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Charles E. McClelland

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PART I

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INTRODUCTION

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## CHAPTER I

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### PROLOGUE

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‘Image’ is a widely understood concept today, thanks to the merchants of flattery who have developed advertising into a major industry in America and Europe. Yet before commercial exploitation diluted and popularized the concept, intellectuals for centuries shaped symbols and myths in a similar, if more honest way. When European thinkers began to accept the nation-state as a normal form of political organization and a legitimate object of human allegiance, they also began to build complex symbolic models, aggregates of accepted perceptions which defined the ‘character’ of the emerging nations of Europe. Sometime during the eighteenth century, such a process took place among certain German intellectuals, and England became a symbol invested with exemplary qualities and surrounded by emotional charges. Of course Germans had written about England before then and still write about it today. But the symbolic value in older times was weak and diffused: by contrast, from the late eighteenth century until just recently, the word ‘England’ suggested something else to German intellectuals – a complex of values, associations, aspirations, and feelings.

There was little reason for England to represent anything special to German intellectuals before the eighteenth century. Before then, Germans thought little about the country, which seemed remote, isolated, and not very important. The features of English life which interested continental intellectuals from the eighteenth century on – the libertarian political constitution, empiricism, the leading position in the development of commerce and industry, and her unique literature – either had not existed before or had to await recognition until the stage was set. Such events as the victory of the moderns over the ancients and the emergence of a wholly new type of secular, independent intellectual first made it possible to regard the state or art of modern England (rather than Greece or Rome) as models and to treat

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with respect such vulgar matters as commerce and industry. By the eve of the French Revolution, however, German intellectuals went so far in agreeing that England symbolized the best form of government, the most progressive economic policies, the best international posture, the most interesting literature, and even the most admirable human characteristics that one can justifiably speak of 'Anglomania'. Germans probably felt more sense of kinship with the English people than any other in Europe – a fact which sheds light on the development of German national consciousness through the process of confrontation with foreign cultures. To a remarkable extent, German thinkers defined German national characteristics not in contrast, but in comparison to the English, by seeking the similarities rather than the differences.

From this time on, and well into the century, England continued to represent well-defined symbolic qualities to German thinkers. These qualities cannot be explained as the sole product of normal cultural or political exchange, geographical contiguity, or the improvement of information and communication, though all these played some role. Clearly German thinkers cast England in a role incomparably more meaningful than that of most other neighboring lands, such as Sweden, Russia, or Italy. Only France was a symbolic subject charged with comparable meaning. Even when the Anglo–German rivalry arose in the late nineteenth century, England remained a charged subject, though negatively.

Why should this be so? The answer is important not only to an understanding of Anglo–German relations, but of the relations between other 'model' and 'modernizing' polities in the contemporary world. The Germans' lively interest in England stemmed from more than purely intellectual causes. It was bound up with struggles for political power, class interests, the cause of national integration, and economic modernization. The nature and intensity of German opinion about England is a subject which goes to the roots of German nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism.

Despite the inherent importance of the problem, however, the changing attitude of German thinkers toward England has not been fully investigated. The vast scope of research necessary to describe and analyze it fully explains the lack of comprehensive treatments. What literature there is exhibits a variety of partial and limited ap-

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proaches. Diplomatic histories tell of the relations between the Foreign Office and the German courts, at least in crucial times; the reaction of German public opinion to Anglo-German relations has also been described in part;<sup>1</sup> German views of English culture and the influence of that culture have received some attention (but not nearly enough).<sup>2</sup> Scholars have pursued much more diligently the attitude of the English toward Germany than vice-versa.<sup>3</sup> Sources of these studies have ranged from newspapers to diplomatic archives to the writings of poets and philosophers. Even these sources have not always been used wisely, and the results have frequently fallen short of definitive coverage.

This study offers such broad coverage of the entire period when England meant most to German thinkers. Like earlier students, I have been forced to limit my investigation to manageable proportions, to seek a compact body of source material. In addition I looked for the most meaningful sources. Almost at the start I saw that the German press offered neither compactness nor consistency: censorship, the low standing of journalism among the professions, the rare expression of editorial opinion in the early nineteenth-century press, and the

<sup>1</sup> These works concentrate on Anglo-German relations chiefly after 1848 and focus heavily on newspapers and interest groups as sources of public opinion: Bernadotte E. Schmitt, *England and Germany, 1740-1914* (Princeton, 1916), a general treatment; Raymond J. Sontag, *Germany and England; Background of Conflict, 1848-1894* (New York, 1938); Eber Malcolm Carroll, *Germany and the Great Powers, 1866-1914. A Study in Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1938); and Pauline R. Anderson, *The Background of Anti-English Feeling in Germany, 1890-1902* (Washington, 1939). Werner Eugen Mosse, in *The European Powers and the German Question, 1848-71* (Cambridge, 1958), discusses chiefly English attitudes; so does Kurt Meine, *England und Deutschland in der Zeit des Überganges vom Manchestertum zum Imperialismus, 1871-76* (Berlin, 1937).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Franz Muncker, *Anschauungen vom englischen Staat und Volk in der deutschen Literatur der letzten vier Jahrhunderte*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1918-25); Percy Ernst Schramm, 'Deutschlands Verhältnis zur englischen Kultur nach der Begründung des neuen Reiches', *Schicksalswege deutscher Vergangenheit*, ed. by Walter Hubatsch (Düsseldorf, 1950), 289-319; René Wellek, *Confrontations. Studies in the Intellectual and Literary Relations between Germany, England, and the United States during the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Manfred Messerschmidt, *Deutschland in englischer Sicht. Die Wandlungen des Deutschlandbildes in der englischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Düsseldorf, 1955); Manfred Schlenke, *England und das friderizianische Preussen, 1740-1763. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Politik und öffentlicher Meinung in England des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg i.B., 1963). Klaus Dockhorn has also investigated the impact of German thought on England in his books, *Deutscher Geist und angelsächsische Geistesgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1954) and *Der deutsche Historismus in England* (Göttingen, 1950). Less exhaustive but more suggestive is Percy Ernst Schramm's article, 'Englands Verhältnis zur deutschen Kultur zwischen der Reichsgründung und der Jahrhundertwende', in *Deutschland und Europa* [Rothfels Festschrift] (Düsseldorf, 1951). Even the German historical view of France has been described in Heinz-Otto Sieburg's *Deutschland und Frankreich in der Geschichtsschreibung des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1954-8).

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fickleness of the newspapers I did consult quickly discouraged making newspapers a main source. After consulting memoirs of public figures (business and military men, statesmen, scholars, and literati) and surveying the literature printed about England, I gradually came to realize that the overwhelming majority of pertinent writings, the bulk of ideas about England, came from one clearly recognizable group. Consistency and breadth of viewpoint set the men in this group off from the journalists with their oscillating reactions to day-to-day events. This group also thought and wrote more about England than poets, philosophers, or statesmen because, in a sense, it was a part of their intellectual or academic duty to do so. To study this group meant to follow a clear thread through the maze of German intellectual life. Empirical sampling of the sources thus revealed what logic could have suggested: that in a century dominated by historicism, the historians themselves are one of the best sources for intellectual trends.

Most of the historians belonged to the influential cultural elite composed largely of professors. German historians looking back at the last century from the vantage point of this one have wistfully noted the high place in the life of the nation which professors then enjoyed. In the century before 1918, Meinecke wrote, 'the politics of scholars [*Gelehrtenpolitik*]. . . were nowhere else so sharply and clearly developed and were nowhere else so closely bound up with the decisive movements of national history as in Germany'.<sup>1</sup> Once they had become politicized by the revolutionary events at the beginning of the nineteenth century, many German professors took up the cause of reconciling the young national culture, which they helped create, with the German political system, which functioned largely without them. The nation might be the child of the poets; the states, children of monarchs and bureaucrats; but the idea of the nation-state was the darling of the professors, as their disproportionate presence in the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848 showed. 'The will of the bourgeois class to have its way in politics, to make the nation unified and powerful in the world,' Meinecke concluded, 'was directed and nourished to an incalculable degree by the politics of scholars.'<sup>2</sup> And of all the scholars, the historians contributed disproportionately to the political leadership of the German middle class.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, 'Drei Generationen deutscher Gelehrtenpolitik', *Staat und Persönlichkeit* (Berlin, 1933), p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

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The historians sought to attain their political goals by direct political action, as in 1848; but they also believed in educating their fellow Germans to a level of political sophistication sufficient for responsible citizenship. German reformers from Stein onward realized this need. The usefulness of the past as a lesson to the present, not mere antiquarianism and pedantry, inspired succeeding generations of German scholars to raise history first to a 'science', then to a distinguishing hallmark of German thought.<sup>1</sup> Throughout most of the nineteenth century, when historical studies attained increasingly high plateaus of 'critical' and 'scientific' method, one could still classify German schools of history chiefly by the way they used the past to teach a political lesson. For this reason their histories are more than obsolete and long-winded volumes gathering dust on our shelves: they are historical documents in themselves. They show us what one of the most influential intellectual elites in Germany thought of the world around it and, allowing for some distortion and an inevitable 'culture lag', what their educated middle-class readers must have absorbed into their own thoughts.

Since the object of this study is to trace the German ideas of England rather than describe the evolution of a special fragment of German historiography, I have defined 'historian' and 'historical literature' loosely. The numerous 'histories of England' written in the nineteenth century reveal much, but their scope necessarily remained fixed by the canons imposed by scholarship and publishers. In many cases I have drawn upon even broader works, such as the 'world histories' favored in the early nineteenth century, when no other printed source of a historian's attitudes exists. Shorter pieces, such as articles, often reveal views on topics of contemporary interest outside the scope of more formal monographs and general histories. I have also examined the letters and personal papers of the historians where available. Secondary materials have usually only grazed this topic; in addition, biographies of all but the greatest nineteenth-century historians, when they exist at all, are usually brief, eulogistic, and uninformative.

Despite the enormous collective bulk of the primary materials, some information is represented only feebly. The immediate reactions of German historians to contemporary English politics and developments,

<sup>1</sup> For an evaluation of the massive impact of historical thought on German intellectual development in the nineteenth century, see Karl Mannheim, 'Historicism' (1924), in his *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. by Paul Kecskemeti (New York, 1952), pp. 84–133.

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which I sought in letters, articles, and books, often proved hard to ascertain. The change of a government in London, Palmerston's latest note on Schleswig-Holstein, or the significance of reform legislation doubtless got discussed at the scholars' *Stammtisch* or club and might sometimes stray into a letter; but, until late in the century, historians seldom commented in print on current English events. Even in critical years when the direction of English diplomacy deeply affected Germany, her historians barely mentioned England in their letters and articles: policies made on the Seine or the Neva aroused more hopes and fears in such crisis years as 1848 and 1859, for example, than those made on the Thames.<sup>1</sup> The very lack of evidence here suggests that the Germans thought of England more in symbolic terms than in immediate, practical ones.

Flexibility also seems useful in deciding which authors to include. If one defines 'historian' too narrowly, one excludes such economists as List and Schmoller and such social theorists as Marx and Huber. The criterion, to be meaningful, must include writers who influenced the German interpretation of England and English history. Some of the names are unfamiliar today, yet, with few exceptions, they all enjoyed international esteem in their time. As for the geographical distribution of the sources, one can say that virtually all the historical writings about England came from cities and university towns – most, from North Germany; some, from the medium states south of the Main. I have excluded Austrian historians because they wrote little about England and because they moved in a somewhat different cultural stream. England certainly did not have the same intense symbolic meaning for the Austrians.

Underlying the choice of a chronological presentation is the assumption that the political thoughts and needs of each succeeding generation conditioned how German historians described England. In order to heighten the contrast between generations enough to make their historical writing usable as a document in the history of ideas, I have had to resort to the seemingly unfair practice of seeking out the fundamental prejudices of each author in each generation. Nineteenth-

<sup>1</sup> For example, perusal of Hans Rosenberg's *Die nationalpolitische Publizistik Deutschlands vom Eintritt der Neuen Ära in Preussen bis zum Ausbruch des deutschen Krieges*, 2 vols. (Munich and Berlin, 1935), covering a very critical period in German foreign relations, reveals how small a role England played in the thoughts of leading political writers – including many historians – compared to other great powers.

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century historians set great store by their own objectivity, but this study must discount it from the start. Clearly the German historians were children of their times; inescapable contemporary concerns guided the questions they asked, the materials they chose to use, and the form of their books. Yet their prejudices are fruitful aids to those who wish to understand them better. As Peter Gay recently put it, ‘When literate and cultivated men make what seem to us Philistine judgments, their inconsistency – which was not an inconsistency to them – should provide historians with a window to the inner recesses of past convictions.’<sup>1</sup> To seek the presuppositions of a generation is to deny neither the idiosyncrasies nor the greatness of individual historians.

Defining just how long a generation lasted and which dates marked the beginnings of new interpretations of England must remain flexible, too. In each group of intellectual contemporaries there are outriders and laggards, and the work of some men spans more than one generation. I have found that units of about fifteen years best fit the transition of thought from one generation to the next throughout most of the nineteenth century. Chapter divisions correspond roughly, but not precisely, to these transitions, except in one case – the period from about 1870 to 1885, which produced too little important literature on England to warrant a full chapter. Instead I have offered a separate chapter on Treitschke, justified on two grounds: because he changed his views on England more dramatically than any other historian and because he stood out in a generation which produced fewer historians of England than any other. Perhaps his generation turned its eyes so little toward England because, as Srbik has suggested, it focussed its attention on German unification, the inward-looking transition between the outward-looking cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and the later, equally outward-looking world-awareness of the period of overseas expansion.<sup>2</sup>

The meaningful unit of study for this subject is a long one, punctuated at the start by the political collapse of the ancient *Reich* and Prussia under Napoleon’s blows and at the end by Germany’s grasp for world power. These political events, more than anything else,

<sup>1</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* (New York, 1966), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte vom deutschen Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Munich and Salzburg, 1950–1), II, 28. For stimulating but less sympathetic observations on bias in European textbooks, see Edward H. Dance, *History the Betrayer. A Study in Bias*, 2nd edn. (London, 1964).



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exercised the greatest influence on the attitudes of the German intellectuals toward England. In order to cover it in a limited space, I have had to hold to a minimum description of historical background, diplomatic relations, and public opinion in the broad sense. I have generally not fully analyzed the sources on which historians drew nor the impact of their writings upon the public. Aside from the limitations of space, there are good reasons for excluding both these topics from this investigation. As the accessibility, codification, and printing of English sources improved in the later part of the century, scholars had more to draw upon and tightened their grip on accurate details;<sup>1</sup> yet in many cases greater knowledge did not lead to a more objective evaluation. As for impact on the public, one encounters the danger of saying *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Quantitative data on the size of a given edition are very hard to ascertain, and an 1810 edition of 1,000 copies might be as 'influential' as an 1870 edition of 5,000. Reviews also help little, for the more popular journals, established in quantity only late in the century, rarely reviewed scholarly works, and the reviews of respectable work on England appearing in scholarly journals were usually written by authors included in this study. Even when scholars addressed themselves to a wider audience through articles, they usually chose prestigious national journals which influenced the elite rather than the mass; thus their impact on the public often moved through indirect channels and therefore defies exact measurement.

In reading through a staggering number of historical works, I have consistently sought answers to certain questions. Most deal with attitudes toward political institutions and great men; some, with such prominent cultural features as England's religious and ethnic heritage; some others, with economic and military themes. The questions were not formulated arbitrarily, however; to a large extent the nineteenth-century historians suggested them by the way they dwelt upon certain themes, and after a few preliminary readings I found myself asking other authors for their views on the same subjects. Sometimes I received no answers, but even silence is useful in showing that a subject had ceased to interest historians. The frequency of use of certain slogans connected with England also indicated attitudes which were

<sup>1</sup> For elucidation of this and other historiographical details, see the authoritative works of George Peabody Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, 1959); Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, 3rd edn. (Munich, 1936); and Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte*.

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sometimes inarticulate. Such normative words as ‘free’ and ‘Germanic’ were used more heavily at one time than at others; neologisms such as *Selfgovernment* and *Parlamentarismus* revealed changes of thinking about England for which a new vocabulary became necessary. Their choice of words, being largely a subconscious process, indicates not only how they thought but how they felt about England.

Feelings and half-articulated ideas reveal as much about attitudes as the most sophisticated critical analysis. Sometimes openly, sometimes indirectly, many German historians revealed that they felt so close to English traditions that they vaguely confused their loyalty to German traditions. That is, by stressing what was common to both Englishmen and Germans and overlooking what divided them, they long put off the confrontation with English national uniqueness which a fully developed national consciousness ultimately demanded. Despite Herder’s admonition that each nation follow its guiding genius as expressed in its language, his contemporaries and later generations tended to forge their national self-image only in contrast to Latin, particularly French characteristics. The need for an ally against French power was thus not the only reason for praising Britain; German authors, the creators of modern German literature in the eighteenth century, also needed the encouragement to strike out against the dominance of French taste and fashions. In Shakespeare and Ossian they found the encouragement they needed, the reassurance that a ‘barbarous’ Germanic tongue could express the loftiest sentiments. Thus the German fascination for England, like the later turn against her, was bound up in the first stirrings of German national consciousness.