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J. Howard B. Masterman

Excerpt

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## I

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE  
OF NATIONALITY.

## DANIEL IV. 25.

*Till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom  
of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*

Dr Adam Smith has called attention<sup>1</sup> to the influence exercised over the prophets of the eighth century by the progress of Assyrian conquest. "The old envies and rancours of the border warfare of Israel with her foes, which had filled the last four centuries of her history, are replaced by a new tenderness and compassion towards the national efforts, the achievements and all the busy life of the Gentile peoples"—"As the rivalries and hatreds of individual lives are stilled in the presence of a common death, so even the factious, ferocious world of the Semites ceased to *fret its anger and watch it for ever* in face of the universal Assyrian fear."

The thought is appropriate, for it was in the protest of the Hebrew prophets against the inexorable march of the vast inorganic empires of the East that the instinct of nationality first becomes articulate in world-literature.

<sup>1</sup> Adam Smith, *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, I, 54—5.

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It was not individuals, but nations, that the imperialism of Babylon or Assyria sought to destroy. Rabshakeh's speech outside the walls of Jerusalem is a summary of the defence of inorganic imperialism against the claims of the national spirit. "Make your peace with me and come out to me; and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one of the waters of his cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards." To such arguments of material advantage the only answer lay in an appeal to the sacredness of the national idea. To the philosophy of materialism and brute force the Hebrew prophets oppose the philosophy of history.

"The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." To forget that truth is to sink back to the law of the beast. The Divine sentence on every ruler of men who ignores the Divine purpose in history is still, "Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him." So Daniel saw in vision

The giant forms of empires on their way  
To ruin one by one,

till after the brute empires had passed one like a son of man came near to the Ancient of Days, and the dominion over all peoples, nations and languages was given to him. The brute rule of force gives place to the moral rule of humanity brought near to God.

This consciousness of the sovereignty of God proved

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the one adequate safeguard of Jewish national life through ages of exile and oppression. For a time it broadened out, in Amos and Isaiah, into an assertion of the Divine purpose in the history, not of Israel only, but of the nations around. In the growing isolation of the post-exilic life of the nation it becomes narrowed into an assertion of the exclusive vocation of the Jewish nation. The noble protest of the book of Jonah on behalf of a wider interpretation of the purpose of God finds little echo in the Apocalyptic literature in which so much of the Catholic spirit of the great prophets is lost.

The Jewish national instinct, become self-conscious in its contest with the first of the great world-empires, outlasted the repressive efforts of the last and greatest, and has held together a nation deprived of every bond of union but the bond of a common religion and a common hope. Any study of the meaning of nationality must begin with the one nation of the ancient world that remains a nation still.

The nation in later times whose history most nearly resembles that of the Jewish people is the Greek. Dean Church has drawn attention, in his sermons on the Influence of Christianity on National Character, to the effect of a common creed and a common hope in keeping alive the instinct of national life among the Greek people.

“What saved Greek nationality was its Christianity.

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It is wonderful that even with it Greek society should have resisted the decomposing forces that were continually at work around it and in it; but without its religion it must have perished. This was the spring of that obstinate tenacious national life which persisted in living on though all things conspired for its extinction; which refused to die under corruption or anarchy, under the Crusader's sword or under the Moslem scimitar."

The disintegration of the last of the great world-Empires was due in part to the influence of Christianity. "Differences of thought and character, which were in abeyance under the Roman rule, began to show themselves again in the modes in which Christianity was apprehended and applied." The settlement of Teutonic tribes within the Empire in the centuries that followed seemed likely to lead to the rise of a group of nations out of the ruin of the Empire in the west. But the imperative need of unity in view of fresh barbarian inroads of Avars, Saracens, Magyars, raised first the Frankish and then the Saxon royal house to the imperial throne, and gave a religious basis to their imperial claims. Only in the lands more sheltered from barbarian attack—in Ireland, England, France—was a national consciousness able to develop. Ireland, remote from the controversies of Western Europe, developed in the sixth century a form of Christian thought and organization that, whatever may have been its weaknesses, was at least distinctively

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national. Till the storm of Norse invasions broke over Ireland at the end of the eighth century, the Irish Church was, both in learning and in missionary enthusiasm, the pioneer of European progress. In England also the Christian Church was, partly through the instinct of independence infused into it by the northern missionaries, the ally of the national spirit. That Hildebrand hoped to use William the Norman as an agent for denationalizing the English Church is very clear, but the wise policy of William, the struggles of Thomas of Canterbury against Angevin despotism, and the alliance of the Church with the nobles in their efforts to curb the power of John, all tended to keep the English Church in close contact with national life. The Ultramontanism of the fifteenth century came too late to counteract the vast service that the English Church had done in giving a definitely religious sanction to the national aspirations of the English people.

France has passed through a harder and less successful struggle in its efforts to retain a Gallican Church that might give religious expression to its national life. The ultimate victory of Ultramontanism has left French national aspirations without the religious consecration to which the French character is peculiarly fitted to respond.

The Western Church after the time of Gregory the Great looked with growing disapproval on the efforts of the peoples of Europe to assert their national inde-

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pendence. In Germany and Italy, where the contest of the papacy with the national spirit was waged with most success, the great allies of the papacy were the religious orders; its great opponents, the bishops. The Church reform movement that centred in the work of Hildebrand, though in part an effort to prevent the secularization of the Church, was also in part a monastic attack on the tendency of the episcopate to identify itself with the awakening national instinct of the peoples of Western Europe. From that time the struggle of the papacy against the national spirit never ceased. "Herein lay the great contradiction of the mediaeval Church, that which produced its monstrous corruptions. It thought that it could exist without distinct nations, that its calling was to overthrow the nations. Therefore the great virtues which nations foster, distinct individual conscience, sense of personal responsibility, veracity, loyalty, were undermined by it; therefore it called good evil and evil good; therefore it mimicked the nations while it was trampling upon them; therefore it became more bloodthirsty than any nation had ever been<sup>1</sup>."

The Council of Constance marks the beginning of the last effort to reconcile the system of the mediaeval Church with the recognition of the developing ideas of nationality. Yet the Council declared war on the Hussites of Bohemia, whose movement was largely

<sup>1</sup> F. D. Maurice, *Social Morality*, p. 180.

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national, as the Pope had declared war on the Albigenses two centuries before. And in the end the attempt to restore the Conciliar authority of the episcopate failed, and the age of Councils is followed by the age of Concordats. At the Council of Trent the Pope withstood all the efforts of Cardinal Pole and others to secure the system of voting by nations that had been adopted at Constance.

The subjugation of the episcopate to the papacy was disastrous in its consequence, for it obliged the national religious aspirations of the peoples of Europe to fall back on the support of the secular sovereign. Marsiglio of Padua prepares the way for the age of Machiavelli and of Luther. Machiavelli is as distinctively the expression of the mind of the Italian Renaissance as Luther is of the German Reformation. Machiavelli, the apostle of efficiency, desired to establish national life on an explicitly non-religious basis; while Luther appealed to the secular princes as the religious leaders of a national Church. The union of the Lutheran tendencies of Cranmer with the Machiavellian policy of Cromwell gave its distinctive character to the early stage of the English Reformation. And even in Spain Philip rather than the Pope was the real head of the Church.

The inevitable reaction followed. The idea of a state-regulated religion is followed by the idea of a religion-regulated state; and Calvinist, Covenanter,

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Puritan tried to substitute the despotism of the saints for the despotism of the King. Only in Scotland did this reaction prove successful. There the General Assembly became the real governing body, and the Church gained the strongly national character that it has never since lost. Elsewhere a century of religious wars led on to the general weariness of national and religious enthusiasm that marked the Age of Reason.

The Eastern Church has never accepted the Latin conception of Catholic uniformity. Repudiating the claims of Rome to Latinize her life, she has been able, through the system of Patriarchates, to foster the national life of the peoples whom she has won for the Christian faith. "As the new races in the East were converted, each was allowed to have the divine offices in the vernacular, and each to have its own independent administration, recognizing only the tie of gratitude that bound it in reverence to Constantinople, whose primacy was of honour, not of supremacy<sup>1</sup>."

In Russia, in Greece, in Roumania and the other Balkan states, the policy of the Eastern Church has enabled the instinct of nationality to find a religious sanction. Undoubtedly this has brought with it the danger of the undue subordination of the Church to political influences, and in Russia especially the abolition of the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1823 has led to a condition not unlike the condition of the English Church

<sup>1</sup> See Allen, *Christian Institutions*, ch. x.



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under Henry VIII. But in Russia, and among the new nations of Eastern Europe, the Eastern Church has yet a part to play worthy of the greatness of its historic past.

The reawakening of the national idea that began with the French Revolution<sup>1</sup>, and has been so marked a characteristic of the Europe of the last century, was the outcome of those ideas of the sovereignty of the people of which Rousseau was the popular exponent, though the origin of them lies much further back in mediaeval scholastic thought. For the sovereignty of the people, if it means anything else than the tyranny of a mere numerical majority—and in Rousseau's conception of it, it never meant that—implies some general mind and will that gives organic character to the state. And this general mind and will is exactly what we mean when we speak of any body of men as a nation. Hence the demand of nations for the right of self-expression—their right to be themselves—becomes a dominant fact in the European history of the nineteenth century. The idea that a state is only in a condition of stable equilibrium when its boundaries coincide with those of a nation, though often hard to apply in practice, may be said to be now almost a commonplace of political thought<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The French Revolution, though it began as the expression of an universal brotherhood, gained its real force from the idea of the "Republic, one and indivisible."

<sup>2</sup> See note at end of chapter.

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But it is a noteworthy fact that the national spirit has not during the past century been linked with religion. Mazzini alone among the great champions of nationality tried to give a religious character to his crusade for Italian independence. The patriotism of Kosciusko, Kossuth, Cavour, Bismarck, though not without the glamour of romance, is not lightened by the steady gleam of religious consecration. And, indeed, the student of modern history can hardly fail to feel that the old sin—the failure to recognize that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men—has brought with it a measure of the old penalty—“let his heart be changed from man’s, and let a beast’s heart be given to him.” Divorced from religion, the spirit of nationality becomes aggressive, intolerant, brutal. It asks for the privileges of power without its responsibilities. It forgets that moral worth is the only guarantee for national greatness.

“To me it seems,” says Bishop Creighton, “that the differentiation of nations is part of that continuous revelation of God’s purpose which is contained in history.” The history of the progress of mankind has been the history of the development of two intermediate forms of organized life—the family and the nation—between the individual and the race. The family—with its wider extension in the clan or tribe—belongs to an early stage of civilized life, and has a religious significance so profound that it is probably true to say