

44.
Political
temper in
Mommsen.

the first great German historian in whom an unrivalled mastership in the critical methods and an unparalleled erudition was mingled with the modern political temper.¹ He had lived through the great political crisis of the middle of the century which had swept away all the older landmarks, many of the great aspirations of the earlier period, and also that religious spirit which—in an unconfessional and unorthodox form—lived in the great heroes of the classical epoch and in those who were inspired by them.

In the General Introduction to this work I have used the word Religion as denoting what is to us of the deepest personal concern, our innermost faith and convictions, finding expression in individual subjective thought; not infrequently also in poetic or artistic creation. In this sense I may now refer to that

¹ "In Mommsen's Work the whole receives a peculiarly vivid colouring which evidently stands in connection with the political mood which recent experiences had produced in many patriotic minds. The 'Ideologues' are ridiculed with caustic bitterness, and again and again we are told with an impetuous accent that only those can count on a statesmanlike influence who understand how to calculate calmly and to utilise existing political forces. Conspicuous is the contrast with the solemn gravity and the old-fashioned stiffness of what has been called 'dignity of historic style' . . . : men and things are conceived with fresh immediateness and brought out with drastic vivacity. In particular the active persons are not mere shadows, but are full of pulsating freshness of life. . . .

In all this the polemical tendency which pervades the whole work makes itself felt with an energy characteristic of an opposition based upon fundamental principles. . . . The political estimate of the whole development of the Roman Republic in its different phases produces everywhere original and suggestive points of view; . . . the defects of the republican constitution are pointed out; the events of the last century are placed in quite a new light as preparatory to the military monarchism of Cæsar; the importance of which is pictured with evident preference. . . . The educated public in Germany which had lost nearly all interest in home labours referring to the ancient world was won with one stroke for Roman history" (Wachsmuth, 'Einleitung,' &c., p. 48 sqq.)