

## THE GERMAN-AMERICAN AS A CITIZEN

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MUCH has been written concerning the work done in America by individuals of German descent. In the present essay we shall attempt to review the contributions of the German-Americans as a whole, and gauge their value as citizens of our country.

In general their qualities are well known. They are frugal, industrious, law-abiding, and orderly. School teachers will tell you that their children are the easiest to manage. Shopkeepers prefer them as customers. Street car companies make every effort to retain them in positions involving the handling of money.

Said a physician to me the other day: "When a patient reaches down into his pocket before leaving the office, he is almost invariably a German."

These judgments, repeated on every hand, cannot be illusory. Nevertheless, they are merely based on general impressions, and so lack the coerciveness of definite facts and figures. To supply these latter is the purpose of the present essay.

We intend to consider the activities of the German-Americans under the headings of

1. Patriotism.
2. Public Influence.
3. Orderliness.
4. Efficiency.

The United States have undergone two great crises: the Revolution and the Civil War. In both the German-Americans did their full share or even more. Says Bancroft: "At the commencement of the Revolution, we hear but little of them, not from their

want of zeal in the good cause, but from their modesty. They kept themselves purposely in the background, leaving it to those of English origin to discuss the violation of English liberties and to decide whether the time for giving battle had come. But when the resolution was taken, no part of the country was more determined in its patriotism than the German counties of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Neither they nor their descendants have laid claim to all the praise that was their due."<sup>1</sup>

As a special sign of their reliability we may regard the fact that Washington's bodyguard was recruited from their ranks. The battle of Oriskany, won by them, was a decisive conflict. Had this fight been lost, the whole struggle for independence might have taken a different turn. In general, the quality of their service was among the best. The battalion of Peter Muhlenberg, for example, is described by Bancroft as "one of the most perfect" in the American army.<sup>2</sup>

Their merits in the Civil War were equally great. In fact, they deserve the place of honor through the readiness with which they placed their lives at the disposal of the Union.

The following table is compiled from B. A. Gould's "Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers."<sup>3</sup> The first column represents the number of Union soldiers which the various elements of the population ought to have furnished if all had come forward in the same proportion. We shall call it the Proper Proportion of Volunteers. The second column shows the actual number of volunteers furnished. The Index of Patriotism, supplied by the writer, is obtained by dividing the second column by the first. Canadians are not included in the table. According to Kaufmann, their proper proportion is figured on the basis of those people who were actually settled in the States, whereas the volunteers must have been drawn largely from the big floating class who came here for a season and then returned to their native land.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Kapp, *The Life of Frederick William von Steuben*, New York, Mason Brothers, 1859, p. VII.

<sup>2</sup> Bancroft, *History of the United States of America*, New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1887, Vol. IV, p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> Published for the U. S. Sanitary Commission, by Hurd and Houghton. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1869. The tables drawn upon are on pp. 27 and 28. Although the figures in this table are taken from the source just given, the form of the table is adopted from Wilhelm Kaufmann's *Die Deutschen im amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, published by R. Oldenbourg, Munich and Berlin, 1911. See p. 120.

	Proper Proportion of Volunteers	Actual Volunteers	Index of Patriotism
Native Americans .....	1,660,068	1,523,267	.92
English .....	38,250	45,508	1.19
Irish .....	139,052	144,221	1.04
Germans .....	118,402	176,817	1.49
Other Foreigners .....	39,455	48,410	1.23

The showing of the Germans, excellent though it is, must have been even better, for according to Kaufmann's careful computations their numbers far exceeded those given by Gould, being placed by him at 216,000. Probably we can safely compromise at 200,000. To these multitudes we must add all those who were born in this country, but were German by descent. The total contribution of this element is placed by Kaufmann at 750,000, or almost a third of the entire northern army! Surely a display of patriotic devotion that merits something different from the ridicule and hostility which are habitually meted out to the "Dutchman."

In this war, as in the Revolution, the Germans deserve credit for an achievement of the most far-reaching importance. It was the saving of the state of Missouri, without which the outcome might have been entirely different.

As if in derision of those who delight in throwing mud, it is a fact that the two feminine figures whose names are indissolubly connected with our national struggles, and who are typical of the bravery of American womanhood, are Germans: Molly Pitcher and Barbara Frietchie! We do not know how much is history and how much legend about the exploit by which the latter was rendered famous, but the fact is undeniable that both she and the courageous Molly belonged to the Teutonic race.

We pass to the heading of "Public Influence." The term "Political Activity" is avoided because it would confine the subject too exclusively to the sphere of office-holding, and we wish to include the influence which makes itself felt at the polls, and which even precedes the act of voting and shapes the opinions of which the latter is the outcome.<sup>4</sup>

The German-Americans have not been especially prominent as office-holders. To be sure, they have had great statesmen, as

<sup>4</sup> Our treatment of this subject is based on the example of A. B. Faust, in his work on *The German Element in the United States*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1909.

is evidenced by men like Wirt, Schurz, and Altgeld. Almost half of the governors of Pennsylvania for a century were German, and in more recent years many of the presiding officials of our big cities have had German names. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the people of Teutonic descent have not been as eminent in this field as elsewhere. There are several reasons for this, prominent among which is the handicap of language. Manifestly, a man with imperfect command of the native tongue can only compete with difficulty in a field where the haranguing of multitudes and preparation of public documents are important duties. Again, office holding in a democracy is not solely a matter of merit, but depends on the will of the majority. A "foreigner" is always at a disadvantage when it comes to an election. But the main reason for the German backwardness is probably to be found in the uncertain nature of the politician's career. One year he is in office, the next he is out; a condition which does not appeal to the Teuton, who more than most other people loves to build up on a firm foundation, and climb steadily from step to step. The unsavory nature of American politics undoubtedly was another deterring feature to men who were accustomed to direct, honest dealing.

All this does not mean, however, that the German's influence was small. The main work in this field is done by the people at the polls, and by public opinion as it decides elections and guides the activity of officials. And here, again, the Germans have been surpassed by none in the quality of their work.

The greatest issue that has confronted the American people since the founding of the republic is the slavery question. From first to last the German-Americans were on the side of justice and humanity in this question. To them belongs credit for the first protest against slavery ever made on the continent. It was drawn up by Pastorius and presented to the Quakers of Pennsylvania in 1688. Although laid aside for the time being, it must have contributed to the agitation against slavery which started soon after in that state. Ever since, the countrymen of Pastorius have remained true to their original convictions. The following table exhibits the number of slaveholding families in the country in 1790:

Nationality	Total Number	White Families Slaveholding	Per Cent
All Nationalities .....	405,475	47,664	11.8
English and Welsh.....	336,651	38,146	11.3
Scotch .....	27,250	4,362	16.0
Irish ....	6,285	962	15.3
Dutch .....	9,399	2,625	27.9
French .....	1,913	589	30.8
German .....	23,300	871	3.7
Hebrew .....	.213	33	15.5
All other .....	464	76	16.4

The compiler goes on to say: "It is significant that the smallest proportion is shown by the Germans, who even at this early period were obviously opposed to slave ownership. Had the proportion of slaves for the entire white population of the United States in 1790 been the same as it was for the German element, the aggregate number of slaves at the first census would have been but 52,520 instead of approximately 700,000."<sup>5</sup>

That there was no later deviation from this attitude is shown by the part which was played by the German-Americans in the agitation preceding the Civil War. Schurz, Follen, Lieber, and Heinzen were among those who championed the cause of the negro with impassioned utterances, risking life and position in doing so; and they were supported by multitudes of similar-minded compatriots. It is well known, for example, that a great majority of the prominent "forty-eighters" became enthusiastic Republicans upon the formation of the party. And of eighty-eight German newspapers of those times, we are told, only eight supported the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. But the best evidence of the spirit animating the Germans was given by the war itself. As already pointed out, they furnished from 50 to 75 per cent more union soldiers than were called by their proportion in the population, and thus occupied the place of honor in regard to the number of soldiers, as indeed they did in regard to this whole great question.

The Sunday observance and personal liberty question is another in which their influence has been wholesome. They have helped to moderate the dread austerity of the old American Sab-

<sup>5</sup> *A Century of Population Growth in the United States, 1790-1900*, p. 124. To be perfectly fair, we must state that the big percentage of the French is due to the fact that so many French families lived in South Carolina, one of the most prominent slave-holding states at the time.

bath, when the libraries were closed, games were prohibited, music was put under the ban, and an atmosphere of restraint and oppressiveness chilled the blood. They believed that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and their influence—manifest at the polls, in the press, and in their personal example—gradually helped to bring about a milder and more tolerant attitude on the part of the public. In related ways, too, they contributed greatly to the brightening and sweetening of life. It is to them that we owe

1. The Furtherance of Music.
2. The Cheerful Christmas.
3. The Roof Garden.

A whole book could be written about their influence on music. Suffice it to mention Theodore Thomas and the Damrosch's, to refer to the big symphony orchestras, to draw attention to the great music festivals, and finally to do honor to the faithful teachers who carried the message of this noble art to the remotest corners of the land.

Christmas was greatly enhanced through the introduction of the lighted tree. The ingenious toys brought over from the Fatherland also helped to make it a blessed time for the young. By reason of the transformation of this season effected by the children of Germania, December might appropriately be styled a German month. The roof garden also did its share to enliven the dreary tenor of life characteristic of the old Puritans.

Though without direct connection with the subject, the impetus given to physical culture might likewise be mentioned. While the Germans contributed little to the outdoor games which are in vogue in this country, they deserve much of the credit for the development of indoor gymnastics.

To return to our subject.

The Germans have lent their weight toward the habit of independent voting. Carl Schurz is the individual who was most prominent in this direction. In fact, he was often called the original Independent. But his countrymen, too, have practised the same freedom of judgment. The most notable example is to be found in their wholesale change of party during the decade preceding the Civil War. Though the majority of Germans had previously been democrats, they now joined the organization which championed the cause of the black man.

In addition to these expressions of conviction, the causes of sound money and political reform also received firm support at their hands.

As to the drink question, they followed the sane middle course. The older Americans were heavy indulgers, and their beverage was the fiery whiskey. Opposed to them we find the prohibitionists, who believe in doing away with all drinking whatsoever. The Germans, ever fond of personal liberty, have almost universally opposed prohibition, but their practice was also against the consumption of heavy liquors and in favor of mild beverages like wine and beer. In introducing these they did the country a genuine service, and indicated the path toward a solution of the whole question.

In all the questions mentioned except the last, the position espoused by the Germans, though hotly antagonized at first, finally proved victorious. This is true of the slavery, Sunday, independent voting, money, and reform questions. The result indicates unusual soundness of judgment on the part of the people involved, and leads us to regret that in regard to the temperance question as well, the solution pointed out by them was not adopted.

It may not be amiss to conclude this section, like the former, with a reference to several prominent individuals and their work. The picture which is most celebrated as a representation of national spirit, "Washington Crossing the Delaware," was executed by the German Leutze. The Capitol owes its imposing appearance to a master builder whose grandfather came from the Fatherland. And the Congressional Library was conceived by men who were born under Teutonic skies. The inference is justified that the people who ordinarily are kicked and cuffed about by their "superior" fellows, must after all be called in when something important is to be done.<sup>6</sup>

In the previous sections we have spoken of positive virtues. The present one will be devoted to those which are negative. Society must not only be built up—it must also be preserved. And a nation is judged not only by the number of great men it produces, but also by the number of its criminals. Here, again,

<sup>6</sup> Curiously enough, the Germans were also involved in the origin of our flag and the national anthem. It was before the battle of Oriskany that the flag was hoisted for the first time; and the immortal "Star Spangled Banner" was written while Armistead—of German parentage—was defending Fort M'Henry from the attacks of the British.

the showing of the German-Americans is excellent. They are surpassed only by a single element of the population—the Scandinavians. A table, compiled from the census and showing the number of foreign-born prisoners, will make this clearer. The figures which it contains refer but to a single year (1904), but may nevertheless be accepted as a faithful index of conditions.

	Number of Prisoners Committed for 100,000 Persons
Canada .....	300
France .....	342
Germany .....	162
Great Britain .....	614
Italy .....	442
Norway .....	143
Poland .....	270
Russia .....	288
Sweden .....	179

Again the compiler cannot resist commenting. "Relative to their numerical representation and importance among the foreign born peoples of the United States, he says, "the Germans are the least conspicuous among the foreign-born prisoners."<sup>7</sup>

This time our "prominent" individuals will belong to other races. If asked to name the worst citizens of our country, we should probably unite on the three presidential assassins: Booth, Guiteau, and Czolgosz. Curiously enough, these represent three non-German races—the Anglo-Saxons, Latins, and Slavs. It is as if the Teutons had been purposely avoided in writing this darkest chapter of American history.

A review of the bandits who have made our country unsafe would likely show that they, too, were but rarely of German descent. The feuds which have scarcely ended even in our own day were carried on by "native" families. The lynchings which disgrace our land take place in regions where foreigners are rare. And the rebellion, too, was prosecuted in the main by people of British descent. To be sure, there were special reasons for the last two phenomena, and Germans might have acted similarly if similarly placed. Still it is doubtful whether they would have resorted to quite such radical measures. We must remember that their forebears had no Charles I and no 1789; likewise that there were only three imperial assassinations in the German

<sup>7</sup> *Prisoners and Juvenile Delinquents in Institutions*, 1904, p. 43.

Empire during the long period of 1100 years! In general, orderliness and restraint are characteristic of the Teutonic race.

With these qualities go their traditional efficiency and thoroughness, which brings us to the last of our sections. Many facts could be adduced in illustration, but we shall confine ourselves to a single group—those which deal with the work of high school pupils. Good scholarship and efficiency, of course, are not always synonymous: some pupils with fine school records achieve no success in life, and many achieve success who have won no distinction in school. On the whole, however, the two classes agree; where the numbers considered are large enough, distinction in school may be regarded as an index of efficiency.

An inquiry covering ten of the largest cities in our country shows that of all the elements composing our population, the Germans and Jews make the best showing. A table of "honor pupils" will be advanced in proof, although the general conclusion is based on much more extensive data. The first part of the table includes schools where the honor pupils number from 10 to 20 per cent of the total graduates, the second where they number from 30 to 40 per cent. These schools are not arbitrarily selected, but include all that have come to our notice under the categories mentioned.

#### First Group

	Graduates	Per cent	Honor Pupils	Per cent	Index of Scholarship
Total .....	946	100	137	100	...
English .....	508	53.7	69	50.4	.94
Germans .....	303	32.0	51	37.2	1.16
Jews .....	82	8.7	11	8.0	.92
Others .....	42	4.4	6	4.4	1.00

#### Second Group

	Graduates	Per cent	Honor Pupils	Per cent	Index of Scholarship
Total .....	1,120	100	369	100	...
English .....	638	57.0	182	49.3	.86
Germans .....	306	27.3	120	32.5	1.19
Jews .....	83	7.4	39	10.6	1.43
Others .....	72	6.4	22	6.0	.94

[Racial affiliation is determined by names—an unreliable index in the case of individuals, but safe enough where great numbers are involved. "English" includes Scotch, Irish, and Welsh; also natives of these races as well as foreign born.]

The somewhat poor showing of the Jews in the first part of the table, and their exceptionally good record in the second are both unusual, and represent fluctuations such as might be expected where small numbers are involved. If we strike an average, we shall about get the true position of these people—which is very near to that of the Germans. In general, the investigation shows that the Germans and Jews are in the lead, sometimes one having the advantage, sometimes the other. And the conclusion is plausible that their eminence is the sign of greater efficiency, based either on superior mental endowment, harder work, or both factors.

To sum up our analysis, we find the Germans occupying the first position in regard to loyalty and patriotism, and unsurpassed with reference to public influence. In orderliness and law observance they are excelled only by a single element of the population—the Scandinavians; and in efficiency their leadership is only disputed by the Jews.

Such being the case, it ought not to take great mathematical keenness to figure out their rank in the rivalry of classes. Though inferior to some elements in numbers, they have demonstrated their claim to first place in those qualities which go to the making of good citizens.