

THE GERMAN IN AMERICA.

BY THE EDITOR.

PROF. Hugo Münsterberg of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., has written in German papers some very sensible articles on America, which will naturally tend to clear up the situation in Germany, and his article "The Germans and the Americans" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, (with the exception, perhaps, of some incidental remarks), is a splendid psychological diagnosis of the rising antipathy between the two nations. The common interests between German culture and American civilisation are so great that we would deem it a great misfortune for the development of both nationalities if the estrangement were perpetuated, and we hope by a free ventilation of its causes to nip the growing hostility in the bud.

Professor Münsterberg is a German, and has remained a German in this country. He is not nationalised, but, being engaged at the University of Cambridge, he has lived in a truly American atmosphere, and knows more about genuine American conditions than many other Germans who have spent the greater part of their lives on this side of the ocean. His judgment, accordingly, rests upon an immediate observation of facts, which he presents with impartiality and fairness, and he may be excused for the little exaggeration which occasionally slips in by way of emphasising his statements. He says,¹ for instance:

"The German-Americans have done but little to make the Germans understand America better, and perhaps still less to make the Americans understand the real Germans; they have given little help toward awakening in the two nations the feeling of mutual sympathy."

¹ *The Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1899, page 402.

This statement is, to say the least, very one-sided; I might with equal force make the very opposite statement and say:

“The German-Americans have done very much to make the Germans understand America better; but even more to make the Americans understand the real Germans. They are the main cause of the mutual sympathy that exists between the two nations.”

The truth is that about fifteen or twenty years ago the sympathy of the German people with the United States of America was very strong,—a fact which I know from my own experience, having passed my childhood and youth in the Fatherland. There was no antipathy whatever to the rising republic of the New World, at least not in the atmosphere which I breathed; and the communications from relatives beyond the sea made every one cherish the best wishes for the welfare of the new democratic empire on the other side of the world. Our cousin from America was a great favorite with the children as well as with the adults, and we were dazzled with the new ideas with which we became acquainted through his conversation. The German school-boys at that time knew that across the Atlantic there were great opportunities and an expanse of life which could not fail to be welcomed by every man of enterprise and energy. I still remember the impression which the lines of the poet made on me.

“Beyond the sea there is a mighty building,
And cities rise in unexpected growth!
The workman there looks gayly to the future
And honest toil will find its just reward.”

When I came to America I found in this country an appreciation of German science, German education, and German culture in general which I scarcely could anticipate. I positively deny that there exists in America an antipathy to German civilisation, or to the Germans in general, and he who would interpret a joke about German beer-drinking or German smoking, or other German habits, which rightly or erroneously are supposed to be typically German, as a slight upon the German character as such, or even upon the mission of Germany's culture, misapprehends the entire situation. In addition to the knowledge of the conditions of the Fatherland which native Germans bring to this country, there is a legion of native Americans who have studied at German Universities, who speak the language to perfection and are deeply imbued with the spirit of German science. I know several American clubs and societies, philosophical, medical, and art associations, in which ad-

dresses could just as well be delivered in German as in English, and the large majority of the members would be able to follow the speaker. There are but few members, e. g., of the Oriental Society who have not studied in Germany. It would be difficult to find a learned society in Germany whose members are so well acquainted with American conditions or have the same familiarity with the English language. I cannot accept Professor Münsterberg's statement without describing it as very one-sided, for it is an indisputable truth that in the circles of true American refinement Germany is not only well known but also highly respected, and its preferences are greatly admired.

The ill feeling that of late prevailed between the two nations is of recent origin, and cannot be traced back farther than about one decade. It originated in Germany, and not in America, and can be cured only through a better understanding of the ideals of the American republic by the leaders of German thought. The antipathy which has originated in this country is certainly not older than two years, and is still very superficial, for it has not yet had time to take deep root in our national consciousness; but for that reason it is sufficiently serious to command our solicitude, and the disease should be treated before the acute state becomes chronic.

One of the most important features of this republic is its faculty of assimilating innumerable varieties of nationalities into one new nation, which is destined to merge its patriotism with cosmopolitan ideals and thus promises to be an advancement upon the nations of the Old World. The secret of this extraordinary power of assimilation lies in the principle of liberty which wrongs no one, and affords an opportunity to every one to assert his own idiosyncrasy and to pursue the propaganda for his own ideals as best he can. The sole condition of our liberty is respect for the liberty of others, implying a loyalty to law; and this feature has become a national characteristic of American life.

Consider, for instance, the gigantic struggles which take place in this country between capital and labor. Germany has its strikes too, but there the government is ready to crush with military power the unruly laborer, at the point of the bayonet. Here, the striker is permitted to have his way until he infringes upon the law, and should a strike assume the aspect of a revolt it will be suppressed more by public opinion than by military force. The reports of the great railroad strike under Eugene Debs a few years ago were misrepresented in European papers, because European writers as well as the European reading public cannot understand the conservative

spirit and the law-abiding nature of the inhabitants of the United States. Thus, the reports of this event were distorted into unintelligibility, and must have made a wrong impression upon European readers.

The American nation is regarded as restless and given to all kinds of innovations, while the fact is the very opposite. Even Professor Münsterberg speaks of the Yankee's motor restlessness which he attributes to "an ability to suppress and inhibit." In spite of the free institutions of the country, *the character of the American nation is a conservatism which is unknown in Europe.* A change in the constitution is more difficult here than in Europe, and almost out of the question; and the fact is well known, though little heeded, that the American flag is one of the oldest flags in the world, all the European flags having been altered in recent times. The German, the Austrian, the French constitutions are of recent date while the American Constitution is still that of 1787.¹

It seems strange to the Germans in the Fatherland that the Germans in America can remain faithful to the ideals of German thought, and yet become good Americans; but such is the true condition of things, and it would be futile for German politicians of the Fatherland to expect any support from their German-American brothers in any scheme that would directly or indirectly invalidate the unity, the power, or the present constitution and national character of the United States. The mere idea of it would be spurned as treason—even if the appeal for such conduct came from the mother country. The situation can be misapprehended only by those Germans of the Fatherland whose views of American conditions have been distorted through the usual misrepresentations. Perhaps it is true that we are not yet a nation in the European sense of the term, but it is equally true that we are building up a nation and every one who believes in American ideals is welcome to contribute his share. The Germans are left at liberty to work out their own salvation in their own way; they are welcome to bring the best they have, and to preserve all the good features of their national

¹The Constitution was formed in 1787, and the new form of government adopted in 1789. The American flag consisting of thirteen stripes alternately red and white with thirteen stars (the number of the States of the Union) in a blue field was adopted by Congress in 1777. In 1794 (after the admission of Vermont and Kentucky) the stripes were increased to fifteen, but at the suggestion of Samuel C. Reid the original form of thirteen stripes was restored in 1818. The number of the stars depends upon the number of States that at the time constitute the nation. Thus the flag, like the Constitution, is rigid in its general structures but admits of variations within definitely prescribed outlines, allowing for further growth and expanse.

The Union Jack (which since James I. consisted of the combined crosses of St. George and St. Andrew) was fixed in its present shape as the flag of Great Britain in 1801 after the incorporation of Ireland, twenty-four years after the adoption of the stars and stripes.

character in the New World. They can preserve the German spirit, the German traditions, the culture of the German language, German humor, German music, German love of science, etc., etc. So long as they do not interfere with the rights and liberties of their fellow-citizens, they are welcome to live in their own way; and the good features of German life are welcome as important and desirable ingredients in the make-up of the new nation that is developing on this continent.

There can be no doubt that the influence of German thought, German sentiment and German modes of life have so powerfully altered the Puritan foundation of our national character, that a new nationality has developed from it with a greater mental breadth and a deeper comprehension of the significance of life. I make this statement not to belittle the Puritan element or to criticise its rigidity, nor do I believe that the result is a Teutonicisation of the Yankee. It is very fortunate that the basis of our national life is dominated by the religious rigidity, the undaunted courage, the manly independence of the Pilgrim fathers. The stubborn character of the Yankee was in the beginning toned down by the gentle breadth of the Friends of Pennsylvania, not less firm wherever principles are at stake. Then the spirit of the Southern States with its aristocratic tendencies, the immigration of the Pennsylvanian Dutch so called, of large numbers of the Irish,¹ of a sprinkling of French, Italian and Spanish, and above all of the Germans, have modified the character of the nation not by detracting from the Anglo-Saxon foundation, but by adding to it; by enlarging the general horizon and engrafting upon the strong roots in the ground of past events new branches of noble promise.

One statement of Professor Münsterberg will probably be endorsed by every German who visits this country and yet I would not allow it to pass without an important modification. He says: "The average German-American stands below the level of the average German at home."

¹ In this connexion I feel called upon to say that the Irish are frequently made the target of unpleasant criticisms among Anglo-Americans and German-Americans. There is perhaps a deep-seated racial antipathy between the Celt and the Teutonic nations; and the immediate cause of animosities is the fact that Irish clanishness enables the son of Erin to play a very prominent part in the petty politics of almost all our city administrations, without however having ever succeeded in influencing the national policy of the United States. Whatever may be said of the faults of the Irish (every nationality has its faults) we must emphasise here that the derogatory tone in which they are frequently spoken of is quite out of place. A sprinkling of Irish blood in the veins of the steady Saxon has so far proved very beneficial and great men of military, literary and artistic fame were the result. The Irish are not as strong as the Teutonic races, but their wit, their quickness, their congeniality can not be underrated by those who have learned to appreciate the Irish temperament.

The truth is that the large mass of German immigrants are recruited from the lower ranks of life; they come from the country and settle here on farms. In addition, however, there are goodly numbers of able artisans of all trades, merchants, and also not a few scholars who have enjoyed all the advantages of the German universities. The average German here is probably of the same stamp as the average German in Germany. But here the commoner is more frequently seen, because not so rigidly excluded from polite society as in the Old World, and therefore cuts a more striking figure.

But granting even what presumably Professor Münsterberg intends to say, that there are many uneducated German-Americans I would still raise my protest against the proposition of their "standing below the level of the average German at home." The educative influence of the American atmosphere should not be underrated and I have not as yet seen a German farmer who has not been favorably affected by it. I have sometimes been startled by a breadth of view and independence of judgment where I least expected it. I will mention one case only which characterises the average German-American.

A German-American of Chicago, by no means a rich man but one who earns a comfortable living, told me that he was the eldest son of a poor laborer in Germany, but that two of his younger brothers held high positions in the Fatherland, one of them being a member of the cabinet of his little native state; and he added with pride, "I sent them the money to go to school with and to attend the University." Certainly, we cannot say that the uneducated German-American stands below the level of his two brothers in the Fatherland, for learning and social polish are not the sole standard by which we must make our measurements.

It is true that German cannot become the language of the country, and there are few among the German-Americans who would deem the adoption of German as the official language at all desirable. The German-Americans, as a rule, speak German at home, for every one here is at liberty to speak any language he may please, be it Polish or Russian or Chinese. There are no laws which would deprive parents of the right to educate their children in accordance with their own views, and no Governor here would follow the example of Von Köller. The Germans might easily be made as restive as are the Danes in the Danish parts of German Schleswig, if ordinances were passed requiring them to speak English and cease to be Germans; but as matters are now they are

perfectly satisfied with the present conditions; they speak German when they please, and English when they please; and their grandchildren *always* prefer the English.

Here is a passage from *Die Deutsche Post* which is devoted to the interests of the German-Americans, and proposes to uphold the German language and strengthen German influence in this country. The editors and contributors are German to the backbone, and an expression of their views will be most characteristic of those German-Americans who propose to assert their nationality in the national life of the United States. The article is apparently an expression of the editorial¹ sentiments, and while the author regrets that German is not the official language of the country, he denounces the mere thought of attempting to make it such as ridiculous and as undesirable. While it proposes to cherish the German language as the bond of union of all the Germans throughout the world, it strongly emphasises the principle that *one* language should rule from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and from the Great Lakes to the Mexican Gulf. We quote the main passage of the article in its original German as follows:

“Es ist ein eigen Ding, im Namen eines Volksthums, das nach Millionen zählt das Wort zu ergreifen.

Wir glauben aber doch die Stellung des Deutschthums hier im Lande dahin präzisiren zu dürfen, dass der Deutsch-Amerikaner in politischer Beziehung sich nur als Amerikaner fühlt.

Alle Versuche zu Gunsten irgend einer anderen Nation, die inneren Verhältnisse der Union zu ändern, würde an der Vaterlandsliebe des Deutsch-Amerikaners gerade so abprallen, wie bei dem auf seine Abkunft von den Pilgrim-Vätern stolzen Stockamerikaner.

Kein vernünftiger Deutsch-Amerikaner kann wünschen, dass in das feste Gefüge der englischen Staatssprache Bresche geschossen wird, durch Erhebung des Deutschen zur offiziellen Sprache in einzelnen Staaten der Union.

Dies wäre der Anfang vom Ende dieser grossen Republik.

Sind vielleicht die gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse in Oesterreich, mit seinem Sprachengewirr, wo das Deutsche als Staats- und Armee-Sprache langsam dem Verfall entgegen geht, zu derartigen Experimenten verführerisch?

Eine Sprache muss herrschen vom Atlantischen bis zum Pacifischen Ocean und von den grossen Seen bis zum mexikanischen Golf.

Dass dies nicht die deutsche ist und sein kann, bedauert Niemand mehr als wir Deutsch-Amerikaner.

Wenn wir trotz der pessimistischen Ansicht bezüglich der Zukunft unseres Volksthums in den Vereinigten Staaten kräftig auftreten für die deutsche Sprache, die deutsche Schule und deutsche Art überhaupt, so beruht dies vor Allem in un-

¹This editorial in *Die Deutsche Post* was written in reply to a recent article in the *Gegenwart* of July 15, entitled: “The National Duty of German-Americans; An Appeal,” in which the German-Americans are expected, for the sake of the German Empire, to make opposition to the employment of English as the official language of the United States.

serer Liebe zur alten Heimat, in gemeinsamen Traditionen und in dem Stolz auf die hohe germanische Kulturmission.

Die Sprache Goethe's und Bismarck's ist für uns die schönste der Welt und auch auf verlorenem Posten werden wir für dieselbe bis zu unserem letzten Athemzuge eintreten.

Mit warmer Theilnahme verfolgen wir die blühende Industrie und die riesige Ausdehnung des Handels im deutschen Reiche.

Und als *Deutsche* fühlen wir mit Freude und Schmerz, Hoffnungen und Enttäuschungen, die den Werdegang der grossen deutschen Nation begleiten.

Politisch getrennt, marschiren wir doch gemeinsam mit unseren deutschen Reichsbrüdern, um deutschem Wesen und Wissen, deutscher Gründlichkeit und Gewissenhaftigkeit die Bahn zu den höchsten Erfolgen zu ebnen.

Wir haben dem Amerikanerthum unauslöschliche Spuren deutschen Geistes eingepägt; wir haben in das starre Zelotenthum amerikanischer Unduldsamkeit den frischen Luftzug einer freieren Lebensanschauung geleitet und dadurch unseren Nachkommen wie dem ganzen Amerikanerthum den Ausblick auf eine bessere, freiere Zukunft eröffnet.

Wenn auch die Tragik des Schicksals es wollen mag, dass dabei schliesslich unser Deutchthum auf der Strecke bleiben wird, so haben wir doch unsere Pflicht erfüllt, indem wir eingetreten sind für das Erbe unserer Väter, errungen in tausendjährigem Kampfe: die deutsche Kultur.

Und unsere deutsche Sprache wollen wir hochhalten und pflegen, denn sie ist das Bindeglied aller Deutschen auf dem weiten Erdenrund."

There will be few German-Americans who do not heartily agree with the editorial of *Die Deutsche Post*, but I wish to add a few comments concerning the "pessimism" expressed by our German-American countryman. Being a German-American myself, I, like him, cherish a high regard for the German language, and I believe that it should be kept up as much as possible in our families and schools. Indeed, I believe that a study of the German language is indispensable in our educational system for a proper comprehension of the English language. This fact is sufficiently well known among educators, and the study of German is greatly encouraged, more so than that of any other modern language. In our English grammars and in every scientific treatment of the English language, German is recognised as the greatest help in the comprehension of the English, not only in the United States of North America but also in England. Any student who would devote himself to a historical and philological study of the English language begins to learn German and then Anglo Saxon.

One quotation which characterises the view of all students of English, may suffice: Clair James Greece, in the preface to his translation of Matzner's *English Grammar*, from the German into the English, says:

"That the Grammar of the tongue should have been approached by Germans

from that purely scientific point of view, from which natives have not hitherto regarded it, will not surprise us, when we consider the relations of German to the classical tongues of antiquity and to our own vernacular. *The German is the living classical tongue*, while the modern tongues of the West of Europe are constructed out of the débris of Latin, as English is from the débris of Romance and of a decayed and decapitated German idiom; the modern high Dutch or German exhibits even more than the classical tongues themselves, a systematic orderly development from indigenous materials. The growth and development of language, which to a Frenchman or an Englishman lie external and remote, are to a German ready to hand; and as the cloudless nights of the plains of Shinar prompted the ancient Chaldæans to study the motions of the heavenly host, the purely indigenous structure of their native speech has suggested to the Germans the investigation of the laws of the vocal material in which thought is deposited and communicated."

In the general competition for a proper sphere of influence, the German language need not be afraid of ever being set aside. Its influence upon the thought of the American nation will be lasting, and it will remain an indispensable factor in the education of our youths. That the German language will not become the language of the country is in my opinion no loss, and need not be regretted by my German-American fellow-citizens. The English is preferable as a world language, and among the non-English speaking peoples the Germans ought to feel the least animosity toward the English, for the English is, after all, a German dialect which has developed into a most glorious and noble growth, having acquired by its separation from its mother language a greater freedom, a greater flexibility, a universality, and a rare adaptability to all kinds of uses,—scientific, philosophical, commercial, and what not. Let me quote as an authority on the subject the great master of comparative philology, Jacob Grimm, who, being a German himself, certainly knew the preferences of the German language to perfection, and is one of the greatest admirers of Teutonic speech. In "The Origin of Language," he expresses his view concerning the English as follows:

"Keine unter allen neueren Sprachen hat gerade durch das Aufgeben und Zerrütten alter Lautgesetze, durch den Wegfall beinahe sämtlicher Flexionen eine grössere Kraft und Stärke empfangen als die englische, und von ihrer nicht einmal lehrbaren, nur lernbaren Fülle freier Mitteltöne ist eine wesentliche Gewalt des Ausdrucks abhängig geworden, wie sie vielleicht noch nie einer andern menschlichen Zunge zu Gebote stand. Ihre ganze überaus geistige, wunderbar geglückte Anlage und Durchbildung war hervorgegangen aus einer überraschenden Vermählung der beiden edelsten Sprachen des späteren Europas, der germanischen und romanischen, und bekannt ist wie im Englischen sich beide zu einander verhalten, indem jene bei weitem die sinnliche Grundlage hergab, diese die geistigen Begriffe zuführte. Ja die englische Sprache, von der nicht umsonst auch der

grösste und überlegenste Dichter der neuen Zeit im Gegensatz zur classischen alten Poesie, ich kann natürlich nur Shakespeare meinen, gezeugt und getragen worden ist, sie darf mit vollem Recht eine Weltsprache heissen und scheint gleich dem englischen Volk ausersehn künftigh noch in höherem Masse an allen Enden der Erde zu walten. Denn an Reichthum, Vernunft und gedrängter Fuge lässt sich keine aller noch lebenden Sprachen ihr an die Seite setzen, auch unsre deutsche nicht, die zerrissen ist wie wir selbst zerrissen sind, und erst manche Gebrechen von sich abschütteln müsste, ehe sie kühn mit in die Laufbahn träte."

Bayard Taylor translates this passage as follows :

"No one of all the modern languages has acquired a greater force and strength than the English, through the derangement and relinquishment of its ancient laws of sound. The unteachable (nevertheless *learnable*) profusion of its middle-tones has conferred upon it an intrinsic power of expression, such as no other human tongue ever possessed. Its entire, thoroughly intellectual, and wonderfully successful foundation and perfected development issued from a marvellous union of the two noblest tongues of Europe, the Germanic and the Romanic. Their mutual relation in the English language is well known, since the former furnished chiefly the material basis, while the latter added the intellectual conceptions. The English language, by and through which the greatest and most eminent poet of modern times—as contrasted with ancient classical poetry—(of course I can refer only to Shakespeare), was begotten and nourished, has a just claim to be called a language of the world; and it appears to be destined, like the English race, to a higher and broader sway in all quarters of the earth. For in richness, in compact adjustment of parts, and in pure intelligence, none of the living languages can be compared with it—not even our German, which is divided even as we are divided, and which must cast off many imperfections before it can boldly enter on its career."¹

On consulting my own sentiments concerning the English language, I must confess that I do not feel as if it were a foreign tongue, but only a kindred dialect of my native speech; in fact, it is in many respects nearer the language of my ancestors, who, so far as I can trace them back, all came from Northern Germany the country of low German dialects. English is a low German dialect, and modern high German was forced by the course of events upon the North Germans, subsequently to the Reformation. If we regard changes in the speech of a country as sad, and view the necessity of them so pessimistically we ought to be deeply affected by the fact that our ancestors gave up their low German which is a most beautiful language in favor of the harder and more guttural high German with its complex constructions, acquired under the influence of Latin Schools. As the English nation including the lowlands of Scotland is more purely Teutonic in blood than any province of Germany, so the structure of the English language has

¹ *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache*, 1851. Berlin edition, 1866, p. 53. See Taylor's translation of Faust, Vol. I., p. xii. See for different translations, Trench's *English: Past and Present*, p. 39, and *Standard Dictionary*, p. ix.

more faithfully preserved the Germanic and especially the Saxon character than the High German that is now spoken in the Fatherland.

It is not my intention to descant on the several preferences which the two languages, German and English, actually possess; but I would say that English has become the language of the country, not alone through the fact that the thirteen oldest states were English colonies, nor because the majority of the people speak English, but by its own intrinsic virtue. The English is to become the world language because it is best adapted to the purpose. Supposing the English had not yet been adopted as the official language of some of our States, we have not the slightest doubt that even if the majority of the people spoke other languages the English would in a free competition conquer and remain the victor by dint of those intrinsic virtues which the father of comparative philology, Jacob Grimm, fully appreciated, and which any one who for any length of time has been compelled to make use of the English will recognise.

We German-Americans stand up for German ideals, for German science, German music, the German spirit as incorporated in the great men of the Teutonic nation, Luther, Kepler, Copernicus, Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Kant, Frederick the Great, Beethoven, and their kind, but we see our duty in building up in unison with our Anglo-American countrymen, not in tearing down their work. We want to build higher and better than it was permitted us in the Fatherland, and if there is to be any rivalry between the different ingredients that are united here in the work of shaping the future of our nation, let it be the competition of vieing with one another in doing the best work. Let no outsider dare to set enmity between the Anglo American and the German-American, for the interests of both are irrevocably cemented together in their common ideals, their common tasks, their common duties.