

A LETTER FROM GERMANY

THE German has the feeling of no longer knowing himself. His own existence has become doubtful to him. In the triple shock: first through the war, which sent all his hopes to destruction, then through the revolution, which was at first merely an act of desperation, and finally through the complete helplessness, stupidity and ineffectuality of the revolution he has lost all faith in himself, all inward certainty, all reliable guiding instinct. Periods of great danger are not the time for reflection; he only has thrived who could act most directly, whose act proceeded from the unconscious through an inward voice which admitted of no doubt. This is the lack of the German to-day. The Napoleonic era seems to have returned, an era which also found the German wanting in all rational instinct. He felt that apology was demanded of him without knowing exactly what it was that he had to apologise for. He felt Germany's position menaced without being able to say just what position Germany occupied. So he feels to-day that the essence of Germany is in danger, but of what indeed this German essence for which he is so fearful actually consists, to this question he has no answer. And all the multitudes of books which now appear, vie with one another, in seeking the same thing; to give the distraught nation the answer to the anxious query, what the German essence consists of. Never was the longing for knowledge of one's own being, the demand for a clear conception of one's inward nature, the impatience for personal consideration of Germany's destiny so great. "What do we really mean by 'German'?" asks one German of another. And all are united in this one belief, that they can only raise themselves again through realisation of the innermost significance of their entire history. But united in seeking this essential consciousness, they at once become disunited again, since everyone has a different explanation of what its interpretation must signify. That seems curious, since one will say: "You want your essential consciousness? Then you must only ask your history, for every people can distinctly read its meaning in its history; its history carries it in large characters on its forehead." This we ourselves say, and perhaps never since the German Romantic movement, through which indeed in another hour of the Fatherland's misery the perception of historical thought was first awakened, has there been the same effort to realise so well our past, to interpret its signs and to learn its portents for the future.

But at this point the current of German history always breaks off again, to resume every time as before, for united progress is not so characteristic as for each German stock to go its own way; they resemble each other only in one respect, namely, the firmness with which they reject the signposts of the past, and all reflect this one inherent particularism, this invincible striving for separation, the same in the presentation of history as in the history itself. Professor Johannes Haller has just written a book on *The Epochs of German History*, formal and brilliant, but so blind to all German sympathies which could disturb the Prussian countenance, so partisan to everything Protestant, and not only so mistaken, so derogatory, so misapprehensive of everything Catholic, but even so very ignorant of it, that such powerful figures as the Emperor Frederick II, the Luxemburgh Charles IV, in fact all the Habsburgs seem faded in his eyes, and what we call German history seems to him an unimportant circumstantial detour to the house of Hohenzollern, for whose

glorification also the good Lord actually intended the creation of the German. And if Haller's book is insufferable in the eyes of the non-Prussian German, then Paul Landsberg's high-minded and valuable work *The World of the Middle Ages and Ourselves* encounters at once, on the other hand, the keenest mistrust of such Germans as believe that Teuton spiritual life began with Luther, and that everything before that lay in blackest night. This "we" in whose name the young author speaks is inwardly the exact opposite of the fanatic for the Prussian "ideal of order," in that they see only "an ordered disorder," from which only something quite contradictory can save us, namely a "Conservative Revolution." It should make possible a "re-attachment to our own culture tradition," which was destroyed by the Reformation. That sounds like Romanticism, but another work of Landsberg's on *Wesen und Bedeutung der Platonischen Akademie* (*Nature and Existence of the Platonic Academy*) demonstrates that he is not thoroughly a romantic wandering spirit, but is completely urgent for stability and form. Landsberg is a pupil of Max Scheler, one of the active professors of Cologne University, who differentiates himself from the accustomed practice of his colleagues in that he does not merely give philosophical lectures, not only teaches his pupils a set philosophy, but rather conducts them to philosophy, tries to live philosophy with them. Keyserling, indeed, seeks the same at Darmstadt but Scheler has more patience, knows man's nature better, and knows that we cannot improvise the harvest, but must quietly sow year after year, and for the rest trust in slow, all-powerful time as to how much it will allow to mature and ripen.

It is recognised everywhere that the German is lacking in form, in knowledge of, and skill in life, and that his really basic problem is to find again the power of form-fashioning. But a stranger effect than any of these praiseworthy efforts is produced by a little book, which, without theorising in the least, contents itself with allowing to appear the form of youth of twenty-eight in 1918, a figure of inner completion, such a one as we would not dare to anticipate in our times, even in liveliest imagination and certainly not in the person of a Prussian Junker. For this Bernhard von der Marwitz whom Otto Grautoff now causes to rise before us through his thoughts, letters and diaries, is a real Prussian Junker, though of a rare human charm, nobility and spirit of self-consecration. (The book is published by the Sibyllenverlag at Dresden). The von der Marwitz are an old stock, which had sat under the electors in the Odermark. The great-grandfather of this Bernhard, Lieutenant-General Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz made himself known through his rigid conservatism of mind, with which he opposed the so-called Hardenbergschen reform, the first effort in Prussia, if not to break, at least to bend the Junker domination. His brother, Alexander von der Marwitz, was, among all the figures of the romantic circle which gathered about Kobel von Vamhagen, the purest, most brilliant and most lovable; in this circle for the first time in Prussia was sought the building-up of a free and noble fellowship, bound only by the spirit; and in it for the first time Goethe was elevated as the form-giving, rebuilding force of the German being. He had many a link in common with Heinrich von Kleist, but was free from Kleist's depressing and demoralising forces, was indeed an unconfused Kleist. In Bernhard there now appears the spirit of his great-grandfather united with his great-great uncle's to finest advantage, and the happy mixture results in an extraordinarily spiritual, heroic life. His great passion was to have no moment of existence empty of significance, lacking in mental experience, devoid of unforgettable impression, to allow his destiny to run unimpeded to its appointed end. Everything ordinary, everything

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commonplace was unbearable to him ; he was able to live only eye to eye with his own conscience. He had none of that aristocratic spirit which occasionally hankers to toy in dilettante fashion with art. " We must," he once cried " perceive what art means, that it is a matter of high faith." When he, who even denies his own talent—for " all moulds break when I pour boiling metal therein"—nevertheless always reaches out for art, so it arrives always out of over-powering sensations " which is precisely the form the greatest art always takes." The mystery of form attracts him again and again, profoundly. Homer, Plato and the French are his dearest comrades : " My first and only love shall be the study of the French, and always with them the authors of antiquity." It is unbearable to him to see art taken for its own sake alone, treated as something merely good to taste, for a work of art is to him " an act of salvation." Therefore he follows Rodin with enthusiasm, whose works are to him the " pillars on which rests the temple wherein God lives." Of all writers of the time, Claudel is to him the chief. He mentions him in the same breath with Hölderlin, and does not hesitate quietly to put the names of Christ, Plato and Claudel side by side. On the other hand he always has doubts about Goethe. Indeed, he would reverse Goethe's command : " Create, artist, do not talk !" to " Talk, artist, do not create !" Thereby we recognise that he belongs to the gloomy, flaming, volcanic type who seek expression only in heat, fire and smoke, but are fearful of the result of cooling into rigid form.

He has also translated Claudel and himself written a *Great Mass* entitled *The Three Prayers*, in which we hear the echo of Claudel. He entered the war as a lieutenant in a regiment of Uhlans and died on September 8th, 1918, in the military hospital at Valenciennes. He would perhaps have completed what the German Romantic movement began, and might have been able to find a solution of our century-old struggle—one in the tranquillity of the grand style, one which reconciles the classical spirit with the romantic.

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