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Jacques Bainville: Profils et réceptions

Up to the moment of his death on February 9, 1936—the day of his fifty-seventh birthday—Jacques Bainville was one of the triumvirate at the head of the *Action française*, the extreme nationalist and royalist movement that left its mark on French political and intellectual life from the time of the Dreyfus Affair to the period of the Vichy regime more than forty years later. More reserved in character than either the triumvirate's leader, Charles Maurras, or its other colorful figure, Léon Daudet, Bainville won his reputation as a distinguished and widely read journalist, commenting on both international affairs and economic and financial matters, and, secondly, as the author of a large number of popular histories in which France's past greatness was associated with monarchical rule while its contemporary weakness was associated with the ills of democracy at home and the Nemesis-like presence of a politically unified Germany across the Rhine. During the Great War Bainville widened his readership, notably by contributing to the prestigious *Revue des deux mondes*. In 1920 he became the publisher of the *Revue universelle*, which was launched that year by Maurras and himself in company with Henri Massis and Jacques Maritain; it was a periodical that was to be admired by T. S. Eliot among others. Bainville was elected to the *Académie française* in 1935.

For between some thirty and forty years after the Second World War, the *Action française* and its leaders were by and large taboo subjects for French contemporary historians. Into the breach stepped others, as is well known, principally though not exclusively from the Anglo-Saxon world. Thus, path breaking for the *Action française* in general was Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (1962) and, for Bainville in particular, William Keylor, *Jacques Bainville and the Renaissance of Royalist History in Twentieth-Century France* (1979). Only later on the French side came Jean Montador, *Jacques Bainville: L'historien de l'avenir* (1984) and, later still, Dominique Decherf, *Bainville: L'intelligence de l'histoire* (2000) and two works by Christophe Dickès,

Jacques Bainville: L'Europe entre deux guerres, 1919-1939 (1996) and *Jacques Bainville: Les lois de la politique étrangère* (2008).

A notable feature of the efforts made in France to advance the academic study of Maurras and the *Action française* (initially to overcome the postwar prejudice against the frank investigation of an inconvenient past and, more recently, to open new paths of exploration and revise some earlier findings) was the holding of two series of conferences separated by thirty years in time. The organizer of the first series was Victor Nguyen. Held at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Aix-en-Provence in 1968, 1970, 1972 and 1976, the conferences led to the publication of four sets of conference proceedings under the title *Etudes maurrassiennes* (1972-1986). The main organizers of the second series have been Olivier Dard and Michel Leymarie, with two conferences held in 2007 and 2009 at the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po, Paris, and two held in 2008 and 2009 at the Université Paul Verlaine, Metz. The present volume contains the proceedings of the second Metz conference. The three other conferences were broader in scope and have also led to publications (*L'Action française, culture, société, politique, 2008*; *Charles Maurras et l'étranger: L'étranger et Charles Maurras, 2009*; *Le maurrassisme et la culture, 2010*).

The different contributions to *Jacques Bainville: Profils et réceptions*—thirteen in all, with an introduction by Olivier Dard and a conclusion by Michel Grunewald—range widely. They bring out Bainville's almost semi-detached position within the *Action française*. He did not share in the deep anti-Semitism that was such a defining feature of the movement and marked so strongly Maurras's own thought. His agnostic frame of mind distanced him from the religious passions that figured so prominently in the movement's history, notably at the time of the Law of Separation of Churches and State (1905) and later at the time of the Vatican's condemnation of the movement (1926-27). His economic and financial journalism reached out to a bourgeois audience that was much wider than that of the conservative and largely Catholic bourgeoisie attracted to the *Action française*, and his economic liberalism was totally out of keeping with the movement's corporatist tendencies and theorizing (as represented notably by Georges Valois, who was to break with Maurras, however, in 1925). Yet for all these differences Bainville was the non-parliamentary right's foremost commentator on international affairs for more than thirty years, writing for the daily *L'Action française* from the time of its launching in 1908 and, before that, for the royalist *Gazette de France*. The Maurras that counted for him was the author of the *Enquête sur la monarchie* (1900-1903) and *Kiel et Tanger, 1895-1905: La République française devant l'Europe* (1910). This second work of Maurras has itself begun recently to receive serious attention in academic circles, as witness Georges-Henri Soutou and Martin Motte (eds), *Entre la vieille Europe et la seule France: Charles Maurras, la politique extérieure et la défense nationale* (2009).

Well over half of the volume's contributions relate broadly speaking to international affairs, covering Bainville's own views on international relations, mainly in Europe, and also the manner in which his own writings—particularly his histories of France—were received or treated abroad. As regards the former, the central contributions are from Christophe Dickès (*Jacques Bainville, une géopolitique française*) and William Keylor (« *Réalisme* » *bainvillien* et « *Idéalisme* » *wilsonien* en débat à la lumière de la politique étrangère

américaine). There is also a closely complementary contribution from Pierre Béhar (*Bainville et la question d'Orient*) dealing with Bainville's analysis of the utter transformation of the Eastern Question as a result of the Great War and the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Dickès outlines the positivist principles of Bainville's geopolitics; he also accepts that it is reasonable to speak of a homegrown French school of geopolitics—Bainville included—embodied initially in the historical writings of Emile Bourgeois and Albert Sorel and marked by the spirit of Montesquieu, Turgot and, above all, Richelieu as expressed in his *Testament politique*. Keylor, in focusing on the settlement flowing from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, contrasts Bainville's realism with Wilsonian idealism; like Dickès, he places Bainville in a specific tradition of international thought, one that goes back in time to the diplomacy of Richelieu and Mazarin and forward in time, after Bainville's death, to the school of "realism" in Anglo-Saxon international relations theory which found an early expression in Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1949).

Bainville had viewed the negotiations and outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference with horror and foreboding. His opposition to what was happening made for the publication in book form in 1920 of his long essay *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix*—an essay highlighted or mentioned by Béhar, Dickès, Keylor and various other contributors to the volume. It was effectively a response to John Maynard Keynes's even longer essay *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* published already before the end of 1919. Bainville deemed the latter to be infused with a materialist conception of history. For the Frenchman, the geopolitical shape of the overall peace settlement was the crucial issue, not the financial reparations meted out to Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. He argued that not only for France's sake but also for the sake of long-term continental peace, the Habsburg empire of Austria-Hungary should not have been dismembered; a new Greater Austria, alongside the resurrected Poland, would have been a factor reducing instability in Central Europe. Germany, on the other hand, so relatively recently unified, should now have been split up. Bavaria, which he knew well (as discussed in the contribution of Thomas Nicklas, *Les Bavières de Jacques Bainville*), was an obvious candidate for independence. As to the Rhineland, Bainville had called for the creation of a Rhenish-Westphalian Republic. However, a unified state structure for Germany was left in place, so there was no flouting of Woodrow Wilson's sacrosanct principle of national self-determination, while the German people were saddled with a mixture of substantial reparations and high-flown moral condemnation. It was a recipe for disaster. The overall peace terms for Germany, said Bainville pointedly, were excessively mild partly by very virtue of their provocative punitive element ("*une paix trop douce pour ce qu'elle a de dur*").

What has been striking in France in recent years has been the new interest shown in Bainville's essay on the Paris Peace Conference; this has been in the context of the geopolitical changes affecting the European integration process and the wider Europe as a result of German unification and the demise of the Soviet Union. The Metz conference, which begat this volume, testifies to this interest. Furthermore, as many as three editions of *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* have been published by different publishers in the past fifteen years: in 1995, with a postscript by Jacques Rupnik; in 1997, with a preface by Georges-Henri Soutou; and in 2002 in the innovative form of a single volume, published by

Gallimard, bringing together Bainville's and Keynes's essays (preface by Edouard Husson, notes and translation of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* by David Todd). For the teaching of international history or international relations, the publication in English of the two essays alongside one another would make for an excellent pedagogic resource, say in conjunction with Margaret MacMillan's *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World!*

To return to *Jacques Bainville: Profils et réceptions*, four contributions deal with the reception of Bainville's thought in Great Britain, Belgium, Romania and Portugal and, to a lesser extent, with his own views on these countries. In the case of Great Britain (Jean El Gammal, *Jean Bainville et la Grande-Bretagne*), there is relatively little to be shown: Bainville took a poor view of Lloyd George and, more generally, English Liberalism, but his own work was little read on the English side of the Channel. Belgium provides a more substantial tale, yet not one to be overblown (Francis Balace, *Prophète, mais en son seul pays*). Bainville was a great admirer of Albert I; but his own influence in Belgium as a commentator on international events was limited and not sustained, reaching its apogee between the Franco-Belgian military accord of 1920 and the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923; while his popular histories, though winning a wide readership in Belgium, could never ultimately shake off the handicap of being a sort of *Gesta Dei per Francos*—lacking in seriousness by the standards of Belgian academic history dominated by Henri Pirenne, and flawed in a Belgian national perspective on account of the violence wrought by the excursions of Louis XIV's armies into the Low Countries. As to Romania (Matthieu Boisdrion, *Jacques Bainville et la Roumanie d'entre-deux-guerres*), while Bainville strongly approved of its monarchy, he was deeply critical of the hopes entertained in Paris in connection with France's foreign policy investment in the backing of the Petite Entente from 1925 onwards. And in Romania itself the intellectual influence exerted by Maurras and Bainville was in clear decline by the 1930s. In the case of Portugal and Salazar's Estado Novo (Ana Isabel Sardinha Desvignes, *Jacques Bainville au temps de Salazar*), Bainville counted for less than in Belgium or Romania, cutting a very pale figure beside Maurras. Yet he left one significant imprint, for his style of popular history writing inspired João Ameal, the Salazarist regime's semi-official historian.

Extraordinary was the degree of interest shown in Bainville's thought, especially after his death, in Nazi Germany. This is the main subject of Michel Grunewald's contribution (*Jacques Bainville en Allemagne*). In 1939 a doctoral thesis treating of Bainville's work as a whole, entitled *Jacques Bainville: Nationalismus und Klassizismus*, was published in Breslau. Its author, Joachim Wieder (later to write the widely translated *Die Tragödie von Stalingrad*, 1955), presented its subject in two related roles: first, as a talented chronicler of the decadence of France and as one of the actors in that same decadence; and, secondly, as a French historian and nationalist upholding concepts that could not but be refused by the proponents of the new German nationalism. At the end of 1939, during the "phoney war", Friedrich Grimm, a leading figure in the Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft and a future member of Otto Abetz's team at the German Embassy in occupied Paris, drew from Wieder's thesis for prefaces he wrote for German translations of two of Bainville's works: *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* and *Histoire de deux peuples continuée jusqu'à Hitler* (1933). These two translations were published by the Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt in Hamburg, with several hundred thousand copies issued between 1939 and 1941, mainly

thanks to special editions for schools, the Hitlerjugend and the Wehrmacht. All on the principle of know thy enemy. That so much German propaganda effort should have been devoted to identifying and decrying the nationalism of Bainville points to one key feature of the history of the Action Française, which has become ever clearer since the start of serious scholarly studies half a century ago, namely the immense difference of view on Franco-German relations between the founding figures of the French nationalist movement in the persons of Maurras and Bainville and, on the other hand, those among Maurras's intellectual progeny, of a generation later, who espoused the cause of Hitler and national socialism—the likes of Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet.

The publisher Peter Lang has produced a handsome book for disseminating these Metz conference proceedings. There are useful abstracts in English. The one criticism that should be made, however, is that the index is very incomplete.

The overall quality of the contributions to *Jacques Bainville: Profils et réceptions* is excellent, and the scope of the book's contents is far wider than might be assumed simply be considering its title. In particular, there is much of interest relating to French foreign policy in the interwar years and France's related failure to control the course of events in continental Europe. The contents would perhaps have been even richer if there had been some consideration of what Charles de Gaulle may or may not have taken from his reading of Jacques Bainville in the 1920s and 1930s.

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