

he would preserve silence. Some biographers, who can be very brave by proxy, have condemned him for this concession; but let us remember that Kant was seventy, that he was frail in health, and not fit for a fight; and that he had already spoken his message to the world.

#### VI. ON POLITICS AND ETERNAL PEACE

The Prussian government might have pardoned Kant's theology, had he not been guilty of political heresies as well. Three years after the accession of Frederick William II, the French Revolution had set all the thrones of Europe trembling. At a time when most of the teachers in the Prussian universities had rushed to the support of legitimate monarchy, Kant, sixty-five years young, hailed the Revolution with joy; and with tears in his eyes said to his friends: "Now I can say like Simeon, Lord, let now Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."<sup>39</sup>

He had published, in 1784, a brief exposition of his political theory under the title of "The Natural Principle of the Political Order considered in connection with the Idea of a Universal Cosmopolitical History." Kant begins by recognizing, in that strife of each against all which had so shocked Hobbes, nature's method of developing the hidden capacities of life; struggle is the indispensable accompaniment of progress. If men were entirely social, man would stagnate; a certain alloy of individualism and competition is required to make the human species survive and grow. "Without qualities of an unsocial kind . . . man might have led an Arcadian shepherd life in complete harmony, contentment, and mutual love; but in that case all their talents would have forever remained hidden in their germ." (Kant, therefore, was no slavish follower of Rousseau.) "Thanks be then to nature for this unsociableness, for this envious jealousy and vanity, for this insatiable desire for possession and for power . . . Man wishes concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species; and she wills discord, in order that man may be impelled to a new exertion

<sup>39</sup>Wallace, p. 40.

of his powers, and to the further development of his natural capacities."

The struggle for existence, then, is not altogether an evil. Nevertheless, men soon perceive that it must be restricted within certain limits, and regulated by rules, customs, and laws; hence the origin and development of civil society. But now "the same unsociableness which forced men into society becomes again the cause of each commonwealth's assuming the attitude of uncontrolled freedom in its external relations, — i. e., as one state in relation to other states; and consequently, any one state must expect from any other the same sort of evils as formerly oppressed individuals and compelled them to enter into a civil union regulated by law."<sup>40</sup> It is time that nations, like men, should emerge from the wild state of nature, and contract to keep the peace. The whole meaning and movement of history is the ever greater restriction of pugnacity and violence, the continuous enlargement of the area of peace. "The history of the human race, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about a political constitution, internally and externally perfect, as the only state in which all the capacities implanted by her in mankind can be fully developed."<sup>41</sup> If there is no such progress, the labors of successive civilizations are like those of Sisypheus, who again and again "up the high hill heaved a huge round stone," only to have it roll back as it was almost at the top. History would be then nothing more than an endless and fruitless futility; "and we might suppose, like the Hindu, that the earth is a place for the expiation of old and forgotten sins."<sup>42</sup>

The essay on "Eternal Peace" (published in 1795, when Kant was seventy-one) is a noble development of this theme. Kant knows how easy it is to laugh at the phrase; and under his title he writes: "These words were once put by a Dutch inn-keeper on his sign-board as a satirical inscription, over the representation of a church-yard" cemetery.<sup>43</sup> Kant had before

<sup>40</sup>*Eternal Peace and Other Essays*; Borton, 1914; p. 14.  
<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.  
<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 53.  
<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.

Will Durant, — The Story of Philosophy — Robert Borkes 1953

