

Toward an appreciation of intellectual life in Austria

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It is with some trepidation that I am sending you the following pages; not that I fear you will underestimate the significance of the intellectual stirrings in Austria, but rather preferably because I am concerned that the facts in this domain will not be accorded the attention they truly deserve in the great movement that is currently penetrating Central Europe. The intellectual life of nations [*Völker*] and states gets its great momentum from two different sides: from the factors of the public life of the state and from the calmer and quieter activity lying beyond political currents that devotes itself with self-sacrifice to the cultivation of science and art, schooling and instruction. Europe's powerfully convulsive and noisy public life very often obscures this modest and quiet activity of the actual benefactors of humanity, and the attention of the public, which is currently claimed almost exclusively by the moral *Salti mortali* [loosely, "risky ventures"] of the heroes of December 2 [1848, presumably a reference to those who induced Ferdinand I to abdicate the throne in favor of Franz Joseph] and the international [*völkerrechtlich*] innovations of the *Rè galantuomo* [Victor Emmanuel II], is seldom interrupted by a glance at the effectiveness of devotion out of pure interest to instruction and schooling, to science and art. And the feverish excitement manifested these days in Austria as well arouses some concerns in this regard.

We Austrians above all have enough grounds to speak with the warmest expressions about quiet and calm progress in scholarship and schooling, and to warn of the passions which, once loosed, would be quite powerful enough to destroy the good that has been gained, but not powerful enough to compensate humanity for the goods lost; for in the end all hope in Austria preferably rests on the increase of intellectual and moral capital, on the healthy culture of the human spirit, that indeed sustain their greatest consecration and their most significant uplift through political and religious freedom, but themselves develop according to independent laws in educational life, and in the richly formed life of the Austrian state it cannot withdraw the positive foundations once they are present as given elements. To these elements which deserve a very special attentiveness at the present time belong the diversity of language families and races, the Catholic and the Protestant church with its distinctive, in part historically and constitutionally founded striving toward emancipation from state power and freedom in church life; the nobility that in Austria is a powerful element in its own right and receives its direction and imprint from both of the factors just named, and finally scholarship, emancipated from the bureaucratic paternalism of the earlier era in Austria, and claiming for itself that honored privilege of freedom of research that it elsewhere already possesses. The disparity of these elements makes summarizing intellectual life in Austria just as difficult as managing it. Nothing would be less appropriate than to ignore the presence of these elements, or to regard them from viewpoints that are justified for other states, but certainly not for Austria.

How often are we found wanting vis-à-vis these standpoints arising from the nature of things! There are Josephiner who, in an age like ours which has given the individual races and language families complete self-assertion, regard instruction as only a means of Germanization—others who are still not prepared to relinquish the thought of Polonizing the Ruthenians, national fanatics who are ready to sacrifice everything to the national struggle even in education and scholarship. From Hungary one hears of attempts (naturally not stemming from state power) in purely Slovak locales to use the public school as a means for Magyarization, while in the eastern tribes of the Austrian imperial state that in culture are in

part very backward we are dealing as a result with nothing other than leading these lands in need of culture in commensurate fashion back to the learning [*Bildung*] of the advanced nations of Central Europe. It is going in similar fashion with the movements in the Church. This powerful factor in the life of our nations and the state cannot be ignored. The Catholic Church specifically is the church of the great majority of Austrian residents; it is not the state church, because in Hungary and Transylvania, thus in a third of the monarchy, the evangelical confessions have an independent position resting on positive foundations, and in the lands which belong to the German Bund the Acts of the Bund guarantees quite definite rights to members of the evangelical confessions. A monstrous moral preponderance would fall to the Catholic Church in Austria if it can rest on the powerful traditions of the Austrian monarchy and the Habsburg House and on the perceptive and placid fundamental character of the nations of Austria favorable to Catholicism—if it had understood the need to attract intellectuals [*Geister*] to it in great numbers, and to concede a worthy position in the spirit of the nineteenth century to scholarship and art in its educational institutions and its temples. But the shining example which the Catholic Church has given in France and England, in Belgium and the neighboring German states, has still found scant consequences in Austria, and the apathy and lack of education of part of the Austrian clerisy, its scant participation in serious scholarship are still an object of loud complaints of the upright, most moderate Catholics of Austria, and clearly explain the preponderance of the Evangelical Church upon the Hungarian Academy, and the scant influence that the Church is in a position to exercise on the educated middle class outside Hungary. On the other hand it exhausts itself in vain attempts to adapt the organization of Austrian political legislation to modern concepts.

The Austrian nobility, or better to say the nobility of the Austrian crown lands, is one of the most interesting and promising elements in the Austrian imperial state. At present, where it is ruled partly by centripetal elements, partly by Jesuit ones, where it is on the leash of the Royal and Imperial tutors and stewards during its educational years and must be deprived of the advantages of a large scholarly and public instructional school, where it yields in its youthful years to that *oisiveté* [passivity] that a witty member of the Lyon Academy, Mr. Amedée Bonnet refers to as one of the main problems of high society in France today, yet it does not exercise the, I would like to say legitimate, influence to which it is entitled in Austria. The bourgeois class and the *haute finance*, who still so little concern themselves here with art and scholarship and the advancement of learning, would scarcely be in a position to oppose themselves to a favored position of the Austrian nobility at present, if the nobility itself were able to clear away the obstacles that stand in its way in public opinion. But this is still much too mistrustful and too little enlightened as against what the nobility wants; the inclinations that continuously emerge from these circles instill anxieties in the bourgeois and learned classes, and thus the actual control of Austrian cultural affairs, with the exception of a few barely viable provincial institutions, and the hopes which are tied up with it, remains exclusively in the circles of state power and its bearers. And yet everything that belongs to the better direction in Austria is permeated with the conviction that state power with its institutions and its purely bureaucratic element no longer suffices, and everything looks forward to the organization of public life that will make it possible for the needs of intellectual life to be able to organize themselves independently and unhindered alongside the institutions of state power. But attention must be directed foremost toward what state power is positively achieving in these circles, so that the good found there is preserved without stunting for posterity.

The educational institutions of the state have made decisive steps forward in the last decade though. They were not subjected to the destructive fluctuations that the administrative and

judicial institutions were. In these areas every creation was accompanied by a complete negation of that which existed, every so-called new organization by a positively extreme idea reacting just to that which existed. The organization and reorganization was in truth a continuous disorganization whose consequences have been a negation of the Austrian state idea penetrating through almost all layers of society. Educational life remained essentially uninfluenced by the theories of the administrative experimenters. Lifting the universities out of the rut of mere vocational study [*Brotstudien*] for administrative and social aims and onto the ground of scholarship is now a completed fact. There is so much yet to be done in them, [but] their connections to the German universities are thereby regulated that they follow the same schedules and have almost the same organization. The effort that Graz is presently making, and has every right to do so, to complete its university in the modern sense are testimony to the value that the better society in Austria is beginning to put on the cultivation of scholarly institutions. The institution of the private docents, the founding of new disciplines, the greater extension which older ones have sustained, the increase in professorships, the recruitment of Austrians expelled by adversity in earlier times to neighboring states, like Purkinje [sic!], Opolzer, Banzetik [?], and others, the appointment of competent foreign scholars in all branches of knowledge, the founding of a series of seminars for training teachers and to attract specialists, these are facts whose significance no prudent person can fail to appreciate. As a consequence scholarly life has become not only better, but also more comprehensive. There are domains coming into their own that wholly ailed in earlier times. For the first time in this century a Greek dictionary prepared by an Austrian has appeared, for the first time younger forces are taking part in learned, mostly natural historical and scholarly [scientific?] works. In many things we are nonetheless still far behind the rest of Germany. The financial calamities press like a mountain on all those institutions like libraries, museums, etc., that are an indispensable arsenal for learned works. A foreigner rarely has a corresponding idea of the obstacles which an Austrian must struggle against in this regard, in the provinces and even in Vienna. But scholarship requires not only institutions in which it is cultivated, but an atmosphere in which the various tendencies can move unhindered. For the targets which scholarship seeks do not come simply from it; they are often offered by life. And in Austria specifically it is just the powerful interests of politically motivated life which continually elicit serious questions, the response to which is very often on the one hand moral courage, on the other hand a lack of prepared ground. The national and ultraclerical parties are the only ones that stand out decisively in Austria, the former especially in institutions like the Hungarian, Bohemian, and Polish Academies, the Hungarian and Bohemian Museums, the Zagreb Yugoslav Society, etc. The universities stand powerless toward them, the Academy of Sciences in Vienna on an indifferent position removed in equal measure from national life and state life, with folded arms and entirely passive behavior.

The *Gymnasien* and *Realschulen* stand even further from these great movements. Yet these who are drawn to university and those who are drawn to practical life must not be passed over. The latter are just as splendid a creation of modern times as they are popular. The former have experienced a thoroughgoing change, yet both demand an extensive and independent appreciation, if we want to take proper account of what has already been achieved and what is yet to be achieved. Then it will become apparent how many *Gymnasien*, *Oberrealschulen*, polytechnic institutions, and universities have contributed, or ought to contribute, to cultivate the Austrian state idea as Maria Theresa created it in educational life, or in other words: then it will be proper to investigate whether these institutions are state or provincial institutions, Austrian or national-particular ones.

The court institutions in Vienna in particular constitute an exception, the Cabinet of Antiquities, the Court Nature and Mineral Collections, the Court Library, the Burgtheater, etc. Almost all have a splendid material for scientific publications, for artistic productions. Our most distinguished scholars count among the staff; these institutions would first be called to surround the court with the splendor that a higher culture alone imparts, that no dynasty can now dispense with. They should deliver a full-throated testimony for the appreciation which scholarship and art receive at court, and form the link in the chain which binds the German courts among each other and abroad on the higher ground of intellectual endeavors. The founding of the Novara Museum and the new constructions for scholarly and artistic court institutions designated for the city expansion project are the first steps taken toward a reform and expansion of court institutions.

The wealth of the elements of the Austrian imperial state does not allow a uniformity of intellectual life; it presses rather for independent expression everywhere, whether it be national or provincial. Flattening and leveling is a lesser danger here than fragmentation and disintegration into atoms that are not held together by a higher law, that are not led toward a common goal. Men like Palacký and Šafařík, Eötvös and Szalay, the learned national institutes in Prague and Zagreb, in Pest and Klausenburg, in Cracow and Lemberg, give power and splendor to the particular life that illuminates not only the literary, but also the political life of many great national tribes, and prepares paths for them into the future on which they will be in a position to go for themselves alone, if one does not want to oppose to this wealth on the periphery, of which we are proud, wealth that we want to know balanced and not destroyed, not the same both in the center as well as in the provinces, if one were only to promote what divides the nations, and not to strengthen intellectually what unites the nations.