

ANSWER OF LEAGUE OF GERMAN
SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS TO THE
PROFESSORS OF GREAT BRITAIN

“Kultur” vs. Culture, or, Kant vs. Cant

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(On November 11, 1914, THE FATHERLAND published a statement by the foremost scholars and artists of Germany. This paper presented the case of Germany with admirable sobriety and distinction. In answer to the arguments contained in that memorable declaration the leading professors of Great Britain in collaboration issued a rebuttal. They presented the very same arguments with which we are so familiar. The Germans had “destroyed such monuments of culture and learning as the library at Louvain and the Cathedrals of Reims and Malines.” They had violated the neutrality of Belgium. “England had in common with France, Russia, Prussia and Austria undertaken the solemn obligation of guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium. The preservation of this neutrality was for us a matter of deepest sentiment and likewise of most vital interest. The violation of this neutrality would not only destroy the independence of Belgium, but also the whole foundation on which rests the possibility of neutrality at all and the existence of such States as are weaker than their neighbors.” Among the names attached to the English plea are such

well-known personalities as F. B. Jevons, Sir Oliver Lodge, Gilbert Murray, William Osler, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Walter Raleigh, William Ramsay and others equally famous. To this statement the German artists and scholars replied herewith.

We have had the grievous experience that in the present struggle which is waging between nations that rightly were considered until now guardians of civilization, even men intellectually eminent, truth-loving and masters in the use of language, no longer find it possible to understand each other when they belong to hostile parties.

It is on this account that we have up to the present considered it superfluous to reply to those who signed the "Declaration by the Professors of Great Britain addressed to the academical Circles of Germany." It has been reported to us, however, that our silence has been taken by many as an admission that we have good reason to feel ourselves worsted in the controversy, and we would, therefore, earnestly present the following statements to our English colleagues, even at the risk of speaking to no purpose.

I.

The principal defect in the relations which have hitherto existed between the countries now hostile to each other is, as it seems to us, that they have known too little of one another. From this fact alone have arisen the misun-

derstandings and discords that have finally resulted in the outbreak of a mortal combat. If the educated classes in England had had only approximately a correct view of the sentiments ruling in the German people before the outbreak of the war, they would have avoided adopting the catchphrase spread abroad by journalistic swashbucklers, that the writers Nietzsche, von Treitschke, von Bülow and von Bernhardi exercised a preponderating influence in Germany; a statement that here at home called forth from those who knew the facts only a smile.

The writings of General von Bernhardi had been known only to a very small circle here, before his name was brought to our notice by way of England. The great historian von Treitschke, who has been dead for twenty years, is separated by a generation from the intellectual life of present-day Germany with its mode of thinking upon political questions. Von Treitschke is industriously cited in the writings of Bernhardi, and we take it that from this fact it comes that England shows such a surprising familiarity with the former's words. The poet-philosopher Nietzsche has, in fact, had considerable influence upon a part of the German people, though others have always regarded him as misleading, but, in any case, it can only be through a misunderstanding of single expressions of his that he can be connected with the reproach, that Germany has a desire for universal dominion; for the conflict proclaimed by him was an intellectual one. So far as the fourth of the names mentioned is concerned, we can only suppose that perhaps

he is meant, who is the most conciliatory of all German statesmen.

But even if Bernhardi had an influence in Germany, this would never have produced such a disastrous effect as that called forth by the English translation of his book "Unsere Zukunft" ("Our Future"), the title of which was changed in the translation for agitative purposes into quite another: "Britain as Germany's Vassal." This falsification helped to stir up the minds of Englishmen to indignation against Germany. Never has there been in our country a writer who has given expression so brusquely to his delight in a war between the nations as John Ruskin when he wrote: "By war nations are created, by peace they are destroyed." Nevertheless, we refrain from making use of these words to hurl a reproach at the sentiments of the English people.

II.

When the English scholars assert further that until now it has been only the German army which has intentionally bombarded and destroyed historical buildings and monuments of civilization, such as the library at Louvain or the cathedrals of Reims and Malines, the limitation "until now (bis jetzt*)", if it has reference to the present war, relieves us of the necessity of answering, for in this war the troops opposed to us have had as yet no opportunity of demonstrating how far their love for German works of art extends. If, however, the intention was to draw past times into the com-

* Since we have not been put in possession of the English original of the "Declaration," we are obliged to cite the German text sent us by the signers and in a given case to retranslate this, as nearly as we can, back into English.

parison, history gives us examples enough of the fighting forces of our adversaries committing acts of devastation, out of mere wantonness and lust of destruction, with which the severity we were compelled to exercise, through the treacherous methods adopted by our enemies, is not to be mentioned in the same breath. For only out of bitter necessity, and with a wish to spare as far as possible, have our guns been directed at objects whose destruction we, with mankind in general, lament as an irreparable loss.

III.

Our English colleagues are certainly right when they express the opinion, that it is difficult for the individual man under his human limitations "to weigh justly the points in dispute affecting his own country," but it seems to us yet more difficult to do the adversary justice in the midst of the hurly-burly of the moment. On this account we do not wonder that the English scholars charge the German government with keeping back the truth, as contrasted with the action of their own government in the matter. Nevertheless, we take the liberty of calling their attention to the fact, that the loss of every man and every ship is communicated to us without hesitancy by our authorities, while, from the very beginning of the war down to the present day, the English press has been charging their army administration with suppressing the news.

We shall never shirk the duty of most accurately testing the facts, but we seek the

truth far back of the published diplomatic documents, and it has been established as a truth, that a peace-loving people, with a peace-loving ruler at their head, have for years been driven towards a war, which, although it remained latent until recently, had its virtual beginning with the "encircling" policy of the English King Edward VII. It was only the instinctive shrinking back from such a horrible event which preserved for the world, for a time at least, the appearance of peace. When the matter is regarded from this point of view, the question whether the documents published by the different governments are more or less complete seems to us one of minor importance. However, the contents of the Austro-Hungarian Red Book, which has lately been issued, supplies the greater part of the gaps which our English colleagues felt obliged to point out as existing in the German compilation. The historians among them, and not only they, are sufficiently aware that a scientific presentation of the events immediately preceding the outbreak of the war, and one that is free from objection, will not be possible for a long time to come. Until this period arrives, they, as well as we, must take care to avoid pronouncing a definitive judgment.

IV.

It can no longer be disputed that the murder of the successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne and his wife was carried out with the help of Servian officials, and just as little can it be doubted that Austria had the right to

demand retribution for this crime, and at the same time to secure herself against like attempts to overthrow the Monarchy. And this is so, no matter how various the opinions may be as to the way in which this right should have been made effective. What must be disputed, however, is the right of Russia to call a halt in the attempt to punish Serbia, and to make Serbia's cause her own. In this claim of Russia's to act as the protector of Serbia—a claim which could not rightly be based, either on the fact that she was a border State, or on economic or dynastic connections, or even on sameness of language—lay a demand which challenged the resistance of Austria-Hungary and likewise of Germany.

When we find the words of the German White Book cited by English scholars in the following way:

“We were, in this connection, well aware that hostile proceedings, if taken by Austria-Hungary against Serbia, might bring Russia upon the scene, and thereby involve us in a war. We could not,* however, advise our ally to yield where it would be incompatible with her dignity to do so.” We are astonished that men, who in their investigations are accustomed to aim in other cases at the greatest accuracy, have thought proper to omit from the second sentence of the above the justification there stated: “In recognition of the fact that the vital interests of Austria-Hungary were at stake.” For it was just the necessity of protecting the vital interests of Austria-Hungary, and accordingly our own, which assigned us our place by the side of our ally. And when

* The word "not" is wanting, although the sense demands it.

the English scholars draw from the same sentence the conclusion that the German government with those words conceded ("eingeräumt") that it did not secretly advise Austria to diminish its demands even in the least, they charge that government with having, either voluntarily or involuntarily, let out a secret, which it was incumbent upon it, as an alleged State secret, to have preserved. The reasons which have led the English scholars to attribute so childlike a simplicity to earnest men, such as they themselves must admit the leaders of German politics to be, lie assuredly very deep; they remain hidden from us.

Since the English scholars call in doubt, on the other hand, the respect of the German government for the truth "in its assurances to the other Powers," it would be without purpose to refer to the despatches of the German Emperor, inspired as they are with the warmest love of peace; but the testimony of the Belgian *chargé d'affaires* in St. Petersburg, M. de l'Escaille, must be proof even against their mistrust. He writes on July 30th to his minister as follows:

"The one thing incontestable is, that Germany has striven both here and in Vienna to find some means of avoiding a general conflict."

When they insist, however, that Germany should have taken part in a conference of the representatives of France, England and Italy, as proposed by Sir Edward Grey, they appear to have left out of consideration the fact that Germany's joining in an attempt to cite Aus-

tria before a European tribunal would have had the result, almost by a natural necessity, of severing our relations with our ally. Even our most bitter adversaries should not deem us capable of such criminal frivolity.

Up to this point—and we gladly make them the acknowledgment—our English colleagues have sought to justify their views by statements which can well form legitimate matter for discussion. When, however, they go on to say:

“One thing we willingly concede: Germany would most probably have preferred not to become, just yet, involved in a war with England. She would rather first have weakened and humiliated Russia, subjected Servia to the power of Austria, rendered France harmless and Belgium dependent, and then, in possession of a vast superiority of power, have had her reckoning with England.” And, further: “Germany's ground of complaint is: England would not agree to this.” We can only remark that this language is a regrettable departure from the lines of a scientific mode of thinking and discussing, and we disdain to speak further of an insinuation which is contradicted by the whole course of the politics of the German Empire.

V.

We have no doubt that large numbers in England cherished the sincere wish to live in peace with Germany, and the efforts they made to bring about a permanent understanding were fully reciprocated by the endeavours

of the German educated classes, acting in accord with their government. But the English government had been already, and before the question of our position towards Belgium aroused them to fever heat, too long involved in an understanding with the Franco-Russian coalition (see Blue Book No. 105, appendix 1) for it to be able or willing to observe a true peace-policy. To prove this it is only necessary for us to refer to the attitude which the English government assumed during the critical time immediately preceding the outbreak of the war. It may be permitted in this connection to make a further quotation from the secret report, already mentioned, of the Belgian chargé d'affaires, M. de l'Escaille. He writes:

"To-day in St. Petersburg one is fully persuaded, nay, one has even the assurance, that England will stand by France. This is a matter of great importance, and has contributed not a little to give the war party the upper hand." (White Book No. 28)

And we add to this a reference to No. 89 of the English Blue Book, according to which Sir Edward Grey, already on the 29th of July, made a statement to the German ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, which cannot be distinguished from a threat of war:

"We knew very well that if the issue did become such that we thought British interests required us to intervene, we must intervene at once, and the decision would have to be very rapid, just as the decisions of the other Powers had to be."

And if any one should be still in doubt where, according to the opinion of her leading statesman, the interests of England lay, we would refer him to No. 87 of the Blue Book, according to which Sir Edward Grey, immediately after the conversation with Prince Lichnowsky, reported this to the French ambassador, M. Paul Cambon, and the ambassador received the impression that what Sir Edward Grey means—and this interpretation was acknowledged to be correct by the latter—was this: That should other issues be raised—i.e. than that of a conflict between Austria and Russia—and Germany and France become involved so that the question became one of the hegemony of Europe, England would then decide what it was necessary for her to do.

M. Cambon, who knew how to construe rightly this guarded language, was naturally in the highest degree satisfied with it. We are of the opinion, however, that a government, which was sincerely endeavoring to preserve international peace, could have proved its love for this in a more effectual and less equivocal manner than by stirring up the contentious disposition of two States, who were still hesitating to enter upon hostilities, by presenting them with the enticing prospect that they could be sure of its powerful assistance in case of war.

V.

This prospect would indeed have proved deceptive, if the English scholars are right in their assertion, that up to the very last there

existed in England the determined desire to remain neutral, in case this could have been done without injury to the honor of the nation. Germany herself, so they say, made the fulfilling of this wish impossible.

So Germany's action touched the honor of England! In what way? In that she violated the neutrality of Belgium, which England with other countries, including disloyal Germany, had guaranteed, a guarantee which England felt herself obliged to uphold under all circumstances.

These phrases have indeed become very popular, and were reckoned upon to catch those whose powers of discernment were untrained, but that the learned men of England should adopt them, even though the official publications of their own country, as well as those of France, show clearly the insincerity of such statements, is for us a matter of regret.

Sir Edward Grey, as is well-known, inquired in Berlin on July 30th, whether the German government was prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium so long as no other power violated it. And on the 1st of August the German ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, put to Sir Edward Grey the counter-question, whether if Germany pledged herself to respect this neutrality, England on her part would remain neutral.

State Secretary von Jagow in Berlin answered Sir Edward Grey's question by saying he must first ask the Kaiser and the Chancellor, a procedure that was necessary not only in our system of government. Sir Edward Grey, however, replied to the counter-question

evasively: The government would consider what to do, it must make its action largely dependent on public opinion, and above all, England is not in a position to promise to remain neutral on a promise made by Germany that goes no further than the observance of the neutrality of Belgium. "I did not think that we could give a promise of neutrality on that condition alone." (Blue Book No. 123)

Germany thus made an offer to the English government to observe the neutrality of Belgium—the violation of which neutrality that government afterward proclaimed before the world as its real reason for going to war—and the English government disdainfully rejected this offer.

VII.

Germany, however, in her efforts to keep peace with England, went much further. Sir Edward Grey felt himself called upon on the 2nd of August to make the following statement to the French ambassador, M. Cambon:

"I am authorized to give the assurance that if the German fleet comes into the channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts or shipping, the British fleet will give all the protection in its power," which, as he on August 3rd added by way of explanation, would mean:

"That from this moment on England and Germany would be at war with each other." (En sorte que dès ce moment a'Angleterre et l'Allemagne seraient en état de guerre.) (Yellow Book, No. 143.)

These declarations, which, in view of the events expected, were almost equivalent to the unconditional assurances of an ally, make no reference to the question of Belgian neutrality, which is thus shown to have been in truth in no way decisive for the action of the English government. But let us even accept it as a fact, that England's honor was engaged in the matter. What did Germany do, in order once again to show that she took account of this position of England's and to render the maintenance of English neutrality possible? The answer appears from the report of the French ambassador in London, who on August 3rd announced to his government:

"The German ambassador has let it be known that if England remains neutral, Germany will refrain from carrying on a naval war, and will not make use of the Belgian coast as a base of operations." (L'Ambassadeur d'Allemagne a adressé à la presse un communiqué disant que si l'Angleterre restait neutre, l'Allemagne renoncerait à toute opération navale et ne se servirait pas des côtes belges comme point d'appui.) (Yellow Book, No. 144.)

And on the next day the Chancellor, von Bethmann Hollweg, himself declared in the German Reichstag, that so long as England preserves her neutrality, our fleet will not attack the north coast of France, and we are even ready to refrain from hostile operations against French shipping in case France for her part does not interfere with ours.

We draw from these facts the conclusion, that not only was England's honor most carefully considered by Germany, but, also, that it

was not at stake, and if we give expression to our conviction that the English government made the question of the violation of Belgian neutrality the basis of its grievances against Germany, only to secure the applause of the crowd, and to allege the pretence of a moral sanction for its own longing to go to war, it would be difficult to refute us.

VIII.

Since, however, the English scholars dwell upon the moral significance of the so-called violation of Belgian neutrality, we deem it worth while to reply to their contention.

The character of the neutrality of Belgium, which an American has appropriately described as a "one-sided neutrality," is sufficiently indicated by a document in which the director in the Belgian foreign office, Count van der Straaten, has recorded a conversation which took place on April 23, 1912, between the English military attaché in Brussels, Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges and General Jungbluth, the chief of the Belgian general staff. In this conversation the lieutenant-colonel said as follows:

At the time of the recent events the English government would have at once landed troops in Belgium even if we had desired no help.

The general objected that our consent would be necessary for that.

The military attaché replied he knew that, *but since we should not be able to restrain the Germans from marching through our country,*

England would have landed troops in Belgium in any case.

Against the announcement of this manifest act of violence, neither the Belgian chief-of-staff ventured to offer opposition, nor did the Belgian government feel itself called upon to enter into a similar understanding, *mutatis mutandis*, with Germany, which an honorable neutrality policy would have led it to do. The belief of the German government that Belgium—it makes no difference whether voluntarily or yielding to the pretext of compulsion—would take her place on the side of the western powers, and that the treaty of 1839, guaranteeing neutrality, had long since become a farce, and was only kept alive nominally to lead Germany to relax her vigilance, has thus been strikingly confirmed.

IX.

In our task of refuting the assertions of the English scholars, point by point, we have reached the last of these. When they say that “never within living memory has there been such a unanimity of opinion in reference to a political question as now,” we beg leave to refer them to the utterances of the leader of the English labor party—utterances which are at least as well known to them as to us—but above all to the stand which was taken at the beginning of the complications immediately preceding the war by the members of the cabinet, Viscount Morley, John Burns and C. P. Trevelyan; and when Ramsay Macdonald wrote:

“During the last eight years Sir Edward Grey has been a threat to the peace of Europe, and his policy a misfortune for England.” The academical circles of Germany have nothing to add to this statement.

Conclusion

We repeat here the words upon which we laid emphasis at the beginning of our answer: if one had sought after the means of bringing the nations now arrayed against each other to know one another better, there never could have arisen such a disastrous misunderstanding as that, for example, which is to be found in the closing words of the Declaration of the English scholars. The “military system” in Germany—of this they could and ought to have convinced themselves—was not a bugbear for Europe, as even they would like to have it considered, but the shield which the German people opposed to their adversaries for the protection of their country and their homes, and the belief that Germany had “dreams of the increase of power by violence” was a delusion evoked by a disordered fancy, the result of a nightmare, to attacks of which the English organism, over-nourished by the abundance of countries it has incorporated, is often subject.

We Germans have never begrudged our Anglo-Saxon blood relations their world-encircling power. The course of this war so far has taught us for the first time that the mastery of the seas, which England regards as her hereditary right, and for which she contends up

to the point of treating contemptuously established axioms of international law, makes doubtful the continuance and the further development of national culture. To fight this claim is for us a sacred duty, the performance of which will prove a blessing to all people, and especially to those who, through their feebleness have been condemned by England to a loss of their rights. We Germans shall not cease, even in the future, to respect and admire English science and learning, full of confidence, however, we leave history to decide the question whether in this war England or Germany wields its weapons "in the case of freedom and of peace."