

Our Contributors.

The Religious Outlook in Germany.

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The problem which now confronts the Churches in Germany presents several features of unusual complexity. It has at length become evident, even to those who have exhibited hitherto a strange obliquity or indifference, that religion in this country has entered upon a new phase, and that the situation is becoming more and more difficult and critical. Earnest souls therefore are beginning to ask:—How will it all end? And the question has its interest,—when seriously weighed, a profound and absorbing interest,—not only for Germany but for the whole Continent, and also for many lands that lie beyond it.

It is abundantly clear that the present condition of affairs cannot long continue. Times of transition are of necessity times of change. Movement of some sort is inevitable, and the variation recorded must be either an advance or a retreat. What verdict then, touching the present religious outlook of this country, must a conscientious observer render? As a frequent visitor of Germany, and having enjoyed the advantage of several periods of residence here, I have been strongly impressed of late by the fact that certain radical changes in the situation have distinctly revealed themselves within the last few years. It is of some of these new factors in the problem that I shall now briefly write.

In dealing with all sorts of questions, too many are content to accept judgments which have been very hastily arrived at, and whose chief recommendation is that they are exceedingly plausible. But such judgments are almost uniformly unreliable. So it has proved in connection with the matter of which I am now speaking. One hears it continually affirmed that the outlook in Germany today is unusually hopeful; and beyond denial there are many facts which,

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seem fully to warrant this conclusion. At no period since the great revival of the sixteenth century has the outward observance of religion been so marked. Church Buildings are everywhere being renovated and enlarged, and more such edifices are now being built every twelve months than used to be constructed within as many years. In Berlin alone, more than twenty new Churches, —some of them most costly and ornate, and involving an immense expenditure of money,—have been erected within less than two decades. And every Sunday, in this city at least, these churches are filled, the aisles also are often packed with men and women, who willingly remain standing there for fully two hours. I have seen crowds waiting on the pavements quite forty minutes before the service was announced to commence, and long before the church doors were opened. In a word: attendance at public worship shows a marvellous advance upon what one was accustomed to observe fifteen or twenty years ago; and, moreover, the proportion of men present has conspicuously risen. The streets, too, speaking generally, have become unusually quiet, nearly all the shops being closed during a considerable portion of each Lord's Day. Save that Germany is happily free from that rowdiness and degrading excess which must ever accompany the indiscriminate sale of intoxicants,—though, in this respect, there has been of

late a marked and serious degeneration, —a Sunday in Berlin today might almost be mistaken for the corresponding day of the week in Edinburgh or London. It is true that a certain amount of work is permitted both in public and private offices, and the popular sentiment demands it. Thus the Postman is everywhere gladly greeted, as he makes his morning call. The Sunday newspaper is eagerly awaited. Many professional men and business men make regular stated-appointments for this day. On the other hand, more rigid than we are, no newspaper work can be done here on the Sabbath, and so the morning Journal is never ready until nearly noon on Mondays. Of course the Germans do not possess, nor do they desire, nor would they tolerate such legislative restrictions as prevail in some parts of the world. A long course of education has produced its legitimate result: and the majority here are determined to pursue "the former way," even if it be not always "the more excellent way." Yet after every deduction has been made, Germany must be said to occupy easily, in this particular, the foremost place among her Continental neighbors. The observance of one day in seven, as a time when religious impulses and duties are to be given the first place, is now a recognized law throughout the fatherland, and this visible respect for the Sabbath has unquestionably lifted that day to a higher and more honorable plane than it has occupied hitherto.

What is the explanation of these noteworthy and commendable changes? There are several cases which might be named, and which will readily suggest themselves; but I want here to call attention to one impelling factor which though very easily discoverable, has been strangely overlooked. It is a factor of the greatest moment, however, in connection with the present inquiry. It is this: persons very high in authority have set the people a new example in reference to the Lord's Day, and the example has proved effective.

Let us take, first of all, the action of the Emperor, than whom no ruler in Europe is more deservedly popular with his subjects. For no ruler of today has identified himself more closely with the interests and aspirations of his people. Literally everything that concerns them has an immediate interest for him and instantly he manifests that interest, whether it be within the domain of politics, commerce or education. His acquaintance with men and affairs, with art and literature, and with those subtle undercurrents by which popular opinion is most easily swayed, is phenomenally wide. Perhaps he is needlessly profuse in his references to his "mighty Ally, the Eternal God in Hebrew"; but to all appearances he devoutly believes every word he says, and men see that he is sane enough to remain ceaselessly vigilant, not forgetting to keep his powder dry. He may be led, in the multitude of his public utterances, to give voice occasionally to some blazing indiscretion; but he invariably speaks with a purpose, and that purpose he is not likely either to surrender or modify. None can fail to mark his tireless energy, his indomitable pluck or his unflinching courage. He may demand of the State huge expenditures for various national undertakings, but he has shown himself to be wide awake and far-sighted. And so the stories which one sometimes encounters abroad, touching the Kaiser's

being disliked by the German nation, find neither expression nor sympathy here: for such fabrications are self-evidently fictions. A crowd in Berlin does not loudly "Hurrah," after the manner of similar gatherings made up of Englishmen or Canadians; but the loyalty of the heart is just as real and profound in the one case as in the other. Apart from a little group of discontented agitators and demagogues, I have no hesitation in saying that the Kaiser, in his own country, is everywhere respected and admired. The people are sincerely proud of him, and they find hundreds of ways in which they effectively prove it. For this reason, the imperial lead is certain to be enthusiastically followed. And the emperor has openly declared himself to be on the side of the church. He attends its services regularly, and withal in a quiet and quite unostentatious manner. Moreover, not only does he thus set his people an excellent example: he has caused it to be known that business must cease during the hours of Church service, so that those of his subjects who desire it may also be able to attend the diets of worship.

Or take the action of the Empress, who is certainly not less popular or beloved than her august husband. Sometimes one feels tempted to believe that she will yet share the unique honors now universally accorded to good Queen Louise. Everyone has heard of her devotion to the three K's, viz., *Kirche, Kinder and Küche*. Beyond question, in all that the Kaiser has done to promote the advancement of the cause of religion in Germany, he has been uniformly and most loyally supported by the Empress. It would not be surprising to discover that it is due even more to the strong Christian convictions of his Consort than to the Emperor's own initiative that so much has been done, and so vast a transformation effected, in so brief a space of time. Be that as it may, the Kaiserin is ceaseless and unwearied in good works. The building of new Churches has received from her the impulse of many gifts, not less than the impetus of timely suggestion and kindly encouraging words. But, above all else, the Empress has shown herself a sympathetic Christian mother in her own home. With the greatest care she has watched and superintended the upbringing of each of her children,—a fact which is not only delightful and most winsome in itself, but which is fraught with priceless promise for generations to come. Is it any wonder that such a woman should always feel a sense of deep and personal responsibility alike for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the millions over whom she helps to bear rule?

Others, like-minded, might be mentioned; but a full enumeration of those occupying high positions in Germany, who have assisted the Christian cause through the influence of their presence and their means, would detain us here too long. Many will doubtless recall the devoted activity of the Countess Waldersee, who was instrumental in securing the introduction of the Young Men's Christian Association into Germany. I think this noble woman is likely to be longer and more gratefully remembered, in the annals of Christian crusades, than even her celebrated husband who is now so prominent in China. The obstacles she had to surmount in her courageous and persevering efforts, were simply tremendous. She,