

The Historical Vision of Chesterbelloc

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A MAN'S VIEW of history is in many ways the surest guide to his entire philosophy. In the same sense, the absence of a view of history in a man tells a great deal about him and about the shallowness of his social understanding. For instance, the criticism has been made, not without some validity, of American conservatism that it is un-historical and founded primarily on economic concepts, whereas the very essence of conservatism should be its historical perspective.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton, and even more so Hilaire Belloc, who was in many ways his tutor in history, can be best appreciated by examining their historical perspective. At first glance that view appears to be a mass of contradictions: Roman, Medievalist, Jacobite, Jacobin, radical, populist, and Catholic. The one label that could definitely not apply to them was Whig, especially Whig in the sense Herbert Butterfield described as:

the tendency in many historians to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present.¹

Perhaps we must continue to describe the Chesterbelloc historical vision negatively by saying what it was not. Accordingly, we ought to discuss the prevailing historical perspective of the time during which Chesterton and Belloc came of age—the nearly half-century that preceded the First World War. This was the age so appropriately labeled by Carlton Hayes as “A Generation of Materialism.”² Technological power and natural and social scientific knowledge seemed to be the keys to the future. Recent political and military

developments saw the victories of the industrialized and efficient northern American states, Prussia, and Piedmont-Sardinia against the south, Austria, France, and the Papal States. The latter four were redolent of at least some of the following attributes: feudalism, agrarianism, and Catholicism. Social Darwinism was in its heyday and seemed confirmed by the material success and political stability of the Nordic and Germanic peoples. The pathetic misery of Celtic and Catholic Ireland—with cartoon-depicted ape-featured revolutionaries—was the classic example of “the lesser breed outside the law.” Having lost its political base, the Papal States, the papacy itself seemed to be as outmoded an anachronism as the Ottoman Sultanate and living on borrowed time, despite the papalist decrees of the first Vatican Council (that significantly was disrupted by the Franco-Prussian War). Orthodox Christianity was reeling before the assaults of secularization and disestablishment, scientific debunking and internal dissolution in the form of higher criticism. Urban alienation and Marxism were de-Christianizing the continental masses. The landed and titled establishment in the Western world had abandoned its romantic but chivalric notions of divine right and noblesse oblige and had instead joined hands with industry and finance to forge the program of nationalist and/or imperialist state-capitalism.

In one of his shrewdest historical insights Chesterton viewed modern history as beginning with the strange friendship of Voltaire and Frederick the Great:

The meeting of these two men, in the mid-winter of eighteenth century scepticism and secularism, is a sort of spiritual marriage which brought forth

the modern world; monstrum horrendum informe ingens cui lumen adeptum. But because that birth was monstrous and evil, and because true friendship and love are not evil, it did not come into the world to create one united thing, but two conflicting things, which between them were to shake the world to pieces. From Voltaire the Latins were to learn a raging scepticism. From Frederick the Teutons were to learn a raging pride.

Chesterton noted how:

these two great sceptics met on the level, on the dead solid plain, as dull as the Baltic Plain; on the basis that there is no God who is concerned with men any more than with mites in cheese.

They agreed, but they also disagreed, and their quarrel ended:

by launching two European forces against each other, both rooted in the same unbelief. Voltaire said in effect, "I will show you that the sneers of a sceptic can produce a Revolution and a Republic and everywhere the overthrowing of thrones." And Frederick answered, "And I will show you that this same sneering scepticism can be used as easily to resist Reform, let alone Revolution; that scepticism can be the basis of support for the most tyrannical of thrones, for the brute domination of a master over his slaves."³

In other words the world of the youth of Chesterbelloc was torn between the faithless realpolitik of the authoritarian regimes and a revolutionary or reformist scepticism that championed mankind but had no love for individual people. Chesterton's childlike clarity of perception and decency enabled him to see through and stand on their head the fashionable intellectual absolutes of his age and ultimately make his way to Catholicism with its quite different historical perspective.

Starting from a nineteenth century radical liberal perspective, with all of its little England, anti-privilege, disestablishment, middle-class premises, he quickly

perceived that the moderns had become sceptical of general ideas in themselves. Old liberals had wanted freedom for heresies so that cosmic truths might be discovered, whereas "The modern idea is that cosmic truth is so unimportant that it cannot matter what any one says." The abandonment of general principles in the age of science and efficiency has brought forth "a race of small men in politics" and "in the arts." "Our modern politicians claim the colossal license of Caesar and the Superman," but "claim that they are too practical to be pure and too patriotic to be moral," and "our new artistic philosophers call for the same moral license, for a freedom to wreck heaven and earth with their energy."⁴

Getting at the heart of much of the modern temper, Chesterton noted that it "holds certain dogmas so strongly that it does not know that they are dogmas." He added that certain progressives who would consider it dogmatic "to assume the perfection or improvement of man in another world," do not think it dogmatic "to assume the perfection or improvement of man in this world; though that idea of progress is quite as unproved as the idea of immortality, and from a rationalist view quite as improbable."⁵

Chesterton was a radical liberal democrat who respected rather than pitied the common man, and who detected a patronizing spirit among many progressives of his time especially those supported by the wealthy. Reforms and regulations aimed at social improvement usually worked to restrict the ordinary pleasures and pattern of life of the common man and were usually financed by him. Chesterton's democratic populism enabled him to grasp certain everyday fundamentals about humanity that were reflective of human experience from time immemorial, but which fashionable theorists blindly disregarded. Alas, in such a way his democratic radicalism would emerge as conservatism in the most important of things.

Consider his comments on the family in his pre-World War One essays, "What's

Wrong with the World”:

. . . this institution of the home is the one anarchist institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside the State . . . in most normal cases of family joys and sorrows, the State has no mode of entry. It is not so much that the law should not interfere, as that the law cannot . . . The State has no tool delicate enough to deracinate the rooted habits and tangled affections of the family; the two sexes, whether happy or unhappy, are glued together too tightly for us to get the blade of a legal penknife in between them. The man and woman are one flesh—yes, even when they are not one spirit.

As for divorce, “the overwhelming mass of mankind has not believed in freedom in this matter, but rather in a more or less lasting tie.” While there have been differences as to the occasion when that bond might be loosened, all accept the idea of the bond or tie, which is “a thing not normally to be sundered.” He went on to state that:

this human belief in a sexual bond rests on a principle of which the modern mind has made a very inadequate study The principle is this: that in everything worth having, even in every pleasure, there is a point of pain or tedium that must be survived, so that the pleasure may revive and endure.⁶

But modern sophists and pedagogues never interest themselves in what is most important, such as the ancient quest of the ordinary man for a private home. As a result of “the bleak and blinding hail of scepticism” to which he has been so long subjected, the common man “for the first time in history” has begun to “doubt the object of his wandering on the earth.” Thus, the future has, in England at least, “always been the ally of tyranny. The ordinary Englishman has been duped out of his old possessions, such as they were, and always in the name of progress.”⁷

The futurists of Chesterton’s time feared the past because of its richness in “high ideals, unfulfilled and sometimes abandon-

ed.” The futurists had a limiting perspective, thinking “that we have got all the good that can be got out of the ideas of the past.” But Chesterton held “we have not got all the good out of them” and maybe not even “any of the good,” and what is needed is “complete freedom for restoration as well as revolution.” Just as a human-made instrument, a clock, can be put back, “society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed.”⁸ How sterling an expression of conservative radicalism, how eloquent a plea for a return to roots, to first principles.

The historical intuitions that emerged from Chesterton’s philosophical and psychological perspective would be transformed into a complete historical vision by his contact with Hilaire Belloc. This unlikely twosome, who came together as part of the pro-Boer camp in Edwardian England, were drawn to each other by their dislike of most of the other pro-Boers, or rather their dislike of the premises of the other pro-Boers—many of whom were pacifist, humanitarian, and teetotaler among other things. Unlike the Little Englander Chesterton, Belloc came with considerable historical baggage, as would befit a descendant of radical Unitarians, French republican-nationalists, and Irish Wild Geese.

Large elements of that vision might not stand the test of time and ought best be understood as a reaction to the prevailing orthodoxies of that era as well as Belloc’s own maverick experience as a Catholic French republican at Balliol during the high noon of imperialism, Germanophilia, and neo-Hegelianism. In addition, because he failed to be made a fellow at Oxford, Belloc did not have the subsidized leisure with which to produce historical works replete with all the scholastic appurtenances. Instead, his canvas had to be covered quickly with broad strokes. But he was concerned more with general popular attitudes than with specialized or original research. Indeed, as Herbert Butterfield noted, the specialist researcher himself usually slides into a Whiggish, anti-Catholic, progressivist historical perspec-

tive when either “visualizing the general course of history” or when “relating his special piece of work to the larger historical story.”⁹ It was precisely that prevalent Whig historical attitude that Belloc, as an historian, and Chesterton, more as a philosopher-theologian, challenged.

The most celebrated, and misunderstood, statement of Belloc’s historical vision was his book, *Europe and the Faith*, which appeared in 1920, although an earlier version appeared in the Paulist Fathers’ *Catholic World* and in other journals. The basic thesis of his work was:

that this our European structure, built upon the noble foundations of classical antiquity, was formed through, exists by, is consonant to, and will stand only in the mould of, the Catholic Church.

Europe will return to the Faith, or she will perish. The Faith is Europe. And Europe is the Faith.¹⁰

Nineteenth century liberals or Whigs and their contemporary heirs would read that as an apologia for their arch enemy, the forces of throne and altar. Yet, as sociologist Robert Nisbet indicated in his *Quest for Community*, the liberal societies that succeeded disestablishment of religion continued to rely on the inherited capital of the Christian social order.¹¹ The endurance of these societies required the general acceptance of basic Christian premises about the nature of man—premises impregnated in the European consciousness by the Catholic Church. In the twentieth century there has been an interesting correlation between the popular abandonment of those premises and the abandonment of an older liberalism that emphasized the limitation of the power of the state. Ethical relativism and philosophical scepticism have been accompanied by a growth in statism whereby the political process is regarded as the ultimate determiner of human values.

Understandably, contemporary statist liberalism is suspicious of Chesterton. What is perplexing is Catholic embarrassment with them, especially Belloc who, if anything, is blamed for ruining an otherwise delightful Chesterton. Christopher

Hollis, for instance writing in the earlier stages of post-Vatican II enthusiasm, could assert:

Belloc had the more dominant character and on certain topics has, as it were, captured Chesterton and dictated to him opinions that were not Chesterton’s own in fields in which Chesterton was not competent.¹²

Furthermore, Hollis asserts, were Chesterton alive in the 1960’s when papal style had changed he would in religious controversy “have allowed full play to his natural genial kindness.”¹³

Paradoxically, while professional students of European history have abandoned more uninhibited anti-Catholicism, partly because of a positivist lack of *weltanschauung*, Catholics are embarrassed by any suggestion of apologetics or triumphalism, even to the point where younger Catholics are either ignorant of Church history or expound the most fundamental anti-Catholic biases in historical commentary.

Some today might argue that Belloc’s identity of Europe with the faith implied racist exclusivism. To expect Belloc to be so different from his own age as to have a sensitivity to a 1970’s or a 1980’s definition of racism would be anachronistic. Moreover, it would still be inaccurate to label his historical view as racist. Racism is essentially materialistic and deterministic—two characteristics completely repugnant to both Belloc and Chesterton. Belloc’s point was not that the European ethnic composition is inherently disposed to Catholicism and its values, but the other way around: Catholicism engendered certain values in the people of Europe from which their civilization, Christendom, developed, thereby giving a civilizational unity to a heretofore purely geographic entity. To the degree that Europe becomes less Christian, the less she remains a distinct civilization, becoming again a geographic entity possessing only temporarily an economic, technical and material unity and superiority.

Consider again the basic theme of both

Europe and the Faith and Belloc's *The Crisis of Civilization*, a book that grew out of his lectures at Fordham in 1937.¹⁴ He argued that the political, and social institutions and heritage of ancient Rome, especially its note of universality, was saved, revived, and refined by the Church rather than, as some historians suggested, being undone by the Church. The resulting Christendom or Catholic Europe subsequently withstood a siege from the forces of both Islam and northern barbarism and emerged in full blossom in the high Middle Ages.

Tragically, the unity of Christendom was shattered by the Reformation. The socio-political implications of some of the reformist theological doctrines and the breakdown of the political unity of Christendom enabled individual states to assert absolute sovereignty, allowed political power to service the interests of wealth, and shattered the corporate spirit and institutions of European society.

Whig-liberal history celebrates the breakthrough in scientific knowledge, technological advancement and wealth which followed the Reformation. But what must also be recognized are such unpleasant aftermaths as the assertion of absolute power by the Leviathan state, that is, the secular version of the Reformation's Divine Right of Kings, and the claim of the new age of science that man is the measure and master of all things. The full implications of the latter claim have been brought home most clearly to the twentieth century post-modern man, who, appreciating the possibility of nuclear holocaust and environmental impoverishment, is no longer so satisfied and confident in political efficiency and scientific knowledge.¹⁵

The Chesterbelloc view of history naturally was not confined to the past, but, as befits students of the past, sought to interpret the contemporary and near future eras, especially with regard to the prospects of religion and the Church. Along these lines Belloc's thoughtful book of the late 1920's *Survivals and New Arrivals*, examined various ideological and cultural challenges to the Church. The old assaults, which he believed were becoming dated in most

areas even by the 1920's, included the fundamentalist scripture criticism of the Church as a deviation from primitive Christianity, the Social-Darwinist attempt to correlate the poverty and underdevelopment of the Catholic world with the Church itself, and the rationalist-empiricist refusal to accept any knowledge not based on scientific measurement.

New and more serious challenges were nationalism, anti-clericalism, and what he called "the modern mind." Nationalism was that claim for absolute loyalty to the national state in all matters so that ultimately "the nation is made an end in itself." Nationalism he saw as "a sort of murder of Christendom" which "interferes with the universality of Catholicism" and "lends to national ends functions which are essentially religious, such as the teaching of morals, the presentation of true history, . . . (and) above all the general education of the young."¹⁶

Anti-clericalism is a force arising in predominantly Catholic societies which challenges the assumption by the Church that she ought to influence the whole of such societies with Catholic morality being reflected in the laws of such societies and the Church itself being "the established and authoritative religion of that society."¹⁷

By the "Modern Mind" Belloc meant the quest for intellectual fashionableness and a doctrinaire dismissal of hypothesis challenging or disparate from the latest authority. The "Modern Mind" was the "worship of humanity" and held as the good that "which makes men happier here — or looks as though it might." The "Modern Mind" consisted of:

the dregs of that too simple creed launched or confirmed by the French philosophers of the Encyclopedia. It is the dregs of that German monism and that German Pantheism which so much effected the nineteenth century. . . . It is the dregs of fatigue in an over-complex civilization.¹⁸

How have these three challenges to the Church fared? As for nationalism, soon after Belloc wrote it reached its foulest

depths in the Western world. Now, however, nationalism, as a kind of religion, seems to have receded in the West, although naturally not in the socialist or third worlds. As for anti-clericalism, the Church seems to have accepted its premises, as not only Catholic establishments but even the reflection of Catholic morality both personal and social seem to be evaporating from what had been Catholic societies. This is not the occasion for a theoretical discussion of what has now become only an academic question: whether the Church should be politically established. However, from the perspective of all recorded human history, and indeed even from the perspective of much of the contemporary world, religious disestablishment and its implications of philosophical neutrality on the part of the engines of authority in a society has been the rare exception.¹⁹ Today, for instance, one need only look at the Islamic world as well as at the established religion of Marxism in the Communist world.

Belloc boldly insisted that when laws are not founded on Catholic morals “they will be anti-Catholic. It is inevitable.”²⁰ Traditional Catholic teachings on property and the family were the universal hallmark of Western society. Today they are no more, as neutrality seems to turn inevitably to hostility. How rapid the jump from religious disestablishment to divorce legislation to free abortion to compulsory sterilization! How much more rapid if the Church is inhibited or prohibited from proclaiming its will on its own members!

Nationalism and anti-clericalism are advanced by the absolute state, which implies not so much a form of government as a claim by the modern state for “complete independence from all authority other than its own.” The greatest assertion of modern absolutism is the state’s claim “to teach what it will to every child in the community, that is, to form the whole mind of a nation on its own despotic fiat.”²¹ That decisive instrument of the modern state—compulsory universal instruction—was the *bête noire* of Belloc who saw the state school system as the maker of the me-

chanically uniform “Modern Mind.” The schools, along with the popular press, were in those days the foremost promoters of not just religious ill-effects but also a deadening uniformity in cultural matters.²² Imagine if Belloc had lived to see the age of television.

On the horizon, coming after these challenges of nationalism, anti-clericalism and the modern mind was their inevitable successor, what Belloc labeled “neo-paganism.” Paganism is natural religion without benefit of revelation. The ancient paganism was admirable in many ways and its institutions and attitudes reflected organic growth and traditional development. In a sense it was like mankind climbing a hill up toward revelation. The new paganism is the reverse path downhill from the Catholic world and reflects corruption and decay. When Belloc wrote, the new paganism was still just an arrival, manifesting itself in “some few deliberately detestable buildings and sculptures in our towns, . . . books, still somewhat eccentric, portraying every vice; the forced and still novel apology in speech for every evil of every kind.” These were still just isolated insults. Belloc was not sure he would like to see the thing full blown, but by the next generation—our age—it would be mature and feature “a positive co-ordination and organized affirmation of the repulsive and the vile.”²³

Neo-paganism is driven by two forces: appetite and despair. Appetite, or more euphemistically “self-expression,” calls for complete license in sexual matters, taste, social conduct, canons of beauty in verse, prose and the plastic arts. Reverence for age, child-parent relationships and the respect for property are broken through. On the other hand despair leads to fatalism and an acceptance of determinism. The rejection of free will or responsibility will be followed by increasingly restrictive legislation on man, especially in his economic actions and in the raising of his family. Symptomatic of this might be the increasing state efforts at curbing smoking simultaneous with the uninhibited expansion of the pornography industry.

Many Christian thinkers visualize a

shrinking of the faithful in the future to a very small isolated remnant, but to rely on such is both shortsighted and contradictory to the mission to spread the Word to all men. As Christopher Dawson noted:

Unless there is a revival or restoration of Christian culture—of the social life of the Christian community—modern civilization will become secularist in a more positive and aggressive way than it is today. And in a Godless civilization of this kind it will be far more difficult for the individual Christian to exist and practice his religion than it has ever been before, even in ages of persecution. . . . today the very existence of the family as a social unit is threatened by the all persuasive influence of the state and the secular mass culture. Yet without the Christian family there can be no Christian community life and indeed no church in the traditional sense of the word.

In short, Church membership implies belief in a Christian social order. To continue with Dawson:

It is the intellectual and social inertia of Christians that is the real obstacle to a restoration of Christian culture. . . . It is the will, not the power, that is lacking.²⁴

A similar expression of concern about the spiritual disorientation of modernity appeared almost a half century ago in the spiritual-intellectual autobiography of a man who acknowledged special debt to Chesterton and to Belloc, in particular, in assisting him through the historical approach to the acceptance of Catholicism. That man was the late and distinguished professor of history at Fordham, Ross J. S. Hoffman. Amidst the discouraging and faithless temper of the modern Western world Hoffman was still able to sense that:

There is still a certain Christian flavor even in those parts of western society most nearly denuded of the Faith—a

mould of mind, an ethical habit, —still a spark that may be kindled into flame anew. If Catholics will be wholly loyal to their own timeless principles and—without timidity or apology, but with all the militant confidence that should flow from a realization that they and they alone represent the one continuous mind and central historic tradition of our civilization—go forward to grapple with the modern world, assimilate what is good in it, and order all of it, then the remaining spark may indeed be fanned into such a flame that the sun itself would be paled.

Ross Hoffman's ultimate confidence was prompted by his realization of how:

Time and time again the story can be told of the Church going, like her Divine Master, down into the grave only to rise more gloriously alive and call new saints and heroes to her banner. And I do believe that we today are witnessing anew that oft-repeated miracle of resurrection, watching the dawn of another age of challenge, war and conquest. Out from the ashes of a dying civilization she is rising to another life and bidding us once more, as so often in the past, to enlist for great adventure, the high adventure of reconquering the world and "restoring all things in Christ."²⁵

How appropriate today that that renewal should appear to emanate from that so often beleaguered and tortured nation—Poland—that had been the partitioned winnings of the enlightened despotism of the eighteenth century, but which today has by spiritual commitment paralyzed the engines of Marxist totalitarianism and has given to the Church and the world one of her own most heroic sons to carry the extremely burdensome cross of Peter. Belloc asserted in the dark days of the late 1930's that "the test is Poland." How true even today, and the test will be surmounted not by the efficiency of modern weaponry, but by a depth of courage and spirituality against which the materialism of East and West will be paralyzed.

- ¹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. v.
- ² Carlton J. H. Hayes, *A Generation of Materialism 1871-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941).
- ³ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The End of the Armistice* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), pp. 30-32.
- ⁴ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Heretics* (London: John Lane, 1904), p. 290.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ⁶ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Whats Wrong with the World* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956) pp. 38-39.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-55.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁹ Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation*, p. 15.
- ¹⁰ Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (London: Burns & Oates, 1962; first published, 1920), p. 192.
- ¹¹ Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 225-226, 243-244.
- ¹² Christopher Hollis, *The Mind of Chesterton* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1967), p. 101.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ¹⁴ Hilaire Belloc, *The Crisis of Civilization* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1937).
- ¹⁵ Thoughtful commentaries on this matter appear in Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), John A. Lukacs, *The Passing of the Modern Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), and E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
- ¹⁶ Hilaire Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929), pp. 141-145.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ¹⁹ Insightful comments on the implications of religion and ethical neutrality appear in James Hitchcock, "Competing Ethical Systems," *Imprimis*, Vol. 10 (April, 1981), No. 4.
- ²⁰ Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, p. 167.
- ²¹ Hilaire Belloc, *Essays of a Catholic* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), p. 83.
- ²² Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, pp. 214-220.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.
- ²⁴ Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 41-42, 46.
- ²⁵ Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Restoration* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1934), pp. 204-205.

Philosophy and Realpolitik

KURT GLASER

KURT RIEZLER (1882-1955) was in many ways a philosopher's philosopher: his *magnum opus* was a study of the pre-Socratic thinker Parmenides. As a German public servant, however, he often turned up where things were happening, and on at least one occasion escaped by the skin of his teeth. Riezler was a German patriot and did his best to shape a theory and practice of politics that would save the Fatherland from disaster. While many of his long-range judgments proved sound, especially his ranking of national priorities early in this century, his theories did not provide firm doctrine for crisis management. Nor did he ever come convincingly to grips with the problem of nationalism in relation to political structure.

Wayne C. Thompson has provided a dispassionate and critical account of Riezler's public service—in the Foreign Office, the Reich Chancellery, and President Ebert's office until 1920, and as *Kurator* of the University of Frankfurt from 1927 to 1933.* The book is to that extent a political biography, but it makes no attempt to give a rounded account of Riezler's life or more than fragmentary sketches of his character. His wife Käthe is mentioned in four sentences: as daughter of the impressionist painter Max Liebermann, as "cute" (by ex-Chancellor Bülow), as an adviser (at her husband's request) to Frau Ebert on how a President's wife should dress for state occasions, and (almost as an afterthought) as having died in 1952. One would have liked to learn more about Kurt Riezler as a person and about whatever influence Käthe might have had on him; it is clear that Thompson admires him even though he does not hesitate to call Riezler's judgments

wrong on several occasions. Behind his apparent complexity and at times seeming vacillation—for instance on what to do about Russia—there was always a rigid standard of personal integrity. This integrity impelled Riezler to resign from the Foreign Office in protest against German signature of the Versailles Treaty—even though non-signature meant invasion and continued British blockade to the point of starvation.

Riezler's education was typical of the pre-World War I German academic elite. They were snobbishly idealistic, tended to eschew politics, and accepted social stratification as natural. Riezler's classical studies and his prize-winning dissertation on the economy of ancient Greece pointed him toward a university career, but after some travel he became foreign affairs editor of the semiofficial *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. His performance there led to a position in the press service of the Foreign Office, which also served the Reich Chancellery; he became a close advisor of Chancellor Bülow and his successor Bethmann Hollweg. Riezler summarized his political ideas in *The Necessity of the Impossible* (1913) and *Principles of Contemporary World Politics*, published under a pseudonym in 1914. The highest social entity, he felt, was the *Volk*, defined not only in terms of language, but as a "unity of personality." Its cultural forms were "direction signs to God."

The state, Riezler considered, was the instrumentality of the *Volk*—a thesis that set him apart from West European political thinkers, whose main categories are the state and the individual. Nations, that is politically organized *Völker*, are naturally hostile: nation as a process needs a hostile environment. This view of things was not, however, a charter for unbridled expansion, which in Germany's case would lead to an unprofitable war. Riezler's critics ac-

* *In The Eye of the Storm: Kurt Riezler and the Crises of Modern Germany*, by Wayne C. Thompson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), xi + 301 pp. \$17.95.