

So in the dear dead days beyond recall, when England had statesmen and not politicians in her councils, we find a perfectly consistent and conservative policy. Before 1812 Russia was hardly on the map of Europe. Its people were boors and sots; its distances untraversable, as Napoleon found. It took one back to the Stone Age. It mattered no more to European politics than the moon did.

But times changed. Napoleon made Russia accessible. Leipsic made Russia important. No sooner was the great emperor safely at St. Helena than Pitt took another look at the map. He saw the obvious, and made a note in his diary to beware of bears. From that moment the persistent policy of England has been dictated by the dread of Russia. She saw the Indian adventure compromised; and that was next her heart (which is in her pocket).

For India, and the route to India\* she gave up everything. She supported the Turk in good report and in evil report; she joined hands with Napoleon in the Crimea; she resisted Russian aggression tooth and nail. There was no principle unviolated, no treaty regarded, if only she could stem the Russian tide. Christian England allied with the infidel Turk and the pagan Japanese! Who cares? Does not the Greek Church spell *Credo* with a K?

But besides these ill-reputed allies whom has England? The Roof of the World, as regards a direct attack; that, and a stonewall Afghanistan. (Observe the agony of England to put a docile Amir at Kabul.) In the East, Japan is subsidized and excited against Russia; but these are later developments, rendered necessary only by the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway. On the south, as we have said, Turkey, and, of late, Persia; on the north, the ice of the Arctic Ocean. On the west—all Europe. Then England needs unconquerable Europe as a buffer State. And the actual frontier must be of hardened steel.

The proper barrier was Poland. England needed an heroic Poland. The savage patriotism of the Poles was her sure shield. And when Poland was finally divided the European War of 1914 became a certainty. Whoever consented to that division was a criminal lunatic; and his heirs must have been in power in France, Belgium and England when they threw in their lot against Germany instead of for her.

## V.

I said earlier in this article that Edward VII. forgot the partition of Poland. The meaning of that remark is now clear. With Poland gone, the terrible salient of Warsaw thrust like a spear at the heart of Europe. There was the shield of the Carpathians to the south; there was the net of the Mazurian Lakes to the north. West was no obstacle but the sheer danger of lengthening the communications. Yet this was enough. Russia so clearly saw the impossibility of moving in the face of a strong Germany and a united Austria that she made the desperate efforts of the fifties to the south. In 1866 she was still so impotent to deal with the lack of communications to the west that Germany could coolly attack Austria without fear of interruption. What did the great Bismarck do with his victory? He refused to humble Austria. He wanted the flank held, for he knew the real enemy. And when in 1870 he consummated his work by building up the Empire, what did England do? She held aloof and let him smash France at his leisure. Why?

\*India is practically an island in this sense—that an invasion by land would present military difficulties insurmountable to modern armies if opposed even weakly. It requires the whole resources of the Gilgit road to supply the small garrison with food; and Gilgit is quite on the hither side of the mountains. Michael and all his angels could not force the Pamirs.

Because her statesmen realized that Germany was her necessary friend.

In 1870 railways were beginning to assume importance. It was realized that sooner or later Russia would build them, and that Russia was not only on the map, but near the middle of it. The Trans-Siberian Railway puts Moscow a long way west of the median line from Brest to Vladivostok.

Yes, English statesmen realized that after 1870 Berlin was the centre of gravity of Europe. If you look at the map of Europe, and imagine it a map of something small, you see at once that Germany-Austria is a buffer State. Destroy or diminish these, and there is nothing even comparable to Russia. Hence the cynical abandonment of Napoleon III. to his fate.

Then Germany, against the counsel of Bismarck, made an error. She annexed Alsace-Lorraine. She had military reasons for the act, and these outweighed Bismarck's sane political sense. I shall lament later a similar blunder in 1914. But mere ethics be damned; right or wrong, it is no odds. The consequence is the bias of the bowl. It left a thorn in the crown of peace. The arguments of ethnologists, historians (and fools generally) should not weigh here. The peace of 1871 ought to have been turned into an alliance. Germany had won Austria for her ally even to this day; she should have done the same with France.

Austria must be sympathetic to her by race, and France by culture. There was nothing to fear from France but the ghost of Napoleon. It was only the old wounds of the first decade of the nineteenth century that bled afresh at Gravelotte and Sedan. It would have been better to have kept in mind the correspondence of Voltaire and Frederick!

## VI.

However, the whole of this argument passed over the head of Edward VII. He only saw Germany as the one strong military power in Europe. He saw her reaching out for naval power. He saw her trade increasing, apparently\* at the expense of England. He saw "designs" on his own crown. And he saw nothing more. With the utmost astuteness and tact he went to work to isolate and destroy Germany. It was the cleverest, the most successful and the most suicidal piece of work ever accomplished in history. It was the complete reversal of all previous policy—just at the moment when railways emphasized the necessity of that policy.

It would have been so simple merely to let Germany alone. Alsace-Lorraine was giving enough trouble to prevent an extension of that principle of blunder-plunder. England should have helped Germany to colonial expansion. She should have striven to heal the breach with France. If she wanted to make trouble for anyone, she should have made it for the sake of Poland.

Edward VII. was so brilliant a diplomatist that only personal rancour could have blinded him to the plain message of the map. And I give him this credit: I believe that if he had lived until 1913 he would have seen his error.

## VII.

The Balkan war would have restored a political Bartimaeus to sight, one might have thought. The fall of Abdul Hamid and the subsequent and consequent ruin of Turkey were signs "which, if they had been graven with needles upon the eye-corners, were a warning to such as would be warned." Indeed, there was enough good sense in Sir Edward Grey to make him acquiesce in a German Albania, had that been possible. As we know, it was not. But so startled was the

\*Some political economists are congenital idiots.