

GERMAN CULTURE.

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THE expansion of Germany by conquest in Europe is often treated as if it were not only for Germany's advantage, but Europe's. Germany, after the preliminaries of aggression, would give more than she took and plant more than she destroyed; her conquests would receive German "culture." As Alexander the Great proposed before his conquests in Asia to give all men a Greek mind, the German nation would give all the world a German mind. That there is ample evidence for this attitude in the works of what Mr. Asquith calls "professors and learned persons," in military writers such as Von Bernhardi, in the speeches of the German Emperor, is shown by the following few extracts which could easily be multiplied.

The Emperor once said: "The German people are the granite block on which the good God may complete his work of civilizing the world. Then will be realized the word of the poet who said the world will one day be cured by the German character." Von Bernhardi (in the introduction to his *War of To-day*) would enforce culture at the point of the sword. "We ourselves," he says, have become conscious of being a powerful, as well as a necessary, factor in the development of mankind. This knowledge imposes on us the obligations of asserting our mental and moral influence as much as possible, and of paving the way everywhere in the world for German labor and German idealism. But we can only carry out successfully these supreme civilizing tasks if our humanizing efforts are accompanied and supported by increasing *political* power as evinced by enlarged colonial possessions, extended international commerce, influence of Teutonic culture in all parts of the globe, and above all by a perfect safeguarding of our political power in Europe." In his even more famous *Germany and the Next War* he preaches a holy war upon the inferior Latin, British or Slav

racés in the interests of his Koran, German culture. He says: "A high, if not the highest, importance for the entire development of the human race is ascribable to the German people. This conviction is based on the intellectual merits of our nation, on the freedom and universality of the German spirit. . . . We often see in other nations a greater intensity of specialized ability, but never the same capacity for generalization and absorption. It is the quality which specially fits us for the leadership in the intellectual world, and impresses on us the obligation to maintain that position."¹ Again, he says that to no nation except the German "has it been given to enjoy in its inner self that which is given to mankind as a whole." He adds: "No other people can follow the bold flights of German genius or soar aloft to the freedom of German world-citizenship;" Germany alone is capable of "leading the harmonious development of humanity."

We are to take it on almost exclusively German authority that German culture is the best. The only foreign voice in this choir is Mr. Houston S. Chamberlain, whose large and popular *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* was written in German for the Germans. It may be of interest to point out that this German view of German culture is not supported by any great non-German critic of culture, and that among German writers Nietzsche condemned it with astonishing bitterness. When a proposal was made to celebrate in the conquered provinces of Alsace-Lorraine the opening of the new university of Strasburg, Nietzsche wanted to send a protest to Bismarck, asking whether German professors had the right to go in triumph to Strasburg. "Our soldiers have conquered the French soldiers, and that is glorious. But has our culture humiliated French culture? Who would dare say so?"²

Leaving on one side Germany's debatable first position in an international competition for the prizes of culture, it is as obviously absurd that all Europe should submit to German culture as that all Europe should drink lager beer. The national flavor of culture is of value to the Continent, and we like to drink now English beer, now French Bordeaux, now Italian Chianti.

But to come back to culture. To begin with, the word is not

¹ *Germany and the Next War*, English translation by Allen H. Powles, Popular edition, 1914, p. 74.

² Nietzsche who says "German depth is often only a difficult hesitating digestion"; and "if any one wishes to see the German soul demonstrated *ad oculos*, let him only look at German taste, at German art and manners. What boorish indifference to taste!" *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. by Helen Zimmern, 1907, p. 199.

of German origin, but borrowed and deformed with an initial "K." In such cases there is a presumption that the thing as well as the word is derivative. Here it may not be irrelevant to notice that a substitute for the naturalized English word "gentleman" is not being sought for in Germany. Murray's *New English Dictionary* defines culture in the sense we are discussing as "the training, development and refinement of mind, taste, and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined; the intellectual side of civilization"; while Matthew Arnold defines it too narrowly as "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world." Such a temper of mind is naturally interested in the preservation of works of art and objects of historic interest; and the deliberate mutilation of works of art and objects of historic interest is impossible to the cultured. On the intellectual side of civilization art plays a great part. What, with the exception of music, has Germany done in the arts which make up so much of culture?

In literature Germany has claimed a high place and has persuaded some people in England and America to agree that she has one of the greatest and most profound schools of poetry. To a person with an eye for quality, the first literatures in the world are the Greek, the English, the French, and the Italian. In German literature Goethe, the least German of all German writers, is a great name, but who else is there whose work is of really first rate quality? Goethe spoke of "the good time when Merck and I were young and German literature was yet a clean slate on which we hoped to write rare things," but somehow no one after Goethe has written immortal things on that slate. Schiller tilled a barren and dry land; Lessing, pursuing art, archeology, history and dramatic criticism, has no place in the temple of Art. There is even less worth in Herder and Jean Paul, Tieck, Novalis and a host of others. The new empire did not produce any literary work of the first order; and the strongest formative influences have been the French realists and the Norwegian Ibsen.

In the last twenty-five years Germany has produced no notable writer, poet, painter or musician. Germany's modern architecture is a byword, though the German Emperor dreamed of Berlin being "some day the most beautiful city in the world." The *Sieges-Allée* did not, as he hoped, make a colossal impression on foreign opinion. Actually, it affected foreign and native observers in the same distressing way. "All the Hohenzollern art to-day has a sensational-sentimental quality which is apparently what William II

means by the ideal." It has neither the repose nor proportion of the true classic, nor the realist's fidelity to humble natural life. It may, perhaps, be called romantic—a very poor, restricted, and vain-glorious phase of romanticism, the romantic in modern military uniform.³ Germany's blindness in matters of taste may be gauged by a claim in a recent *Frankfurter Zeitung* that "German victory will bring for the joy and glory of the human race greater and more splendid works" than the damaged cathedral of Rheims.

Germany has declaimed against uncultivated Russia, but it would be impossible to find a single modern German fit to stand with Turgenev, Tolstoy, or even writers of the second line such as Dostoyevsky and Maxim Gorky, who have so profoundly affected the art of to-day. As to German painting, a brilliant writer lecturing on this subject at Oxford to German extension students said lightly that the problem of his lecture was that there was no German art, though there were a few German artists who were steeped in foreign influences. Germany in art has never been a great power, and even her apologists have to admit it. Thus Bernhardt tells us that "German art has. . . failed to win a leading position." In the same candid paragraph he also confesses that "in the domain of the exact sciences Germany has been compelled to give precedence to foreign countries."⁴

What is left, then, to the home of culture? It is perhaps hardly fair to take some foolish persons who may claim the first place for Germany among nations because she "was the fatherland of Goethe and Zeppelin," and Herr Wedekind who says that the 42 cm. howitzer "is the the finest proof of our intellectual superiority," as representative of the mind of Germany. Yet it would be impossible to find parallel utterances in the English press, such as that "England is supreme as the fatherland of Shakespeare and Shrapnel."

The fact, according to Bernhardt, that the annual export of German books to foreign countries is, according to trustworthy estimates, twice as large as that of France, England, and North America combined,⁵ proves the well-known proficiency in research and aptitude for systematic work. But what of this huge mass of books shipped from Germany? How many have proved their value

³ G. H. Perris, *Germany and the German Emperor*, London, 1912, pp. 380-381.

⁴ *Germany and the Next War*, p. 7. This lack of originality is also emphasized in an article by Sir William Ramsay in *Nature* (London), October 8, 1914, p. 137, who speaks of the leading characteristic of Germans as being the exploitation of other people's discoveries.

⁵ *Germany and the Next War*, p. 7.

by being translated? Many books relating to the destiny and claims of Germany which have been recently translated have only, as it were, a *succès de scandale*, and are only interesting for the light thrown upon the German (or Pan-German) mind.

"The Teutons love the truth," said Tacitus; but the Teutons of to-day love it not. Least of all do they love the truth about themselves, to judge by their preposterous claims for German supremacy as colonists and as a world-power. What other nations would have cackled so loudly as to its future prospects of founding a world-religion; or have boasted that if Germany were worsted in the next war, the universe would receive a staggering blow, and "the general progress of mankind be checked in its healthy development, for which a flourishing Germany is the essential condition"? Megalomania isolates; the moral isolation of Germany is paralleled by her political isolation of to-day, and the expression of her overweening confidence as *hybris*.

Well, what about the contributions of Germany to science and philosophy?

Germany has an imposing list of names of philosophers; but the whole question of realism and idealism is such a wide one that it is impossible to say that such and such a school of philosophy ranks above another. It is enough to say that the value of German stock in philosophy is depreciating; and with that the credit of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer.

German scientists are in the main distinguished by three traits: they are notable for their powers of research rather than for originality, many are of foreign extraction, and the greatest of them date before the foundation of the German empire in 1871, as Monsieur Denys Cochin has recently pointed out. In pure mathematics, Leibniz may be taken to balance Newton; against Lagrange, Fourier and Cauchy, Germany may be considered approximately to balance accounts with Gauss, Lejeune-Dirichlet, Riemann, and Weierstrass, of whom Lejeune-Dirichlet was of French descent. In mechanics and mathematical physics, it is interesting to notice that the following are the leading thinkers who are quoted in the German *Encyklopädie der mathematischen Wissenschaften* (Vol. IV, 1, p. 17): Galileo, Varignon, Euler, Newton, Laplace, Clairaut, d'Alembert, Lagrange, Bernoulli, Poncelet, Coriolis, Culmann, Fourier, Cauchy, Poisson, Green, Gauss, Lamé, Barré de Saint-Venant, Franz Neumann, Stokes, Maxwell, William Thomson, Kirchhoff, Helmholtz. Of these, only Culmann, Gauss, Neumann, Kirchhoff, and Helmholtz are German; and Culmann is comparatively unimportant. In

biology Darwin and Cuvier are greater names than any German. In surgery, Pasteur, Simpson and Lister, than Koch. In electricity and magnetism Galvani, Gilbert, Volta, Cavendish, Coulomb, Poisson, Ampère, *Ohm*, Faraday, Clerk Maxwell, the Dane Oersted, Kelvin, *Helmholtz*, and *Hertz* are the leading names, and the italicized ones only are German.

The science of optics is mainly due to Descartes, Newton, Huygens, Young, Fresnel, Cauchy, Stokes, and Maxwell. The theory of thermo-dynamics was the work of Sadi Carnot, Clapeyron, *Clausius*, *Helmholtz*, Mayer, Joule, W. Thomson, and Rankine. In applied science Germany has not the first or second place. The steam-engine was developed by Watt and Stephenson. The telephone is the work of Graham Bell and Edison; the telegraph of Cooke, Wheatstone, W. Thomson and Morse; the electric light of Edison and Swan. The gas engine was the invention of Otto in France; the balloon came from France, and was first used for military purposes by the French; flying machines were largely developed in America.