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Volume I

J. R. Seeley

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LIFE AND TIMES

OF

STEIN.

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LIFE AND TIMES
OF
STEIN,
OR
GERMANY AND PRUSSIA
IN THE
NAPOLEONIC AGE.

BY

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REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

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Hoch auf dem alten Thurne steht
Des Helden edler Geist,
Der, wie das Schiff vorübergeht,
Es wohl zu fahren heisst.

‘Sieh, diese Senne war so stark,
‘Dies Herz so fest und wild,
‘Die Knochen voll von Rittermark,
‘Der Becher angefüllt.

‘Mein halbes Leben stürmt’ ich fort,
‘Verdehnt’ die Hälft’ in Ruh’,
‘Und du, du Menschen-Schifflein dort,
‘Fahr’ immer, immer zu!’

GOETHE.

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To DR REINHOLD PAULI at Göttingen.

Dear Dr Pauli,

I dedicate this book to you, first, because I cannot otherwise sufficiently acknowledge the debt I owe to you for the friendly advice, criticism and constant encouragement which I have received from you in writing it.

But if it were not so, I should still wish to inscribe it to the scholar who has thrown so much light from Germany upon English history, not only out of gratitude, but because your authority might protect me from the charge of presumption in treating German affairs from England. I may be asked why I should write the Life of Stein after Pertz, or treat of Germany in the Napoleonic Age after Häusser. If I should answer by pointing to the new materials which have lately been furnished to the historian in the Memoirs of Hardenberg, Schön's Remains, &c., I might be told that it would be wiser to leave the task of working up this new matter to German writers. If in

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return I point out that you have not adopted this principle, I hope I shall not be supposed to argue that whatever is possible to you is possible to me also, for I only hope to teach my own countrymen, and do not dream of instructing the Germans in their own history as you have instructed the English in theirs. But you certainly had your own countrymen also in view. You doubtless considered that the principle on which the Historical Series of Heeren and Ukert and the Staatengeschichte der neuesten Zeit have been written is a sound one, and that it is not desirable to leave each nation to its own historians. Germany may boast of having put the history of every great European state as much within the reach of her public as her own history. Your countrymen can study the affairs of foreign countries not merely in translations, or hasty magazine-articles, but in elaborate works, written in their own language, with full responsibility and independence of judgment, written also by those who understand clearly the wants of the public for which they write. Among this group of writers you are best known in England, and I shall make my object in writing this book best understood by announcing in this Dedication that I belong to your school.

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P R E F A C E.

It is not to set forth the merits of a great man who has been too little known that I write the life of Stein at such an unusual length, but on account of the intrinsic importance of the revolutions in which he took part. It has been my object to consider the transformation of Germany and Prussia in the Napoleonic age, which has usually been contemplated by us only as a part of the life of Napoleon, in its proper place as a part of German history.

When I first asked myself how this subject might best be treated, I remarked that it was one which especially needed to be gathered up in a person. I soon satisfied myself that the only person who could be taken in this way to represent his nation and his time was Stein.

Hence arose the plan of this work. When it was formed I had no clear opinion as to Stein's claim to be admired or regarded as a great man. It was enough for me that his central position, his

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important achievements, and his strongly marked character made him more interesting than any of his German contemporaries. As I proceeded with my task I gradually formed an estimate of his merits. It was a very high estimate, as the reader will see, but it was formed in perfect freedom of judgment. I was not influenced by the consideration which so often makes a biographer partial, viz., that if the subject of the biography is not made out to be a very extraordinary man, people will ask why the book was written or why they should read it. The public are invited to read this book simply because they will find in it an account, the clearest the writer could produce, of a great and momentous transition in the history of Germany.

Such an account could not be given in a smaller compass. To set forth the merits of Stein a rapid sketch might have sufficed, but my plan required that the history of Prussia between 1806 and 1822 should be written in some detail, that abundant information about other German states and about Germany in general should be given, and also that biographies of other distinguished men, such as Hardenberg, Scharnhorst and others, should be interwoven with the biography of Stein. I have felt throughout that my explanations and statements must be full because a large proportion of the questions discussed had never been treated before in English. It is the abundance of matter and not, I venture to affirm, any diffuseness or

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prolixity of style that has made the book so large.

I proceed to give an account of my authorities.

THE SOURCES.

These fall into several classes.

A. Original narratives by leading actors in the history of the time. Of these we have

1. Stein's Autobiography. This is printed at length in Pertz. I have given some account of it below (III. p. 475). It is often vague, and in small details incorrect; but all the important and precise statements it contains are of fundamental importance, and I have taken the greatest care that my narrative should ultimately rest upon them throughout.

2. The Memoirs of Hardenberg. These appeared in two volumes, edited by Ranke, in 1877. They must be carefully distinguished from the spurious Memoirs attributed to Hardenberg which have misled the world for 40 years; of these an account is given below (III. p. 480). The genuine Memoirs are of the utmost importance for the period with which they deal, but this is very short, being only the years 1804 to 1807, in which years, moreover, Stein had not yet become a politician of the first mark. But they have been of much use to me in Part II.

3. Schön's Memoirs. In the work called 'Aus den Papieren Schöns' (4 vols., 1875, 76), are found two autobiographical papers by this important politician. The one covers the whole period of Stein's public life, and speaks freely of him, but seems to have been written in old age, perhaps about 30 years after Stein's Ministry. The second, written in 1844, covers the period from the establishment

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of the Central Administration in 1813 to 1840. There is also a diary of great importance, kept by Schön from Nov. 29, 1808 to January 6th, 1809. Other short historical fragments by Schön are contained in this collection. I am often obliged to controvert Schön's statements; in each case my objections are given in the text.

4. Arndt, the well-known song-writer, has two books containing original information about Stein. Some account is given of these below (II. pp. 489—499). Arndt was not much initiated into affairs, but gives lively personal descriptions; he is particularly useful for 1812 and 1813, and for Stein's domestic life in old age. Another work of his, written in defence of himself against those who accused him of revolutionary conspiracies, and entitled *Nothbedrängener Bericht*, contains some additional information about Stein.

5. Count Senfft, Saxon Minister at the beginning of 1813, has left *Memoirs*, which were published in 1863. He was married to Stein's niece, and has two or three passages which are important for Stein's biography.

6. Ludwig v. Ompteda, a Hannoverian politician, has left a collection of documents connected by a slight thread of narrative (*Politischer Nachlass aus den Jahren 1804 bis 1813*). They were published in 3 vols. in 1869. These are particularly important for the year 1813, and contain some new papers from Stein's hand.

7. Hans v. Gagern; *Mein Antheil an der Politik*. 5 vols., 1823—45. A whole volume is devoted to correspondence between Gagern and Stein.

8. Diaries of Sir George Jackson (1872) and Bath Archives (1873), 4 vols. in all.

9. Gentz; *Tagebücher*, &c. I may as well class here all the various writings of Gentz, diaries, letters, pamphlets, &c., which have appeared at various times.

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They lie a little on one side of my subject, but I have kept them in view.

These are the principal writers that fall under this head. Others, such as Rehberg, the Countess Voss, Bishop Eylert, Scheffner, F. v. Raumer, Steffens, Perthes, Varnhagen v. Ense, N. Turgeneff, General Wolzogen, and others, who furnish perhaps one fact or trait apiece, are not worth more particular enumeration.

B. Biographies founded on, distinctly referring to, and reproducing in more or less number, original documents.

1. Das Leben des Ministers Freiherrn vom Stein, von G. H. Pertz. In 6 vols. (the 6th in two divisions). I have had before me the second edition of the first four vols., dated 1850—1. The other three parts, of which there has been only one edition, appeared in 1854—5. This work, in which is included Stein's Autobiography, is by far the most important that has appeared on the subject—more important, indeed, than all others put together. Many imperfect sketches that had appeared earlier (*e.g.* Rehberg's) are absorbed in it, and many popular delineations that have appeared since (*e.g.* W. Baur's) are only abridgements of it. It consists of

(a) The Autobiography.

(β) A narrative founded upon information and papers furnished by the family, and in part upon information given orally by Stein.

If I might criticise a work of such inestimable value, I should say that its principal blemish is a sort of confusion, which reigns through it, between the personalities of Stein and Pertz. The reader is frequently left in doubt which of the two is speaking. And this doubt grows upon him as he studies the book. A number of statements, expressions of opinion, &c., which at first he took undoubt-

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ingly to come from Pertz, he discovers to be Stein's, and to have been passively copied by Pertz from the Autobiography. In some cases even Stein's errors are thus endorsed by his biographer¹. This once remarked, it becomes a question whether many other statements, which also seem to be Pertz', are not really Stein's, and in many cases highly probable that they are; but no means are given us of deciding the question.

(γ) A mass of correspondence, partly incorporated in the narrative, partly added in appendices.

(δ) A mass of invaluable official documents, reports of Ministers, diplomatic despatches, political pamphlets reprinted *in toto*, Cabinet Orders, Laws. These are chiefly contained in the rich appendices of the work.

Altogether it seems to me to have continued up to the present time to be the richest source of information not only on the Life of Stein, but on the whole period of German history.

2. *Denkwürdigkeiten des Staatskanzlers Fürsten v. Hardenberg*. Herausgegeben von Leopold v. Ranke, 1877. These Memoirs consist of two volumes, of which the first is an introduction to Hardenberg's Autobiography, and the second a continuation of it to the end of the war in 1814. A third volume composed entirely of original documents has since been added. The memoirs are founded upon a collection of documents made by Hardenberg himself with a view to the history of his time, and committed by the Prussian Government to Ranke at the end of the 50th year from Hardenberg's death. To me they

¹ For example, we read (III. 647) in a report of Stein's to the Czar that he had procured from the merchants of Königsberg an advance of 300,000 thalers for Yorck's army. Yet in his narrative (III. 278) Pertz calls it 500,000. Dr Lehmann (Knesbeck und Schön, p. 190) calls this statement of Pertz 'incomprehensible.' He has not remarked that Pertz is simply transcribing from the Autobiography, and that the error is Stein's own.

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have been particularly useful for the commencement of Stein's Ministry, and its connexion with the earlier Ministry of Hardenberg.

3. Das Leben des Generals v. Scharnhorst. Von G. H. Klippel, 1869, &c. This book has generally been found disappointing, but I have drawn from it most of my sketch of Scharnhorst's life, and several of the documents extracted in the chapter on Military Reform.

4. Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen Neithardt v. Gneisenau. Von G. H. Pertz, 1864, 65.

5. Lebensnachrichten über B. G. Niebuhr. I have generally used Miss Winkworth's well-known translation. The book is admitted by its translator to be meagre on the political side. Pertz gives in his Life of Stein a large quantity of Niebuhr's political correspondence which might well have found a place in this work. I have taken some pains to make the present book serve as a political supplement to the Life of Niebuhr.

6. Das Leben des Ober-Präsidenten Freiherrn v. Vincke. Von E. v. Bodelschwingh, 1853. An unfinished work, principally useful for the Westphalian part of Stein's life.

7. Aus den Papieren Schöns. In this collection, besides the biographical fragments, there is a certain amount of correspondence between Schön, Altenstein, Niebuhr, and others, which has been useful.

8. Preussen während der Französischen Occupation. Von Max Duncker. This essay, which originally appeared in the Preussische Jahrbücher, and has since been reprinted in a volume entitled Aus der Zeit Friedrichs des Grossen und Friedrich Wilhelms des Dritten, is entirely founded upon documents preserved in the Prussian Archives, and is of the utmost importance for the period between the Congress of Erfurt and the Treaty of Kalisch.

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9. Oesterreich und Preussen im Befreiungskriege. Von W. Oncken, 1876. Founded on new documents. Important for the policy of the Czar in the first months of 1813.

10. Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen v. Yorck von Wartenburg. Von G. Droysen, 1851, 52. This very interesting book is a great authority for the Convention of Tauroggen and the important events at Königsberg at the beginning of 1813.

11. Bernhardt's Geschichte Russlands. Useful on the Congress of Vienna.

12. Aus dem Nachlasse F. A. L. v. der Marwitz, 1852. Marwitz is the best literary representative of the feudal opposition to the Stein-Hardenberg reforms.

C. Detached studies on particular historical points have often been useful to me. I may mention particularly: Aegidi, Die Sendung Knesebecks u.s.w. (Sybel's Hist. Zeitschr. 16. 274); Nasse, Die Preussische Finanz- und Ministerkrise im Jahre 1810 (Sybel's Hist. Zeitschr. 1871); Dilthey, Schleiermachers Politische Gesinnung u.s.w. (Preussische Jahrbücher, Vol. x.); Treitschke, Der Verfassungsstreit, and, Preussen auf dem Wiener Congresse (Preussische Jahrbücher, Vol. XXXVII.). I might place under this head many other less important biographical works, *e.g.* those of Held on Struensee, of Voigt on Dohna, of Schlesier on W. v. Humboldt, &c., and the correspondence of Clausewitz recently published; the controversial papers that were called forth by the publication of Aus den Papieren Schöns, particularly Max Lehmann's Knesebeck und Schön, and the anonymous answer entitled Zu Schutz und Trutz am Grabe Schöns; Quistorp, Die Kaiserliche Russisch-Deutsche Legion; Eichhorn, Die Centralverwaltung; C. Perthes, Das Deutsche Staatsleben von der Revolution and Politische Zustände und Personen in Deutschland zur Zeit der Französischen Herrschaft.

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D. From such studies I may distinguish special treatises on whole departments of affairs. Under this head come Riedel, *Der Brandenburgisch-Preussische Staatshaushalt*, a most complete account of Prussian finance up to the war of 1806, Bassewitz, *Die Kurmark Brandenburg im Oct. 1806*, v. Rönne, *Die Preussischen Städteordnungen*, and the same author's standard book *Das Staatsrecht der Preussischen Monarchie*, the statistical works of Dieterici, the works of Voigt, Baersch and Lehmann on the *Tugendbund*, Kaltenborn's *Geschichte der Deutschen Bundesverhältnisse*, &c., &c.

E. Lastly, it is needless to remark that the well-known histories of the period, such as Häusser's *Deutsche Geschichte vom Tode Friedrichs des Grossen*, K. A. Menzel's *Zwanzig Jahre Preussischer Geschichte*, Gervinus' *Geschichte des XIXten Jahrhunderts*, Springer's *Geschichte Oesterreichs*, and the various writings of v. Sybel on the period, have always been before me.

The question may be asked: 'In what relation does the present *Life of Stein* stand to the great work of Pertz?' Is it merely an abridgement such as Pertz himself published in two volumes under the title *Aus dem Leben Steins*, or a popular abridgement aiming at a livelier style, such as is the work of W. Baur? Or does it pretend, on the other hand, to be in any degree an original work?

In answer I may be allowed first to point out what a large number of the authorities mentioned in the above list did not exist when Pertz wrote. It has seldom happened that I have found myself reduced simply to abridge Pertz. I have usually found that later information has enabled me to add or modify

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something in his account. Hardenberg and Schön on the period just before Stein's Ministry and on the first suggestions of his legislation, the writers on the Tugendbund and Schön on the course of it, Düncker on the period from his fall to the War of Liberation, Ompteda, Ranke and Oncken on 1813, have perceptibly altered the state of our knowledge on the greater part of his active life. This is less the case in his old age, but here I adopt a much more condensed style, so that my last hundred pages represent about 1400 pages in Pertz.

It is also possible to use the information given by Pertz himself so as to produce a narrative by no means identical with that of Pertz. There is room sometimes for difference of opinion even in estimating the evidence, still more in judging the persons and measures under consideration. It is possible at times also to apply a different scale of importance to the same materials. I have tried to use my own judgment, though with the caution that befits a foreigner.

I have also recast the whole narrative in order to adapt it to a different public. Pertz could assume the whole world in which his hero lived, the whole scenery and background of his drama, and the lives of the *dramatis personae*, to be already known. I, on the other hand, not only assume all this to be unknown, so as to bind myself to give so much of it as to make Stein's life intelligible, but I am concerned with it for its own sake, and

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describe Stein for the sake of his time quite as much as the time for the sake of Stein. I therefore not only reject a prodigious quantity which Pertz gives, but I also insert much which he does not give. In particular I have been anxious to incorporate several companion biographies. Hardenberg and Scharnhorst are described here pretty fully; Schön, Niebuhr, W. v. Humboldt, and some others are painted with much more care than a mere biography of Stein would require. In like manner I have been anxious to disentangle the thread of Prussian history, and to guide the reader as much as possible across the period which separates Frederick the Great from the present day.

In what I have said of making use of Stein's personality to enliven the history of his age I must not be understood to mean that I have not taken a strong interest in his character for its own sake. It was from the outset my intention to describe him with the most conscientious care, and by no means to be content with the slight careless second-hand sketch which is generally considered enough for a foreign statesman. When I was fairly embarked I soon found the character much more interesting than I had anticipated, and before long it had become a labour of love to me to shed the clearest possible light upon it. I certainly wish this biography to be judged by a high standard, and desire no other allowance to be made for me than what may always be claimed by a biographer who

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is writing of a foreigner, and of one from whom he is separated by a whole age.

In conclusion I have to acknowledge my obligation for kind help received from Dr Pauli, to whom the book is dedicated, and from the Countess v. Kielmansegge for answers kindly given to inquiries made on sundry questions relating to the family, and for the portrait from which the engraving prefixed to the third volume has been executed, and which the Countess certifies to be 'a very good likeness of Stein at about seventy.'

I have also received useful assistance from two Cambridge friends, Professor Sidney Colvin and Mr Oscar Browning.

I cannot refrain at the same time from acknowledging my debt to the Syndicate of the Pitt Press for the invaluable help which they rendered to me unasked at an early stage of my enterprise. Understanding it to be their function to further the production of laborious works for which the book market did not offer sufficient encouragement, they made me an offer which I could not look for from a private publisher, and which has enabled me, as I fully believe, to finish my task sooner than I could have done otherwise by two or three years. This is indeed endowment of research. And to me personally it has made the greatest difference that the agent of their kindness, Mr Clay, has been inspired with all the good will and sympathy of an old friend.

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