

[Paul's] Translation of Baron Eduoard Sochor's Obituary for Bloch in *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*

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With the imperial Russian councilor of state J.G. Bloch has departed one of the most interesting personalities of our time. Born to a poor Jewish family, self-taught through work and experience from an early age, he was, **when I first met him twenty-eight years ago** [i.e. 1874], 37 years of age, and already an outstanding figure in the Russian empire. President of the Kyiv-Brest and the Odessa Rail Companies, he was on good terms with the Russian Ministers and received visits from the best of society in his Warsaw palace. He had made his fortune as a contractor. This sturdy, self-assured man did not make the slightest impression of being an upstart: a smooth, powerful voice, a fine, healthy appearance, a decisive, optimistic nature – all these features produced the appearance of a gentleman who had not earned, but inherited, his fortune. His house, his family, and his carefully curated art collection gave the impression that things had always been so, and could not have been otherwise. Outside the village school he had never received a proper education, and yet hardly anyone could pursue such a variety of undertakings; an autodidact in the true sense of the word, he felt at home in all fields, able to speak knowledgeably on all topics, and with equal comfort in four or five languages.

**In addition to his extensive business activities, he devoted his most active attention at that time to the railways he managed, keeping track of everything, aware of everything. When, as often happened he attended important conferences with the managers of foreign railroad lines, all differences vanished, and his recommendations were accepted.** Beyond this he pursued, one might say as a kind of private sport, statistics, reaching such a level as hardly a second private individual could claim to have achieved. He founded a statistical bureau, employing more than 30 workers there, and brought to the 1878 Paris Exposition a series of volumes publishing his statistical researches into Russia's economic situation and trading activities. **I was with him then in Paris**, and was astonished to see how wide his network was and how, from all sides and from all spheres, people sought him out. In truth he was on familiar terms with the whole world.

Already at that time he showed a lively interest in the reforms ongoing in the French military, and in the effects that the increased military expenditures of all countries were likely to have in general on the economic development of Europe. In later encounters he always returned to this same theme; his statistical bureau was continuously occupied with this issue until, **during our meeting in Karlsbad in 1889**, he laid before me a definite plan for publishing his ideas on this topic. It was a megaproject that he here embarked upon. What he had, at that time, read and excerpted on this topic, with which he was previously wholly unfamiliar, covered all relevant areas: military books and journals from all countries filled his house in Karlsbad; he worked, despite the recommendations of his doctor at the sanitorium, day and night, in order to, as he put it, to form and inform his staff; imparting the lesson of the impossibility of a European war had become his life's work. In 1893 he shared with me the first leaves of the German translation of

this work (if I am not mistaken, they bore the title “Vom Schießen”) and later over the art of naval warfare. It was pointless, at that time, to call his attention to the fact that professional opinions are not easily changed by the contributions of lay people; he was no longer primarily concerned merely with pointing out the consequences of military expenditures, but instead with the idea of peace. I am acquainted with very few of those called the “Friends of Peace,” though I have always been impressed by the warmth of their convictions; but -- without wanting to offend anyone -- hardly any of them could have felt such an honest, almost excessive fanaticism for peace as Bloch. It was simply and totally impossible to change his thinking on this point; he went so far as to **fund an entire military maneuver in Switzerland**, and to pay for his own pavilion at the last Paris exposition in order to exhibit the horrors of modern war.

What influence he achieved through his work in the Hague, what his activities there consisted in, I do not know. But I can confidently tell the world that his soul was gripped by the idea of peace; he was so occupied by it, that his body suffered the effects; for I have no doubt that such an iron man as he was would not have gone to such an early grave, if he had not pursued this idea with a tenacity bordering on the torturous, had he not sacrificed himself to it. Let people think of this what they will; he was subject to grand impulses, as goodness and benevolence were the core of his being.