

German Historical Institute
London

THE 1992 ANNUAL LECTURE

Protestant Germany through British
Eyes: A Complex Victorian
Encounter

by
Keith Robbins

Keith Robbins is Principal of the University of Wales, Lampeter. He was previously Professor of Modern History at the universities of Bangor and Glasgow. He is a former President of the Historical Association and Editor of *History*. His publications include *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1975* (1983); *The First World War* (1984); and *Nineteenth-Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (1988).

London 1993

Published by
The German Historical Institute London
17 Bloomsbury Square
London WC1A 2LP
Tel: 071 - 404 5486 Fax: 071 - 404 5573

ISSN 0269-8560
ISBN 0 9521607 1 4

‘Really this Germany is a wonderful country’, wrote Charles Kingsley on a holiday visit, ‘– though its population are not members of the Church of England – and as noble, simple, shrewd, kindly hearts in it, as man would wish to see’.¹ This lecture is concerned with the problems, from a British perspective, posed by the undeniable, but probably unalterable, fact that Germans showed no disposition to remove the one blemish on their condition and become members of the Church of England. In the absence of such a development, German Protestantism constituted a puzzling phenomenon when viewed from an insular perspective. Its impact on religious life and theological debate in nineteenth-century Britain was widespread and reached into some unexpected quarters. As will appear, the reaction it evoked was by no means universally favourable. Indeed, for some, the course followed by German Protestantism was primarily an example to be avoided rather than emulated. ‘Germanism’, in such quarters, became a term of abuse, used to describe movements in life and thought which, it was claimed, would undermine religious belief and practice. Inevitably, therefore, German Protestantism was often attacked or defended on the basis of its supposed implications for the religious life of Britain rather than in relation to its own native context. Indeed, some controversialists knew little of German Protestantism at first hand, but do not appear to have been unduly worried by their ignorance.

Of course, ‘German Protestantism’ is itself a complex entity. British commentators extrapolated from their own often very partial observation and experience to make generalizations about its nature. We know enough about the regional differences within German Protestantism to realize the extent to which outside observers mistook the particular for the general. Even so, when every allowance has now been properly made for differences in liturgical

practice or in theological tradition within Lutheranism – not to speak of the divide between Evangelical and Reformed – it remains the case that foreign contemporaries often talked about ‘German Protestantism’ as if it constituted a single phenomenon.

To speak about ‘German Protestantism’, however, carried with it (as did, for that matter, talk of ‘English’ or ‘Scottish’ Protestantism) the assumption that, over the three hundred or so years since the Reformation, the *national* character of Protestantism had been accentuated. Almost by definition, the various Protestantisms of Europe lacked a common confession, constitutional structure, seat of authority or relationship with the state. They still bore the hallmarks of their own history prominently. Two hundred years after the Treaty of Westphalia, this was very evident in the plurality of arrangements within ‘Germany’. To state the obvious, throughout the period we are considering, there was no single body in ‘Germany’ – before or after unification – which was the equivalent of the Church of England.

Of course, there was nothing new in this situation. The Church of England could be said to contain certain ‘borrowings’ from Lutheranism and Calvinism but, despite the wishes of some factions in its history, it was neither Lutheran nor Reformed in a continental sense. It was, however, Protestant, or at least was perceived by most of its early nineteenth-century adherents to be Protestant. It followed, therefore, that German Lutherans and English Anglicans were ecclesiastical cousins, if not brethren. North of the border, the problem of correspondence was less complicated. The Church of Scotland was indubitably a Reformed Church and therefore, in theory at least, fitted more neatly into the ecclesiastical world of the European mainland than the anomalous English Anglicans. Both the Church of England and the Church of

Scotland were, in their different ways, 'established' churches and by this fact confirmed the Protestant character of Britain. The notion of a confessional state still held sway in the British Isles, though tempered in England and Wales by substantial bodies of Protestant Dissenters (Independents, Baptists, Quakers and, most recently, Methodists) who were, nevertheless, still subjected to certain restrictions. In Scotland, Episcopalians were Dissenters. The passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 posed, in some minds, a threat to the Protestant character of the country.

In the early 1830s, therefore, it looked to many observers as though the ecclesiastical settlements north and south of the border in Britain were in jeopardy – something to be welcomed or resisted according to view. It is not surprising that people began to ask themselves again what a Church might be. Was it the spiritual arm of the nation? Did its authority, on the contrary, rest on apostolic foundations? Was the Church of England really the Protestant Church which many of its members supposed it to be? Perhaps, if it was indeed a Protestant Church, it was a schismatic national affair, and it would be advisable to join the universal Catholic Church. 'National Christianity', for those who shared this alarm, was a contradiction in terms. These were difficult and worrying issues, but the French Revolution, on the one hand, and such writers as Tom Paine, on the other, had shown that Christianity itself was under threat. How could Christian faith be reasserted? Could one distinguish between what was its core and what was peripheral? What was the relationship between the authority claimed by a Church and the authority believed to rest in the Bible? Was either claim to authority tenable? If not, was the individual left with no alternative but to fashion a creed which might or might not have much resemblance to the faith supposedly delivered once

and for all to the saints? How could one distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate doctrinal developments? No doubt, in theory, the constitutional issues could be separated from the theological and philosophical – but for many minds they were inseparably linked. The path taken by German Protestantism had a bearing on all these issues. Whether its influence was for good or ill depended on the preoccupations and prejudices of the British observer.

It was, however, impossible to come to terms with German Protestantism without reference to the past. The legacy of Martin Luther hung over these debates. His reputation in Britain had never been beyond dispute, but in the nineteenth century his career and character became ever more contentious. He remained a 'hero of the Reformation' amongst those who felt that the Reformation was heroic. The influence of some of his writings had never completely faded in England – we recall that John Wesley's life was changed as a result of reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley retained a lifelong admiration for Luther as a 'champion of the Lord of Hosts'.² Nevertheless, the adulation apparently accorded Luther in Germany seemed little short of idolatry, even to some British Evangelicals. In his autobiographical fragment, Max Müller recalls how, in his childhood, Luther was represented 'as a perfect saint, almost as inspired and infallible'. His hymns seemed little different from the Psalms of David. It came as a shock to him later in life at Oxford to hear Luther spoken of like any other mortal, indeed as a heretic.³ To such English minds, the extent to which German Evangelical Protestantism continued to refer constantly to Luther's teaching and example seemed excessive. Anglican Evangelicals had no such single towering figure in their own history and were a little disconcerted at the place Luther occupied.

Even admirers of Luther's theology did not feel that his character was altogether attractive. Indeed, in his 1945 reply to the author of *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor*, Gordon Rupp rejected as absurd the proposition that 'the Luther legend had found a firmer holding in England than in any other country'. England, he noted, had never celebrated Luther day. Luther medals and portraits were not to be found on sale in English shops. In four hundred years, not forty of Luther's many hundreds of works had ever been translated. Luther, Rupp believed, lived in the penumbra rather than at the centre of English Protestantism.⁴

A century earlier, the tide of Anglican opinion appeared to be flowing against Luther. It is true that in the 1820s and 1830s further volumes of translations of Luther's works appeared in Britain but, for writers whom we may loosely label Tractarian, Luther could be pilloried as the destroyer of the unity of Christendom. There was no more extreme critic of the evils of the Reformation than Hurrell Froude but he was not alone. W. G. Ward published various assaults on Luther before demanding the expulsion of any trace of Lutheranism from the Church of England in his *The Ideal of the Christian Church* (1844). There was a certain regret that Queen Victoria had been rash enough to marry a Lutheran. John Keble felt it incumbent upon him to protest against the unsoundness of the King of Prussia as a sponsor at the christening of the future Edward VII. John Henry Newman did not engage himself deeply with Luther but thought he knew enough about continental Protestantism to be horrified by it.⁵ 'How different the fortunes of the Church of England might have been', Dean Stanley once commented to Mark Pattison, 'if Newman had been able to read German.'⁶ What was characteristic of these writers was that their knowledge of Luther's writing was superficial and their

first-hand experience of contemporary German Protestantism non-existent.⁷ It was a point seized on by their critics. F. D. Maurice thought it a scandal that 'a man should thus anathematise and rail at one of the best branches of the Church, without so much as looking at its symbolical books, or at any rate one of its great teachers, on the mere credit of an avowed and rancorous enemy!' He believed that the contemporary English denigration of Luther was primarily indebted to the perspective of J. A. Möhler in his famous *Symbolik* – though it was not until 1843 that a full English translation of that work appeared.⁸

The counter-attack was led by Julius Charles Hare, supported by his former pupil and brother-in-law, F. D. Maurice. Hare's mother had determined from an early age that he should become acquainted with German culture. She could not think of a more appropriate place to send him than Weimar, to sit directly at the feet of Goethe. At Cambridge, both as an undergraduate and subsequently, Germany continued to fascinate him. *Guesses at Truth*, written with his brother and first published in 1827, became a celebrated work. It contained essays on many German writers, among them Luther. Lurking in the background was the undisciplined genius of S. T. Coleridge, whose reading of Luther's *Table Talk* prompted the plea for 'a Luther in the present age'.⁹ Not, of course, that Coleridge's insights, German-inspired or not, received entire approbation in Cambridge: 'As he takes all the conceivable elements of unintelligibility', wrote William Whewell, 'it is hard if any envious ray of meaning finds its way through the theologico-metaphysico-etymologico-Coleridge thatch with which he will cover his Platonic hut.'¹⁰

Hare later became an Anglican clergyman but retained his strong German theological and literary interests.¹¹ A fine collection of his Luther first editions remains in the

Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. It was to Luther that he increasingly turned, culminating in his *Vindication of Luther* (1852), described by Professor Rupp as 'hardly more than a series of learned footnotes', which defended Luther against Möhler, Newman, and Sir William Hamilton. It was work which earned him a gold medal from the King of Prussia for his noble vindication of Luther in the face of Tractarian hostility.¹² The author sadly confessed that many unfounded charges against Luther had been accepted in England. Ugly words about him, said Hare, were repeated with a parrot-like volubility. No doubt the vehemence of Luther's convictions seemed repulsive to sensible Englishmen who liked rhetorical or scholastic exercises and smiled with Erasmus. Luther knew, however, that questions of 'weal or woe, of life or death' were at stake for the whole race of man. One had to go back to the man himself and his writing, and largely ignore even what English Evangelical writers supposed Lutheranism to be.¹³

The debate over Luther continued in mid-century.¹⁴ It survived into the later nineteenth century.¹⁵ The fourth centenary of his birth in 1883 provoked differing responses. One reaction was to produce an edition of *Luther's Primary Works* in English with introductions by Dr Wace and Professor Buchheim. In Cambridge, papers were read and speeches made with the objective of honouring a great and good man, as F. J. A. Hort put it. 'He was sometimes violent and unwise, but those were exceptions only.'¹⁶ In Oxford, on the other hand, Henry Liddon rejoiced at the rejection of a proposal to affix the University Seal to a congratulatory address to the German Emperor on the occasion of the Luther Commemoration. 'Luther had some great personal qualities', he wrote privately, '... but unless it is right to reject all Scripture that does not bear out your private views, and to make feeling

instead of conscience the test of your state before God, his general influence upon Christendom must be deemed to be a grave misfortune.¹⁷

In 1917, plans which had been tentatively laid in Britain to celebrate with Germany the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation had to be abandoned. A congratulatory message to the German Emperor did not appeal at that time.

If we move away from the specific problem of Luther to the evaluation in Britain of contemporary developments in German theology and Biblical criticism we must again focus, at least initially, upon Cambridge and Oxford.¹⁸ At the turn of the century, Cambridge was not entirely unaware of German developments. Herbert Marsh, Lady Margaret Professor from 1807 to 1839 (a post he managed to combine with his successive occupation of the sees of Llandaff and Peterborough), had spent much of the 1780s and 1790s in Leipzig. His translation into English of the *Introduction to the New Testament* by Michaelis and his own comments on the origins of the three first gospels provoked vigorous debate in the first decade of the century. Since Marsh was nothing if not a controversialist on this and other topics he relished the attacks that were made on critical method. Even at this juncture 'critical method' and 'Germanism' were synonymous in the eyes of opponents. Controversy rumbled on and was brought to a temporary head by Hugh James Rose's *The State of Protestantism in Germany* – sermons preached before the University of Cambridge. He warned his congregation to be on their guard against 'that large party of men in Germany who, calling themselves Christians, have shown an anxious desire to get rid of all that is supernatural in Christianity, and to set aside the positive doctrines of the Gospel scheme, generally on the ground that those doctrines are

contrary to their reason'.¹⁹ What was extraordinary, however, was that they still retained the name of Christians and the language and profession of Christianity. To his mind, 'the strange aberrations of the German Protestant Divines are a strong proof of the necessity of an efficient and active system of Church discipline'. In his final address, however, he thought he detected some improvement in Germany and that 'no small degree of disgust at the past follies of the Rationalist system prevails'.²⁰ Such sweeping condemnation was in turn criticized both in Germany and in England. He was in no doubt, however, of the superiority of the Church of England.

It was not only Julius Hare among the younger men whose response was more sympathetic. His friend Connop Thirlwall published anonymously a translation of Schleiermacher's *Essay on Luke*. In his introduction Thirlwall observed that he was taking a bold step since 'it cannot be concealed that German theology in general and German biblical criticism in particular, labours at present under an ill name among our divines'.²¹ When Schleiermacher paid his visit to England, it was Thirlwall who met him in London and escorted him to Cambridge. The wider range of Schleiermacher's writings, however, were scarcely known at all. Hare and Thirlwall spoke scathingly of the view that Schleiermacher and Niebuhr (whose *History of Rome* they had translated) were irreligious. 'Our irreligious atmosphere', Thirlwall wrote to Bunsen in 1831, 'is a very peculiar one, as may be supposed when it is known that we are beginning to be very fluent in unknown tongues' – a reference to the followers of Edward Irving. Ten years later, he was still complaining that there was 'no English theological journal connected with the Church which does not *studiously* keep its readers in the dark as to everything that is said and done in German theology'.²² Shortly afterwards, Thirlwall himself disap-

peared to Wales as Bishop of St Davids, where he became fluent in what had hitherto been for him an unknown tongue.

A parting shot in his 1825 introduction had been directed at another university: 'It would almost seem as if at Oxford the knowledge of German subjected a divine to the same suspicion of heterodoxy which we know was attached some centuries back to the knowledge of Greek.'²³ He was furious at Dr Conybeare's 1824 Bampton Lectures. Conybeare apparently went so far as to wish 'that all your German theology might be buried at the bottom of the German Ocean'. It was in this context that the youthful Edward Pusey went to Germany to Göttingen and Berlin – for the first time in 1825. Here he was influenced by Schleiermacher and Tholuck. *Vermittlungstheologie* had great attractions and was prepared to acknowledge Luther as the greatest Christian since St Paul. He published *An Historical Enquiry into the probable causes of the Rationalist Character lately predominant in the Theology of Germany* in two parts. Designed originally as a response to Rose, the rejoinder led Pusey back to the Fathers in defence of his Protestant principles – a move which, paradoxically, was to lead him to Tractarianism. 'If in time he came to regard the continental Protestant churches as effectively heretical', it has been recently argued, 'it was because their practice and belief was so much further removed from the patristic model than either England's or Rome's ... Nevertheless, his grateful memory of the mediating pietists remained always with him.'²⁴

The 'Jerusalem Bishopric' crisis of October 1841 placed Pusey – as it did others – in an awkward position. The scheme to establish a Protestant bishop in Jerusalem had been the brainchild of the Prussian diplomat, the Chevalier Bunsen. This bishop was to be consecrated by English bishops and nominated alternately by the Prussian and

British crowns. The details of this complicated scheme need not detain us, but its significance for our theme was that it forced individuals to take a formal view of German Protestantism which they might otherwise have preferred to avoid. 'Lutheranism and Calvinism are heresies', declared publicly the still Anglican Newman, 'repugnant to Scripture ... and anathematised by east as well as west.' Pusey did not go quite so far, though he opposed the scheme and, indeed, the 'Pan-Protestantism' implicit in the project – albeit with Episcopacy coming into Germany by the back door.²⁵ On the other hand, he admired Bunsen's zeal and enthusiasm over so many topics and valued the link he provided with Prussia.²⁶

Nevertheless, the notion that the Prussian king should take such a prominent role was unacceptable. The union of Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Old Prussia in 1817 had occasioned adverse Anglican comment. Bishop Jebb, for example, stated that 'the tone of modern German divinity considered, we can little doubt, it will be an union cemented by indifferentism, at the best; and having illimitable scepticism, for its no very distant consequence'.²⁷ In the 1840s, opponents of 'Jerusalem' wished to steer clear of such a monarchically-inspired structure. As Mozley put it, 'German religionism has taken two remarkable lines against the Church – one against her corporate character, the other against her doctrines. It has subjected Church to State with one hand, and it has destroyed unity of faith with the other.'²⁸ Samuel Wilberforce, however, thought the distrust of the King of Prussia was excessive. He had been shown letters by Bunsen in which the king expressed a longing to give up the keys to the church but would not do so to the Lutherans because 'God gave them me no doubt to keep until I could give them up to His Bishops and then I will'. 'I feel furious', he wrote to his brother Robert in early 1842, 'at the craving of men for

union with idolatrous, material, sensual, domineering Rome, and their squeamish anathematizing hatred of Protestant Reformed men.’²⁹

It was Pusey who had been helpful in the late 1820s in providing introductions in Germany for the young Robert Wilberforce, and he arrived there in 1831. His father, William Wilberforce, had been so alarmed fifteen years earlier as to appeal to the Duke of Cambridge to use his influence in Hanover to stop the rot in Göttingen – it seems to no avail. His son was not so disturbed: ‘I never had before so full a conviction of the excusableness of sleep in poor people during a learned sermon, for the sitting still hearing a monotonous sound not one syllable of which I could comprehend produced every time such irresistible drowsiness that I could scarce hold myself up. At present I don’t go to the lectures, but hope in a week’s time to be able to make some of them out.’ Eventually he did so to good effect and in his subsequent work on the Incarnation he makes explicit reference to the work of Schleiermacher and Dorner, amongst others.³⁰ His early admiration for German Protestantism also faded, however. He differed from his brother and opposed the Jerusalem Bishopric. In 1854 he became a Roman Catholic.

Such a rejection, however, was not inevitable. Thomas Arnold, who feared that Rose’s sermons would create an atmosphere in which all ‘impartial investigation and independent thought’ would become impossible, stood by what he believed to be liberating methods of historical/biblical criticism as developed in Germany. It comes as no surprise that when Otto Pfleiderer published his *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and its Progress in England since 1825*, a book translated into English in 1890, he identified Arnold as ‘the pioneer of free theology in England’. He showed his fellow countrymen that the Bible should be read with honest human eyes

‘without the spectacles of orthodox dogmatic presuppositions’.³¹ Dean Stanley, however, described Milman’s *History of the Jews* as ‘the first decisive inroad of German theology into England; the first palpable indication that the Bible could be studied like any other book’, though Stanley would have been the last person to deny Arnold a formative role.³² It is not surprising, however, that in reviewing Stanley’s *Life of Arnold* in 1844, J. B. Mozley considered that ‘Arnold was a German; his ethos was that of genuine religious Germanism, and his life a most favourable, but still a real specimen and legitimate development of the Lutheran theory’. He was prepared to admit that ‘Lutheranism has its fine as well as its coarse side’. Of course, Arnold’s early death makes it impossible to judge what ultimate form this ‘Germanism’ would have taken.³³

Benjamin Jowett of Balliol, however, lived into old age. In a sense, the fellowship of that College reproduced within its ranks the wider ‘German’ issue. The young Jowett greatly admired ‘Ideal’ Ward in Balliol, although he was not to follow the path Ward took. He was also close to Tait, the Scotsman who became an Anglican and was subsequently to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Tait had spent three months in Bonn in 1839. His objective, however, had been more to study German literature and education than theology. There was also the influence, through Stanley, of Arnold. Contact with German criticism and philosophy was unavoidable, though as Jowett himself noted, others on the rebound from Tractarianism preferred lobsters and champagne. He embarked on his Pauline commentaries and at the same time wrestled with the nature of theology. Yet, as Peter Hinchliff points out, despite the fact that he was indeed one of the first English scholars to take account of German criticism, ‘it is the more extraordinary that he should have displayed so little

concern for history and almost none for the application of historical critical method to the epistles'.³⁴

Hinchliff has confirmed that the Balliol library and Jowett's own collection contained a considerable number of works of German theology, most of them stemming from the 1840s – including the collected works of Schleiermacher and a good deal of Hegel, Kant, Schelling, and Fichte. His interest in Hegel is well-known but, after careful examination, Hinchliff finds it difficult to decide how 'Hegelian' Jowett actually was.³⁵ In general, it seems, he found the Germans 'too metaphysical and remote, insufficiently practical in their concerns', though he never went as far as Thirlwall who wrote in 1849 that in his opinion, after close study, Hegel was, 'to say the least, one of the most impudent of all literary quacks'.³⁶ Nevertheless, Jowett was widely supposed to be a leader of those who were infiltrating German ideas into the English scene. The storm aroused by the publication in 1860 of *Essays and Reviews* confirmed this impression. Pusey was led to doubt whether he and Jowett held any single truth in common 'except that somehow Jesus came from God, which the Mohammedans believe too'.

The essay which Rowland Williams contributed to *Essays and Reviews* also disclosed that German ideas had reached Wales, or at least Lampeter.³⁷ Already in trouble as Vice-Principal of St David's College *inter alia* for views expressed in his *Lampeter Theology* (1856), his essay on Bunsen's biblical researches led to the verdict (subsequently reversed) that he was guilty of heresy. He ended his days as vicar of two country parishes near Salisbury, from which point he was no longer in a position to infect the students of Lampeter with German heresy.

Since, at the time, little Lampeter stood in lonely if precarious eminence as a degree-granting institution in Wales, it is superfluous to enquire whether the Rowland

Williams storm was repeated elsewhere in Welsh universities. In Scotland, however, the position was very different. The reactions we have so far considered have been English and largely located in the ancient universities. It is salutary to remind ourselves that Scottish Protestants, whether in their pulpits or in their universities, saw themselves as part of a northern European Protestant academic and ecclesiastical world. The squabbles and rivalries of Oxford were merely those of a provincial English backwater. It was no accident, in their view, that it was the Edinburgh publishers T. & T. Clark who made available, first with their *Biblical Cabinet* founded in 1832 and then with their *Foreign Theological Library*, started in 1846, more than a hundred books by German theologians or biblical scholars, though they were often conservative rather than radical.³⁸ The notion that Scottish universities were rather like German ones led to Samuel Parr's Oxford comment at the beginning of the century that German lectures upon the latest scholarship produced students who were 'all speculative to a degree surpassing even the highest flights of those in our northern capital ...'.³⁹

The Church of Scotland and the various bodies that separated from it were all Reformed rather than Lutheran, but for the most part their leading figures had little difficulty in identifying with Luther. Thomas Carlyle should not exactly be taken as an ordinary member of the Church of Scotland but in calling Luther a truly great man – 'great in intellect, in courage, affection and integrity: one of our most lovable and precious of men' – he spoke for nineteenth-century Scotland, untroubled by the doubts about the Reformation troubling Anglicanism. The young John Tulloch was not untypical in being determined, on his first visit to Germany in 1847, to seek out Wittenberg. It was an overwhelming experience to worship where 'more than three centuries ago, the burning words of

divine truth fell fresh after centuries of ignorance upon the astonished ears of the multitude'.⁴⁰ One of the liveliest sketches of Luther's career came from the pen of Robertson of Irvine who had been a student at Halle in 1842. It no doubt helped Scottish readers that a Cranach picture of Luther preaching called to mind two remarkable Scotchmen, Dr Chalmers and Robert Burns!⁴¹

So far as I am aware, no detailed study of the careers of Scottish theological students in Germany and its bearing on their intellectual development and future careers is available. It is, however, a familiar pattern. Robertson's essay on 'German Student Life' begins with an imaginary conversation in a Scottish manse on the grave and serious question of whether the son of the manse, student in theology, should be allowed to go to Germany to prosecute his studies. To judge by the references to Germany in nineteenth-century Scottish ministerial biography, such conversations were frequent. To judge, too, by the letters John Cairns sent home from Berlin in 1843-4, Scotsmen retained a good conceit of themselves, their kirk and their country. 'My *Sprach-Gefühl* develops', he wrote,

and I can fight my way through interrogations, descriptions and even debates on the Absolute, Supernaturalism and Calvinistic Dogmatic sufficiently well to bring down denunciations on the practical, unphilosophical genius of *Engländer* and the harshness and ignorant confidence of Scottish orthodoxy. The arrogance of the Germans on these points is beyond expression ... I have learned much and will learn more from the erudition and speculation, abortive or otherwise, of the Germans; but my system of doctrine and plans of active and spiritual life are, and are likely to be in all essentials, perhaps in all particulars, unchanged.

It staggered him that 'Church independence and toleration as understood and practised in Scotland are here unknown'. He and some of his friends amused them-

selves with the thought of what a Free Church Assembly might be like if held in Berlin!⁴²

Nevertheless, scholarly interest in Scotland concerning German developments remained high. Kahn's *Internal History of German Protestantism* was translated into English in Edinburgh and published there in 1856. The translator stressed that the importance of the work was that it did not treat theology in isolation. Foreigners rarely understood the philosophical and political background and it was to be hoped that Kahn would make that plain. The translator, however, was careful to distance himself from the opinions of the author, a Lutheran divine, who belonged to the High-Church section of Lutheranism, whose opinions came near to the High-Church party within Anglicanism and who were reviving 'the exclusiveness and fanaticism of bygone centuries against the Reformed Church'.⁴³ Another introduction, George Matheson's *Aids to the Study of German Theology* had reached a third edition by 1877. William Hastie published in Edinburgh in 1889 his translation of Lichtenberger's *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. His lengthy introduction expressed the view that at last the extent of indebtedness to Germany was being acknowledged throughout Britain.

It had to be candidly and frankly admitted that the English mind and English theology 'has had to go to school again to Germany', and latter-day scholars like Lightfoot and Westcott did not now have to endure the kind of criticism for adopting 'German methods' which had been commonplace earlier in the century. Hastie's own very vigorous continental correspondence testified to the extent to which Scotland continued to keep abreast of scholarly developments in Germany. The picture he painted, however, somewhat overstated the degree of acceptance – as the problems encountered by Robertson Smith and others demonstrated.

Nor must we neglect the attitudes of Protestant Dissenters and Methodists in England towards Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism in Germany. Baptists and Methodists in England were aware of the difficulties encountered by their fellow-believers in parts of Germany, and offered support and encouragement.⁴⁴ Cairns, who was neither a Baptist nor a Methodist, found that Baptists in Berlin were the 'objects of special jealousy' as much from the Established Church as from the State. However much English Protestant Dissenters saw themselves as 'children of the Reformation', therefore, they held no brief for the hostility shown towards their counterparts in nineteenth-century Germany. That apart, however, men who taught in Nonconformist theological colleges saw Germany as the country where they should pursue further study. They were likely to be at least as well-informed as their Anglican counterparts.⁴⁵

We shall mention only two names – first, Samuel Davidson, the Ulsterman, who became a professor in the Congregational College in Manchester. Paying his first visit to 'the land of learning' in 1844 he was vastly impressed by the scholars of Berlin and Halle. He undertook the translation of Gieseler's *Church History*. The author expressed his gratitude that his work should be brought before a Protestant country of the importance of England. He added that he was convinced that the Puseyite attempt to separate English people from the fundamental principles of the Reformation would fail. He added that he could not understand what had happened to the Pusey he had known twenty years earlier in Bonn.

Over the next twenty or so years Davidson developed a formidable reputation as an Old Testament scholar but grew increasingly unhappy with English Dissenting bodies, particularly when accusations of heresy were brought against him and which led him to leave the college.

Speaking of his visit to Göttingen, Leipzig, and Berlin in 1865 he remarked, 'I breathed there, as I always did in the society of German scholars, an atmosphere of freedom ... I felt that learning cannot flourish under the management of a religious sect.' Over the last twenty years of his life there was nothing he liked better than to visit Germany and maintain his contact with a very considerable array of German scholars.

He was conscious, however, that there was another side to the picture. Ewald from Göttingen acknowledged that the 'powers of evil', that is, those who would suppress scholarly enquiry and free expression of critical opinion, were more powerful in England than in Germany. However, the English were free in a more general sense than were Germans. 'If we in Germany were as well off politically as the English, what a powerful influence for good we should now be able to exercise! But Prussia is always the bane of Germany ...'⁴⁶ Davidson, in turn, patronized another Congregationalist, the young David Worthington Simon, who developed extensive German contacts during many years in the country in the 1850s and 1860s. His wife was German and he was widely regarded in Nonconformist circles as being the man in their ranks most well-informed about German developments, even more knowledgeable than A. M. Fairbairn, the first Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford.⁴⁷

The word man is used advisedly, because we should not ignore the fact that women, Anglican, Nonconformist, and unbelieving, had German connections and interests which are apt to be overlooked simply because they did not hold posts in universities or colleges. It was, after all, a woman without an academic appointment – Marian Evans (George Eliot) who translated Strauss's *Leben Jesu* into English. It was the 'cold infidelity' of this work which chilled the soul of Henry Liddon, and practically every

other Anglican reader. Yet Hort in Cambridge professed not to be worried by Strauss. Indeed, he was coming to the conclusion that the infidelity of even educated Englishmen would not be German in its character.⁴⁸ Unbelief would arise from social issues rather than from theological debate as such. George Eliot was not alone, however. No one could fail to be impressed by the intensive study undertaken in Berlin by Anna Swanwick, translator of Goethe and Schiller. It is not difficult to agree with her biographer who comments that her mind 'was filled with philosophical speculations to the exclusion of more mundane subjects'.⁴⁹ Less well-known is Charlotte Williams-Wynn, daughter of a well-known North Wales family who immersed herself in German philosophy and theology and who also maintained a close interest in German church life. It was rather reassuring to her that whatever else might be predicated of the German Protestant clergy she met, 'no one could say they looked like gentlemen'.⁵⁰

That remark reminds us that the ecclesiastical and scholarly issues which have been the concern of this lecture cannot be confined to church and university. Appraisals and perceptions of German Protestantism were almost inextricably bound up with attitudes in Britain towards 'German' social life, institutions, and political aspirations. In particular, the forum of intellectual debate, the university itself, was inevitably the source of much British comment, though it was actually an American student who remarked that the German scholar was 'a man of whom we in America have no conception ... a man who could not exist under our system'.

Matthew Arnold noted that the paramount aim in Germany was 'to encourage a love of study and science for their own sakes; and the professors, very unlike our college tutors, are constantly warning their pupils against

Brotstudien'.⁵¹ 'There is an appetite for learning', noted Thomas Lovell Beddoes in Göttingen in 1825, 'a spirit of diligence and withal a goodnatured fellow-feeling wholly unparalleled in our old apoplectic and paralytic Almae Matres.'⁵² William Howitt also held out for English readers a picture of German professors who were most astoundingly plodding in their labours and studies, lecturing daily, publicly and privately, on the most abstruse philosophy, the heaviest law, and the profoundest science, and also writing year-books, 'histories of the world, in amazingly numerous volumes, systems of metaphysics and physics, and all other sorts of books except *entertaining* ones ...'.⁵³ Cairns in Berlin was a bit surprised to find that the venerable Neander paused to spit every second sentence during his lectures.

This sense that Oxford (and possibly Cambridge) offered a different order of experience was a view regularly repeated at Oxford high tables. The lack of any collegiate organization in Germany reflected an excessive concentration of intellectual speculation there and insufficient concern for the whole man. 'The safer round of wholesome learning' based upon well-established texts was preferable to the 'superabundance of professorial knowledge with which Germany is deluged.'⁵⁴ Far from restraining the follies of youth, the follies of professors were virtually indistinguishable from them. German Protestantism, in such Oxford circles, was to be looked upon with suspicion not only because of its theological content, but because it had the misfortune to be trapped within a system of instruction which they liked to believe was unhealthy. 'This state of the bodies of the Germans', wrote Hodgskin of his travels in the north of Germany in 1818-1819,

is undoubtedly a cause for some part of their character – for the placidness, stillness, and want of energy, which distinguishes

them from the other nations of Europe. It does not hinder them from thinking, writing, and compiling, day after day, week after week; in fact, it permits them to do all those more than any other people can, for they can do them constantly and without any fear of injury to their health; but it deprives them of the need and of the wish for active exertion.⁵⁵

Such a life did not seem altogether attractive to the muscular Christians emerging from English public schools in the decades ahead. It was the same kind of emphasis on balance that led Liddon to write to Scott Holland in 1887 in praise of hymns. 'In Protestant Germany', he declared, '... the infidelity of the pulpit has been constantly neutralized by the *Gesangbuch*.'⁵⁶ Even so, apparently oblivious to the fact that the issue had been discussed for a century, Hastings Rashdall, after a visit to Berlin in 1904 to listen to Harnack and Seeberg, somewhat envied the position of a German professor. He wrote to an Oxford colleague that 'we want to take some steps in that direction', but at the same time he did not believe in the possibility or desirability of Germanizing our universities.⁵⁷

It was also the case, by 1870, that for many British observers the 'want of energy' which Hodgskin thought he detected as typically German, no longer seemed so typical. It was the power and dynamism of Germany which increasingly alarmed. 'I like the predominance of Protestant Prussia',⁵⁸ wrote Jowett to Florence Nightingale in 1866. 'I dislike the predominance of aristocratic, vulgar, military Prussia.' *A fortiori*, after 1870, many observers found it increasingly difficult to reconcile their admiration for many aspects of German Protestantism with their fear of the behaviour of a powerful united Germany. We find an interesting letter from the Simon we have just mentioned in 1900 expressing his disgust at the attitude of Germany during the South African War. It decreased his interest in German ideas. 'If men can be

such arrant fools, and display such boundless prejudice and lend an open ear to such packs of lies ... how are they likely to be safe guides in dealing with Hebrews and Early Christians? No – not for me!’⁵⁹ When Quakers, under the guidance of Thomas Hodgkin, prepared a message of goodwill to send to Germany in 1905, they declared: ‘We do not forget that we are both branches of the Teutonic stock, allied to one another by a common faith and long friendship, and that we, with the rest of the civilised world, owe a great debt to Germany for her achievements in literature, science, and art.’⁶⁰

However, there was more than an undercurrent of uncertainty as to whether ‘German Protestantism’ and ‘British Protestantism’ did indeed constitute a ‘common faith’. Young English theology students in the early years of the new century felt more apprehensive about the prospect of war, though they deplored the fact that people at home seemed to have got spring hysteria about Germany. In September 1914, one of their number, who was not to survive the war, poured out his contempt. ‘It seems to me’, he wrote of the Germans amongst whom he had been but recently living, ‘that their united Protestantism was a thin veil for paganism, that Joshua and the Book of Judges may be considered the Gospel of the *Staatskirche* and that Southern Germany has entirely lost control of the barbarians outside the *limes*.’⁶¹ German divines were to be able to find comparably harsh things to say. The battle of the British/German Protestant theologians was about to begin with distressing ferocity.⁶²

Of course, the Great War inevitably added a passion and a venom which had not been present in such acute form during the century we have been considering. Arguably, however, it was the century of crisis for ‘national Protestantism’. Many of those we have mentioned perceived that there was a problem of national perception but

could do little more than articulate their feelings without being able to see how it could be transcended. For example, in a letter to Arndt, who was thinking of going to England to live, Schleiermacher replied that he could not do the same – ‘I would be no earthly use beyond the limits of Germany.’⁶³ Of course, from the German side, English Protestant churchmen were also curiously oblivious of the extent to which they saw a special virtue in the ethos and institutions of their own country. Pfleiderer, for example, spoke scathingly of the way in which, according to him, F. D. Maurice’s ‘supernaturalism’ was ‘the more pronouncedly narrow, inasmuch as he found the spiritual community of humanity, founded by the revelation of Christ, embodied not in the universal Kingdom of God, or the invisible community of the children of God, but in the Church of England’.⁶⁴

The German intellect found such a conclusion hard to comprehend and could only explain it ‘by supposing that the strong national feeling of the Englishman had got the better of the intellect of the theologian’. It was, indeed, the case that Maurice, for all his admiration of Germans and Germany, remained convinced that ‘we should be Englishmen and not either Scotchmen, Frenchmen or Germans in our studies of whatever kind they be ...’. His feeling about the relation between English thought and German he expressed in 1848: ‘that we must always be, to a considerable extent, unintelligible to each other, because we start from exactly opposite points; we, naturally, from that which is above us and speaks to us; they, naturally, from that which is within them and which *seeks* for some object above itself.’⁶⁵

In taking this theme for the 1992 Annual Lecture, I hope I have contributed, in modest degree, to the still vital task of making British and German historians, and the countries they serve, a little less ‘unintelligible to each other’.

References

- ¹ R. S. Martin, *The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London, 1959), p. 135.
- ² E. G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London, 1953), p. 45.
- ³ F. Max Müller, *My Autobiography: A Fragment* (London, 1901), p. 63.
- ⁴ E. G. Rupp, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause or Cure?* (London, 1945), pp. 13-14.
- ⁵ O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 1 (London, 1966), p. 192; M. A. Crowther, *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian England* (Newton Abbot, 1970), pp. 40-81.
- ⁶ M. Pattison, *Memoirs* (London, 1885), pp. 210-1.
- ⁷ Cited in Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, p. 192.
- ⁸ F. Maurice, *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, vol. 1 (London, 1884), p. 357.
- ⁹ Rupp, *Righteousness of God*, p. 50.
- ¹⁰ J. M. Douglas, *The Life of William Whewell, D.D.* (London, 1881), p. 78.
- ¹¹ See also Hare's *The Victory of Faith and Other Sermons* (Cambridge and London, 1840), and A. P. Stanley's essay on Archdeacon Hare in his *Essays on Church and State 1850-1870* (London, 1870), pp. 538-71.
- ¹² A. F. Hort, *Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, vol. 1 (London, 1896), p. 46.
- ¹³ J. C. Hare, *Vindication of Luther*, 2nd edn (London, 1855), pp. 3-4.
- ¹⁴ J. B. Mozley, *Essays Historical and Theological*, vol. 1 (London, 1892), p. 438; *The Letters of the Rev. J. B. Mozley*, edited by his sister (London, 1885), p. 191.
- ¹⁵ O. Chadwick, *Creighton on Luther* (Cambridge, 1959).
- ¹⁶ Hort, *Hort*, vol. 2, p. 306.
- ¹⁷ J. O. Johnson, *Life and Letters of Henry Parry Liddon* (London, 1904), p. 330.
- ¹⁸ S. W. Sykes, 'Deutschland und England: Ein Versuch in theologischer Diplomatie', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 69 (1972).

- 19 H. J. Rose, *The State of Protestantism in Germany*, 2nd edn (London, 1829), pp. xxvii-ix.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 4-5 and 255.
- 21 Cited in F. Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1889), p. ix, note.
- 22 J. J. S. Perowne and L. Stokes (eds), *Letters Literary and Theological of Connop Thirlwall* (London, 1881), p. 101 and p. 175.
- 23 J. C. Thirlwall, *Connop Thirlwall* (London, 1936), p. 30.
- 24 L. Frappell, "'Science" in the Service of Orthodoxy: The Early Intellectual Development of E. B. Pusey', in P. Butler (ed.), *Pusey Rediscovered* (London, 1983), p. 24.
- 25 A brief account of this affair is in Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, pp. 189-93.
- 26 W. Höcker, *Der Gesandte Bunsen als Vermittler zwischen Deutschland und England* (Göttingen, 1951).
- 27 C. Forster (ed.), *Thirty Years' Correspondence between John Jebb, D.D., F.R.S. and Alexander Knox*, vol. 2 (London, 1834), p. 343.
- 28 Mozley, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 30.
- 29 S. Meacham, *Lord Bishop: The Life of Samuel Wilberforce, 1805-1873* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 68-9.
- 30 D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends* (London, 1966), pp. 137-8; R. I. Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (London, 1852), p. 101 and 278-80.
- 31 O. Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and Its Progress in England since 1825* (London, 1890), p. 367.
- 32 Stanley, *Essays on Church and State*, p. 576.
- 33 Mozley, *Essays*, vol. 2, pp. 25-6.
- 34 P. Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (Oxford, 1987), p. 54.
- 35 Ibid., p. 87.
- 36 Thirlwall, *Thirlwall*, p. 48.
- 37 *Life and Letters of Rowland Williams*, ed. by his wife [Ellen Williams] (London, 1874); D. T. W. Price, *A History of St. David's University College, Lampeter*, vol. 1 (Cardiff, 1979), pp. 97-102; Crowther, *Church Embattled*, pp. 82-106.
- 38 P. Hinchliff, *God and History: Aspects of British Theology 1875-1914* (Oxford, 1992), p. 30.

- ³⁹ W. R. Ward, *Victorian Oxford* (London, 1965), p. 63.
- ⁴⁰ M. O. Oliphant, *Memoir of Principal Tulloch* (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 60.
- ⁴¹ W. B. Robertson, *Martin Luther: German Student Life: Poetry* (Glasgow, 1892), p. 30.
- ⁴² A. R. MacEwen, *Life and Letters of John Cairns, D.D., LL.D.* (London, 1898), pp. 165-8.
- ⁴³ C. F. A. Kahn, *Internal History of German Protestantism since the middle of the last century*, translated by the Rev. Theodore Meyer (Edinburgh, 1856), pp. 8-9. More generally, see Lecture V, 'The Reaction of German Theology (especially in Scotland)', in J. Dickie, *Fifty Years of British Theology* (Edinburgh, 1937).
- ⁴⁴ See M. Brecht, 'The Relationship between Established Protestant Church and Free Church: Hermann Gundert and Britain', in K. Robbins (ed.), *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America c.1750 - c.1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 135-52.
- ⁴⁵ W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1954); J. Medway, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith* (London, 1853), pp. 319-21. However, the well-known preacher Joseph Parker asked rhetorically whether it was necessary to await a communication from Tübingen before the Bible could be read.
- ⁴⁶ A. J. Davidson (ed.), *The Autobiography and Diary of Samuel Davidson* (Edinburgh, 1899), pp. 21-24, 84, 88-9.
- ⁴⁷ F. J. Powicke, *David Worthington Simon* (London, 1912).
- ⁴⁸ Hort, *Hort*, vol. 1, p. 187.
- ⁴⁹ M. L. Bruce, *Anna Swanwick: A Memoir and Recollections 1813-1899* (London, 1903), p. 29.
- ⁵⁰ *Memorials of Charlotte Williams-Wynn*, edited by her sister [H. H. Lindesay] (London, 1877), pp. 204-6.
- ⁵¹ R. H. Super (ed.), M. Arnold, *Schools and Universities on the Continent* (Michigan, 1964), p. 262.
- ⁵² E. Gosse, *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (London, 1894), p. 82.
- ⁵³ W. Howitt, *German Experiences: Addressed to the English, both stayers at home and goers abroad* (London, 1844), p. 25.

- ⁵⁴ Ward, *Victorian Oxford*, p. 63.
- ⁵⁵ T. Hodgskin, *Travels in the North of Germany; describing the present state of the Social and Political Institutions in that country; particularly in the Kingdom of Hanover* (Edinburgh, 1820), p. 60.
- ⁵⁶ S. Paget, *Henry Scott Holland: Memoir and Letters* (London, 1921 edn), p. 145. Many such German hymns found their way into English use through the translations of Catherine Winkworth in her *Lyra Germanica* (1855).
- ⁵⁷ F. E. Matheson, *The Life of Hastings Rashdall* (Oxford, 1928), p. 110.
- ⁵⁸ E. V. Quinn and J. M. Prest (eds), *Dear Miss Nightingale: A Selection of Benjamin Jowett's Letters, 1860-1893* (Oxford, 1987), p. 85.
- ⁵⁹ Powicke, *Simon*, pp. 228-9.
- ⁶⁰ L. Creighton, *Life and Letters of Thomas Hodgkin* (London, 1917), pp. 370-1.
- ⁶¹ E. Bevan, *A Memoir of Leslie Johnston* (London, 1921), pp. 200-1.
- ⁶² S. Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 32-3.
- ⁶³ *The Life of Schleiermacher as unfolded in his autobiography and letters*, translated by F. Rowan (London, 1860), vol. 2, p. 209; J. F. Dawson, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: The Evolution of a Nationalist* (Austin, 1966), p. 31.
- ⁶⁴ Pfleiderer, *Development of Theology*, pp. 377-8.
- ⁶⁵ Maurice, *Frederick Denison Maurice*, vol. 2, pp. 37-8.