

CHAPTER III

To understand a limited historical epoch, we must step beyond its limits, and compare it with other historical epochs. To judge Governments and their acts, we must measure them by their own times and the conscience of their contemporaries. Nobody will condemn a British statesman of the 17th century for acting on a belief in witchcraft, if he find Bacon himself ranging demonology in the catalogue of science. On the other hand, if the Stanhopes, the Walpoles, the Townshends, etc., were suspected, opposed, and denounced in their own country by their own contemporaries as tools or accomplices of Russia, it will no longer do to shelter their policy behind the convenient screen of prejudice and ignorance common to their time. At the head of the historical evidence we have to sift, we place, therefore, long-forgotten English pamphlets printed at the very time of Peter I. These preliminary *pièces des procès* we shall, however, limit to three pamphlets, which, from three different points of view, illustrate the conduct of England towards Sweden. The first, the *Northern Crisis* (given in Chapter II.), revealing the general system of Russia, and the dangers accruing to England from the Russification of Sweden; the second, called *The Defensive Treaty*, judging the acts of England by the Treaty of 1700; and the third, entitled *Truth is but Truth, however it is Timed*, proving that the new-fangled schemes which magnified Russia into the paramount Power of the Baltic were in flagrant opposition to the traditionary policy England had pursued during the course of a whole century.

The pamphlet called *The Defensive Treaty* bears no date of publication. Yet in one passage it states that, for reinforcing the Danish fleet, eight English men-of-war were left at Copenhagen "*the year before the last*," and in another passage alludes to the assembling of the confederate fleet for the Schonen expedition as having occurred "*last summer*." As the former event took place in 1715, and the latter towards the end of the summer of 1716, it is evident that the pamphlet was written and published in the earlier part of the year 1717. The Defensive Treaty between England and Sweden, the single articles of which the pamphlet comments upon in the form of queries, was concluded in 1700 between William III. and Charles XII., and was not to expire before 1719. Yet, during almost the whole of this period, we find England continually assisting Russia and waging war against Sweden, either by secret intrigue or open force, although the treaty was never rescinded nor war ever declared. This fact is, perhaps, even less strange than the *conspiration de silence* under which modern historians have succeeded in burying it, and among them historians by no means sparing of censure against the British Government of that time, for having, without any previous declaration of war, destroyed the Spanish fleet in the Sicilian waters. But then, at least, England was not bound to Spain by a defensive treaty. How, then, are we to explain this contrary treatment of similar cases? The piracy committed against Spain was one of the weapons which the Whig Ministers, seceding from the Cabinet in 1717, caught hold of to harass their remaining colleagues. When the latter stepped forward in 1718, and urged Parliament to declare war against Spain, Sir Robert Walpole rose from his seat in the Commons, and in a most virulent speech denounced the late ministerial acts "as contrary to the laws of nations, and a breach of solemn treaties." "Giving sanction to them in the manner proposed," he said, "could have no other view than to screen ministers, who were conscious of having done something amiss, and who, having begun a war against Spain, would now make it the Parliament's war." The treachery against Sweden and the connivance at the plans of Russia, never happening to afford the ostensible pretext for a family quarrel amongst the Whig rulers (they being rather unanimous on these points), never obtained the honours of historical criticism so lavishly spent upon the Spanish incident.

How apt modern historians generally are to receive their cue from the official tricksters themselves, is best shown by their reflections on the commercial interests of England with respect to Russia and Sweden. Nothing has been more exaggerated than the dimensions of the trade opened to Great Britain by the huge market of the Russia of Peter the Great, and his immediate successors. Statements bearing not the slightest touch of criticism have been allowed to creep from one book-shelf to another, till they became at last historical household furniture, to be inherited by every successive historian, without even the *beneficium inventarii*. Some incontrovertible statistical figures will suffice to blot out these hoary common-places.

£ Export to Russia 58,884 Import from Russia 112,252 ----- Total 171,136

Export to Sweden 57,555 Import from Sweden 212,094 ----- Total 269,649

During the same period the total

£ Export of England amounted to 3,525,906 Import 3,482,586 ----- Total 7,008,492

In 1716, after all the Swedish provinces in the Baltic, and on the Gulfs of Finland and Bothnia, had fallen into the hands of Peter I., the

£ Export to Russia was 113,154 Import from Russia 197,270 ----- Total 310,424

Export to Sweden 24,101 Import from Sweden 136,959 ----- Total 161,060

At the same time, the total of English exports and imports together reached about £10,000,000. It will be seen from these figures, when compared with those of 1697-1700, that the increase in the Russian trade is balanced by the decrease in the Swedish trade, and that what was added to the one was subtracted from the other.

In 1730, the

£ Export to Russia was 46,275 Import from Russia 258,802 ----- Total 305,077

Fifteen years, then, after the consolidation in the meanwhile of the Muscovite settlement on the Baltic, the British trade with Russia had fallen off by £5,347. The general trade of England reaching in 1730 the sum of £16,329,001, the Russian trade amounted not yet to 1/53rd of its total value. Again, thirty years later, in 1760, the account between Great Britain and Russia stands thus:

£ Import from Russia (in 1760) 536,504 Export to Russia 39,761 ----- Total £576,265

while the general trade of England amounted to £26,361,760. Comparing these figures with those of 1706, we find that the total of the Russian commerce, after nearly half a century, has increased by the trifling sum of only £265,841. That England suffered positive loss by her new commercial relations with Russia under Peter I. and Catherine I. becomes evident on comparing, on the one side, the export and import figures, and on the other, the sums expended on the frequent naval expeditions to the Baltic which England undertook during the lifetime of Charles XII., in order to break down his resistance to Russia, and, after his death, on the professed necessity of checking the maritime encroachments of Russia.

Another glance at the statistical data given for the years 1697, 1700, 1716, 1730, and 1760, will show that the British *export* trade to Russia was continually falling off, save in 1716, when Russia engrossed the whole Swedish trade on the eastern coast of the Baltic and the Gulf of Bothnia, and had not yet found the opportunity of subjecting it to her own regulations. From £58,884, at which the British exports to Russia stood during 1697-1700, when Russia was still precluded from the Baltic, they had sunk to £46,275 in 1730, and to £39,761 in 1760, showing a decrease of £19,123, or about 1/3rd of their original amount in 1700. If, then, since, the absorption of the Swedish provinces by Russia, the British market proved expanding for Russia raw produce, the Russian market, on its side, proved straitening for British manufacturers, a feature of that trade which could hardly recommend it at a time when the Balance of Trade doctrine ruled supreme. To trace the circumstances which produced the increase of the Anglo-Russian trade under Catherine II. would lead us too far from the period we are considering.

On the whole, then, we arrive at the following conclusions: During the first sixty years of the eighteenth century the total Anglo-Russian trade formed but a very diminutive fraction of the general trade of England,

say less than 1/45th. Its sudden increase during the earliest years of Peter's sway over the Baltic did not at all affect the general balance of British trade, as it was a simple transfer from its Swedish account to its Russian account. In the later times of Peter I., as well as under his immediate successors, Catherine I. and Anne, the Anglo-Russian trade was positively declining; during the whole epoch, dating from the final settlement of Russia in the Baltic provinces, the export of British manufactures to Russia was continually falling off, so that at its end it stood one-third lower than at its beginning, when that trade was still confined to the port of Archangel. Neither the contemporaries of Peter I., nor the next British generation reaped any benefit from the advancement of Russia to the Baltic. In general the Baltic trade of Great Britain was at that time trifling in regard of the capital involved, but important in regard of its character. It afforded England the raw produce for its maritime stores. That from the latter point of view the Baltic was in safer keeping in the hands of Sweden than in those of Russia, was not only proved by the pamphlets we are reprinting, but fully understood by the British Ministers themselves. Stanhope writing, for instance, to Townshend on October 16th, 1716:

"It is certain that if the Czar be let alone three years, he will be absolute master in those seas." [21]

If, then, neither the navigation nor the general commerce of England was interested in the treacherous support given to Russia against Sweden, there existed, indeed, one small fraction of British merchants whose interests were identical with the Russian ones--the Russian Trade Company. It was this gentry that raised a cry against Sweden. See, for instance:

"Several grievances of the English merchants in their trade into the dominions of the King of Sweden, whereby it does appear how dangerous it may be for the English nation to depend on Sweden only for the supply of the naval stores, when they might be amply furnished with the like stores from the dominions of the Emperor of Russia."

"The case of the merchants trading to Russia" (a petition to Parliament), etc.

It was they who in the years 1714, 1715, and 1716, regularly assembled twice a week before the opening of Parliament, to draw up in public meetings the complaints of the British merchantmen against Sweden. On this small fraction the Ministers relied; they were even busy in getting up its demonstrations, as may be seen from the letters addressed by Count Gyllenborg to Baron Görtz, dated 4th of November and 4th of December, 1716, wanting, as they did, but the shadow of a pretext to drive their "mercenary Parliament," as Gyllenborg calls it, where they liked. The influence of these British merchants trading to Russia was again exhibited in the year 1765, and our own times have witnessed the working for his interest, of a Russian merchant at the head of the Board of Trade, and of a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the interest of a cousin engaged in the Archangel trade.

The oligarchy which, after the "glorious revolution," usurped wealth and power at the cost of the mass of the British people, was, of course, forced to look out for allies, not only abroad, but also at home. The latter they found in what the French would call *la haute bourgeoisie*, as represented by the Bank of England, the money-lenders, State creditors, East India and other trading corporations, the great manufacturers, etc. How tenderly they managed the material interests of that class may be learned from the whole of their domestic legislation--Bank Acts, Protectionist enactments, Poor Regulations, etc. As to their *foreign policy*, they wanted to give it the appearance at least of being altogether regulated by the mercantile interest, an appearance the more easily to be produced, as the exclusive interest of one or the other small fraction of that class would, of course, be always identified with this or that Ministerial measure. The interested fraction then raised the commerce and navigation cry, which the nation stupidly re-echoed.

At that time, then, there devolved on the Cabinet, at least, the *onus* of inventing *mercantile pretexts*, however futile, for their measures of foreign policy. In our own epoch, British Ministers have thrown this burden on foreign nations, leaving to the French, the Germans, etc., the irksome task of discovering the *secret* and *hidden* mercantile springs of their actions. Lord Palmerston, for instance, takes a step apparently the most

damaging to the material interests of Great Britain. Up starts a State philosopher, on the other side of the Atlantic, or of the Channel, or in the heart of Germany, who puts his head to the rack to dig out the mysteries of the mercantile Machiavelism of "perfidious Albion," of which Palmerston is supposed the unscrupulous and unflinching executor. We will, *en passant*, show, by a few modern instances, what desperate shifts those foreigners have been driven to, who feel themselves obliged to interpret Palmerston's acts by what they imagine to be the English commercial policy. In his valuable *Histoire Politique et Sociale des Principautés Danubiennes*, M. Elias Regnault, startled by the Russian conduct, before and during the years 1848-49 of Mr. Colquhoun, the British Consul at Bucharest, suspects that England has some secret material interest in keeping down the trade of the Principalities. The late Dr. Cunibert, private physician of old Milosh, in his most interesting account of the Russian intrigues in Servia, gives a curious relation of the manner in which Lord Palmerston, through the instrumentality of Colonel Hodges, betrayed Milosh to Russia by feigning to support him against her. Fully believing in the personal integrity of Hodges, and the patriotic zeal of Palmerston, Dr. Cunibert is found to go a step further than M. Elias Regnault. He suspects England of being interested in putting down Turkish commerce generally. General Mieroslawski, in his last work on Poland, is not very far from intimating that mercantile Machiavelism instigated England to sacrifice her own *prestige* in Asia Minor, by the surrender of Kars. As a last instance may serve the present lucubrations of the Paris papers, hunting after the secret springs of commercial jealousy, which induce Palmerston to oppose the cutting of the Isthmus of Suez canal.

To return to our subject. The mercantile pretext hit upon by the Townshends, Stanhopes, etc., for the hostile demonstrations against Sweden, was the following. Towards the end of 1713, Peter I. had ordered all the hemp and other produce of his dominions, destined for export, to be carried to St. Petersburg instead of Archangel. Then the Swedish Regency, during the absence of Charles XII., and Charles XII. himself, after his return from Bender, declared all the Baltic ports, occupied by the Russians, to be blockaded. Consequently, English ships, breaking through the blockade, were confiscated. The English Ministry then asserted that British merchantmen had the right of trading to those ports according to Article XVII. of the Defensive Treaty of 1700, by which English commerce, with the exception of contraband of war, was allowed to go on with ports of the enemy. The absurdity and falsehood of this pretext being fully exposed in the pamphlet we are about to reprint, we will only remark that the case had been more than once decided against commercial nations, not bound, like England, by treaty to defend the integrity of the Swedish Empire. In the year 1561, when the Russians took Narva, and laboured hard to establish their commerce there, the Hanse towns, chiefly Lübeck, tried to possess themselves of this traffic. Eric XIV., then King of Sweden, resisted their pretensions. The city of Lübeck represented this resistance as altogether new, as they had carried on their commerce with the Russians time out of mind, and pleaded the common right of nations to navigate in the Baltic, provided their vessels carried no contraband of war. The King replied that he did not dispute the Hanse towns the liberty of trading with Russia, but only with Narva, which was no Russian port. In the year 1579 again, the Russians having broken the suspension of arms with Sweden, the Danes likewise claimed the navigation to Narva, by virtue of their treaty, but King John was as firm in maintaining the contrary, as was his brother Eric.

In her open demonstrations of hostility against the King of Sweden, as well as in the false pretence on which they were founded, England seemed only to follow in the track of Holland, which declaring the confiscation of its ships to be piracy, had issued two proclamations against Sweden in 1714.

In one respect, the case of the States-General was the same as that of England. King William had concluded the Defensive Treaty as well for Holland as for England. Besides, Article XVI., in the Treaty of Commerce, concluded between Holland and Sweden in 1703, expressly stipulated that no navigation ought to be allowed to the ports blocked up by either of the confederates. The then common Dutch cant that "there was no hindering traders from carrying their merchandise where they will," was the more impudent as, during the war, ending with the Peace of Ryswick, the Dutch Republic had declared all France to be blocked up, forbidden the neutral Powers all trade with that kingdom, and caused all their ships that went there or came thence to be brought up without any regard to the nature of their cargoes.

In another respect, the situation of Holland was different from that of England. Fallen from its commercial and maritime grandeur, Holland had then already entered upon its epoch of decline. Like Genoa and Venice, when new roads of commerce had dispossessed them of their old mercantile supremacy, it was forced to lend out to other nations its capital, grown too large for the vessels of its own commerce. Its fatherland had begun to lie there where the best interest for its capital was paid. Russia, therefore, proved an immense market, less for the commerce than for the outlay of capital and men. To this moment Holland has remained the banker of Russia. At the time of Peter they supplied Russia with ships, officers, arms, and money, so that his fleet, as a contemporary writer remarks, ought to have been called a Dutch rather than a Muscovite one. They gloried in having sent the first European merchant ship to St. Petersburg, and returned the commercial privileges they had obtained from Peter, or hoped to obtain from him, by that fawning meanness which characterizes their intercourse with Japan. Here, then, was quite another solid foundation than in England for the Russianism of statesmen, whom Peter I. had entrapped during his stay at Amsterdam, and the Hague in 1697, whom he afterwards directed by his ambassadors, and with whom he renewed his personal influence during his renewed stay at Amsterdam in 1716-17. Yet, if the paramount influence England exercised over Holland during the first *decennia* of the 18th century be considered, there can remain no doubt that the proclamations against Sweden by the States-General would never have been issued, if not with the previous consent and at the instigation of England. The intimate connection between the English and Dutch Governments served more than once the former to put up precedents in the name of Holland, which they were resolved to act upon in the name of England. On the other hand, it is no less certain that the Dutch statesmen were employed by the Czar to influence the British ones. Thus Horace Walpole, the brother of the "Father of Corruption," the brother-in-law of the Minister, Townshend, and the British Ambassador at the Hague during 1715-16, was evidently inveigled into the Russian interest by his Dutch friends. Thus, as we shall see by-and-by, Theyls, the Secretary to the Dutch Embassy at Constantinople, at the most critical period of the deadly struggle between Charles XII. and Peter I., managed affairs at the same time for the Embassies of England and Holland at the Sublime Porte. This Theyls, in a print of his, openly claims it as a merit with his nation to have been the devoted and rewarded agent of Russian intrigue.

FOOTNOTE:

[21] In the year 1657, when the Courts of Denmark and Brandenburg intended engaging the Muscovites to fall upon Sweden, they instructed their Minister so to manage the affair that the Czar might by no means get any footing in the Baltic, because "they did not know what to do with so troublesome a neighbour." (See Puffendorf's *History of Brandenburg*.)