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BRITISH HISTORIANS AND THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN CRISIS

The Schleswig-Holstein crisis of 1863-4 was one of the important turning-points in the history of British foreign policy. It produced the most emphatic diplomatic defeat suffered by the Victorians and it precipitated their eclipse in Europe during the Bismarckian age. But despite its historical significance, it has not yet received adequate attention from British historians.

It is tempting to attribute this to psychological causes: to say that historians are naturally patriotic and prefer to deal rather with national triumph than catastrophe. This explanation cannot suffice, however, for Danish historians have been discussing their country's tragedy from that day to this. Indeed, within twenty-five years of the loss of the Danish duchies, Alexander Thorsöe had produced his solid account of Frederick VII's reign, and by 1901 Kristian Erslev had published his thesis which many still consider the definitive work on the Augustenburg claims. In 1916 Niels Neergaard completed his classic history of Denmark from 1848 to 1866. Between the World Wars, Danish scholars like Erik Arup, Aage Friis, and Erik Möller continued to examine various aspects of the Schleswig-Holstein question. During the period 1923-66, Holger Hjelholt wrote several studies on the Dano-German dispute.

There is indeed a substantial volume of European literature on the question of Schleswig-Holstein, and the formation of British policy during the crisis has sometimes been critically examined from continental vantage-points. But strangely enough, British historians have generally displayed no similar enthusiasm for this kind of discussion. As a result, the immediate British response to the Schleswig-Holstein crisis has not yet been thoroughly analysed. In partial explanation of this oddity, it must be noted that for many years, even after the First World War, the Foreign Office papers dealing with the 1860s were not open to students except by special permit. It was not in fact until the early 1930s that the opening of the archives was extended and the British Government removed the restrictions governing the use of the Foreign Office documents after 1861. Even so, it is clear that a British historian of repute would not have been denied access to the Schleswig-Holstein materials had he applied for special permission to consult them. It is also true that many British historians sought and received permission to use similar papers on other contemporary issues long before the formal waiving of the official restrictions.

In fact, only four English-speaking historians have thus far attempted a detailed treatment of the Schleswig-Holstein question as a problem in European politics, and two of these — Chester W. Clark and Lawrence D. Steefel — are actually Americans. The other two are Werner E. Mosse and Sir Adolphus William Ward. A detailed study of British policy in Schleswig-Holstein has so far been attempted only by Mosse, Steefel and Ward. Clark, in his *Franz Joseph and Bismarck before 1866* (Harvard, 1934), displayed only a secondary interest in the British role. His primary concern was to combat the popular "Prussian" account of German history in the 1860s by making more effective use of Austrian sources than had hitherto been done. By focusing so carefully on Austria's motives and schemes, he developed a keen appreciation of her difficulties and thus partially succeeded in rehabilitating Count Johann von Rechberg, the much maligned Austrian minister.

Steefel's excellent monograph, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question* (Harvard, 1932), is still the definitive exposition of the subject in English. His industrious research in the archives of the main European capitals resulted in a brilliant synthesis of the Austrian, British, French, Hanoverian, Prussian and Scandinavian materials then at his disposal. His treatment of Russian diplomacy was somewhat cavalier, and there were Austrian sources (later used by Clark) that Steefel did not consult, but his analysis is well-balanced and most of his judgements are sound. Steefel succeeded in placing the complicated Elbe riddle quite squarely in its local and international contexts. On the British side, he looked carefully at the parliamentary papers, some of the Foreign Office despatches, the most important parliamentary debates, the file of *The Times* and the *Morning Post,* and some of the private correspondence of Earl Russell, the foreign secretary, and A. H. Layard, the undersecretary for foreign affairs. Steefel was justifiably critical of British policy in Schleswig-Holstein, although he did not suggest alternative courses that Britain might possibly have pursued with greater success or dignity.

Sir A. W. Ward, in *Germany: 1815-90* ((Cambridge, 1917), made considerable use of the available printed materials in English, French and German, but his treatment of the Schleswig-Holstein question suffered from inadequate research on Austrian, Danish and Russian sources. Like his father, who was the British consul at Hamburg in the 1860s, Ward sympathized with the German claims and therefore viewed very critically the policy of Britain and Denmark in the duchies. He examined British policy at greater length in the chapter entitled "The Schleswig-Holstein Question, 1852-1866" in the second volume of the *Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy: 1815-1866* (1922). Here Ward condemned the London Treaty of 1852 and threw much light on the development of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis after the Danish king Christian VIII's publication of the notorious "Open Letter" in 1846. He dealt more patiently with Russell's various Schleswig-Holstein proposals bet-

ween 1859 and 1865 than is normally done even by Russell's biographers. Ward's narrative, however, was based almost entirely on the papers presented to parliament and there are therefore substantial gaps in his research. He made very little use of the Foreign Office documents (which he would surely have been permitted to use for this purpose), the parliamentary debates, or the private correspondence relating to the topic. Nor did he display much interest in press and public opinion. The Queen played an important role in determining British policy in the Danish crisis, and the Cabinet consistently prevented Russell from pursuing the line of his choice, but these factors were neglected by Ward. Even though he seriously criticized Russell's programme in the duchies, he never seems to have been conscious of the difficulties facing the foreign secretary and he did not try to indicate what the British Government could actually have done to avoid embarrassment in 1864. In fairness to Ward, however, it must be added that when he wrote this particular chapter he was a very old man.

The majority of the defects in Ward's work have been corrected by Mosse. The latter has succeeded in making a valuable contribution to historical knowledge largely by exploring the Royal Archives in Windsor Castle with commendable assiduity. His great work, *The European Powers and the German Question, 1848-71* (Cambridge, 1958), is particularly concerned with explaining the attitudes of Britain and Russia toward the development of German unification. Here Mosse intelligently demonstrated how and why domestic as well as diplomatic circumstances conspired to prevent Russia and Britain from pursuing, in central Europe, a policy of active interference that would clearly have thwarted Bismarck's plans. His research on British and Russian primary sources was honest and thorough, and his work therefore supplements that of countless Europeans who had previously been dealing with the Bismarckian miracle chiefly from French and Prussian angles of vision. Mosse's analysis of the impact of the Schleswig-Holstein question on European politics was shrewd. He rightly stressed the Anglo-Russian mistrust of Napoleon III as the key to an understanding of 1864, and thereby also showed why it was hardly possible for France to pursue a bolder course in the Danish crisis. He took a favourable view of Napoleon's masterly inaction, but concluded (p. 211) that the British policy was "conducted with an incredible lack of skill and consistency."

Mosse himself did much to explain this British lack of resolution in the Danish crisis when he produced his scholarly essay, "Queen Victoria and her Ministers in the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis, 1863-64," which appeared in Volume LXXVIII of the *English Historical Review* (April 1963). By focusing largely on the Court, he emerged with a careful assessment of the Queen's role in the shaping of British policy in the Dano-German dispute. His argument here (pp. 263-283) was that the Queen played a very effective part in preventing Russell from pursuing a

violent anti-German policy. He showed how often the Queen, by allying with the peace-party within the Cabinet, compelled the foreign secretary to alter and even to withdraw despatches that he was proposing to send to European courts. Mosse observed that the Queen occasionally stretched her constitutional rights to their limit, and concluded (perhaps too cautiously in view of his abundant evidence) that her influence was "subtle" and "intangible," and that she might well have affected Britain's Schleswig-Holstein diplomacy "in detail rather than substance."

Altogether Mosse's treatment of British policy in the Schleswig-Holstein affair was much more comprehensive than Steefel's or Ward's. Not only was the base of his British research broader than theirs but he addressed himself to a wider range of questions. Thus he was able to stress the importance of ministerial discord, to comment briefly on press and public opinion, to examine the role of parliament in 1864, and to emphasize the involvement of the Court. He seems less sound when dealing with the Dano-German crisis of 1848-52 but he was clearly in command of his material on the 1860s — especially when commenting on the relationship between the Polish revolt and the Danish crisis.

Mosse is also much more reliable than the host of British historians who have touched briefly on Schleswig-Holstein as a problem in nineteenth-century British foreign policy. Apart from the biographers of Palmerston and Russell, the British diplomatic historians who have perhaps tried hardest to unravel the Schleswig-Holstein puzzle are, in chronological sequence, A. Hassall, H. E. Egerton, A. A. W. Ramsay, A. Cecil, R. W. Seton-Watson, H. Temperley and L. Penson, and K. Bourne. Among this group, the first four are the least reliable. Their treatment of the crisis as a European problem is faulty, and their notions of the British role are unsound.

Hassall, in his *History of British Foreign Policy* (London, 1912), blamed Palmerston for encouraging Denmark in 1863, and thought (pp. 277-282) that Britain ought to have adopted a stronger anti-German stand. He overestimated the importance of the Baltic in the British scheme of things, and quite wrongly claimed that Palmerston foresaw the Prussian danger as superseding the French. He overlooked the difficulties facing the Foreign Office and depicted Palmerston as more warlike than in fact he was. Writing on the eve of the First World War, Hassall was too conscious of the German threat and he therefore regretted the collapse of the Anglo-French understanding in 1863 as a result of the Polish fiasco.

Writing at the end of the Great War, Egerton, in *British Foreign Policy in Europe* (London, 1918), was too pro-Danish and therefore unduly critical of British diplomacy in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis. His vision was severely circumscribed as his narrative is based mainly on the ideas of Lord Salisbury and Queen Victoria, and on the opinions of Sir Robert

Morier, who had been attached in the 1860s to the British embassy in Berlin.

There are simply too many errors of judgement and of fact in Anna Ramsay's *Idealism and Foreign Policy* (London, 1925). Her work is a provocative indictment of mid-Victorian diplomacy, but most of her criticisms are based on hindsight. Curiously, she appreciated the difficulties facing Denmark and France in 1863-1864 but was much less sympathetic to Russell and Palmerston. Her general argument was that Britain, in the 1860s, remained in the clouds and refused to be jolted into reality by the astonishing events of that decade.

Algernon Cecil's analysis of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis is even worse than Ramsay's. His *British Foreign Secretaries, 1807-1916* (London, 1927) is pervaded by a keen dislike for Palmerston and Russell which distorts his whole view of Victorian statecraft.

In *Britain in Europe, 1789-1914* (Cambridge, 1937), Seton-Watson's analysis of the Schleswig-Holstein question represents the median, in time as well as character, between Ward's approach and Mosse's. His account is based on a vast body of literature and his grasp of European politics was more secure than that of most British diplomatic historians. He looked briefly but squarely at the policies of Bismarck and Napoleon III. He also carefully evaluated the British response to what was definitely a very delicate situation in 1863-1864. Seton-Watson was critical of the British Government and rightly saw that the Danish crisis tended to diminish British influence and prestige on the continent. He clearly showed how inconsistent was Russell's Schleswig-Holstein programme and deftly related Britain's failure here to her errors in Poland. He indicated that the Court exerted considerable influence to prevent a divided Cabinet from involving Britain in a war with Germany, and he also examined the major parliamentary debates on the Dano-German question. Most of Seton-Watson's notions have been confirmed by Mosse's more specialized studies. On the debit side, Seton-Watson did not attempt to explain or to estimate the role of the British press during the crisis, and his account of the London conference of 1864 is sketchy. In analysing parliamentary opinion he might also have examined profitably the serious divisions over the matter within both liberal and conservative ranks. But given the scope of his work and the nature of the sources available to him, Seton-Watson deserves praise for the over-all competence with which he has dealt with British policy in the Danish duchies.

Contributions in this area have also been made by Temperley and Penson in their two heavy volumes on the *Foundations of British Foreign Policy, 1792-1902* (London, 1938) and *A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books, 1814-1914* (London, 1939). These texts are valuable guides in the use of primary sources. They not only indicate what documents have been published but they also show where these documents may be

found. The selection of Schleswig-Holstein material in the *Foundations* is very full and fair, and the accompanying comments are most apt.

The most recent British survey of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis appeared in Bourne's *Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830-1902* (Oxford, 1970). This work is, on the whole, a good general summary of Victorian foreign policy, but on the question of Schleswig-Holstein (pp. 107-110), Bourne accepted too readily the orthodox view of Palmerston's later diplomacy. He glossed too rapidly over the earlier history of the Dano-German quarrel and therefore failed to take properly into account the difficulties facing the British Foreign Office in 1864. Even so, Bourne made a number of perceptive observations, and his selection of documents was carefully considered. His conclusion (p. 110) that ministerial disagreements prevented Britain from pursuing a Palmerstonian line in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis is certainly valid.

Much less sound on the question of Schleswig-Holstein is the work of the vast majority of British survey-historians. Those who wrote before the First World War seemed too close to the Danish problem to view it objectively. Consider, for example, J. F. Bright, in *History of England, 1837-80* (London, 1902), and H. Paul, in *A History of Modern England* (London, 1904). Both presented a flimsy *résumé* of the Schleswig-Holstein question, were supremely critical of British policy in the crisis, and were obviously too pro-Danish. They did not understand the main issues at all. Only slightly less flimsy was the analysis of Justin McCarthy in his *History of our own Times* (London, 1887). After misinterpreting the course of Schleswig-Holstein developments in their European context (p. 156), he suggested that Britain's humiliation in 1864 sprang from her excessive sympathy for Denmark and her overwhelming fear of France. McCarthy felt that these passions, combined with ignorance of the major points at issue, prevented Britain from reacting positively to the events in the duchies. There is some wisdom in a number of his observations, but McCarthy's grasp of the subject was patently insecure. W. N. Molesworth made no attempt whatever to come to grips with the Danish crisis. He casually dismissed it in a single page in the *History of England after 1830* (London, 1873). His suggestion (p. 322) was that the British parliament should have spent its time more profitably than in discussing this complex riddle, about which Englishmen knew, and cared, so very little. More concerned was Sir Spencer Walpole, the biographer of Russell, but his account of the Danish problem in the first volume of *The History of Twenty Five Years* (London, 1904) was faulty. He depicted Palmerston as reckless throughout — even after Britain had failed to secure French help (pp. 438-440). Walpole's conclusion (p. 447) was that Britain erred not in remaining at peace but in encouraging Denmark to resist.

The soundest analysis of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis among the British surveys is undoubtedly that of Sir E. L. Woodward in *The Age of*

Reform, 1815-70 (Oxford, 1962). Here (pp. 317-324) the author is too brief on the Danish problem to throw much new light on it, but he demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the question in its European context. He was perhaps a trifle too partial to Palmerston, and he passed little judgement on Russell's work. There is no mention of Clarendon or Granville in his summary, and he deals with the Queen only in a footnote. Woodward's over-all treatment of the British role, however, is very good. His view of British public opinion with respect to foreign affairs in general, and the Schleswig-Holstein question in particular, is eminently reasonable.

Other survey-writers have tended to sidestep the Schleswig-Holstein affair. Sir J. A. R. Marriott, for example, in *England since Waterloo* (London, 1927), passed rapidly over the problem — merely observing (pp. 326-327) that it resulted in a substantial loss of British prestige while he gave the Queen credit for preserving the peace. G. M. Trevelyan devoted less than two pages of *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (London, 1937) to the issue, which he thought (pp. 338-339) provided the occasion for Britain's departure from Palmerstonian diplomacy. With a firmer grasp of diplomatic matters, Lord Strang dealt more sensibly with the Dano-German dispute, albeit with equal brevity (pp. 181-183) in *Britain in World Affairs* (London, 1961). A. C. Wood, in *Nineteenth Century Britain, 1815-1914* (London, 1960), reserved a page or two for a general condemnation of the Palmerstonian habit of making threats and promises that Britain could not fulfil (pp. 247-249).

There are, however, many more British historians who are much less enthusiastic about Schleswig-Holstein even than this. Consider, for instance, the case of G. P. Gooch and J. H. B. Masterman, whose *Century of British Foreign Policy* (London, 1917) contains (pp. 21-22) only a fleeting and inaccurate statement on the problem. Sir J. Headlam-Morley completely ignored the Danish question, while he touched on contemporary issues of lesser moment, in his *Studies in Diplomatic History* (London, 1930). R. J. Evans in *The Victorian Age, 1815-1914* (London, 1950) covered the question in two short paragraphs (p. 170). Asa Briggs offered nothing on Schleswig-Holstein in *The Age of Improvement, 1784-1867* (London, 1959). And, inexplicably, D. C. M. Platt did not refer to the Danish affair at all in his *Finance, Trade and Politics: British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914* (London, 1968).

Some of this kind of indifference has affected British biographers also. S. J. Reid, for example, in his *Lord John Russell* (London, 1895), glossed over the Danish problem with the simple observation (p. 323) that the British failure here was due to the timidity of Russell's colleagues and the apathy of France and Russia. R. E. Leader's edited version of the *Life and Letters of J. A. Roebuck* (London, 1897) made no mention whatever of Schleswig-Holstein. W. N. Bruce, who edited *Sir Austin Henry Layard: Autobiography and Letters* (London, 1903), has left only one relevant

passage, and this deals with Layard's brilliant speech in defence of the Government's foreign policy on 7 July, 1864. H. D. Trail's *Salisbury* (London, 1906) stated merely that Lord Robert Cecil once spoke effectively on the Schleswig-Holstein question. And R. B. O'Brien, in *John Bright: a Monograph* (London, 1910), referred not once to Denmark.

Not all British biographers, of course, could remain silent on the Dano-German conflict. It was hardly possible for Queen Victoria's biographers to ignore the Schleswig-Holstein crisis completely, even though some of them almost did. Lytton Strachey and E. F. Benson, for example, merely alluded to the issue by way of demonstrating the posthumous influence of Prince Albert;[1] and E. Longford, in *Victoria R. I.* (London, 1964), while doing much the same, added (pp. 318-319) that the Schleswig-Holstein question proved to be the turning-point of the Queen's political career as it gave her confidence in the knowledge that she could survive without Albert's help. Two of Disraeli's biographers did little better. E. T. Raymond, in *Disraeli: Alien Patriot* (New York, 1925), included two pages of superficial analysis with the conclusion (p. 230) that the British failure in Denmark led directly to Prussia's misdeeds after 1864; and Robert Blake's excellent *Disraeli* (London, 1966) contains only two minor references to Schleswig-Holstein. Similarly, Trollope's *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1883) dealt with that crisis almost as an afterthought. Although J. Prest, in *Lord John Russell* (London, 1972), concluded (p. 398) that the famous motion of censure in 1864 was "decisive for British foreign policy in the nineteenth century," he himself provided only a flimsy summary of the Dano-German dispute. When compared with these paltry contributions, Magnus's paragraph on the Danish problem (pp. 169-170), in *Gladstone* (London, 1954), ceases to look skimpy. At least he indicated that one of the explanations for British vacillation in 1864 was the failure of her leaders to agree among themselves.

Of all the British biographers, the most scholarly in their treatment of the Danish crisis were W. B. Pemberton, D. Southgate, A. W. Tilby, and Sir Spencer Walpole. Not surprisingly, they were all biographers either of Palmerston or Russell. And since no discussion of Palmerstonian biography can be complete without some mention of his most famous biographer, the name of H. C. F. Bell, a naturalized American, must be included in this group.[2]

In Bell's *Palmerston* (London, 1936), there is very good coverage of the Dano-German quarrel during the two periods of crisis, but there is nothing on this subject between 1852 and 1862. As a result, Bell spoke glibly (II, 361-400) of Palmerston's failing memory in 1863, although

[1] L. Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York, 1921), pp. 309-312; E. F. Benson, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1935), pp. 219-223.
[2] For information on Bell, I am indebted to Professor Steefel who says that Bell was actually born in Hamilton, Ontario, and was naturalized in the United States in 1919.

indeed Russell and Palmerston had conducted a vigorous correspondence with European courts on the question of the duchies ever since 1859. At any rate, Bell analysed Palmerston's difficulties in 1864 with skill as well as sympathy. He attributed the British failure to Palmerston's declining mental and physical powers, the pacific and mercenary attitude of the public, divisions within the Cabinet, the constant meddling of the Queen, and the British fear of France. Rather than blame Palmerston for the rebuffs suffered by Britain in the Danish crisis, Bell accepted them philosophically as the signal that the age of Palmerstonianism had passed. The European forces at work here were not always soundly grasped by Bell who failed also to deal thoroughly either with the London conference or the Schleswig-Holstein debates in parliament. But, on the whole, his assessment of the British role in the conflict is quite satisfactory although space did not permit him to deal as fully with the matter as he would have wished.

Pemberton's *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1954) was not as carefully researched as Bell's and it was not intended to be as ambitious a project. Still, Schleswig-Holstein is dealt with here (pp. 329-347) in greater detail than in other biographies written on a similar scale. Although Pemberton minimises Russell's role, his analysis of Britain's policy is sound enough. By assuming, however, that there were certain straightforward options available to Palmerston in the attempt to solve this puzzle, Pemberton seems unduly critical of his hero. He is the only one of Palmerston's biographers who has admitted the validity of the Queen's stand on the Schleswig-Holstein dispute.

Southgate contrived, in *The Most English Minister: Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London, 1966), to produce a fine synthesis of all the known printed materials on this outstanding Victorian. Here, he followed the orthodox interpretations of Britain's involvement in the Schleswig-Holstein drama, and agreed (p. 518) with Mosse and A. J. P. Taylor that the Cabinet meeting of 25 June 1864 marked a turning-point in British Diplomacy.[3] But, by accepting too readily the normal criticisms of the British programme, Southgate failed to answer the following questions: How obvious was it in 1863 that Prussia was leading Germany? Why was it really necessary to meet the Queen's objections on the question of a plebiscite in the duchies? Why should Denmark expect British help after she had so consistently disobeyed British advice? If the London Treaty of 1852 was an error, when and how should Russell have abandoned it? Had Southgate tried to answer these questions, his otherwise scholarly summary would have been more favourable to Palmerston and Russell who were trying to follow a confused public opinion,

[3]Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 153-154; and *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939* (London, 1957), pp. 64-67.

to lead a divided and reluctant Cabinet, to forestall the Russians and the French while restraining the Germans, and to cope with an unduly Germanophile Court. In fairness to the "two dreadful old men," criticism of their Schleswig-Holstein policy must be tempered by the realization that they were also hamstrung in the 1860s by Gladstonian finance and Cobdenite economics.

Tilby's *Lord John Russell* (London, 1930) was very much a product of its immediate circumstance. In an age when warlike programmes were being disavowed by Englishmen, Tilby described Russell's policy in the Danish crisis as "folly" (p. 245). He recommended a programme of indifference since the Baltic was not in any case a direct British interest. He was critical of Russell for failing to understand the motives of Bismarck and to appreciate the measure of Prussian strength. Moreover, he felt that this fundamental lack of understanding was simply due to Russell's ignorance of the issues involved. In this analysis, Tilby did an injustice to Russell. In 1864 it was not merely a question of remaining indifferent, for clearly there was too much British sympathy for Denmark; parliament itself recommended diplomatic intervention early in that year. It was all right for Palmerston and Russell, like Tilby in 1930, to resign themselves in the end to the consolation that the Baltic was not a direct British interest — but this view would not have been acceptable to the vast majority of Englishmen as late as 1863. There is nevertheless some validity in Tilby's claims (pp. 235-245): the Schleswig-Holstein crisis of 1864 was to some extent created by British bungling in the immediate past, and the policy of "meddle and muddle" certainly reduced British prestige abroad. Tilby, however, exaggerated when he declared that Britain ceased to count in European affairs for half a century after Denmark's defeat.

In *The Life of Lord John Russell* (London, 1891) by Walpole, the foreign secretary received his most lenient treatment. This was done (II, 380-410) at the expense of Denmark. Walpole blamed the Danish downfall in 1864 on the obstinacy of the Danes themselves. Perhaps because the Queen was still alive, his treatment of her influence was imperfect, and he failed likewise to deal adequately with the question of ministerial discord. But Walpole is useful for his long extracts from Russell's correspondence, and while he did not try to estimate the French contribution to the Danish tragedy, his remarks on Napoleon III's motives and policies were sometimes perceptive.

Some British biographers have accomplished a curious feat in that they have dealt at some length with Schleswig-Holstein without attempting to provide any analysis or to reach any conclusions. They have simply reproduced the ideas of the statesmen about whom they have written. This is especially true, in chronological sequence, of the Honourable Evelyn Ashley, *Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston* (London, 1879); A. Lang, *Life, Letters and*

Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote, First Earl Iddesleigh (London, 1890); J. Morley, *Life of Gladstone* (London, 1903); Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Second Earl Granville* (London, 1905); Sir H. Maxwell, *Life and Letters of George, William Frederick, Fourth Earl of Clarendon* (London, 1913); A. H. Hardinge, *The Fourth Earl of Carnarvon* (Oxford, 1925); and A. L. Kennedy, *Salisbury, 1830-1903* (London, 1953). These biographies throw no light on Schleswig-Holstein as a problem in European diplomacy. But they help to indicate that both political parties in Britain were hopelessly divided over the issue; that Palmerston was recommending caution to Russell in February, although he was still prepared to speak sternly to the Germans at the end of April 1864; and that, in his efforts to please the Queen, Granville often behaved disloyally to Palmerston and Russell.

By tending, in the main, to accept the opinions of their subjects British biographers have contrived to perpetuate the Dano-German controversy by transforming it from an actual into a historiographical one. Thus the ministerial struggle, which severely hampered British policy in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, has not yet ended. In fact, most British historians who have addressed themselves to the Danish problem have curiously assumed the same moral positions as those held by Victorian politicians in the 1860s. Consequently, no fewer than six distinct schools seem to be participating in this general debate: Palmerstonians (the advocates of a vigorous British policy); Mancunians (the peace-at-any-price party); Royalists (the admirers of Queen Victoria who give her credit for maintaining peace despite the stupidity of her advisers); Danophiles who feel that Britain should have defended Denmark in her hour of need; Germanophiles who complain of Danish malpractices in the duchies; and Disraelians who totally condemn the policies of the liberals as a matter of course.

Apart from some of Palmerston's biographers, the leading Palmerstonians have been Hassall, McCarthy, Saintsbury, Whibley, and Wolf. Hassall took the view that Britain should have been firmer both in Denmark and in Poland. McCarthy, in retrospect, considered that war might have been better than ignoble peace. G. Saintsbury, in *The Earl of Derby* (London, 1906), expresssed the opinion (p. 135) that Britain should have fought despite her isolation. C. Whibley, in *Lord John Manners and His Friends* (London, 1925), supported Manners in regretting that the German influence of the Queen, coupled with the "tergiversation of Russell" (p. 131), prevented Britain from defending Denmark in 1864. L. Wolf, in his *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon* (London, 1921), felt that Britain fundamentally erred in trying so hard to preserve the peace during the Dano-German quarrel (p. 204). All of these historians were profoundly stirred by the awareness of British humiliation in the 1860s. Their patriotism was manifested in their passionate concern for British dignity and honour.

The patriotism of the Mancunians, however, has been expressed more in terms of interests. Their premise is that British material interests were not involved in the Baltic, and that Britain therefore should not have joined an expensive war for the dubious advantage of maintaining the *status quo* in that part of Europe. The most potent preachers of this gospel are A. I. Dasent, W. H. Dawson, J. A. Hobson, J. Morley, D. Read, A. W. Tilby, and G. M. Trevelyan. Not surprisingly, the majority of this group were biographers of Cobden and Bright, the avowed leaders of the Manchester School in the mid-century. Dasent, however, was not, and he would perhaps be somewhat offended to find himself linked in this fashion with the Mancunians; but his *John Thaddeus Delane* (New York, 1908) viewed favourably the British determination to keep the peace in 1864 (II, 111-114), despite Delane's own warlike editorials in *The Times* at the end of 1863. In *Richard Cobden and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1927), Dawson blamed Russell for encouraging Denmark by pursuing a Palmerstonian policy of bluff and swagger. Although Hobson thought that Cobden was too sanguine in his notions about international free trade, he sympathized with Cobden's views in *Richard Cobden: the International Man* (New York, 1919). He also showed (p. 301) that Cobden was fearful in the early 1860s of an Anglo-American war supervening upon a British struggle with Germany. Morley supported the pacifism of Cobden and Gladstone in his biographies of these men. He regarded the result of the conservative motion of censure in July 1864 as a "remarkable triumph for Cobden's principles" (II, 440) in the *Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1881), and in his *Life of Gladstone* (London, 1903) he found it "incredible" that the Cabinet should even have been debating the question of going to war against Austria and Prussia (II, 118). Reflecting upon the British policy of peace after the Crimean War, Donald Read, in *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London, 1967), sensibly observed (pp. 147-148) that concrete diplomatic and military necessities dictated a programme of non-interference. Tilby insisted that a policy of indifference in the Danish crisis would have been more dignified than the policy of idle threats; and Trevelyan, writing on the eve of the Great War, exulted in the failure of Palmerstonian methods in the Schleswig-Holstein question. In the *Life of John Bright* (London, 1913), he took the Cobdenite view that the British policy of non-intervention after 1864 wisely promoted national prosperity (pp. 333-334).

The leading Royalists have been J. A. Farrer, Sir S. Lee, Sir J. A. R. Marriott, and W. B. Pemberton. Their strange brand of patriotism is somewhat negatively expressed in their sense of relief at having escaped a disastrous war which Britain could not successfully have waged in 1864 against the whole of Germany. Farrer declared himself doubtful, in *The Monarchy in Politics* (London, 1917), about Britain's capacity to withstand the Prussian needle-gun in 1864; his conclusion therefore was

(pp. 282-283) that the Queen saved Britain from disaster during the Schleswig-Holstein crisis. Lee, in *Queen Victoria: a Biography* (London, 1904), likewise praised the Queen for preserving the peace (pp. 342-352). Marriott did the same, both in *England since Waterloo* and *Queen Victoria and her Ministers* (London, 1933). And, as indicated earlier, Pemberton expressed disappointment with Palmerston for having failed to appreciate the validity of the Queen's views on Schleswig-Holstein.

In addition to Bright, Egerton, Hardinge, Paul, and Ramsay, the leading Danophiles have been Lady Gwendolen Cecil, E. Sheppard, and G. Villiers. In her *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury* (London, 1921), Lady Gwendolen expressed dissatisfaction with the spineless liberal programme (I, 306-314), but failed to take into account the fact that the Danes brought their own sorrows largely upon themselves by failing consistently to follow Russell's advice. Sheppard sympathized with the Danish prejudices of the royal duke in his *George, Duke of Cambridge* (London, 1906). And it is the pro-Danish bias of Villiers that made him so critical of Britain's Schleswig-Holstein policy in *A Vanished Victorian* (London, 1938).[4]

Among British historians, the pro-Germans have definitely remained in the minority. Even those Royalists who whole-heartedly support the programme of the pro-German Court have not admitted the validity of the German claims. Both Fitzmaurice and Walpole, for instance, who may be regarded as Germanophiles for the purposes of this discussion, were really anti-Danish rather than pro-German. Only two biographers of pro-German Victorians can properly be placed in this school: Mrs. R. Wemyss, who supported the ideas of Morier in her *Memoirs and Letters of Sir Robert Morier* (London, 1911); and T. Wemyss Reid, who did not challenge the pro-German notions of his hero in *Life, Letters and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes, the First Lord Houghton* (London, 1890). Sir A. W. Ward thus remains the leading Germanophile.

There is, finally, the Disraelian school, composed mainly of biographers of the conservative leaders. Mention has already been made of Blake, Lady G. Cecil, Kennedy, Lang, and Raymond. To their number must now be added W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle who, in the *Life of Benjamin Disraeli* (London, 1916-20), appear to accept the Disraelian argument (IV, 343-344) that Palmerston's bungling in Poland increased Britain's difficulties in Denmark; and W. D. Jones who, in *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism* (Oxford, 1956), regretted that the conservatives were so divided over the Dano-German dispute (pp. 279-280), and seems to have felt that had Derby not been so ill after 1862 he might have taken a more active interest and offered the opposition party much-

[4]A biography of Clarendon, written by his grandson.

needed leadership on this matter. To this conservative school Algernon Cecil also belongs although he assumed a fairly Royalist attitude in *Queen Victoria and her Prime Ministers* (London, 1953).

The existence of so many separate schools in the British historiography on Schleswig-Holstein bears ample testimony to the complex nature of the Elbe puzzle and also to the enormous difficulty facing Palmerston and Russell in their search for a solution. The contrariety of advice still being offered by British historians must serve as proof that Palmerston and Russell had no clear-cut options in 1864. Even British material interests, which by virtue of their very nature are normally measurable, have been a source of controversy. Whereas, for example, Molesworth, Pemberton and Tilby denied that Britain had genuine interests in the Baltic, Lord Strang spoke of Denmark as a "prime British interest."[5] Some of the Queen's supporters do not believe that British honour was compromised in 1864, but many other British writers do. Some historians, like Hassall, recommended war; several others suggested that non-intervention was best. Many of them, however, made no positive recommendation although they saw fit to criticize the British programme severely. And even so knowledgeable an historian as A. J. P. Taylor has admitted, in *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954), that it is still difficult to determine exactly what else the British Government could have done in 1864 (pp. 153-154).

Taylor's caution in this matter was based on his vast knowledge of nineteenth-century European diplomacy. But apart from Mosse, the other British historians who have dealt with the Schleswig-Holstein question were not so familiar with the continental background. In fact, only a small number of the historians mentioned here have even attempted to place the Dano-German struggle properly within its historical and European context. Moreover, even those who have examined the problem simply as an issue in British politics and diplomacy have circumscribed their own vision by the flimsiness of their research. As a result, the majority of British historians have made the elementary mistake of assuming that the crisis of 1864 sprang suddenly upon Palmerston and Russell and found them ridiculously unprepared. They have invariably ignored the voluminous correspondence on Schleswig-Holstein conducted by the British Foreign Office during the period 1848-1863. This was an error commited even by Bourne and Southgate whose analysis of the British role in the Danish crisis was sounder than most. Jasper Ridley, for example, in *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1970), simply spoke of the revival of the old legal arguments in 1863 (p. 569) as though the whole matter had lain dormant since 1852; and Prest, in his recent biography of Russell, actually referred to Palmerston's speech in the House

[5]*Britain in World Affairs* (London, 1961), p. 181.

of Commons on 23 July 1863 as "the original and greatest mistake" in Britain's handling of the whole affair (p. 396).

Few British historians have stressed the fact that Britain's anterior negotiations helped to place her in her dilemma during the actual crisis. To say that Britain was confused in 1863-64 is clearly not sufficient: Britain, after all, had followed the Schleswig-Holstein question perhaps too closely during the preceding fifteen years. Britain committed the blunder of adhering too tenaciously to the London Treaty of 1852, which both the Danes and the Germans were determined to circumvent. But, given the chaotic circumstances of 1848-52, the London Treaty appeared the least of evils, and it might have succeeded had the Danes been more co-operative. The British Government recognized this, and it therefore constantly urged Denmark to be more conciliatory. There was really no other course, for the foreign secretary could scarcely have offended parliamentary and public opinion by appearing to take up cudgels for Germany. Indeed, when Russell came forward with his notorious "Gotha Despatch" in 1862, he was promptly denounced by the British parliament, the press and even the Cabinet.[6] Had not the Crimean War embittered the Russians, and the Polish question frustrated the French, Britain might well have managed to prolong the settlement of 1852 for many more years. The circumstances prevailing in 1864, however, could not easily have been foreseen by Palmerston and Russell in the 1850s.

British historians have not generally considered any of these matters. Instead, they have done Palmerston a grave injustice by quoting out of their context the oft-repeated remarks made by the prime minister in July 1863. The reply that Palmerston gave to an innocent question about the threatened federal execution in Holstein was the only possible one that he could then have given. For no one, in the summer of 1863, could rationally have predicted that Denmark would ultimately be left alone to face a German invasion. Palmerston's response to Seymour Fitzgerald in the House of Commons was based on Britain's entire policy in Schleswig-Holstein since 1848. He was warning the Germans to be wary of starting a disturbance on the banks of the Elbe that was likely to expand in ways for which they had not bargained. He was also advising the Danes to fulfil the engagements they had contracted in 1851-1852. British historians (like Bourne, Prest, Ridley and Southgate) who have criticized Palmerston for raising Danish hopes by threatening Germany with war in July 1863, have not realized that Palmerston was talking about a general European reaction against German aggression and not about British acts of hostility. Indeed, as Steefel has suggested (p. 61), it seems clear that Palmerston confidently expected France to resist the

[6]L. D. Steefel, *The Schleswig-Holstein Question* (Harvard, 1932), pp. 45-47, 61, 147.

Germans should they encroach upon Danish soil. Furthermore, most British historians seem unfamiliar with the remainder of the same speech in which Palmerston refers to the Germans in Schleswig in a manner that could hardly have satisfied the Danes. To quote this speech and then dismiss Britain's Schleswig-Holstein policy as one purely of bluff, as so many historians have done, is simply to misinterpret what Palmerston, and certainly Russell, thought they were doing. In any case, even if it can be proved that Palmerston was indeed bluffing in July 1863, diplomatic historians must surely realize (as Palmerston himself did) that the European situation had changed drastically by January 1864.

The fact is that the majority of British historians have no enthusiasm for investigating the British role in the Danish crisis. Most of their remarks on Schleswig-Holstein have been superficial — sometimes even inaccurate. But now that most of the relevant correspondence, both private and public, is available, there is no longer a good excuse for inaccuracy in the British treatment of Schleswig-Holstein. There are volumes of records in the Royal Archives which throw light on the attitude of the Court and the motives of individual Cabinet members. The latter have also left volumes of private correspondence, of which the Palmerston, Russell, Clarendon, Gladstone, Granville, Halifax, Somerset, and Ripon Papers are most important. Also very useful are the Hammond and Layard collections. The parliamentary Blue Books have been used by many British historians, but often without the necessary double-check on the Foreign Office documents. Among these, indeed, there is a vital collection (FO 97) devoted entirely to the British correspondence on Schleswig-Holstein during the period 1851-1859. Few historians, either British or European, have utilized this source. The British parliament also displayed an unusually keen interest in Danish vicissitudes in 1863 and 1864. More use needs to be made of these parliamentary debates. British historians, as a rule, are familiar only with Palmerston's famous reply to Fitzgerald on 23 July 1863 and with the long motion of censure in July 1864. The Victorian press, too, followed the Dano-German controversy with remarkable zeal. Countless editorials, letters, and miscellaneous items on Schleswig-Holstein appeared in most London and provincial journals. Dailies, weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies all devoted an astonishing amount of space to the Elbe riddle, as it was then called. Only *The Times,* the *Morning Post,* and the *Quarterly Review* have so far been examined by a few of the British historians who have written on the Danish crisis. In addition to all this, the Dano-German controversy was the kernel of much pamphleteering activity in Britain from 1846 to 1864. This war of words was waged by Danes, Germans and Englishmen of whom the chief perhaps were Baron Christian von Bunsen (the Prussian minister in London, 1842-1854), Lord Robert Cecil (the future marquis of Salisbury), Carl August Gosch (a Danish agent in Britain), Sir Robert Morier (a British diplomat attached to the legation in

Berlin), and Dr. Travers Twiss (a Fellow of University College, Oxford).

This largely untapped body of sources could effectively be used to bridge the current gaps in our knowledge of Britain's reaction to Schleswig-Holstein crisis. Her official policy has been analysed often enough by British and European diplomatic historians working in archives all across the continent, but it will never be properly understood until the domestic background is further illuminated. Mosse has examined masterfully and in detail the important role of the Queen. The part played by the Cabinet, however, has only very recently been investigated with care.[7] The ambivalent attitude of Palmerston toward this whole Danish business in 1864 has not yet been thoroughly considered by any of his biographers. The influence of parliament has also been neglected thus far, and only vague hints have been made about the increasing passivity of the Palmerstonians within the Cabinet after the House of Commons refused to encourage warlike designs in February 1864. Obviously, then, despite an abundance of literature directly or tangentially related to the subject, there are still huge gaps in the common knowledge of Britain's response to the Danish crisis.

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[7]K. A. P. Sandiford, "The British Cabinet and the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis, 1863-1864", *History,* LVIII (October, 1973), pp. 360-383.