

"History of the German Struggle for Liberty"

By Poultney Bigelow. Illustrated with Drawings by R. Caton Woodville, and with Portraits and Maps. 2 vols. Harper & Bros.

THE STRUGGLE for liberty which Mr. Bigelow has undertaken to record in these two choicely printed and illustrated volumes is not, as might readily be supposed, the notable revolutionary struggle of 1848, which culminated, after many vicissitudes and much bloodshed, in giving to the German states representative government, a free press and universal suffrage. Nor yet is it the later popular movement, still in progress, to cast off the burden of aristocratic privilege and military caste under which Germany is still suffering. With both these movements, the author, it is evident, is in full sympathy. And it is apparently on their behalf that he has preferred to go back to a national movement of still earlier date—to the uprising of the whole German people to throw off the tyranny of Napoleon, which followed his famous victories of Austerlitz and Jena. Of that period, now more than eighty years past, he can write without wounding the personal sensibilities of any living individual. Yet all that he writes may, and in fact, does, have a direct bearing on existing politics.

Mr. Bigelow, as most magazine readers know, has been for many years a strenuously active canoe-voyager and foot-

traveler through central Europe, and has thus become well acquainted with its people of every grade, from emperors and kings to peasants and barges. The treatment he has received has been almost uniformly friendly and generous. He thinks he has come to know how Germans feel. The present work is evidently an attempt to manifest his consequent sympathy, and to repay by suggestions of practical value the kindness he has experienced. His work, though written in English, is apparently intended mainly for German readers, and in a German version will doubtless be read with avidity; for it contains much that has never before been published, while much that is known is presented in new lights. The author has been indefatigable in his researches. In his preface he acknowledges his obligation to the German Emperor and the official keepers of the Prussian secret archives for permission to examine much valuable material; to the Duke of Cumberland and the Queen of Hanover, and to Count Voss, the descendant of Lady Voss, the principal companion of Queen Luise, and also the Countess Chorinsky, who had in her possession a large correspondence with Queen Luise, for similar kindness. The English archives have also been laid open to him, with other collections of historical papers and portraits, of which he has made important use.

How great is the novelty which he has thus been able to impart to his pages will be best seen by a comparison of his narrative with that of any other English history of the period. His account of the battle of Jena, for example, and of the events in Prussia which preceded and followed it, when compared with Allison's history of the same events, leaves a widely different impression. An American writer has lately recorded as the height of wisdom a maxim of Prince Bismarck, that "the world cannot be governed from below." Mr. Bigelow points out that "when Bismarck in 1871 became Chancellor of the new German Empire, the socialist vote was so small that it could be ignored. When he left office, after twenty years of rule, he left to his people a legacy of popular disaffection that may be estimated only by reference to one and a quarter million votes cast for socialist candidates." He further shows us that from the time of Frederick the Great to the battle of Jena, Prussia had been constantly governed "from above," as Bismarck would have expressed it. Every minister and every military officer had been noble. The result was that, in the first time of real trial, the government proved utterly inefficient; the army operations were grossly mismanaged; and after one defeat, fortress after fortress, though well-garrisoned and well-victualled, was surrendered at the first call by its pusillanimous and unpatriotic high-born commander.

As the independence of Prussia was lost in 1806 by her weak king and her incapable nobility, so it was regained in 1813 by the voluntary uprising of her patriotic people. This is, in fact, the text for whose enforcement Mr. Bigelow's work is written. He is satisfied, from his personal knowledge of them, that the German people are capable of self-government. And for such a people he holds that such a government—a government by the people for the people—is the only proper one. He admits, however, that Germans in general, even when liberals, are still monarchists. Though he doubtless fully comprehends the reason, he does not clearly explain it. It is simply a matter of national self-preservation. Surrounded by hostile or jealous neighbors, menacing her with large standing armies, Germany must be always prepared for self-defence; and this necessity implies a powerful army and navy, directed by a single overruling will. Germans can thus far see distinctly no better mode of ensuring these necessities of self-defence than through a hereditary monarchy. Perhaps in time the examples of France, Switzerland, and America may bring about a change of sentiment. Meanwhile Germans, if grumbling and uneasy, sustain their Government and are proud of their country, though they gladly leave it, by every opportunity, for any

other country in which they can enjoy the highly prized boons of personal freedom and social equality.

Viewed merely as a history, complete in itself, Mr. Bigelow's work leaves much to be desired. It lacks a proper introduction and an adequate conclusion. It commences abruptly with the military murder of the bookseller Palm by Napoleon's orders, and it ends as curiously with Napoleon's defeat and deposition. It thus presupposes in the reader a knowledge of all the previous circumstances in the rise of Napoleon to power, and a like knowledge of the immediate consequences to Prussia of his overthrow. As regards the reading public of the now educated Germany, this presumption is doubtless correct. The work, in fact, does not profess to be a complete history, but rather an episode of modern European annals. While it has the interest of romance, it would be utterly unjust to style it an historical romance, seeing that it aims, in all its facts, to be a scrupulously truthful narrative. It is rather a romance of history, bringing with it a moral of the highest importance. It tells us, in a plain, straightforward narrative, how a powerful and opulent kingdom was nearly ruined by the misgovernment of a weak king and a selfish, incompetent nobility, and was finally, in spite of the opposition of the frightened sovereign and princes, restored to freedom by the efforts of its common people.

Mr. Bigelow's narrative shows us many heroic characters, but no special hero. It has, however, a heroine, and one of the highest and most engaging cast, in Queen Luise, the wife of the unhappy monarch, Frederick William III. The two portraits which are given of her show that she possessed all the personal beauty and charm of Queen Marie Antoinette—attractions which, with no corresponding moral or intellectual graces, were sufficient to call forth the famous eulogium of Burke. Luise had all the endowments which the unfortunate French Queen lacked—an intense affection for her dull but well-meaning husband, which made her do all in her power to shield him and his people from the consequences of his follies; an equally strong devotion to her country and its people, which caused her to press upon her prejudiced and reluctant husband the services of Stein, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau—the only leaders, plebeians though they were, who could have redeemed the kingdom; and a sense of the value of popular education which led her to encourage to the utmost for this purpose the plans of Pestalozzi, in whose works she delighted. It is no wonder that her memory is cherished to this day as that of the Joan of Arc of Germany.

Burke's once famous book, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," which in its day aroused all monarchical and aristocratic Europe against the efforts of the French constitutional party to lift their half-famished and almost brutalized peasantry and populace higher in the scale of rational beings, no longer needs an antidote. If it did, no better one could be found than this work of Mr. Bigelow. While it pretends to no special charm of style, it is written throughout with good taste and spirit. Its effect is produced, not by rhetorical artifice, but by the *coherent logic* of accumulated facts.