

The Nazi Edda

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY MYTH BY ALFRED ROSENBERG

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IN his Twentieth Century Myth Alfred Rosenberg provided the German nation with what the Edda was to the ancient Scandinavians: a description of their world, an account of their history, and a source of inspiration for their future.

The Twentieth Century Myth is one of the best read books in Germany, especially among the younger generation. It has been prescribed as suitable reading in all Secondary Schools, numerous study groups have been formed to devote themselves to its interpretation, it graces all libraries. Its author holds a very exalted position in the Party: he is one of the oldest followers of the Fuehrer, whom he met in Munich in 1919. After Hitler's rise to power he became Director of the Foreign Policy Bureau of the National Socialist Party. In 1934, the post of Dictator of Education and Philosophy was created for him, and only recently did he receive a new mark of esteem by being appointed to take charge of the German youth in wartime (March 1940). To study the views of such a man more closely will certainly lead to a truer understanding of the queer workings of the Nazi mind.

The title of the book was not chosen without a purpose. It serves to emphasize the antagonism to "reason" current in modern Germany. By opposing "myth" to "reason," Rosenberg gives expression to the deeply-rooted conviction that the intellect (*Geist*) is to blame for the failures of the past, and that only recourse to man's emotions and the subconscious strata of his personality, all that is comprised in the vague term "blood," can avail him. In a shrewd appreciation of the spiritual state of the German people in the years following the last war, with their loss of faith and unexpressed yearnings, their readiness for complete surrender and incapability to see and grasp the truth offered in Christ and His Church, Rosenberg sets out to provide a "myth" which around all these inarticulate feelings can crystallize the starting point for the development of a folk-church and all the other expressions of the folk spirit. He does so in the conviction that the Twentieth Century Myth is the legitimate successor of those "myths" which shaped both belief and destiny of the great nations of the past: the Greek myth of Olympus, the Christian "myth," and the myths of Freedom of Conscience and Research. His aim is to give the nation a religion which is worth dying for, and he claims to have found it in the myth of blood. "To-day," he writes, "there is rising a new belief, the myth of blood (*viz.* Race), the belief that in the blood the divine character of man is being defended, the belief, enshrined in the clearest knowledge, that Nordic blood represents the mystery which has overcome and replaced the old sacraments." (page 129).

Rosenberg is by no means original in his choice of the racial myth as the key to the secrets of the universe. The supremacy of the Nordic, or Teutonic, blood and its unique power of founding cultures had been proclaimed by Houston Stewart Chamberlain in the preceding generation whose book "Foundations of the Nineteenth Century" (1899) is based on the study of the French Count Gobineau "Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races humaines." (1853). Gobineau thought he had found an explanation of the fall of civilisations in racial deterioration through crossbreeding. But he was a Catholic, and this affected his thought in more ways than one. At the beginning of his first chapter he affirms his acceptance of the fact that the world is governed by God in the sense the Catholic Church has defined. "It is incontestable he writes, "that no civilisation perished without God willing it." Gobineau is also agreeably free from all hatred and contempt of racially inferior peoples whose inability to reach higher stages of civilisation does not, in his view, prevent them from accepting the Christian Gospel. With all his regret at the prospect facing humanity, viz. the reign of mediocrity, he does not suggest any means of arresting a development which, in his belief, has its origins in the mysterious will of the Creator himself.

It is H.S. Chamberlain who applies Gobineau's conception of three separate races, black, white and yellow with distinct racial properties, among which the white race is the only one capable of founding cultures, to the Mediterranean basin. He thereby paves the way for the self-adulation of the German people which is the chief characteristic of the Nazi creed. In Chamberlain's view the Teutons are the master race in the world. "It was Teutonic blood and Teutonic blood alone (in the wide sense in which I take the word, that is to say, embracing the Celtic, Teutonic and Slavonic, or North European races) that formed the impelling force and the informing power. It is impossible to estimate aright the genius and development of our North-European culture, if we obstinately shut our eyes to the fact that it is a definite species of mankind which constitutes its physical and moral basis. We see that clearly to-day; for the less Teutonic a land is the more uncivilised it is." (pages 187-8). Unfortunately, the Teutonic race cannot find salvation in the Church of Christ. Though in his chapter on religion he expresses admiration for her ecclesiastical and political ideals, he comes to the conclusion that the Church constitutes a danger to the Teutonic race, because it has subjected it to the influence of alien thought and customs. For the very reason that the Church contains Jewish elements as well as those originating in the "chaos of peoples," which lived round the Mediterranean in the years immediately preceding and following the fall of the Roman Empire, it must be rejected. Among other things Chamberlain offers a justification of antisemitism on the ground that the Jewish spirit, however worthy and excellent, tends to corrode and disintegrate all that is best in the Teuton.

The "Foundations of the Nineteenth Century" are indeed the arsenal which provides Rosenberg with all his weapons. Yet the author of the "Twentieth Century Myth" differs from his immediate predecessor by the virulence of his hatred of the Catholic Church and the greater skill with which he blends mysticism and pseudo-science.

In the hands of this artful magician what had merely been the vagaries of misguided eccentrics became the centre of the most pernicious and yet mysteriously attractive teaching. With an ingenuity worthy of a finer cause Rosenberg weaves the different threads of thought of his predecessors into a net destined to catch the inexperienced. Anticatholicism, and antisemitism, faith in the mystical qualities of the Nordic blood, the narrowness of extreme nationalism, and belief in the coming of the superman are all mixed in this new myth. In three books, entitled : " The Conflict of Values," " The Quality of Germanic Art," and " The Coming Reich," Rosenberg gives a new interpretation of life and history. In his introduction he describes as the task of our age the creation of a new type of humanity through a new myth of life. This is the myth of the Aryan or Nordic hero who, ever since his entrance into history, has given evidence of his complete superiority to all other races. All that we admire in India, in Greece or ancient Rome, the famous artists and discoverers of the Renaissance, the great kings and princes of European civilisation, they have all belonged to the Nordic stock. Whatever was cunning and treacherous, unbalanced or divided in spirit from St. Augustine (!) to Machiavelli was of racially inferior origin. Certain qualities are unmistakably Aryan : a keen sense of national honour and personal dignity, unflinching loyalty, and a courageous spirit of childlike simplicity. Above all, the Nordic hero is at peace with himself, possessing as he does a complete trust in his Almighty Father. We meet him first in the guise of the Aryan conquerors of India, we see a different side of his character in the Persia of Zoroaster, the Greeks of the Homeric age show him at his height, the integrity of ancient Rome is his, and yet another trait is added in the descriptions of the Edda, where this hero in warfare, profound philosopher, and superb artist reveals himself as the eternal seeker, prepared even to sacrifice an eye on his quest. (Odin). Wherever this superior being appeared, all the blessings of civilisation followed in his wake.

In the explanation of the inevitable fall of the Aryan empires, Rosenberg offers the same theory as his predecessors : the pernicious influence of the conquered races. He renounces the evolutionary conception of history in favour of a static one. In his view the developments of history are conditioned entirely by the struggle between the superior and the inferior races. He shows that this struggle has at all times had the same form—the complete conquest of the aborigines by the Aryan invader, the establishment of a highly developed culture, its gradual disintegration through the influence of the racially inferior elements of the population, and lastly its collapse. History teaches that inferior races have invariably brought about the fall of the superior by spoiling their stock through intermarriage, and breaking their independent spirit by injecting the poison of an alien teaching. The latter weapon is even more deadly than the former. Rosenberg illustrates his point by examples taken from the different periods of history, the most interesting to us, no doubt, being the fate of Greece.

In Greece, the difference between the conception of life of the Aryan conquerors and the aborigines is most marked. On the one hand we have the radiant Gods of Olympus with their beauty of

harmony and their divine indifference to suffering, on the other the dark Gods of the earth, such as Demeter, whose service involves mysterious orgies and occult ecstasies. The Homeric age shows us the Nordic conqueror with as yet unsapped strength. "These deeply pious creations of the Greek spirit show the unbent and pure spiritual life of Nordic man." They are religious confessions of the highest degree, expressions of faith in oneself and in the deities which are conceived with the naiveté of a genius as propitious spirits. "Homer neither dogmatizes nor does he enter upon polemics," says Erwin Rohde ("Psyche"), and in this one sentence he describes the nature of all genuinely Aryan religious feeling. Again this profound student of the Greek spirit says, "Homer has no interest in, nor tendency towards, the mysterious and the ecstatic." This is the mysterious straightness of best race which resounds from every authentic verse of the Iliad and from all the temples of Hellas." (pages 55 and 56).

But only too soon is the self-confidence of the stalwart hero undermined—life is no longer taken for granted. A study of the plays of the great tragedians reveals an increasing tendency to question life and the justice of fate. The gradual development of the critical spirit is not natural to the pure Aryan and can only be accounted for by crossbreeding. The fateful intellectuality which is characteristic of the Age of Pericles proves the influx of racially inferior elements into Greek life. Socrates, however admirable he may have been in his own way, was definitely not an Aryan. His exterior shows that he belongs to the subject race, but even more his mental outlook. All his teaching concerning the relations between virtue and knowledge, the existence of a "good" which can be apprehended by all men, the very quality of his intellect, show traces of inferior origin. For the Aryan, besides being by nature aristocratic, possesses so sure an instinct that he can dispense with reason altogether, which he despises as the stigma of the slave. Once this servile spirit had penetrated Greek culture it was doomed as is every other civilisation in which the racially inferior elements gain the upper hand.

The history of Christian Europe gives an account of the struggle between the Nordic Aryans and the "chaos of peoples." This struggle is still continuing, and it is therefore of supreme importance that statesmen and people alike should be alive to its implications. From the outset the Aryan was faced by a powerful foe who endeavoured to overthrow him by his usual policy of intermarriage and subjection to alien ideals. Wherever the Aryan asserted himself, civilisation flourished, and it is indeed worth noting that during the highly creative age of the Renaissance in Italy it was only the Africanised region of southern Italy which failed to make its contribution. Yet all the time the Aryan was fighting against great odds; for the "chaos of peoples," the racial underworld, had succeeded in building a very powerful organisation for his overthrow: the Catholic Church. This was indeed a most deadly weapon. By preaching an ideal which was so alien to the Aryan, the Church succeeded in injecting the element of doubt into a character by nature not divided in itself. Rosenberg is firmly convinced that the great dogmas of sin and redemption have nothing to do with the real teaching of Christ Who was himself of pure race. "The doctrine of original sin would have been unintelli-

gible to a people of unbroken racial character. For in such a nation dwells a faith in itself and its own will, which it conceives as its destiny. Homer's heroes know as little of "sin" as the ancient Indians, and the Germans of Tacitus and the Saga of Dietrich. On the other hand a constant feeling of sin is a concomitant of physical hybridisation. Racial incest leads to disintegration of character, lack of direction in thought and action, inner insecurity, the feeling as if the whole of existence were the "wages of sin," and not a mysterious and necessary task of self-formation." (page 88).

As Friedrich Nietzsche had done before him in his *Genealogy of Morals*, Rosenberg endeavours to discredit Christianity in the eyes of the world by pointing out origins both degrading and obscure. In his opinion as in that of his master, the Christian ideal, as it has been developed in centuries of Christian civilisation, shows all the signs of the slave's mentality. In complete misunderstanding of spiritual realities he contrasts honour, dignity, self-assertion and pride with charity, humility, self-denial, and submissiveness, and pronounces judgment in favour of the former. Blinded as he is, he sees in the Christian virtues no more than individual efforts at sanctity, which are unable to affect the destinies of nations. In his view, the entire struggle of the Germanic spirit for self-expression is contained in the conflict between the two values of charity and honour. Wherever charity has triumphed, honour has been trampled underfoot, and it is only when honour, conceived in a strictly nationalist sense, is victorious that the spirit of the Aryan German can develop to its full stature. What, Rosenberg asks, has this teaching of charity resulted in? It has resulted in the preservation of all that is "inferior, diseased, crippled, criminal and rotten"; it has undermined the proud dignity of the Nordic peoples and robbed them of their original surety of instinct, thus rendering them a prey to unscrupulous foes.

To free Christianity, if it is to be preserved at all, from all foreign accretions, notably those of Jewish origin, is the foremost task of the responsible leader. The exclusion of the Old Testament and the Pauline Epistles would seem an obvious demand. All study of the Gospels must concentrate on those traits in Christ's character which show him as the dauntless hero, the Mighty One in the temple. The Man of Sorrows, Whose sufferings redeemed the world, does not appeal to the sturdy Germanic spirit. For the German looks upon life as a process of self-education. He is interested in the life of Christ, not in His death. In this Goethe, the greatest of all Germans, is his model. Concentration on the sufferings of Christ betrays a slave's mentality, and has purposely been fostered by the Church and the power-loving hierarchy in order to break the proud independence of the Aryan spirit. In this she has proved all too successful in the past.

Throughout the centuries, according to this reading of history, the battle has been pitched between the liberty-loving Nordic peoples and the overbearing claims of an alien organisation. The "Reformers" from the Albigenses onwards have taken part in it. The rise of National states in Europe marks one of its stages. All the northern States: Great Britain, Holland, the Scandinavian countries and last, not least, Prussia, have taken sides in it. It is only through their efforts that the Aryan stock has survived at all. But the battle is

not yet won. The springs that poison the thought life of the Aryan are still flowing. The danger of racial deterioration through crossbreeding is still imminent. The fate of France affords ample proof that this is so. Her vitality has been undermined through intermarriage with inferior races and nothing can now restore her to her former glory.

Rosenberg does not fail to evolve a scheme for the ordering of the world in conformity with the racial theory. The future of the nations is conceived of in the form of a system of racially pure States. In Europe, under the hegemony of Germany, the Nordic stock will be dominant. A Nordic North America will control the South American Continent. In Asia, the Japanese will hold the key position. The British Empire, governed as it is by a Nordic race, will remain intact! The Jews will be collected in a place especially set apart for them, and Africa may safely be left to her own peoples, once the negroes from America have been repatriated.

In a world of this description the Aryan will be able to devote himself to the task of founding cultures, and all that as yet has been only promise will find fulfilment. The Nordic hero who was thwarted from the very moment he entered history will then develop unimpeded. But as this glorious day has not yet dawned, it is imperative to be watchful and pursue a policy in accordance with the new ideals, especially in the educational field. Mention has already been made of the new interpretation of the Gospel, and Christian teaching is to be modified still further in the spirit of the following quotation. "All German education must be based on the appreciation of the fact that it was not Christianity which brought civilisation to us, but that Christianity owes its lasting values to the Germanic character. . . . Hence the Germanic values of character are the eternal forces by which everything else must be governed." (page 623).

The disastrous results to which such subversive teaching has led in Germany are a matter of common knowledge to-day. In pursuit of so fantastic an ideal as that of the perfect Aryan far-reaching legislative measures have been taken. The efforts to preserve the Aryan from racial contamination by marriage with Jews are crystallized in the Nuernberg Laws of 1935, which prohibit marriage and sexual intercourse between Jews and Aryans even when the Jewish element is limited to one grandparent each. Divorce on grounds of racial incompatibility has been facilitated. The Sterilisation Law of January 1934 has affected the most private sphere of the individual. To these protective measures we must add those taken to ensure both health and fecundity of the Aryan. By the Hereditary Farm Law of 1933, the entail system has been applied to small peasant holdings. These must be owned by Aryans of pure race who are thus bound to the land where, as the new theory teaches, they are more likely to preserve their racial heritage intact. Marriage facilities are granted, and the foundation of large families encouraged. To provide the State with healthy offspring is the primary duty of its citizens who are brought up to realise their responsibilities. Leaders of the Hitler Youth sign pledges that they will fulfil their obligations, and information on racial matters is freely given at the various branches of the Racial Policy Bureau.

This new conception of the world has profoundly affected German

education. In schools a large amount of time is devoted to the new subject. Moreover all others, even the most alien such as science and mathematics, are coloured by it. We have already heard of the new outlook on history. Pupils are taught that the very fact of being an Aryan affects the whole outlook of a person and lends a unique quality to his work. The intellectual and spiritual life of a people is racially conditioned, and as each race apprehends truth differently, there can be no real understanding between the nations of the world. Even where the naturally generous instincts of the Aryan would lead him to seek intercourse with members of other races, where pity might urge the Aryan child to resent the treatment meted out to his Jewish fellow pupil, he must remember that the racial inferior is only waiting to explain such sentiments which, far from being good in themselves, are in reality a sign of weakness. For only those—here an argument of Nietzsche's is resumed—who have risen above their pity are really free to govern a world which has been emptied of God.

In the Twentieth Century Myth the revolt against God which has at all times been a possibility of the human soul, becomes articulate in a form most suited to the present spiritual state of the German people. Their ardent nationalism thwarted by defeat, their pride wounded by humiliation, their faith undermined in centuries of religious disunity, they grasped at a solution, which exalts their nationalism, panders to their pride, and offers them a substitute for genuine faith. They believe, may they be conscious of it or not, that the time has come for man to set himself up as final arbiter of all values in a world, which is the sole reality. In doing so, they hope to attain that freedom and power, which they believe to be rightfully theirs.

This hope has already proved to be vain. Instead of opening up unto him realms of hitherto unrealised possibilities, this new teaching has made man subject to the hardest taskmasters the world has ever known. For the presumptuous attempt of the creature to revolt against his Creator, his yielding to that subtlest of all temptations; *eritis sicut Deus*, must inevitably lead to his complete destruction.
