

## I.



IN his admirable "Inquiry into the European Balance of Power" \* Constantin Frantz closes with the following paragraph his exposition of the influence, outspoken in the Napoleonic propaganda, of French politics upon the European system of States :—

"But it is on nothing else than the power of French civilisation that this propaganda rests ; without that, itself would be quite powerless. To extricate ourselves from the tyranny of that materialistic civilisation, is therefore the only effectual dam against this propaganda. And this is precisely the mission of Germany ; because Germany, of all Continental countries, alone possesses the needful qualities and forces of mind and spirit to bring about a nobler culture, against which French civilisation will have no power any more. Here would you have the rightful German propaganda, and a very essential contribution to the re-establishment of European equipoise."

We place this saying of one of the most comprehensive and original political thinkers and writers—of whom the German nation might well be proud, had it only learnt to listen to him—at the head of a series of inquiries to which we are incited by the certainly not uninteresting problem of the relation of Art to Politics in general, of German art-endeavours to the struggle of the Germans for a higher political standing in particular. The first glance reveals this particular relation as of so peculiar a kind, that it seems worth while to proceed from *it* to a comparative examination of that more general relation,

\* "*Untersuchungen über das europäische Gleichgewicht*": published in Berlin, 1859. In Volume II. of the present series will be found Richard Wagner's dedication (1868) of the second edition of *Oper und Drama* to this same author.—TR.

—worth while for rousing the Germans to a noble sense of self-reliance, since the universal import of even this particular relation, while it meets the efforts of other nations in a conciliatory temper, at like time very evidently assigns to the qualities and development of just the German spirit the pre-eminent calling to that work of reconciliation.

That Art and Science pursue their own path of evolution, of efflorescence and decay, completely aside from the political life of a nation, must have been the conclusion of those who have paid their chief attention to Art's Renaissance amid the political relations of the expiring Middle Ages, and have deemed impossible to accord to the downfall of the Roman Church, to the prevalence of dynastic intrigues in the Italian States, as also to the tyranny of the ecclesiastical Inquisition in Spain, any furthersome connexion with the unparalleled artistic flourishing of Italy and Spain at the same epoch. That present-day France is standing at the head of European civilisation, and yet betrays the deepest bankruptcy of truly spiritual \* productivity, is a fresh apparent contradiction : here, where splendour, power, and acknowledged supremacy over almost every other land and nation in every conceivable form of public life are undeniable facts, the best spirits among this people, that accounts itself so eminently spirituel, despair of ever mounting from the mazes of the most degrading materialism to any sort of outlook on the beautiful. If one is to grant the justice of the never-ceasing French laments about the restriction of the nation's political freedom (and people flatter themselves with assigning this as the only ground for the ruin of the public art-taste), these laments might still be met, and not without good reason, by a reference to those flowering periods of Italian and Spanish

\* The word "*geistig*" (derived from "*Geist*," i.e. "mind" or "spirit") having no comprehensive equivalent in the English language, one must render it by "intellectual," "mental," or "spiritual"; as a rule I propose to employ the last-named, but must claim a certain amount of elasticity in the interpretation.—TR.

Art when outward lustre and decisive influence upon the civilisation of Europe went hand in hand with so-called political thralldom, pretty much as now is the case in France. But, that at no epoch of their lustre have the French been able to produce an Art even distantly approaching the Italian, or a poetic Literature of equal standing with the Spanish, must have a special reason of its own. Perhaps it may be explained through a comparison of Germany with France at a time of the latter's greatest splendour and the former's deepest downfall. There Louis XIV, here a German philosopher [Leibnitz] who believed he must recognise in France's brilliant despot the chosen ruler of the world: indisputably an expression of the German nation's deepest woe! At that time Louis XIV and his courtiers set up their laws for even what should rank as beautiful, beyond which, at the real heart of the matter, the French under Napoleon III have not as yet exceeded; from that time dates the forgetting of their native history, the uprooting of their saplings of a national art of poetry, the havoc played with the art and poesy imported from Italy and Spain, the transformation of beauty into elegance, of grace into decorum (*der Anmuth in den Anstand*). Impossible is it for us to discover what the true qualities of the French people might have engendered of themselves; it has so completely divested itself of these qualities, at least in so far as concerns its "Civilisation," that we can no longer argue as to how it would have borne itself without that transformation. And all this happened to this people when it was at a high stage of its splendour and its power, when, forgetting itself, it took its likeness from its Princes; with such determinant energy did it happen, this civilised Form of its impressed itself so indelibly upon every European nation, that even to-day one can picture nothing else but Chaos, in an emancipation from that yoke, and the Frenchman would rightly think he had lapsed into utter barbarism if he swung himself from out the orbit of his Civilisation.

If we consider the positive murder of freedom involved in this influence, which so completely dominated the most original German ruler-genius of latter times, Frederick the Great, that he looked down upon everything German with downright passionate contempt, we must admit that a redemption from the manifest bankruptcy of European manhood might be deemed of moment not unlike the deed of shattering the Roman world-dominion and its levelling, at last quite deadening civilisation. As there a total regeneration was needed of the European Folk-blood, so here a rebirth of the Folk-spirit might be required. And indeed it seems reserved for the selfsame nation from whom that regeneration once proceeded, to accomplish this rebirth as well; for demonstrably, as scarce another fact in history, the resurrection of the German Folk itself has emanated from the German Spirit, in fullest contrast to the "Renaissance" of the remaining culture-folks of newer Europe—of whom in the French nation's case at least, instead of any resurrection, an unexampledly capricious transformation on mere mechanical lines, dictated from above, is equally demonstrable.

At the very time when the most gifted German ruler could not look beyond the horizon of that French civilisation without a shudder, this rebirth of the German Folk from its own spirit, a phenomenon unparalleled in history, was already taking place. Of it Schiller sings :

No Augustan age's flower,  
 No Medici's bounteous power,  
     Smiled upon our German Art ;  
 She was never nursed in lustre,  
 Opened wide her blossoms' cluster  
     Ne'er for royal Princes' mart.

To these eloquent rhymes of the great poet we will add in humdrum prose that, when we talk of the rebirth of German Art, we are speaking of a time at which, on the other hand, the German Folk was scarcely recognisable outside its royal families; that, after the unheard ruin of all civic culture in Germany through the Thirty Years'

War, all right, nay, all capacity to move in any walk or sphere of life lay in the Prince's hands alone ; that these princely courts, in which alone the might and even the existence of the German nation found expression, behaved themselves with almost scrupulous conscientiousness as threadbare imitations of the French King's court : and we shall have a commentary, at any rate challenging earnest meditation, to Schiller's strophe. If we arise from that meditation with a feeling of pride in the German spirit's indomitable force ; and if, encouraged by this feeling, we may dare assume that even now, despite the wellnigh unbroken influence of French civilisation upon the public spirit of European peoples, this German spirit stands facing it as a rival equally-endowed at bottom then, to mark the situation's political significance withal, we might frame the following brief antithesis :—*French Civilisation arose without the people, German Art without the princes ; the first could arrive at no depth of spirit because it merely laid a garment on the nation, but never thrust into its heart ; the second has fallen short of power and patrician finish because it could not reach as yet the courts of princes, not open yet the hearts of rulers to the German Spirit.* The continued sovereignty of French civilisation would therefore mean the continuance of a veritable estrangement between the spirit of the German Folk and the spirit of its Princes ; it thus would be the triumph of French policy, aiming since Richelieu at European hegemony, to keep this estrangement on foot, and make it total : just as that statesman made use of the religious strifes and political antagonisms between Princes and Empire [or "Realm"—*Reich*] for founding French supremacy, so, under the changed conditions of the age, it would be bound to be the persistent care of gifted French dictators to employ the seductive influence of French civilisation, if not to subjugate the remaining European peoples, at least to openly control the spirit of German courts. Complete success attended this means of subjugation in the past century, where with a blush

we see German Princes snared and alienated from the German Folk by presents of French ballet-dancers and Italian singers, just as savage Negro-princes are beguiled to-day with strings of beads and tinkling bells. How to deal with a Folk from whom its indifferent Princes have at last been actually kidnapped, we may see by a letter of the great Napoleon to his brother, whom he had appointed King of Holland: he reproached him with having given way too much to the national spirit of his subjects, whereas, had he better Frenchified the country, the Emperor would have added to his kingdom a slice of Northern Germany, "*puisque c'eût été un noyau de peuple, qui eût dépaysé davantage l'esprit allemand, ce qui est le premier but de ma politique,*" as the sentence runs in the letter in question.—Here stand naked, face to face, this "*esprit allemand*" and French civilisation: between the two the German Princes, of whom that noble strophe of Schiller's sings.—

Clearly, then, it is worth while to inspect the closer relations of this German Spirit with the Princes of the German people: it well might give us serious pause. For we are bound some day to reach a point, in the contest between French civilisation and the German spirit, where it will become a question of the continuance of the German Princes. If the German Princes are not the faithful guardians of the German spirit; if, consciously or unconsciously, they help French civilisation to triumph over that German spirit, so woefully misprised and disregarded by them: then their days are numbered, let the fiat come from here or there. Thus we are fronted with an earnest question, of world-historical moment: its more minute examination, will plainly teach us whether we err when, from our standpoint, that of German Art, we assign to it so great and grave a meaning.

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