

**A MANUAL OF THE HISTORY  
OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF EUROPE  
AND ITS COLONIES.**

UND DAS BAND DER STAATEN WARDGEHOHEN,  
UND DIE ALTEN FORMEN STÜRZEN EIN !

SCHILLER,

THE BOND OF THE NATIONS WAS BROKEN, AND THE ANCIENT EDIFICE  
OVERTHROWN !

# A MANUAL

OF THE

## HISTORY OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

OF

## EUROPE AND ITS COLONIES,

FROM ITS FORMATION AT THE CLOSE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY,  
TO ITS RE-ESTABLISHMENT UPON THE FALL  
OF NAPOLEON.

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## TO THE READER.

THE very satisfactory account which the author himself has given of the plan and execution of his work, renders it quite unnecessary for the translator to say any thing upon that head; and the very fact of the work having passed through five editions in Germany, and having been translated into French, Polish, Swedish, and Dutch, is quite a sufficient apology, if indeed any were necessary, for presenting it to the English reader. He has therefore only to notice two matters connected with the translation, which may seem to require some explanation. The first is the use of the word *States-System*, which has been adopted throughout the work, and which, though perhaps not strictly English, seemed to him the only term by which he could adequately express the author's meaning. The second matter refers to the work in general, which, not having been all translated or revised by the same hand, may, it is feared, present a somewhat motley appearance to the nice and critical reader. Should this be found to be the case, the publisher humbly hopes for his indulgence, the more especially as he verily believes the sense of the original is in all cases faithfully given.

*Oxford, December, 1833.*



## PREFACE

TO THE FIRST AND SECOND EDITIONS.

AMONG the remarkable phenomena which the general history of mankind presents to our notice, that of the European States-System, or confederation of states, during the last three centuries, is the greatest, and, at the same time, with reference to ourselves, the most important. The states-systems which were formed in ancient Greece, and in Italy during the middle ages, are far inferior, both as regards their power and their extent; and though the Macedonian system, which arose out of the division of Alexander's universal monarchy, may, perhaps, be compared with it in this respect as well as in some others, it still altogether failed to attain to such an exalted degree of maturity and refinement. But it possesses this superior importance for us, not merely on account of the personal interest we take in its transactions, but also because we have by far the best acquaintance with the mode of its formation, and the various changes and vicissitudes it has undergone.

Whoever undertakes to write the history of any particular states-system, (by which we mean the union of several contiguous states, resembling each other in their manners, religion, and degree of social improvement, and cemented together by a reciprocity of interests,) ought, above all things, to possess a right conception of its general character. In the system of European states, it is obvious this character must be sought for in its internal freedom, or, in other words, the mutual independence of its members, however disproportionate they may otherwise be in regard to physical power. It is this feature which distinguishes

such a system from one of an opposite class, that is, where an acknowledged preponderance of one of the members exists.

An historian, therefore, who proposes to exhibit the various changes which have occurred in the reciprocal connexions of these states, must consequently regard them as a society of independent individuals, variously related to each other. A peculiar use of modern phrase, indeed, might designate such states by the name of mere machines (an application of the term, which, in Europe at least, is contradicted by the variety of the constitutions); but if it be impossible to discipline an army into a mere machine, (and if this could be done none would ever retreat,) can it be less difficult in the case of civil society?

By adopting these fundamental notions, as the point from which he was to set out, the field of the author's investigations was necessarily very much enlarged. He could not, therefore, limit his range to the mere external working of the machine; but was obliged rather to penetrate its hidden principles of action, in order to detect the secret springs which supplied a continuous motion to the whole. In every society of moral beings, and consequently, therefore, in every society or union of states, certain general ideas, from which the leading motives of conduct originate, will of necessity prevail, without there being any occasion to assume the fact of a generally adopted system of action. These ideas, however, agreeably to their nature, cannot possibly remain unaltered, for the very reason that the leading minds do not. For the same reason it is absurd to require that any cabinet should always act upon one uniform system, though undoubtedly every judicious government must act upon certain well established principles. To have a correct apprehension, therefore, of the ruling ideas of each age, and to exhibit the particular maxims arising from them, will be the first requisite of the historian. But further, all the members of such a system of states have, each of them, their peculiar character, and their own mode of existence and action, which again are subject to change; how then could a general history of the system be properly executed, without the revolutions in the most powerful of the separate states being noticed?

These remarks will serve to vindicate the plan adopted by the author. It was his intention not merely to furnish a sketch of the



various revolutions brought about in the political relations of modern Europe, together with the several events springing out of them, though this would certainly form the most important part of his undertaking ; but also to exhibit, at the same time, their foundation in the prevailing ideas of each age, and as well with regard to the particular leading states, considered as prominent actors in the system, to illustrate the formation of their respective characters and consequent modes of action. With this view the sections relating to the separate states have been introduced, which, however, it would be a total misapplication of the author's plan, to regard as an attempt to furnish a particular and special detail, while he merely proposed a general history of the states in question. The former very well-defined object was the one which he has principally kept in view. That the author, however, has also noticed the colonies, their progressive improvement, and their influence upon Europe itself, can scarcely require any justification. Considering their vast and increasing commercial and political importance, a general sketch like the present, which did not also comprise some account of the colonies, would be extremely limited and imperfect. The sections relating to this portion of the work will, it is apprehended, be the more favourably received, owing to the absence of any other satisfactory treatise on the subject.

From what has been already said, it will be evident that the author has not spared considerable pains in the execution of his design ; and a minute examination of each section will, it is hoped, supply additional proofs of his care. It has been his constant endeavour, as well to preserve the general view of the whole, as to represent each individual subject in the light in which, after deliberate study, it appeared to his own mind ; in fact, he wished to exhibit on each subject the results of his own reflection, with the greatest brevity consistent with the nature of his work, and thus to supply the lovers of history with a general outline. That this attempt, owing not merely to the great number, but also the great variety of the subjects treated of, required a long and varied course of preliminary study, he may confidently venture to assert. Who indeed, without an intimate acquaintance with the whole circle of political sciences, can engage to write the history of modern Europe ? The author is not ignorant of the objections com-

monly urged against the mere scholar's presuming to decide upon the policy of cabinets; he has himself felt the necessity of preserving a lively sense for practical politics, by keeping entirely remote from all speculation; and while he has not denied himself that proper degree of freedom which a judgment upon past events requires, he at the same time believes that he has not been wanting in that proper respect, which is due to the memory of those great men who have played the chief parts in this enlarged drama.

While the author was thus employed in elaborating the history of the European states-system, he himself saw it overthrown in its most essential parts. Its history was in fact written upon its ruins. When was such a work ever executed under similar circumstances? While, however, he has confined the range of his history so as to exclude the times immediately past, and not yet ripe for historical narration,<sup>1</sup> he yet hopes to have preserved a full view of the whole; in doing which he was perhaps favoured by his personal situation. Having been brought up in a very small, but happy free state, he passed the years of his manhood under a mild monarchical form of government, and was thus enabled to bring to the study of history, some practical ideas, simple in their nature, but the result of his own observation; which, though perhaps dim for others, have served him as loadstars in his voyage through its territory. It only remains for him to say, that while he does not disown a certain degree of respect for the country to which he belongs, yet as he has never been a citizen of any of the principal states of Europe, he could never entertain a partiality for any one of them in particular.

It was therefore the author's endeavour to pass nothing more than a human judgment upon human affairs. He never contemplated raising himself to that more elevated point of view from which our speculative historians, looking down upon the European system of states as constituting merely a link in the great chain of events, affect to measure the progress of mankind by referring to this standard. Those who have looked from this lofty point of view, have assured him that they could discover little more than what might already be seen from below; that

<sup>1</sup> The two first editions only reach down to the establishment of the French imperial throne, in 1804, see p. 350.

their prospect in one direction, that is, towards the past, was equally confined; while in the other, that is, when they attempted to penetrate the future, they could see nothing but clouds, through which some doubtful forms were with difficulty to be discerned. It was, they thought, a place of visions. The author, however, considered it his first duty to remain on the firm ground of history, and owing to the vast extent of his subject, he regarded the possibility of his being able to do so, as a most essential advantage.

A numerous society of states, subsisting together under long and varied forms of relationship, improves and degenerates just as any great mass of individuals would do under similar circumstances. The evils, which brought with them the downfall of the European States-System, chiefly proceeded, as in fact its advantages also did, from the very circumstance of its being a system. To lay before the reader the causes which prepared the final catastrophe, certainly formed a part of the author's design; he has not however the arrogance to pretend that the results must necessarily have been just as they are here described. No eye, indeed, but that of the Eternal, can see through the whole maze of history. But perhaps the modest inquirer, in the representation here given of the past, at the same time that it may serve to illustrate the present, will also be able to discover the prospect of a greater and more glorious future; when, instead of the confined European States-System of the last centuries, he beholds, in consequence of the diffusion of European culture over remote quarters of the globe, and the flourishing colonies beyond the ocean, the elements of a more free and comprehensive system, which shall include the states of the whole earth, and is even now rising in its strength.—The fertile theme for the historian of future generations!

*Göttingen, Feb. 5, 1809.*

POSTSCRIPT TO THE THIRD, FOURTH, AND  
FIFTH EDITIONS.

WHEN the two former editions of the present work appeared, in the years 1809 and 1811, the re-establishment of order in Europe, such as we have now lived to see, was so far beyond the bounds of probability, that the most sanguine could scarcely venture to hope for such an event. In those gloomy days, the remembrance of happier times, and of the principles on which the policy of Europe rested, was not perhaps without advantage; and that to preserve this was the author's aim, his work itself will best show. He would venture to hope that he has not altogether failed in attaining this object; and accordingly, as in the first instance he was obliged to end his labours with the overthrow of the European States-System, so now he is fortunate in being able to subjoin the history of its restoration. In the third and fourth editions, not only was every thing, contained in the two former, thoroughly revised, but also, owing to the disclosure of additional sources of information, certain parts, as for example, those relating to the British East India Company, and the free states of South America, etc., were completely re-written. In what way indeed could the writer earn additional praise, placed as he is in a situation which the approbation of his contemporaries has conferred upon him, than by endeavouring to perfect his work to the utmost of his ability. His earnest request therefore is, that it may be received in the same sense which he has intended it should be, namely, as a History of the European States-System, founded upon one great principle, that is, its internal freedom, (as is clearly and definitively expressed in the very commencement of the Introduction,) and consequently, notwithstanding all its internal variety, as one intimate, though unconstrained and connected whole, it is only when contemplated in this light, that it can be properly estimated. He makes this remark with particular reference to the continuation, and last period, which can only be appreciated, when read and examined in connexion with the

earlier parts of the work, and as forming a continuation of them. The author had already, in what had gone before, expressed his own principles and sentiments so plainly, that no other mode of treating the subject could have been expected. He believed it to be the most correct way of viewing that extraordinary man, who requires to be so often mentioned in this part of the work, and who, in fact, now belongs to general history, to consider him simply as an instrument in the hands of Providence, employed for other and higher purposes than his own; and for this reason alone it was incumbent upon the author, when speaking of him and the nation which suffered itself to be so abused, not to lose sight of that becoming and dignified tone which, independently of the motive assigned, is also the imperious duty of an historian.

Of the third edition, with the continuation, only one solitary review has come to the author's knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The suggestions there made with respect to certain points in his work, have not been disregarded; two or three others are of a general nature, and in reply to these it will be necessary to enter into some explanation. It is objected, that a sufficient degree of attention has not been paid to the 'domestic life of the people.' The expression here used is somewhat indefinite; it includes constitution, laws, customs, etc. Now in writing a history of the European States-System, these subjects could only so far come under consideration, as they exercised an influence upon it. And, in fact, it is precisely for this reason that the author has inserted occasional sections relating to the individual states, in which he believes he has noticed every thing that was absolutely necessary, without descending into particular details. He is fully sensible that in this case, the great difficulty consists in knowing how much and how little to say; but still, as the work now stands, he is not without hopes of having succeeded in preserving a just mean between the two. He must leave the reader to decide whether he has not

<sup>3</sup> In the HERMES, part iv. for the year 1819, p. 259—285.—The fact of the author's work having been translated into the several languages of France, Holland, Sweden, Poland, and the United States, would seem to furnish a satisfactory proof that the principles of practical politics set forth by him, are regarded as correct by those nations. He is also informed that a new translation is in progress in England. [The present one.]

given with sufficient clearness and precision, as far indeed as it was possible to do so in a Manual like the present, the prevailing ideas at the different periods, which determined the character of their practical policy; as well as the great moral causes which co-operated to the same end. He was as little obliged to write a general history of modern times, as to detail that of particular states; on the contrary, he has merely fulfilled the engagement implied in the title-page, of giving what he calls a history of the European States-System, of which so few persons seem to have formed any clear and adequate notion.—Another fault which the reviewer finds with the work, respects its division. According to his view of the subject, it should have been divided into two periods only, that is to say, into ‘modern, and very recent, history,’ the latter period commencing with the French Revolution. In reply to this objection, the author might perhaps rest his justification on the bare fact, that it is a matter of perfect indifference whether he divided his work, as he has done, into three, or into two periods; because the last actually does commence with the very point of time suggested by the Reviewer. But he willingly confesses that the proposed alteration is entirely at variance with his plan, and the particular views he has adopted. It is unnecessary to remind the reader that the work must be considered as a whole. The third leading period is as intimately connected with the second, as the second is with the first. To separate the most modern time from that which is less so, appears much too premature; such a distinction may perhaps be allowed to the writers of the twentieth century, but would be just as improper in those of the first quarter of the nineteenth, as it would be to commence the history of modern times with the Reformation. A third objection still remains to be considered, which is, that the last period has not been executed with the same degree of success as the two first. Upon this point, however, it certainly does not become the author to express any opinion; he can only observe, that he has anticipated the probability of such an objection being made. That it is impossible to write the history of one’s own times as satisfactorily as that of the past, the author has most sensibly felt during the course of his labours; for what reader does not bring to the perusal his own views, his own opinions,

his own feelings? and what writer can expect to satisfy them all? The author, therefore, must rest contented with having exhibited the events which came under review, according to the political principles which he regards as immutable, and which predominate from the first to the last page of his work. This, in fact, is the impartiality he has endeavoured to attain, and no other.

In preparing the present edition, nothing has been overlooked, which, in addition to the continuation, might give it that degree of correctness, as well in regard to the impression, as the determination of the several dates, which legitimate criticism can possibly require. Both indeed have been submitted to the most scrupulous revision. The author considered it to be so much the more incumbent on him, because, as he is now in the seventieth year of his age, the present edition is, in all probability, the last that will ever proceed from his hands.

Let him then express a hope, that the dearly bought experience of recent times may not be without its use for the future! May no possessor of arbitrary power again seek to fetter the liberties of Europe! May the nations show themselves worthy of recovered freedom; and their rulers not be surprised when they see that its enjoyment is not altogether free from abuse!

GÖTTINGEN,

*April 10, 1819 and 1822, and Feb. 5, 1830.*