

What the German Is Thinking

The Kaiser Is Definitely Kaput, But the "Deutschland Ueber Alles" Spirit Still Smoulders

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Illustration by De Alton Valentine



WHEN in Germany the American traveler soon decides to shave himself. To entrust one's self to a German barber these days is hard on the nerves. Outwardly Herr Barber is polite; when you enter his shop he clicks his heels together in the approved way, but as he leans over you, razor in hand—what a look!

The mortality figures of Americans in German barber chairs are probably very low, but if looks were bullets the undertakers of Germany would be a happy and prosperous lot. As Herr Barber scrapes your face you need not be a mind reader to sense that he is thinking of the elaborate barber shop he had dreamed of establishing in the Champs Elysées when the Kaiser got to Paris, and you are all too painfully aware that he is somehow blaming you for the frustration of his plan.

A barber shop the world over is an excellent place to gauge public opinion. The barber chair is the throne from which the common man directs the

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world's destinies—or at least it is where he announces his theories as to how all things ought to be run. A German barber shop is no exception to the rule. In point of fact, almost all German barber shop conversations are political for the German still feels himself highly qualified to run the world.

And it is not long before Herr Barber has drawn you into a political discussion—not so much to get your viewpoint as to present his. With all the rest of his countrymen, he is quite sure that the German viewpoint needs a great deal of explaining, and it seems that every German considers it his patriotic duty to do his share.

Here, indeed, is an interesting insight into the working of the German national mind. The German is still goose-stepping, and this time to the sharp command of the strong group of financiers, headed by Hugo Stinnes, who have bought up all the surviving newspapers in Germany. At the command of this controlled press propaganda has become a national pastime with every foreigner its victim. Hence everything that a German tells you these days is according to formula, for the pattern of his propaganda comes from the same source. What you hear in one barber shop, then, you will hear all over Germany.

Their viewpoint on present-day conditions can be briefly summarized. They are willing to admit that they lost the war—"but we had the whole world against us," the German will add.

"It was America's entrance into the war," he will say heatedly, "that complicated matters. We were ready, back in 1917, to make reasonable terms of peace."

If you venture to mention the submarine campaign, the treatment of women and children in occupied territory, the sudden adoption of gas warfare, Herr Barber looks deeply pained and tries to divert your attention by declaring stolidly, "Ah, yes, we Germans were misguided. The Kaiser—ach, what a man! We are glad he is gone."

Thus, with a gesture toward Holland, the German seems to absolve himself completely, in his own mind, of any responsibility for war guilt. Moreover, he is training himself to forget the war. All over Germany one searches in vain for a history of the late war from the German point of view. Many such were started in the halcyon days of 1916, but there seems to have been no German historian with the intellectual courage to finish the story. Even if one had, it is doubtful whether the history would find enough German readers to make its publication practical.

Yet on the terms of the Treaty of Versailles the German is voluble and historians are prolific. Every bookshop is filled with books, pamphlets and leaflets decrying the peace settlement, and there are thousands of purchasers of this sort of literature. Certainly if the German has forgotten his war itself he had carefully memorized every paragraph of the treaty that concluded it.

The fundamental position taken by the German, in discussing the peace terms, is that the treaty does not agree with the terms of the Armistice as laid down in the fourteen points. The Ar-

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mistice is popularly known as the Betrayal, for they will tell you that they would have never agreed to an Armistice if they had been able to foresee the terms of the Versailles treaty.

Feeling as they do about the treaty gives them plenty of justification, in their own minds, for the present-day German attitude toward reparation payments.

"We don't owe this money," one German stormed at me. "What we are paying is at the point of a pistol leveled at us by the presence of the armies of occupation."

These assertions fill in the background for our picture of the astounding condition of German finances today. There are probably few financial thinkers in the world who can adequately explain the downward rush in the value of the German mark. If they can, then they are working under the direction of Hugo Stinnes, the dark, sinister figure whose power over Germany today is greater than ever a Hohenzollern dared to dream.

To the Stinnes group the present German government is putty. To the outside world the official German government totters on the verge of bankruptcy, and facts and figures seem to bear this out. In order to satisfy the ever-increasing demands for currency made by the hectic business boom in Germany the Government has set the printing presses working night and day for the issuance of paper marks. With each new flood of paper marks their value falls, while prices and wages try to struggle up to meet the new level.

At the same time the fall in the value of the mark makes Germany a pathetic figure, rapidly declining into bankruptcy, before the eyes of the world. When the foreigner reads in his newspaper that the mark has fallen to 2,000 to the dollar he sighs at the sad plight of Germany. There is no doubt that Germany needs the sighs of the world, but the traveler through Germany soon realizes that the bankruptcy of Germany is a paper one.

One readily cultivates the suspicion, while traveling through Germany, that somewhere behind the scenes some shrewd manipulation of the finances of the country is being accomplished which enables Germany to appear bankrupt before the world and yet actually to keep her resources intact.

German life is like a pot, always ready to boil over. This constant change in the value of the mark keeps things seething and everyone restless. Thus the German is

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the prey of new movements and weird ideas, while the monarchists and communists are active in still further bewildering his outlook on life.

Over here in America the returned traveler is asked frequently, "Does Germany want the Kaiser back again?" The answer is an emphatic no, although Germany is by no means through with the monarchistic idea. One still sees pictures of the ex-Kaiser hanging about, for naturally there will always be a following for any lost cause. Yet the old Junker type—many of them are still influential—still hopes for the return of Wilhelm. Perhaps a quarter of the German people would vote royalist, but there would be only a scant proportion who would vote for the return of the exile of Doorn.

"No, we found out what sort of a character Wilhelm was," explained a staunch royalist to the writer, "and we could never be successful in any effort to bring either Wilhelm or the crown prince back again. You see, they both ran away when the fire was directed toward them. They proved themselves poor soldiers, unworthy of their positions and honors, and we feel that we are well rid of them."

Hence the royalists in Germany are without a king to return to the throne in Germany. In Bavaria there is a strong movement to bring about the return of the Wittelsbach family to their Bavarian principality, but Germany as a whole would never consent to be ruled by a Bavarian king.

One hears vaguely of a movement to return the oldest son of the ex-crown prince to the throne. Then, again, the royalists talk of making an emperor out of Von Hindenburg, who is very popular in Germany, but the unpopularity of his son tempers their enthusiasm.

Thus the royalists are a bit vague in their choice of a king, but less vague in their methods for creating more confusion. There is a strong murder group forming the nucleus of the royalist movement who, taking a page from the experience of the Fascisti, are terrorizing men whose support would go a long way toward stabilizing the present Government. It was this murder group that killed Dr. Walter Rathenau last summer, and their activities are embarrassing many men who are endeavoring now to lead the German peo-

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ple out of their maze of ideas.

Pitted against the royalists, and even more troublesome, are the communists. There is a rapidly growing feeling in Germany that her future lies in a strong alliance with Russia. However, the German people are weary of revolutions — they have had their fill of them in 1918 and since—and any suggestion of violence falls on deaf ears.

But with the stabilizing of Russian life there is no doubt that Germany will do everything she can to develop her alliance with Russia. Both these countries are harboring grudges against the world in general and France in particular. Germany feels that she is so completely disarmed that she has no chance in starting a new war, but she is looking enviously at the military equipment lying around loose in Soviet Russia. Russia knows her great strength in natural and military resources, but she casts envious eyes on the well-trained German generals, despite their war records which were, perhaps, after all, much better than those of the average run of Russian generals.

Thus any traveler in Germany feels that the future grows darker and darker for both Germany and Europe. There is no doubt that the German people have learned little from their war experiences, and that it would require only a spark to set them off in another wild rush down through Europe behind Russian guns. It is a dismal prospect, and it is a terrible one, for it would mean, in the final analysis, the utter destruction of European civilization.

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