack Johnson knocking out an English prize-fighter, you have only to say that it was the whiteness of the black man that won and the blackness of the white man that was beaten. But about the Italian Renaissance they are less general and will go into detail. They will discover (in their researches into 'istry, as Mr. Gandish said) that Michael Angelo's surname was Buonarotti; and they will point out that the word "roth" is very like the word "rot." Which, in one sense, is true enough. Most Englishmen will be content to say it is all rot and pass on. It is all of a piece with the preposterous Prussian history, which talks, for instance, about the "perfect religious tolerance of the Goths"; which is like talking about the legal impartiality of chicken-pox. He will decline to believe that the Jews were Germans; though he may perhaps have met some Germans who were Jews. But deeper than any such practical reply, lies the deep inconsistency

of the parable. It is simply this; that if Teutonism be used for comprehension it cannot be used for conquest. If all intelligent peoples are Germans, then Prussians are only the least intelligent Germans. If the men of Flanders are as German as the men of Frankfort, we can only say that in saving Belgium we are helping the Germans who are in the right against the Germans who are in the wrong. Thus in Alsace the conquerors are forced into the comic posture of annexing the people for being German and then persecuting them for being French. The French Teutons who built Rheims must surrender it to the South German Teutons who have partly built Cologne; and these in turn surrender Cologne to the North German Teutons, who never built anything, except the wooden Aunt Sally of old Hindenburg. Every Teuton must fall on his face before an inferior Teuton; until they all find, in the foul marshes towards the Baltic, the very lowest of all possible Teutons, and worship him--and find he is a Slav. So much for Pan-Germanism.

But though Teutonism is indefinable, or at least is by the Teutons undefined, it is not unreal. A vague but genuine soul does possess all peoples who boast of Teutonism; and has possessed ourselves, in so far as we have been touched by that folly. Not a race, but rather a religion, the thing exists; and in 1870 its sun was at noon. We can most briefly describe it under three heads.

The victory of the German arms meant before Leipzig, and means now, the overthrow of a certain idea. That idea is the idea of the Citizen. This is true in a quite abstract and courteous sense; and is not meant as a loose charge of oppression. Its truth is quite compatible with a view that the Germans are better governed than the French. In many ways the Germans are very well governed. But they might be governed ten thousand times better than they are, or than anybody ever can be, and still be as far as ever from governing. The idea of the Citizen is that his individual human nature shall be constantly and creatively active in altering the State. The Germans are right in regarding the idea as dangerously revolutionary. Every Citizen is a revolution. That is, he destroys, devours and adapts his environment to the extent of his own thought and conscience. This is what separates the human social effort from the non-human; the bee creates the honey-comb, but he does not criticise it. The German ruler really does feed and train the German as carefully as a gardener waters a flower. But if the flower suddenly began to water the gardener, he would be much surprised. So in Germany the people really are educated; but in France the people educates. The French not only make up the State, but make the State; not only make it, but remake it. In Germany the ruler is the artist, always painting the happy German like a portrait; in France the Frenchman is the artist, always painting and repainting France like a house. No state of social good that does not mean the Citizen choosing good, as well as getting it, has the idea of the Citizen at all. To say the Germanies are naturally at war with this idea is merely to

respect them and take them seriously: otherwise their war on the French Revolution would be only an ignorant feud. It is this, to them, risky and fanciful notion of the critical and creative Citizen, which in 1870 lay prostrate under United Germany--under the undivided hoof.

Nevertheless, when the German says he has or loves freedom, what he says is not false. He means something; and what he means is the second principle, which I may summarise as the Irresponsibility of Thought. Within the iron framework of the fixed State, the German has not only liberty but anarchy. Anything can be said although, or rather because, nothing can be done. Philosophy is really free. But this practically means only that the prisoner's cell has become the madman's cell: that it is scrawled all over inside with stars and systems, so that it looks like eternity. This is the contradiction remarked by Dr. Sarolea, in his brilliant book, between the wildness of German theory and the tameness of German practice. The Germans sterilise thought, making it active with a wild virginity; which can bear no fruit.

But though there are so many mad theories, most of them have one root; and depend upon one assumption. It matters little whether we call it, with the German Socialists, "the Materialist Theory of History"; or, with Bismarck, "blood and iron." It can be put most fairly thus: that all important events of history are biological, like a change of pasture or the communism of a pack of wolves. Professors are still tearing their hair in the effort to prove somehow that the Crusaders were migrating for food like swallows; or that the French Revolutionists were somehow only swarming like bees. This works in two ways often accounted opposite; and explains both the German Socialist and the Junker. For, first, it fits in with Teutonic Imperialism; making the "blonde beasts" of Germania into lions whose nature it is to eat such lambs as the French. The highest success of this notion in Europe is marked by praise given to a race famous for its physical firmness and fighting breed, but which has frankly pillaged and scarcely pretended to rule; the Turk, whom some Tories called "the gentleman of Europe." The Kaiser paused to adore the Crescent on his way to patronise the Cross. It was corporately embodied when Greece attempted a solitary adventure against Turkey and was quickly crushed. That English guns helped to impose the mainly Germanic policy of the Concert upon Crete, cannot be left out of mind while we are making appeals to Greece--or considering the crimes of England.

But the same principle serves to keep the internal politics of the Germans quiet, and prevent Socialism being the practical hope or peril it has been in so many other countries. It operates in two ways; first, by a curious fallacy about "the time not being ripe"--as if time could ever be ripe. The same savage superstition from the forests had infected Matthew Arnold pretty badly when he made a personality

out of the Zeitgeist--perhaps the only ghost that was ever entirely fabulous. It is tricked by a biological parallel, by which the chicken always comes out of the egg "at the right time." He does not; he comes out when he comes out. The Marxian Socialist will not strike till the clock strikes; and the clock is made in Germany, and never strikes. Moreover, the theory of all history as a search for food makes the masses content with having food and physic, but not freedom. The best working model in the matter is the system of Compulsory Insurance; which was a total failure and dead letter in France but has been, in the German sense, a great success in Germany. It treats employed persons as a fixed, separate, and lower caste, who must not themselves dispose of the margin of their small wages. In 1911 it was introduced into England by Mr. Lloyd George, who had studied its operations in Germany, and, by the Prussian prestige in "social reform," was passed.

These three tendencies cohere, or are cohering, in an institution which is not without a great historical basis and not without great modern conveniences. And as France was the standard-bearer of citizenship in 1798, Germany is the standard-bearer of this alternative solution in 1915. The institution which our fathers called Slavery fits in with, or rather logically flows from, all the three spirits of which I have spoken, and promises great advantages to each of them. It can give the individual worker everything except the power to alter the State--that is, his own status. Finality (or what certain eleutheromaniacs would call hopelessness) of status is the soul of Slavery--and of Compulsory Insurance. Then again, Germany gives the individual exactly the liberty that has always been given to a slave--the liberty to think, the liberty to dream, the liberty to rage; the liberty to indulge in any intellectual hypotheses about the unalterable world and state--such as have always been free to slaves, from the stoical maxims of Epictetus to the skylarking fairy tales of Uncle Remus. And it has been truly urged by all defenders of slavery that, if history has merely a material test, the material condition of the subordinate under slavery tends to be good rather than bad. When I once pointed out how precisely the "model village" of a great employer reproduces the safety and seclusion of an old slave estate, the employer thought it quite enough to answer indignantly that he had provided baths, playing-grounds, a theatre, etc., for his workers. He would probably have thought it odd to hear a planter in South Carolina boast that he had provided banjos, hymn-books, and places suitable for the cake-walk. Yet the planter must have provided the banjos, for a slave cannot own property. And if this Germanic sociology is indeed to prevail among us, I think some of the broad-minded thinkers who concur in its prevalence owe something like an apology to many gallant gentlemen whose graves lie where the last battle was fought in the Wilderness; men who had the courage to fight for it, the courage to die for it and, above all, the courage to call it by its name.

With the acceptance by England of the German Insurance Act, I bring this sketch of the past relations of the two countries to an end. I have written this book because I wish, once and for all, to be done with my friend Professor Whirlwind of Prussia, who has long despaired of really defending his own country, and has fallen back upon abusing mine. He has dropped, amid general derision, his attempt to call a thing right when even the Chancellor who did it called it wrong. But he has an idea that if he can show that somebody from England somewhere did another wrong, the two wrongs may make a right. Against the cry of the Roman Catholic Poles the Prussian has never done, or even pretended to do, anything but harden his heart; but he has (such are the lovable inconsistencies of human nature) a warm corner in his heart for the Roman Catholic Irish. He has not a word to say for himself about the campaign in Belgium, but he still has many wise, reproachful words to utter about the campaign in South Africa. I propose to take those words out of his mouth. I will have nothing to do with the fatuous front-bench pretensions that our governors always govern well, that our statesmen are never whitewashed and never in need of whitewash. The only moral superiority I claim is that of not defending the indefensible. I most earnestly urge my countrymen not to hide behind thin official excuses, which the sister kingdoms and the subject races can easily see through. We can confess that our crimes have been as mountains, and still not be afraid of the present comparison. There may be, in the eyes of some, a risk in dwelling in this dark hour on our failures in the past: I believe profoundly that the risk is all the other way. I believe that the most deadly danger to our arms to-day lies in any whiff of that self-praise, any flavour of that moral cowardice, any glimpse of that impudent and ultimate impenitence, that may make one Boer or Scot or Welshman or Irishman or Indian feel that he is only smoothing the path for a second Prussia. I have passed the great part of my life in criticising and condemning the existing rulers and institutions of my country: I think it is infinitely the most patriotic thing that a man can do. I have no illusions either about our past or our present. I think our whole history in Ireland has been a vulgar and ignorant hatred of the crucifix, expressed by a crucifixion. I think the South African War was a dirty work which we did under the whips of moneylenders. I think Mitchelstown was a disgrace; I think Denshaw was a devilry.

Yet there is one part of life and history in which I would assert the absolute spotlessness of England. In one department we wear a robe of white and a halo of innocence. Long and weary as may be the records of our wickedness, in one direction we have done nothing but good. Whoever we may have wronged, we have never wronged Germany. Again and again we have dragged her from under the just vengeance of her enemies, from the holy anger of Maria Teresa, from the impatient and contemptuous common sense of Napoleon. We have kept a ring fence around the Germans while they sacked Denmark and dismembered France.

And if we had served our God as we have served their kings, there would not be to-day one remnant of them in our path, either to slander or to slay us.