

THE ESTRANGEMENT BETWEEN AMERICA AND GERMANY.

BY MAXIMILIAN GROSZMANN.

THE very interesting discussion of the present relations between my native land, Germany, and this my adopted country, to which you have recently opened your columns, brings back to my memory some facts and experiences which may be helpful in the consideration of recent developments.

It has become customary with the newspapers in Germany to accuse the American press generally of a wilful misrepresentation of the German attitude towards the United States, and to maintain that the estrangement between the two countries is largely due to perfidious insinuations which can be traced back to British influence. A German professor with whom I had become acquainted on my recent trip through Germany, sent me, a little while ago, a number of clippings from various papers, notably the *Tägliche Rundschau*, *Magdeburgische Zeitung* and *Kölnische Zeitung*, by whom a great cry is raised against the American press which they charge with mischievous and systematic "well-poisoning" (*Brunnenvergiftung*) of a most alarming kind. The *Magdeburgische Zeitung* makes a touching appeal to the Americans travelling in Germany as best qualified to dispel the "foolish" illusion that there exists an animosity on the part of the Germans against the Americans.

The alleged misrepresentation of the German sentiment by American papers is surely not so universal and mischievous as our German friends seem to suppose. Of course, if they read only the silly and despicable declamations of the Jingo press, and of such German-American publications as are edited under the influence of un-American ideas, they may feel justified in thinking so; but that would only prove that they know little of true American conditions and of the true American spirit. The great mass of Americans is

not likely to be carried away by such talk; they are much more apt to preserve their independence of judgment than other people may be, not only because their republican form of government gives them a keen sense of responsibility as well as continuous training in the exercise of this responsibility, but also owing to the fact that they are in the habit of more extensively reading newspapers that present different sides of the same question, and magazines of all kinds in which the problems of the day are more or less comprehensively discussed. Indeed, the number of publications which mediate information to the American readers is enormous, testifying to the eagerness with which we endeavor to follow up the evolution of history as making in our own time. There are over 21,000 newspapers published in the United States and Canada, as against 6000 in Germany. As we are always interested in what is going on in the old country, and in what other nations think of us, the papers contain a great quantity of reading matter covering these topics, and reporting all shades of opinion entertained abroad concerning our own development and conduct. The news-service here is so well organised that we are daily informed on everything that occurs in all parts of the world, especially in Europe; we receive this information simultaneously with our foreign contemporaries, and perhaps with even greater comprehensiveness and wealth of detail than the people in these foreign parts themselves. For we are here unrestricted by press censorship and every editor is at liberty to express his views as rigorously as he pleases; he can print anything and everything. Further the publishers of our great dailies are more enterprising than is the average publisher on the continent. The daily despatches are supplemented by weekly cable letters and mail matter, and also by extensive reproductions from the foreign press. All this makes it very improbable that the average American should long remain ignorant of the facts of a case of international importance. Deplorable as the malicious ranting of "yellow" papers may be, they stand a thousand times corrected and called to order by the consensus of the great majority of publications, so that in the United States there is little danger of a universal "well-poisoning" by the sensational press.

The press conditions in Germany exhibit a notable contrast. In the first place, the news-service is very inadequate, and American events especially are treated in a rather perfunctory manner. I had occasion to travel through the Fatherland several times in recent years when there were periods of great political excitement in the United States, and I remember how annoyingly difficult it

was to glean information as to the trend of events at home, from the meagre news columns of the German papers. And yet, one time there was a presidential campaign in progress the outcome of which was destined to influence to a considerable extent our foreign relations, particularly with Germany, in matters of commerce; and another time there was a war. To those especially who were unfamiliar with American conditions, the press despatches were almost unintelligible.

But worse than that. We have, on this side of the Atlantic, a much greater right to complain of malignant and systematic misrepresentation as practised by the German press towards the United States than the Germans have to speak of American "well-poisoning." And this is a matter of very long standing, for rarely do German newspapers take the pains to secure and print reliable information about American affairs. Consequently, the average German entertains the grossest prejudices against America and her citizens, and listens willingly to the most preposterous calumniations of our country. This happens in spite of the fact that so many thousands and hundreds of thousands of German families are represented here by immigrants who have learnt to love their adopted country which has given them political liberty and prosperity; and that thousands of Americans of all classes are traveling through Europe year after year, seeking knowledge and recreation. Much of this prejudicial sentiment has remained to me a psychological mystery; but surely, the unfriendly attitude of the German press towards everything that comes from this country has a large share of the blame—the same press which is now exercised over the anti-German attitude of a few Jingo papers.

Mr. Wilhelm Mueller, formerly editor of the German edition of *Puck*, had a very instructive article in the *New Yorker Staatszeitung* from which I may be allowed to translate a few telling passages.

"A few years ago, during an extended sojourn in the Fatherland, I became acquainted with the editor of a widely-read journal. In the course of our conversation, we frequently touched upon questions of American politics and exchanged opinions from our respective standpoints. Once when I had succeeded in throwing a new light on a puzzling problem to the surprise of my German colleague who had occasion to correct his own views, he invited me to send him an occasional article on American affairs, *Provided I would write in the satirical style so pleasing to the German reader.*¹ A German journalist who after settling in New York continued to write for a newspaper published in his native land, records a similar experience. As long as he regarded the conditions of American life with German

¹ The italics are mine.

eyes, and consequently formed his judgment mainly from outward appearances such as strike the foreigner first, naturally finding in this way much more to criticise than to praise, his articles were welcome. But no sooner had his growing familiarity with America and Americans begun to clear his vision, to ripen his judgment, and no sooner had he commenced to insert words of appreciation for our institutions, than the German editor first struck out these paragraphs from his contributions, and when my friend protested, he was told that they had no use for other than fault-finding reports on American affairs. The same standpoint is represented by many other German papers. The news they publish about America is extremely meagre.

"The truthful and reliable reports which some of the great political dailies sometimes print in the form of articles or even weekly letters from well-informed American correspondents, attract not the attention and are not so widely circulated as they deserve. It is preferably descriptions of extraordinary happenings, distorted statements of such abnormal phases of New World life as are apt to occur from time to time, that are printed and reprinted. The evils which accompany our political development are pointed out with chuckling delight; but never a word is said appreciative of the vast benefits which our institutions have brought forth.

"The average German newspaper reader learns terrible things about bossism and corruption in many of our municipal administrations; but of the powerful influence of our free institutions upon the blending of many nationalities into one people and upon the calling forth of all the latent energy of its citizens in making productive the enormous wealth of our great country in natural resources and staples; of the new, strong, and self-reliant national spirit which is here evolving—of all this he hears nothing. The ridiculous excrescences of American shoddyism are attacked with biting satire; the noble impulses of the genuine American, however, his boundless generosity, his practical philanthropy, the grand creations which owe their existence to him, are rarely mentioned.

"Little attention is attracted to the comprehensive and sustained efforts in behalf of progressive civilisation which are characteristic of American nature efforts which are made with an unflinching energy, a definiteness of aim, and a degree of success seldom witnessed elsewhere. When reference is made to these things at all, it is to belittle them. . . .

"Most German newspapers have for many years past been in the habit of branding as "characteristically American" (*echt amerikanisch*) only the dark side of our institutions, the fungus-growth in our public life, the cranky and abnormal features of our national character, and have thus given to their readers, instead of a picture of reality, a caricature of true Americanism."

Under these circumstances, was it possible for the average German to judge our attitude in the Spanish-American imbroglio with any amount of fairness? And can it be expected that the German newspapers will do what they demand their American colleagues to do, viz., to publish statements of facts, from the pen of people competent to know and to judge, so as to dispel erroneous impressions?

It may be of interest to consult what Prof. Hugo Münsterberg, of Harvard, has to say in connexion with this matter. How has it happened that the real America is still as undiscovered by the edu-

cated Germans as if Columbus had never crossed the ocean? he asks in the September *Atlantic*, and answers his own question thus:

"The German immigrant can justly claim to be a respectable and very desirable element of the American population; he has stood always on the side of solid work and honesty; he has brought skill and energy over the ocean, and he has not forgotten his music and his joyfulness; he is not second to any one in his devotion to the duties of a citizen in peace and in war, and without his aid many of America's industrial, commercial, and technical triumphs would be unknown. But all that does not disprove the fact that he is somewhat unfit to form a fair judgment on the life which surrounds him. First, he belongs almost always to a social stratum in which the attention is fully absorbed by the external life of a country, and which is without feeling for the achievements of its mental life; he was poor in his Fatherland, and lives comfortably here, and thus he is enthusiastic over the material life, praises the railroads and hotels, the bridges and mills, but does not even try to judge of the libraries and universities, the museums and the hospitals. On the other hand, he feels socially in the background; he is the Dutchman who through his bad English, through his habits and manners, through his tastes and pleasures, is different from the majority, and therefore set apart as a citizen of second rank,—if not slighted, at least kept in social isolation. The effect of this situation is on the German side an entire ignorance of the Anglo-American life; he may go his way here for thirty years without ever breaking bread at the table of any one outside of the German circle; he may have even become rich, and yet he is not quite in the social current. . . . And worst of all, in this atmosphere live nearly all those journalists, from the editor to the penny-a-liner, who fill the eight hundred German-American newspapers and supply most of the papers in Germany. . . ."

Münsterberg's picture is somewhat overdrawn and emphasises one phase of German-American life too strongly, omitting others equally interesting and more creditable; yet what he says throws light on certain indisputable facts which account for some of the misconceptions that are now prevalent.

On the other hand, there is no need of entertaining any fear that the great influence of German science, art, and industry in the building-up of this country will be underestimated. Prof. Harry Thurston Peck, of Columbia University, and as editor of the *Bookman* one of our most prominent critics, showed in a recent article that the old traditions of American education have been wiped out by German influence, that a vivid interest in German pedagogy is asserting itself more and more, and that German language and literature are crowding out other foreign influences. He went so far as to say: "German influence has altered the racial character of our people."

This admission with its sweeping significance is very noteworthy at the present moment when short-sighted jingoism empha-

sises an alleged Anglo Saxon kinship of Americans. And I have quoted Professor Peck because he found himself forced to make this admission not by any native predilection of the German influence, but contrary to his own desires. His words are therefore convincing proof that our German cousins need not be exercised over lack of appreciation.

We may also remember Ambassador Andrew D. White's words in his Fourth of July oration before the American colony in Leipzig, in 1898. Strong and convincing as they were, they found a feeble echo in the German press and were ignored as much as possible. And why was it that President White felt called upon to express himself so frankly and emphatically? Because he considered it timely to check, if possible, the flood of calumniations and misrepresentations of Americans and American motives that had swollen to such a dangerous height during the Spanish-American war. These calumniations have indeed aroused a strong resentment on this side of the ocean. At this the German editors who are now so violent in their condemnation of American jingos, ought not to be surprised; it has been caused by their own indiscretion and unfair criticism of American methods.

When, in the spring of 1898, shortly after the outbreak of the war, I set sail for my German Fatherland, I wore a small badge in the American colors such as were worn in those days by most of us as an outward symbol of patriotic enthusiasm. To my astonishment, many of my fellow-passengers advised me to take it off before landing, to avoid unpleasant experiences. And indeed, even the officers of the German steamer which carried me across, who might have been expected to know a little more about us than those who never touched our shore, could not refrain from dropping occasionally supercilious and disparaging remarks on our politics and our conduct of the war. But the prejudice and lack of knowledge displayed by many of those I met during my sojourn in the Fatherland surpassed my anticipations. Truly, I found very few who were inclined to do the Americans justice, or who would listen to an argument. As a rule, we were treated to all sorts of sneering reproofs of the policy of the United States in the Spanish-Cuban imbroglio, as soon as we were recognised as coming from across the water. How often we had to hear what hypocrites the Americans were, and how they could not begin to be compared with the Germans in point of character, magnanimity, bravery, and warlike qualities. Remonstrations and statements of facts were of no avail;

we were simply not believed; they knew everything better than we did.

There was a physician in my native city of Breslau who was particularly scandalised over the sham-humanitarianism (*Humanitätsheuchelei*) of the Americans. He would not allow himself to be persuaded into believing, he said, that in declaring war against Spain a single Yankee had ever thought of down-trodden Cuba; it was but the meanest greed and self-interest that was behind it all. When I replied that he seemed to be unacquainted with the qualities and sentiments characteristic of the American people; that there had been an irresistible public opinion which had decided the question of peace or war; and that the American is much more swayed by sentiment (*Gemüth*) than he received credit for in Germany,—he laughed in my face. “An American, and sentiment! A Yankee has a money-bag in place of a heart.”

I had my half-grown son with me on my trip to show him the beauty and grandeur of the land of his fathers. Though he received many inspiring impressions, to be sure, it can be imagined what a shock it was to him to experience the narrowly prejudicial condemnation of the land of his birth, to which his ardent patriotism and enthusiasm justly belonged. The sad effect may never be wiped out.

In Dresden I met some Austrian friends who expressed themselves even more prejudicially than the Germans. This was perhaps due to the fact that Austria's sympathies were outspokenly with Spain, their ruling families being related by ties of blood. Particularly curious, however, was the zeal of a guide in the Cologne cathedral. No sooner had he made out that our little party was composed of Americans than he began to spice his explanations of the wonders of this famous structure by invectives directed against the terrible Yankees; it was extremely amusing, in one sense, to witness him spurting out his harangues in dialect German and broken English. He even called upon the mildly smiling priest who was stationed as a guard in the dazzling treasure chamber, to testify to the treachery committed by the Americans against Spain. After receiving his customary tribute from us, he felt constrained to shout after us from the portal of the great church: “And yet you will not get Cuba,—think of me, the poor cathedral guide!”

The military pride of my German countrymen was especially tickled to make fun of American field operations. Easy enough it was, they said, to attack so weak a nation as the Spaniards. But if an army like the German had been opposed to us, the case would

have been very different indeed. A single German regiment would have been sufficient to annihilate an entire American army-corps, of that we could feel sure.

Boasting never sounds well, and it hurt more my German than my American patriotism; it is a bad symptom and reminds me of the proverb, "Pride goeth before destruction."

As a military power, Spain might have been expected at least to rival the United States. No American, indeed, had anticipated so speedy and complete a collapse of the Spanish forces, and the talk of our falling upon an enemy whom we knew to be weak, is therefore quite idle. Did Austria and Prussia with their united strength consider it cowardly to attack poor Denmark, and did not even France prove very weak? On the other hand, the United States has never been a military power in the European sense of the term, and let us hope will never be one. Spain, on the other side, had the advantage of military tradition and experience, and in Cuba she had a body of troops at her disposal which was our superior in numbers as well as in position. Then, Spain had been a mistress of the sea for centuries, while the efficiency of our navy had, practically, to be tried for the first time. That our victories were so decisive should certainly not be counted against us.

And it remains to be proved whether German troops would have been so much more successful than were the Spanish, or if you please, the Americans. No sensible American will for a moment underestimate the military efficiency of the German army and its management; we are not jealous of this well-earned glory. Yet we must take into account the difference of conditions. A war in little Europe which has long been laid out in checker-board fashion by her military experts, can hardly be compared with operations extending over three continents. Our German friends may find it difficult to form an adequate idea of the enormous distances, of the climatic difficulties, and the perplexities of transportation with which our American troops had to cope. Their sufferings baffle description; had the commissary department been ever so much more efficient than it was, in consequence of lack of experience, and perhaps of competency, this suffering could not have been entirely avoided. The greater is the glory of our citizen-soldier whose bravery, endurance, and self-sacrifice deserve full recognition.

It was painful to read, day after day, what the papers saw fit to print on the progress of the war. There were continuous belittlings of the American successes, and attempts to cast suspicion

on American motives. Whatever could vilify our good name as a nation was dwelt upon with apparent satisfaction, and only reluctantly did the victorious bravery of our troops receive a scanty recognition. I may be permitted to quote two examples of editorial comment, to illustrate my point.

In reference to Cervera's defeat and the fall of Santiago, the *Dresdner Nachrichten*, of July 5, wrote as follows :

"With regard to its effect upon America, the result of the war must arouse even greater misgivings than the future of Spain. There may, of course, be one advantage for Europe in this rapid success : knowing as we do the character of the Americans, we can rest assured that their blind admiration for the efficiency of their militia will now cause them to give up the recently developed plans to make the United States a military and naval power of first rank. On the other hand, we can expect the arrogance of the Yankees now to assume intolerable proportions, and their fresh enthusiasm for national expansion will perhaps induce them to prove their strength in more or less dangerous fields. Clearly, such a development of events may conjure up perils if in the case of a disagreement of the European nations there should ever come a clash between the Yankee republic and one or the other of the great powers of Europe. The common European interests demand, therefore, that we carefully watch the further development of the foreign policy of the United States. As soon as the Americans will find themselves confronted with the unanimous opposition of Europe (*europäischer Gesamtwille*) they will in good time restrain their greed for more territory. To effect this Europe must of course prove that it is not merely a geographical term, and an empty name, but an essence and a reality. If it does that, there is hope that the negotiations referring to the Philippine question which after the close of the war will necessarily assume an acute character, may be conducted in a matter satisfactory to the interests of Europe."

And the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* of July 13 had this to say :

"Spanish pride which still resents making peace with America—a peace to be paid dearly for anyway, it appears—and which yet is clinging to hopes that can never be realized, even though this pride may not be unmixed with fancy, is certainly justified ; for it represents nothing less than the sense of national honor to which it can be but repugnant to yield in a struggle against palpable wrong and aggression. Even the sworn defenders of the United States could after the outbreak of the war no longer uphold the phrase of humanity in whose name the United States had pretended to fall upon Cuba ; some acknowledged the full truth and spoke openly of hypocrisy ; others at least admitted the selfish designs of the Americans. Spanish honor rebels the more against humiliation the clearer it becomes to Spain that she is being deserted by the European powers. We have here the second edition of the European concert of Armenian-Cretensic memory, with but this variation that the powers are now still more unanimous than they were then, viz. in doing nothing. . . . If it should come to a final overthrow of Spain as a colonial power (and all events seem to point to this) England will have this result on her conscience. . . . Not only England's attitude however, but also certain utilitarian considerations must be held responsible for decrepit Europe to allow Spanish honor to waste itself in hopeless resentment. For industrially and commercially, little is to be expected from Spain,

and we do no longer get excited over mere ideals of right and justice. [*sic!*] Yet there may come a time when the advantage of a continental European concert, based on the idea of righteousness pure and simple, will—too late—be recognised; when the humiliation of Spanish self-respect will prove injurious to the self-respect of Europe. And what will, in the end, prevent the Yankee, power-swollen as he now is, from stopping short at the boundary of Canada? England ought to consider that."

Protestant and Catholic organs piped the same tune; but the German government succeeded in maintaining a strict neutrality. Yet there is no telling what may have been behind it all; prudence and sentiment clashed, perhaps. At any rate, there can be no mistake about the meaning of these press utterances whose echo ran through the land; and though American good nature can be relied upon to a fault, we should stultify ourselves if we should consider the German attitude at that time, when our national honor was at stake, as anything but unfriendly. Is it so very strange that Americans, many of whom witnessed this ill-feeling against their country directly on their travels, have now a strong apprehension of German motives and sentiments? If our German cousins wish to be recognised as the friends of the United States, it will depend largely upon them, and upon nobody else, to make us forget their unfairness of a year ago.

Surely I love my native country no less than the one in which my children were born. The present strained relations between the two are very painful to me; but the mischief done so far can only be repaired by a frank discussion of the causes. It would be folly to blind ourselves against the facts of the case. It is an old experience that it is easier to create prejudices than to allay them; but *if those among us who take a vital interest in preserving good-will between Germany and America, from love of both, will unite their efforts in establishing a mutual better understanding and appreciation, there need be no danger of further estrangement.* However, let us also be sincere and defy hypocritical opportunism. Better an open criticism than a suppression of unfriendly sentiment.

Americans and especially German-Americans have the best intentions to restore the traditional *entente cordiale* between the United States and the Fatherland, but our brothers beyond the sea must assist us in the task and not make us suffer abuse which is both uncivil and unjust.