

PROFESSOR CRAMB ON TREITSCHKE.

BY THE EDITOR.

TREITSCHKE is mostly condemned by English people on the basis of Professor J. A. Cramb's authority; but while Professor Cramb characterizes this German historian as outspokenly anti-English, he has the highest regard for him and apparently holds to him the relation of disciple to master. He speaks of him in terms of great respect and even admiration. He refers for instance on page 86¹ to Treitschke's "deep Teutonic moral nature," and on page 82 he says: "Treitschke's History is characterized by punctilious research and by reliance on original documents and original documents only."

Treitschke has often been made out to be a disciple of Nietzsche. This is impossible not only because Nietzsche was much younger than Treitschke, and Treitschke might *vice versa* have been the master and teacher of Nietzsche, but the two characters were too unlike to agree. Treitschke naturally looked upon Nietzsche as a crude immature pretender who had no depth and was not worth serious consideration. Professor Cramb makes these brief comments on Treitschke's view of Nietzsche:

"Against the creator of Zarathustra Treitschke was bitterly and irreconcilably prejudiced from the very beginning of the former's career, when Treitschke wrote of him to Overbeck as "that run fellow Nietzsche." He even quarreled with Overbeck because of the latter's sympathy with his young colleague at Basle. His roughness to Nietzsche in 1872 is not worse than Stein's roughness to Goethe, and arose from similar causes. Treitschke divines in the author of *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* "the good European" of later works; and therefore the bad Prussian, the bad German.

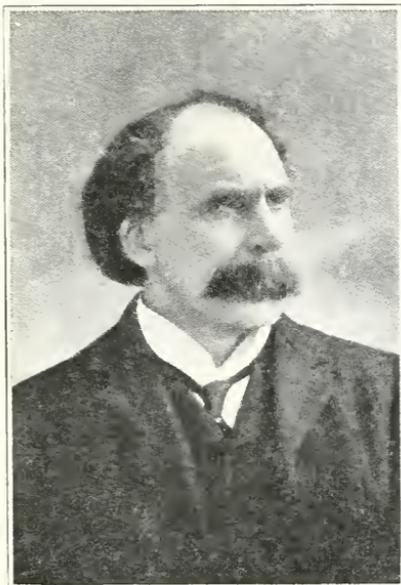
We must bear in mind that Treitschke was a professor of

¹ All the quotations in this and the following article are taken from Professor Cramb's posthumous book, *Germany and England*, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1914.

high standing and even fame, while Nietzsche was regarded in university circles as a popular philosophaster, a pseudo-philosopher. People have long realized that he was a popular author appealing only to the unschooled masses but not to scholars, and even to-day he is not recognized among professional thinkers.

Because Treitschke is so strangely misrepresented in all English papers as well as in pro-British American literature, we will quote from Professor Cramb what he has to say on the German historian.

“Like many notable Germans of the nineteenth century, above



J. A. CRAMB.



H. G. VON TREITSCHKE.

all that German who is now beginning to arrest the attention even of Englishmen—for as a rule it takes at least half a century for any true German thought to cross the North Sea!—like Friedrich Nietzsche, and perhaps like Ranke himself, Heinrich von Treitschke was Slavonic in origin. His ancestors were Czechs who migrated from Bohemia during the turmoils of the Thirty Years' War and, seeking refuge from the Jesuit plague, found security under the Protestant electors of Saxony. During the eighteenth century they gradually rose in the favor of the ruling house. Under the last elector of Saxony a Treitschke became a privy councilor. He sent his sons into the army, secured for them in 1821 the syllable *von*, and

before his death had the joy and satisfaction of seeing one of them commandant of the fortress of Königstein, which still rises in gray and impressive solitude on its tall rock above the Elbe. This was Eduard von Treitschke, the historian's father.

"Treitschke was born at Dresden in September, 1834, one of the darkest and most disconsolate periods in modern German history. The old ideals were sinking; the new had not yet arisen. The despotism of Metternich lay like a dead hand upon Austria and the South; the princes clung to their privileges; Frederick William III still reigned in Prussia. Schelling died that year, sunk in obscurantism; Arndt was a professor at Bonn; Tieck had ceased to write; Wilhelm von Humboldt still lived in honorable retirement at Schloss Tegel; but Goethe had died two years before, and, a year earlier than Goethe, Hegel and Niebuhr had both passed away; Stein had died some months after Niebuhr in solitude and estrangement from his times, seeing not only Germany but Europe itself rushing upon the abyss. Schleiermacher preached for the last time in 1834. The heroes of the War of Liberation were long dead, or lived, an embarrassment and a reproach, amid a generation which, apathic and indifferent, half wished to forget their heroism. Scharnhorst had died of his wounds at Prague (1813), in the very hour of Germany's glory; Blücher, in 1819; Yorck in 1830; and Gneisenau (just when entering upon the Polish campaign), a Field-marshal at last, had died in 1831, like Hegel, of cholera, then raging throughout Europe. Who was there left to represent the past splendors? And in the deep night there was not a star to hint the coming dawn. Such was the world into which Treitschke was born.²

"In his childhood everything seemed to mark him out as a Saxon, as destined, that is to say, to follow a career in that country. Treitschke, however, early discovered something that alienated him from the career contemplated for him by his father. His mother, who was of pure German origin, was a reader of Willibald Alexis, above all of those tales the scenes of which were placed in the heroic times of Frederick the Great; and when Treitschke's own tastes began to form they led him as instinctively to the Wars of Liberation as Rousseau's tastes had led him to Plutarch, or Mirabeau's to Livy or the Rome of the Gracchi and of Sulla. He took to the study of history; and he discovered in that study the conduct of Saxony in the past, the conduct of the Saxon dynasty

² Treitschke himself has described this period in the third volume of his *Deutsche Geschichte*.

—perhaps the stupidest royal house in Europe. He discovered the part played by Saxony at Leipsic, and the yet more despicable part played at Waterloo; and all that was German as distinct from all that was particularist in that history took possession of his imagination.

“While he was still a boy his great heroes were not the heroes of Saxony; they were all Prussians. Just as in the eighteenth century the men of the French Revolution found their inspiration in the heroes of Plutarch, Caius Marius and Sulla and Brutus, so Treitschke found his inspiration in the Prussian heroes *à la* Plutarch, in those magnificent figures which fill and adorn the pages of Prussian history between 1809 and 1813. His heroes are Gneisenau, Blücher’s aide-de-camp, he who really controlled Blücher’s actions in all matters of diplomacy; and Scharnhorst, of whom he has left one of the most powerful sketches that German literature possesses. Again, his hero is Stein, or the philosopher Fichte, or Moritz Arndt the poet, the son of a serf, author of the famous song, ‘Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?’ And there is significance as well as authenticity in the anecdote which depicts him as a boy of fifteen reading aloud in the presence of Beust, one of Metternich’s most repulsive satellites, an essay in the dithyrambic manner rejoicing in the downfall of the princes and exalting German unity, a unity which is to be accomplished ‘by a race into whose blood has passed in their youth the free and bracing winds of the Baltic strand.’

“It is while he is a boy also that there overtakes him a disaster which tries the steel and stoicism in him. He has described it for us in a volume of verses published in 1856—the coming upon him of a fever, his slow recovery, and, at last, his astonishment at the persistent sorrow on his mother’s face, despite his recovery. He describes his being taken out into the garden on an early summer’s day, lying on a bench in the sun, seeing the bright skies for the first time after what seemed months and years. And then a strange thing happens. A singular feeling comes over him of a vast and unnatural silence. He sees the mounting lark; he hears no song. It is a silent universe. Terrified, the child rushes back into the house, and there he discovers the cause of the persistent sorrow on his mother’s face. He is nearly stone deaf, incurably and for ever.

“His description of the fight within himself back to courage, stoicism, and acceptance of life is a very remarkable passage in the poem; and in this passage something of Treitschke’s temperament throughout life is revealed. ‘There are men who are

doomed to pass their lives on broken wings,' he wrote later of Heinrich von Kleist, 'because some malevolent chance has excluded them from that sphere in which alone they could accomplish the highest that is in them to do.' To him in his youth that 'highest' seemed his missed career of action and war. For it is certain that Treitschke, compelled to be a writer of books, would, but for this disaster, have been a soldier.

"His course of study was the usual course of a young German of the time. Perhaps the greatest moment in it was when he came to the University of Bonn in 1851. There, amid the romance of the scenery, the mountains, the distant view of the spires of Köln—Balthazar, Gaspar, and Melchior, the three kings—the river, the castle from which Roland had started, he knew the happiest period of a university life. 'He who is not a poet in Heidelberg or Bonn,' he writes, 'is dead to poetry.'

"The intellectual activities of the place rapidly absorbed him. The aged poet, Moritz Arndt, was still teaching history; and one can imagine the thrill—indeed he himself has helped us to imagine it—with which the young Treitschke, with his enthusiasm for the heroes of the War of Liberation, first looked upon those high and noble features. Each successive phase of that heroic action Arndt had witnessed; his own songs had been part of the action; he had been the companion and confidant of the great minister Von Stein. Even more powerful was the influence of another of the Bonn professors—Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, the historian of Denmark. He too, like Arndt, had played his part in the War of Liberation, and at four-and-twenty he had walked across Germany with the poet of Arminius,³ determined to fight in the ranks of Austria, since Prussia was still too timid or too weak to strike at the tyrant. In the young student Arndt kindled memories and sentiments; but Dahlmann was at once an inspiration as a lecturer and in private a friendly adviser.

"Next perhaps to the influence of Arndt and Dahlmann upon him was the influence of the Rhine. It is hard for us in England to understand what the Rhine really means to a German, the enthusiasm which he feels for that river. Treitschke himself says of it, for instance, when he has to leave Bonn: 'To-morrow I shall see the Rhine for the last time. The memory of that noble river'—and this is not in a poem, observe, but simply in a letter to a friend—'the memory of that noble river will keep my heart pure and save

³ Heinrich von Kleist, author of *Die Hermannsschlacht*.

me from sad or evil thoughts throughout all the days of my life.' Try to imagine anyone saying that of the Thames!

"When Treitschke becomes a teacher himself and a professor at Freiburg these are the influences governing his teaching. His own career as a teacher began at Leipsic in 1859, and he inaugurated it in a striking enough manner by his treatise on 'The State.' This treatise might be described as an abstract justification of monarchy, just as Rousseau's famous essay might with fairness be described as an abstract justification of democracy. Like every sincere attempt in the field of abstract politics it is full of inconsistencies and contradictions; but it reveals the central tendencies of the author's mind. The friend of Bismark, the apologist of the Hohenzollern and the eager admirer of Prussian bureaucracy already announces himself. The essence of the state, he argues, is power; but it is a moral power, and in virtue of this moral nature the authority of the state over the individual is supreme and without appeal.

"Four years later, at Freiburg, he gave for the first time the lectures which developed afterwards into the two volumes entitled *Die Politik*. But the stress of the period speedily tears Treitschke from abstract speculation upon the state to living politics and to the study of the actions of men in the concrete. Bismark's struggle with the Prussian parliament is at its height. The safety and prestige of the Prussian monarchy is not yet assured. The dispute about the duchies is at hand, and behind it rises the war of 1864, and behind the war of 1864 and the Convention of Gastein loom the war of 1866, and Königrätz, and the creation of the North-German Confederation; then the insulting half-maniacal jealousy of France, and the war of 1870.

"Treitschke had originally been destined for the army, and it is as a soldier of soldiers that we see him in each phase of those momentous nine years. 'Lay on my coffin a sword,' the dying Heine wrote in 1856. But the war in which Treitschke fought was less vague than that dim war for the freedom of humanity in which Heine imagined himself a fighter. Treitschke was an enthusiast for freedom, as his essays on Milton and Byron as well as scores of passages in his other writings attest; but he plunged into the struggle to assert the Prussian ascendancy over Germany with all the ardour with which, in an earlier age, Fichte and Dahmann had plunged into the War of Liberation. At Freiburg, Kiel, and finally at Heidelberg, his own enthusiasm communicated itself to hundreds of students who heard him, and ultimately to thousands.

“His appearance at this period was striking: a tall, rather slim figure, marked nobility of feature and bearing, dark eyes and masses of thick dark hair. He was sparing in gesture, abrupt and effective, more chary of pure rhetoric than Droysen, more regardful of fact than Häusser. His voice was harsh, the Saxon accent unmistakable, and he had often to pause for a word. He seldom mixed with his audience after his lectures; his deafness made this difficult, for, to a man of his sensitiveness, an ear-trumpet in general company was abhorrent. But this was no real drawback; it rather invested the speaker and his impassioned utterances with a touch of prophetic remoteness.

“‘Is Treitschke an orator at all?’ and English admirer of his writings once asked a member of the Reichstag. ‘In the sense in which Mr. Gladstone was an orator,’ was the reply, ‘certainly not. In the Reichstag he is always listened to with respect; he never kindles enthusiasm; and yet, if the art of the rhetor is to compel men to action, how many greater orators are there in modern Germany, or, for that matter, in modern France or England, than simply Heinrich von Treitschke? . . . And see, yonder he comes.’

“The excitement, the momentary pallor on the speaker’s face, proved to the Englishman more powerfully than words the dominion which intellect united to moral greatness exercises over other men. He pointed to a solitary figure walking with a stick slowly down the shady path of the splendid street Unter den Linden. He walked as the deaf always walk, glancing rapidly from side to side. It was impossible to resist the melancholy of penetrating strength in the dark and luminous eyes, eyes of a type which one seldom meets in England, full of meditative depth and integrity, trust-winning. Once, where the crowd was less, he raised a soft grey felt wide-awake hat, for the day was hot, and the noble forehead was for a second visible. Involuntarily the Englishman raised his own hat with an instinct of reverence. That was in the summer of 1892.

“The years in which Treitschke wrote his greatest book are also the years of his greatest fame as a lecturer. Probably no German professor, not Fichte, not Schlosser, not Droysen, has ever commanded such audiences. His lecture-hall in Berlin did actually suggest a concourse such as, in the Middle Ages, met to hear an Abelard, or, in the Renaissance time, thronged around Giordano Bruno or Pico della Mirandola.

“And it was a true message, a ‘gospel,’ which they came to hear, a gospel which the commonest could understand, which the

most cultured could not disdain. His subject, of course, was history, or it was politics; but through all the mazes of historical narrative, carefully documented, fact on fact torn from hours in the Berlin archives, and amid all the mazes of political speculation, close and stern reasoning, sometimes repellent by its accumulation of apparently redundant matter and irrelevant illustration—amid all this a man's soul was wrestling almost visibly to bring home to his hearers his own burning conviction of the greatness of Germany, her past, her present, and the unfathomable vistas which open out before her in the future.

“That is Treitschke's central theme. It is the informing thought of each of his distinctive books or collections of writings—the five volumes of his *History*, the two volumes of his *Politik*, his two series of *Deutsche Kämpfe*, his *Bilder aus der deutschen Geschichte*, his political essays and literary portraits, above all, his magnificent full-length portraits of Dahlmann and of the poet Heinrich von Kleist.

“Treitschke has no philosophy of history in the sense in which Hegel or Buckle or Cousin has a philosophy of history. He has come too late into the world for that. But in a wider sense, like every true German historian, he *has* a philosophy of history. There is nothing in which German historians more completely differ from English historians than in this respect. No German historian is ever satisfied that he has the right to teach history until he has acquired for himself by individual vision, or adopted from another, whether Kant or Hegel or Lotze or Nietzsche, some general view, some theory of the working of God in history. To him history is a drama in which God is the supreme actor.”