

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

CARLTON J. H. HAYES

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

AUTHOR OF "A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE"

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TO

THOSE STUDENTS OF HIS WHO LOYALLY LEFT THEIR  
BOOKS AND PROUDLY PAID THE SUPREME SACRI-  
FICE IN THE CAUSE OF HUMAN SOLIDARITY  
AGAINST INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY  
THE AUTHOR INSCRIBES  
THIS BOOK

## PREFACE

THE following pages constitute a connected story of the late war from its origins to the conclusion of the Peace of Versailles, not for the edification of "experts," military or other, but rather for the enlightenment of the general reader and student. A "definitive" history of the war will never be written; it is much too early, of course, even to attempt it. All that the author has here essayed to do is to sketch tentatively what seem to him its broad outlines — domestic politics of the several belligerents no less than army campaigns and naval battles, — and in presenting his synthesis to be guided so far as in him lay by an honest desire to put heat and passion aside and to write candidly and objectively for the instruction of the succeeding generation.

The author is under special obligation to Messrs. Dodd, Mead and Company for the kind permission which they have accorded him of drawing freely upon the articles on "The War of the Nations" which he wrote in 1914, 1915, and 1916 for their invaluable *New International Year Book*. In the opening chapter of the present work the author has also incorporated a few paragraphs from the last chapter of his *Political and Social History of Modern Europe*, to which, in a way, the BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR is supplementary.

CARLTON J. H. HAYES.

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE GREAT WAR COMES . . . . .	I
The General Cause: International Anarchy . . . . .	1
The Immediate Cause: Germany . . . . .	7
The Occasion: The Assassination of an Archduke . . . . .	13
II. GERMANY CONQUERS BELGIUM AND INVADES FRANCE . . . . .	21
Mobilization and Strategy . . . . .	21
The Conquest of Belgium . . . . .	27
The Invasion of France . . . . .	30
German Gains in the West — and Failure . . . . .	37
III. RUSSIA FAILS TO OVERWHELM GERMANY . . . . .	41
The Russian Invasion of East Prussia . . . . .	41
The Russian Invasion of Galicia . . . . .	43
The German Invasion of Russian Poland . . . . .	50
The Security of Serbia . . . . .	55
IV. GREAT BRITAIN MASTERS THE SEAS . . . . .	58
Importance of Sea Power . . . . .	58
The Participation of Japan . . . . .	62
The Conquest of the German Colonies . . . . .	65
Turkey's Support of Germany . . . . .	69
Germany's Counter-Offensive on the Seas . . . . .	73
V. THE ALLIES ENDEAVOR TO DOMINATE THE NEAR EAST . . . . .	80
Allied Optimism in the Spring of 1915 . . . . .	80
The Attack on the Dardanelles . . . . .	83
Italy's Entry into the War . . . . .	89
VI. RUSSIA RETREATS . . . . .	99
Mackensen's Drive: The Austrian Recovery of Galicia . . . . .	99
Hindenburg's Drive: The German Conquest of Poland . . . . .	102
Revival of Political Unrest in Russia . . . . .	107
Failure of the Allies to Relieve Russia . . . . .	112
VII. GERMANY MASTERS THE NEAR EAST . . . . .	121
Decline of Allied Prestige . . . . .	121
Bulgaria's Entry into the War and the Conquest of Serbia . . . . .	124

CHAPTER	PAGE
Failure of the Allies to Relieve Serbia: The Salonica Expedition . . . . .	129
Completion of German Mastery of the Near East . . . . .	134
VIII. GERMANY FAILS TO OBTAIN A DECISION IN 1916 . . . . .	143
Teutonic Optimism at the Beginning of 1916 . . . . .	143
The Difficulty at Verdun: "They Shall Not Pass" . . . . .	148
The Difficulty in the Trentino: Italy's Defense . . . . .	156
The Difficulty in Ireland: Suppression of Rebellion . . . . .	158
Difficulties at Sea: The Grand Fleet and the United States Government . . . . .	162
IX. THE ALLIES FAIL TO OBTAIN A DECISION IN 1916 . . . . .	168
Attempted Coördination of Allied Plans . . . . .	168
Simultaneous Allied Drives: The Somme, the Isonzo, and the Sereth . . . . .	171
The Participation and Defeat of Rumania . . . . .	181
Stalemate and the Teutonic Peace Drive . . . . .	191
X. THE UNITED STATES INTERVENES . . . . .	201
The Stakes: Isolation or a League of Nations? . . . . .	201
The Occasion: Unrestricted Submarine Warfare . . . . .	213
The Problem: Preparedness . . . . .	219
XI. RUSSIA REVOLTS AND MAKES "PEACE" . . . . .	225
Destruction of Russian Autocracy: the March (1917) Revolution . . . . .	225
Disintegration of Democracy: Political and Military Experiments . . . . .	231
Dictatorship of the Bolsheviki: the November (1917) Revolution . . . . .	246
Defection of Russia: the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk . . . . .	252
XII. THE ALLIES PAVE THE WAY FOR ULTIMATE VICTORY . . . . .	261
Allied Plans and Prospects in 1917 . . . . .	261
The Lesson of the Hindenburg Line . . . . .	272
Recovery of Allied Prestige in the Near East . . . . .	281
Seeming Obstacles to Allied Victory . . . . .	287
XIII. GERMANY MAKES THE SUPREME EFFORT . . . . .	299
"Whom the Gods Would Destroy" . . . . .	299
The Drive against the British: The Battle of Picardy . . . . .	304
The Drive against the French: The Aisne and the Oise . . . . .	313

# CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER	PAGE
The Drive against the Italians: The Piave . . . . .	317
The Final German Drive: The Second Battle of the Marne . . . . .	320
XIV. THE ALLIES TRIUMPH AND CENTRAL EUROPE REVOLTS . . . . .	326
Allied Victories in the West . . . . .	326
Allied Intervention in Russia . . . . .	334
Allied Triumph in the Near East: Surrender of Bulgaria and Turkey . . . . .	342
The Collapse of Austria-Hungary: Resurgence of Op- pressed Nationalities . . . . .	348
The End of Hostilities: Flight of William II . . . . .	356
XV. A NEW ERA BEGINS . . . . .	365
The Settlement . . . . .	365
The Losses . . . . .	388
Landmarks of the New Era . . . . .	395
APPENDIX I: THE COVENANT OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS . . . . .	413
APPENDIX II: AMERICAN RESERVATIONS TO THE TREATY OF VER- SAILLES . . . . .	424
APPENDIX III: PROPOSED AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE . . . . .	428
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	431
INDEX . . . . .	437



## MAPS IN COLOR

	PRECEDING PAGE
1. EUROPE, 1914 . . . . .	I
2. GERMANY, 1871-1914 . . . . .	7
3. AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, 1914 . . . . .	15
4. WAR AREA OF WESTERN EUROPE . . . . .	27
5. WAR AREA OF EASTERN EUROPE . . . . .	41
6. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE BALKAN STATES . . . . .	81
7. CENTRAL EUROPE, JANUARY, 1916 . . . . .	143
8. CENTRAL EUROPE, MARCH, 1918 . . . . .	299
9. EUROPE, 1920 . . . . .	365
10. COLONIAL DOMINIONS OF THE GREAT POWERS . . . . .	401

## SKETCH MAPS

	PAGE
1. FARTHEST GERMAN ADVANCE IN FRANCE . . . . .	34
2. ALLIES' WESTERN FRONT, DECEMBER, 1914 . . . . .	37
3. JAPAN'S POSITION IN RELATION TO KOREA, KIAO-CHAO, AND CHINA . . . . .	63
4. GERMAN "WAR ZONE" OF FEBRUARY 18, 1915 . . . . .	77
5. THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN, 1915 . . . . .	86
6. HABSBURG TERRITORIES PROMISED TO ITALY BY THE ALLIES . . . . .	93
7. THE AUSTRO-ITALIAN WAR AREA . . . . .	96
8. EASTERN BATTLE FRONT, 1915 . . . . .	103
9. THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES, APRIL-MAY, 1915 . . . . .	116
10. THE ALLIED OFFENSIVE IN SEPTEMBER, 1915 . . . . .	119
11. SERBIA, 1914 . . . . .	128
12. ASIATIC TURKEY, 1914 . . . . .	138
13. MESOPOTAMIA AND ITS STRATEGIC POSITION . . . . .	141
14. BATTLE LINES AROUND VERDUN, 1916 . . . . .	154
15. THE RUSSIAN DRIVE ON THE STYR, 1916 . . . . .	172
16. THE RUSSIAN DRIVE ON THE SERETH, 1916 . . . . .	173



	PAGE
17. THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST GORIZIA . . . . .	175
18. BATTLE OF THE SOMME . . . . .	179
19. RUMANIA AND TRANSYLVANIA, 1916 . . . . .	186
20. GERMAN "WAR ZONE" OF FEBRUARY 1, 1917 . . . . .	214
21. THE WESTERN FRONT NEAR ARRAS AND ON THE AISNE . . . . .	273
22. THE HEIGHTS OF THE AISNE . . . . .	275
23. BATTLES OF MESSINES RIDGE AND YPRES . . . . .	279
24. BATTLE OF CAMBRAI . . . . .	281
25. SCENE OF BRITISH AND ARAB ADVANCE IN PALESTINE . . . . .	286
26. THE AUSTRO-GERMAN INVASION OF ITALY . . . . .	295
27. GERMAN GAINS, 1918 . . . . .	305
28. SECOND PHASE OF THE BATTLE OF PICARDY . . . . .	309
29. SCENE OF THE LAST AUSTRIAN OFFENSIVE . . . . .	318
30. SCENE OF THE LAST GERMAN OFFENSIVE: THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE . . . . .	323
31. PRINCIPAL CHANGES IN WESTERN FRONT FROM AUGUST, 1914, TO NOVEMBER, 1918 . . . . .	327
32. THE ST. MIHIEL DRIVE OF THE AMERICANS . . . . .	329
33. THE FRANCO-AMERICAN OFFENSIVE ON THE MEUSE AND IN THE ARGONNE . . . . .	333
34. ALLIED INTERVENTION IN RUSSIA . . . . .	339
35. MACEDONIAN FRONT AT TIME OF BULGARIA'S SURRENDER . . . . .	345
36. PROGRESS OF BRITISH AND ARAB OFFENSIVES IN TURKEY, OCTOBER, 1918 . . . . .	347
37. TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY THE ALLIES UNDER THE ARMISTICE OF NOVEMBER 11 . . . . .	358
38. NEW WESTERN BOUNDARIES OF GERMANY . . . . .	374
39. NEW EASTERN BOUNDARIES OF GERMANY . . . . .	375

# A BRIEF ~~HISTORY~~ OF THE GREAT WAR

## CHAPTER I

### THE GREAT WAR COMES

#### THE GENERAL CAUSE: INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY

SELF-INTEREST was the dominant note of the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Great War. In economics and in politics, among individuals, social classes, and nations, flourished a self-interest that tended more and more to degenerate into mere cynical selfishness. Pseudo-scientists there were to justify the tendency as part of an inevitable "struggle for existence" and to extol it as assuring the "survival of the fittest."

Economic circumstances had provided the setting for the dogma of self-interest. The latest age in world history had been the age of steam and electricity, of the factory and the workshop, of the locomotive, the steamship, and the automobile. It had been the age of big competitive business. Between the capitalists of the new era had developed the keenest rivalry in exploiting machinery, mines, raw materials, and even human beings, with a view to securing the largest share of the world's riches and the world's prestige. It was a race of the strong, and "the devil take the hindmost."

Competition in big business gave manners and tone to the whole age. It inspired a multitude of mankind to emulate the "captains of industry." It furnished the starting-point and the main impulse for the development of the doctrines of Socialists and of Anarchists and of all those who laid stress upon "class consciousness" and "class struggle." It even served to set farmers against manufacturers and to pit "producers" against "consumers." To secure power and thereby to obtain wealth, or to secure wealth and thereby to obtain power, became the more or less conscious end and aim of individuals and of whole classes.

Trade — the veritable red blood of modern industrial life — has not been, and from its nature cannot be, narrowly national. Not only must there be commerce between one highly civilized nation and another, but there must likewise be trade between an industrialized nation and more backward peoples in tropical or semi-tropical regions. The modern business man has need of raw materials from the tropics; he has manufactured goods to sell in return; most important of all, he frequently finds that investments in backward countries are especially lucrative in themselves and stimulative of greater and more advantageous trade. So self-interest has been pursued abroad as well as at home, and usually with the most calamitously anarchical results. Whatever restrictions might be imposed by a strong national state on the selfish activities of its citizens at home were either non-existent or ineffective in restraining them wherever governments were unstable or weak. In backward countries the foreign exploiter often behaved as though "getting rich quick" was the supreme obligation imposed upon him by the civilization whose representative and exponent he was. The natives suffered from the unregulated dealings of the foreigners. And the foreigners, drawn perhaps from several different nations, carried their mutual economic rivalries into the sphere of international competition and thereby created "danger zones" or "arenas of friction."

After 1870 this aspect of capitalistic imperialism was increasingly in evidence. Any one who would follow an outline story of the exploitation of backward regions by business men of Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Japan, and the United States would perceive the process and would appreciate its attendant dangers. Any one who is at all familiar with the "arenas of friction" in Egypt, in China, in Siam, in the Sudan, in Morocco, in Persia, in the Ottoman Empire, and in the Balkans would be in possession of a valuable clew to a significant cause of every war of the twentieth century, particularly to the chief cause of the Great War.

What had complicated the situation was the fact that trade, though in essence international, had been conducted in practice on a national basis, and that foreign investors had been perpetually appealing for support not to an international conscience and an international police but to the patriotism and armed forces of their respective national states. In other words, anarchy had continued to characterize international politics as well as domestic economics.

There was no international organization. There was no general authority for the determination of disputes and for the regulation of world interests. There were at the opening of the twentieth century some *fifty* states, in theory absolutely independent, sovereign, and equal. In fact, the fifty were very unequal and even the strongest among them was not strong enough to maintain its independence should the others unite against it. Yet each proceeded to act on the assumption in most cases that it was self-sufficient and that its own self-interest was its supreme guide.

Running through the whole anarchic state-system, as wool through warp, was the doctrine of nationality. It is a commonplace to us that a compact people speaking the same language and sharing the same historical traditions and social customs should be politically united as an independent nation. To the nineteenth century, however, nationalism was a revolutionary force. At its dawn there was no free German nation, no free Italian nation. But the all-conquering armies of the French Revolutionaries brought to the disjointed and dispirited peoples of Europe a new gospel of Fraternity, that men of the same nation should be brothers-in-arms to defend their liberties against the tyrant and their homes against the foreign foe. Poetry glorified the idea of national patriotism, religion sanctioned it, and political theory invested it with all the finality of a scientific dogma. Within a century, the spirit of nationality produced an independent Greece, a Serbia, a Rumania, a Bulgaria, a Belgium, a Norway, an Italy, a Germany. Each nation—old and young—was proud of its national language, its national customs, its frequently fictitious but always glorious national history, and above all, of its national political unification and freedom.

Everywhere the doctrine of nationality has brought forth fruits in abundance. It has awakened all peoples to national self-consciousness. It has inspired noble and glorious deeds. It has stimulated art and literature. It has promoted popular education and political democracy. It should have led, not backwards to eighteenth-century indifferent cosmopolitanism, but forwards to twentieth-century *inter-nationalism*, to a confederation of all the free nations of the world for mutual co-operation and support. Hither, on the eve of the Great War, it had not led. And this was the tragedy of nationalism.

Nationalism was utilized too often to point citizens to what was peculiar to their own nation rather than to what was common

to all mankind. It served to emphasize the exclusiveness of each state and to promote selfishness in a new and national form. It led nations which had not yet achieved complete unity and independence, like the Irish, the Poles, the Czechs, the Serbs, and the Rumans, to combat more fortunate nations; and among the perfected nations it aroused such selfish intolerance as to render them tyrannical over dissident minorities and to cause them to entertain the notion that they were manifestly destined to impose their own brand of civilization or *Kultur* upon, if not arbitrarily to rule over, "inferior" races.

Nationalism, moreover, prompted whole peoples to give patriotic support to the pretensions of their relatively few fellow-citizens who in less favored lands were seeking profits at the expense of natives and perhaps of neighbors. The foreign tradesman or investor was under no obligation to an impartial international tribunal: he had only to present his international grievances to the uncritical and sympathetic ears of his distant fellow-nationals, with the usual result that his cause was championed at home and that redress for his real or fancied wrongs was forthcoming from a single one of the fifty sovereign states. And when tradesmen or investors of other nationalities appealed from the same distant regions to their several states, what had been an arena of economic friction between competing capitalists in backward lands speedily became an arena of political friction between civilized sovereign states.

In this fashion the spirit of nationalism operated to reënforce the anarchy both of international politics and of international economics. Modern imperialism, curiously enough, became an arc on the circle of exclusive nationalism. It was a vicious circle, and the only way to break it seemed to involve the method most terribly anarchic — employment of brute force — war! It had been in view of this grim eventuality that in the nineteenth century every sovereign state had been arming itself and utilizing every landmark in the progress of civilization in order to forge instruments of destruction. Imperialism — Nationalism — Militarism — these three stalked forth hand in hand.

Armed force was comparatively little used; its mere existence and the mere threat of its use ordinarily sufficed. Indirectly, if not directly, however, force and power were final arbitrament between each two of the fifty sovereign states. And it was no euphemism that every such state was styled a "Power," and that certain states on account of the thickness and weight of their armor and the success that customarily attended their threats were



popularly dubbed "Great Powers." In a world like this there was little chance for international order and security. It was international anarchy — and that was all.

For many generations before the Great War the delicate relations between the jealously sovereign states — aptly called the "balance of power" — had been manipulated by a professional class of "diplomatists" with the aid of military and naval *attachés* and of spies and secret service. The customs and methods of diplomacy had been determined in large part at a time when they conformed quite nicely to the purposes and ideals of the divine-right dynasts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when democracy was constantly preached and increasingly practiced, they might have seemed old-fashioned and anachronistic. To be sure, there were some modifications both in the objects and in the methods of diplomacy: as a result of the industrial changes in our own day, economic questions provided a larger and more attractive field for tortuous diplomatic negotiation than mere dynastic problems; and by the use of the telegraph, the telephone, and the cable the individual diplomatist was kept in closer touch than formerly with his home government. Still, however, the diplomatists were mainly persons of a class, elderly, suave, insinuating, moving mysteriously their wonders to perform. Democrats who in many countries had laid violent hands upon innumerable institutions of despotism and had brought most matters of public concern to the knowledge of a universal electorate, hesitated to assail this last relic of divine-right monarchy or to trust the guidance of international relations to an enfranchised democracy which might by the slightest slip upset the balance of power and plunge an anarchic world into an abyss.

So the diplomatists in our own day continued to manage affairs after their old models. They got what they could for their fellow-nationals by cajolery or by threats. If they thought they could do more for their fellow-nationals by making special "deals" with diplomatists of other Powers, they did so, and presto! a "convention," an "entente," or a "treaty of alliance" defensive or offensive or both. The game had become quite involved and absorbing by 1914, and quite hazardous. Germany thought she needed aid to enable her to retain the loot which she had taken from France; Austria-Hungary thought she needed assistance in the development of her Balkan policy; Italy thought she must have help in safeguarding Rome and in defending herself from possible French or Austrian aggression. So German and Aus-

trian diplomatists formed a "defensive alliance" in 1879, and Italy, joining them in 1882, transformed it into the "Triple Alliance." This was the beginning of the alignment of the Great Powers in our own generation. Diplomatists of republican France and autocratic Russia cemented the secret defensive "Dual Alliance" in 1892. Diplomatists of democratic Great Britain and oligarchical Japan formed a Far Eastern "alliance" in 1902. Diplomatists of Great Britain and France effected a *rapprochement* and an "entente" in 1904. To this "entente" the diplomatists of Russia were admitted in 1907. And between Triple Alliance and Triple Entente the balance of power was so neatly adjusted that from 1907 to 1914 one trivial occurrence after another almost upset it.

Of course, the smaller states — the "lesser powers" — were mainly at the mercy of the "Great Powers" and their delicate balance. On the very eve of the Great War diplomatists of Germany and Great Britain were secretly negotiating the virtual partition of the colonial empire of Portugal. On the other hand, changes among the lesser powers might produce prodigious danger to the balance of the Great Powers. The defeat of Turkey by four little Balkan states in 1912-1913 appeared on the surface to be slightly more advantageous to Russia than to Austria-Hungary, with the result that Germany and her Habsburg ally were thrown into a paroxysm of fear, and one Power after another consecrated the year 1913 to unprecedented armed preparedness. By 1914 it actually required nothing less trivial in itself than the assassination of an archduke to exhaust the imagination and endeavor of the professional balancers between the Powers and to send the diplomatists scurrying homewards, leaving the common people of the several nations to confront one another in the most formidable and portentous battle-array that the world in all its long recorded history had ever beheld.

Those last years before the storm and the hurricane were indeed a strange, nightmarish time. Man had gained a large measure of control over his physical environment and a very small amount of knowledge about his true political, social, and economic needs. In most countries democracy and nationalism were growing by leaps and bounds. In other countries there was more or less mute protest against interference with national right and democratic development. Everywhere the Industrial Revolution was providing an economic foundation for international federation. Yet the spirit of the age seemed incapable of expression save in institutions which had been distantly inherited and which in most



*not change*

instances had outlived their usefulness. Recurring crises between sovereign states and increasing social unrest in every country were alike signs of the passing of a worn-out age and of the coming of a new age which should more perfectly square institutions with vital popular needs and longings. Those three shibboleths of the nineteenth century, — Nationalism, Imperialism, Militarism, — as interpreted in the traditional language of the exclusive state-system, were producing the utmost confusion. Together they embodied the spirit of Anarchy, a spirit that could not permanently endure on a shrinking globe or among social animals. Together they were operating to produce a cataclysm which should stand forth as one of those great crises in Man's historic evolution, such as the break-up of the Roman Empire, the Reformation, and the French Revolution. And the cataclysm came in the Great War. Its underlying cause was international anarchy. Its stakes were the perpetuation or the destruction of that anarchy.

*long*

#### THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE: GERMANY

The vices of modern political and economic life might be exemplified in greater or less degree by reference to the history of any Power or any country. Obviously they were more developed in the "Great Powers" than in the "Lesser Powers"; and of all the "Great Powers" the most perfect exemplar of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism, and therefore the most viciously anarchic in international relations, was Germany. It was Germany which precipitated the Great War.

Militarism is not merely the possession of large armed forces; it involves also the exaltation of such armed forces to the chief place in the state, the subordination to them of the civil authorities, the reliance upon them in every dispute. In explaining why a given nation may be peculiarly predisposed to militarism, at least four factors should be taken into account: (1) geographical situation, (2) historical traditions, (3) political organization, and (4) social structure. In every country one or another of these factors has worked toward militarism, sometimes two or three. In Germany all four have been fully operative in that direction.

For centuries German lands had been battlefields for aggressive neighbors. Situated in the center of Europe, with weak natural frontiers, these lands had been the prey of Spaniards, Swedes, Frenchmen, Poles, and Russians. From the Thirty Years' War, in the first half of the seventeenth century, down to the domi-

nation of Napoleon Bonaparte, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, most of the German states were at the mercy of foreigners. What international prestige Germans retained throughout that dreary period was credited to the military prowess of Austria and more particularly to the waxing strength of Prussia. Prussia had no easily defensible boundaries, and her rise to eminence was due to the soldierly qualities of her Hohenzollern sovereigns — the Great Elector, King Frederick William I, and Frederick the Great. When, in the nineteenth century, the German Empire was created, it was the work of the large, well-organized, well-equipped army of Prussia, and it was achieved only at the price of French military defeat and of diplomatic concessions to Russia. After the creation of the German Empire in 1871 most of its citizens continued to believe that its geographical position between populous Russia and well-armed France required the guarantee of militarism for its future maintenance.

Despite the drawback of their geographical situation the Germans had finally achieved national unification, and among a people zealously worshipping the spirit of nationalism the process by which they had secured national union became their most hallowed historical tradition. It will be recalled that the first serious attempt to achieve the political unification of the Germanies was made by the democratic Frankfort Assembly in the stormy days of 1848-1849; that it represented a combination of nationalism and liberalism, of the German nation with the German democracy. But this first attempt failed. The second attempt, Bismarck's attempt "by iron and blood," was crowned with success. Bismarck's three wars of 1864, 1866, and 1870-1871, solidly established the united German Empire. "Nothing succeeds like success," and the three wars simultaneously sanctified the union of nationalism and militarism, of the German nation with the Prussian army. Moreover, as Prussia henceforth embraced two-thirds the area and three-fifths the population of the Empire and as the Hohenzollern king of Prussia was henceforth the German Emperor, the whole Empire was inevitably Prussianized, and Prussian history and Prussian tradition supplied the patriotic impulse to all Germans. In this way the tradition of militarism — the most important one that Prussia had — gradually supplanted the more cosmopolitan and cultural traditions which had once flourished in southern and central Germany, and in the pantheon of national heroes all German patriots inscribed tablets to the long line of warlike Hohenzollern monarchs, to the valorous Queen Louise, to Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Moltke, and Roon, to