

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."³⁹

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 . . . men 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

³⁹Wallace, 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."⁴⁰ 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."⁴¹ 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 circuitous folly; "and we might suppose, like the Hindu, that the earth is a place for the expiation of old and forgotten sins."⁴²

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."⁴³ Kant had before

⁴⁰*Eternal Peace and Other Essays*, Borton, 1914, p. 14.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 63.

Will Durant, - The Story of Philosophy - (Pocket Books) 1953

complained, as apparently every generation must, that "our rulers have no money to spend on public education . . . because all their resources are already placed to the account of the next war."⁴⁴ The nations will not really be civilized until all standing armies are abolished. (The audacity of this proposal stands out when we remember that it was Prussia itself which, under the father of Frederick the Great, had been the first to establish conscription.) "Standing armies excite states to outlive one another in the number of their armed men, which has no limit. Through the expense occasioned thereby, peace becomes in the long run more oppressive than a short war; and standing armies are thus the cause of aggressive wars undertaken in order to get rid of this burden."⁴⁵ For in time of war the army would support itself on the country, by requisitioning, quartering, and pillaging; preferably in the enemy's territory, but if necessary, in one's own land; even this would be better than supporting it out of government funds.

Much of this militarism, in Kant's judgment, was due to the expansion of Europe into America and Africa and Asia; with the resultant quarrels of the thieves over their new booty. "If we compare the barbarian instances of inhospitality . . . with the inhuman behavior of the civilized, and especially the commercial, states of our continent, the injustice practiced by them even in their first contact with foreign lands and peoples fills us with horror; the mere visiting of such peoples being regarded by them as equivalent to a conquest. America, the Negro lands. The Spice Islands, the Cape of Good Hope, etc., on being discovered, were treated as countries that belonged to nobody; for the aboriginal inhabitants were reckoned as nothing. . . . And all this has been done by nations who make a great ado about their piety, and who, while drinking up iniquity like water, would have themselves regarded as the very elect of the orthodox faith."⁴⁶—The old fox of Königsberg was not silenced yet!

Kant attributed this imperialistic greed to the oligarchical constitution of European states; the spoils went to a select

⁴⁴p. 21.
⁴⁵p. 71.
⁴⁶p. 68.

few, and remained substantial even after division. If democracy were established, and all shared in political power, the spoils of international robbery would have to be so subdivided as to constitute a resistible temptation. Hence the "first definitive article in the conditions of Eternal Peace" is this: "The civil constitution of every state shall be republican, and war shall not be declared except by a plebiscite of all the citizens."⁴⁷ When those who must do the fighting have the right to decide between war and peace, history will no longer be written in blood. "On the other hand, in a constitution where the subject is not a voting member of the state, and which is therefore not republican, the resolution to go to war is a matter of the smallest concern in the world. For in this case the ruler, who, as such, is not a mere citizen, but the owner of the state, need not in the least suffer personally by war, nor has he to sacrifice his pleasures of the table or the chase, or his pleasant palaces, court festivals, or the like. He can, therefore, resolve for war from insignificant reasons, as if it were but a hunting expedition; and as regards its propriety, he may leave the justification of it without concern to the diplomatic corps, who are always too ready to give their services for that purpose."⁴⁸ How contemporary truth is!

The apparent victory of the Revolution over the armies of reaction in 1795 led Kant to hope that republics would now spring up throughout Europe, and that an international order would arise based upon a democracy without slavery and without exploitation, and pledged to peace. After all, the function of government is to help and develop the individual, not to use and abuse him. "Every man is to be respected as an absolute end in himself; and it is a crime against the dignity that belongs to him as a human being, to use him as a mere means for some external purpose."⁴⁹ This too is part and parcel of that categorical imperative without which religion is a hypocritical farce. Kant therefore calls for equality: not of ability, but of opportunity for the development and application of ability; he rejects all prerogatives of birth and class, and traces all

⁴⁷p. 76-77.
⁴⁸*Ibid.*
⁴⁹In Paulsen, p. 340.

hereditary privilege to some violent conquest in the past. In the midst of obscurantism and reaction and the union of all monarchical Europe to crush the Revolution, he takes his stand, despite his seventy years, for the new order, for the establishment of democracy and liberty everywhere. Never had old age so bravely spoken with the voice of youth.

But he was exhausted now; he had run his race and fought his fight. He withered slowly into a childlike senility that came at last to be a harmless insanity: one by one his sensibilities and his powers left him; and in 1804, aged seventy-nine, he died, quietly and naturally, like a leaf falling from a tree.

VII. CRITICISM AND ESTIMATE

And now how does this complex structure of logic, metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and politics stand today, after the philosophic storms of a century have beaten down upon it? It is pleasant to answer that much of the great edifice remains; and that the "critical philosophy" represents an event of permanent importance in the history of thought. But many details and outworks of the structure have been shaken.

First, then, is space a mere "form of sensibility," having no objective reality independent of the perceiving mind? Yes and no. Yes: for space is an empty concept when not filled with perceived objects; "space" merely means that certain objects are, for the perceiving mind, at such and such a position, or distance, with reference to other perceived objects; and no external perception is possible except of objects in space; space then is assuredly a "necessary form of the external sense." And no: for without doubt, such spatial facts as the annual elliptical circuit of sun by earth, though statable only by a mind, are independent of any perception whatever; the deep and dark blue ocean rolled on before Byron told it to, and after he had ceased to be. Nor is space a "construct" of the mind through the coördination of spaceless sensations; we perceive space directly through our simultaneous perception of different objects and various points—as when we see an insect moving across a still background. Likewise: time as a sense of be-

fore and after, or a measurement of motion, is of course subjective, and highly relative; but a tree will age, wither and decay whether or not the lapse of time is measured or perceived. The truth is that Kant was too anxious to prove the subjectivity of space, as a refuge from materialism; he feared the argument that if space is objective and universal, God must exist in space, and be therefore spatial and material. He might have been content with the critical idealism which shows that all reality is known to us primarily as our sensations and ideas. The old fox bit off more than he could chew.⁵⁰

He might well have contented himself, too, with the relativity of scientific truth, without straining towards that mirage, the absolute. Recent studies like those of Pearson in England, Mach in Germany, and Henri Poincaré in France, agree rather with Hume than with Kant: all science, even the most rigorous mathematics, is relative in its truth. Science itself is not worried about the matter; a high degree of probability contents it. Perhaps, after all, "necessary" knowledge is not necessary?

The great achievement of Kant is to have shown, once for all, that the external world is known to us only as sensation; and that the mind is no mere helpless *tabula rasa*, the inactive victim of sensation, but a positive agent, selecting and reconstructing experience as experience arrives. We can make substantial gains from this accomplishment without injuring its essential greatness. We may smile, with Schopenhauer, at the exact baker's dozen of categories, so prettily boxed into triplets, and then stretched and contracted and interpreted deviously and ruthlessly to fit and surround all things.⁵¹ And we may even question whether these categories, or interpretive forms of thought, are innate, existing before sensation and experience;

⁵⁰The persistent vitality of Kant's theory of knowledge appears in its complete acceptance by so matter-of-fact a scientist as the late Charles P. Steinmetz: "All our sense-perceptions are limited by, and attached to, the conceptions of time and space. Kant, the greatest and most critical of all philosophers, declares that time and space are the product of experience, but shows them to be categories—conceptions in which our minds clothe the sense perceptions. Modern physics has come to the same conclusion in the relativity theory, that motion, space and absolute time have no existence, but time and space exist only as far as things or events fill them; that is, they are forms of perceptions."—Address at the Unitarian Church, Schenectady, 1923.

⁵¹*Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 23.