

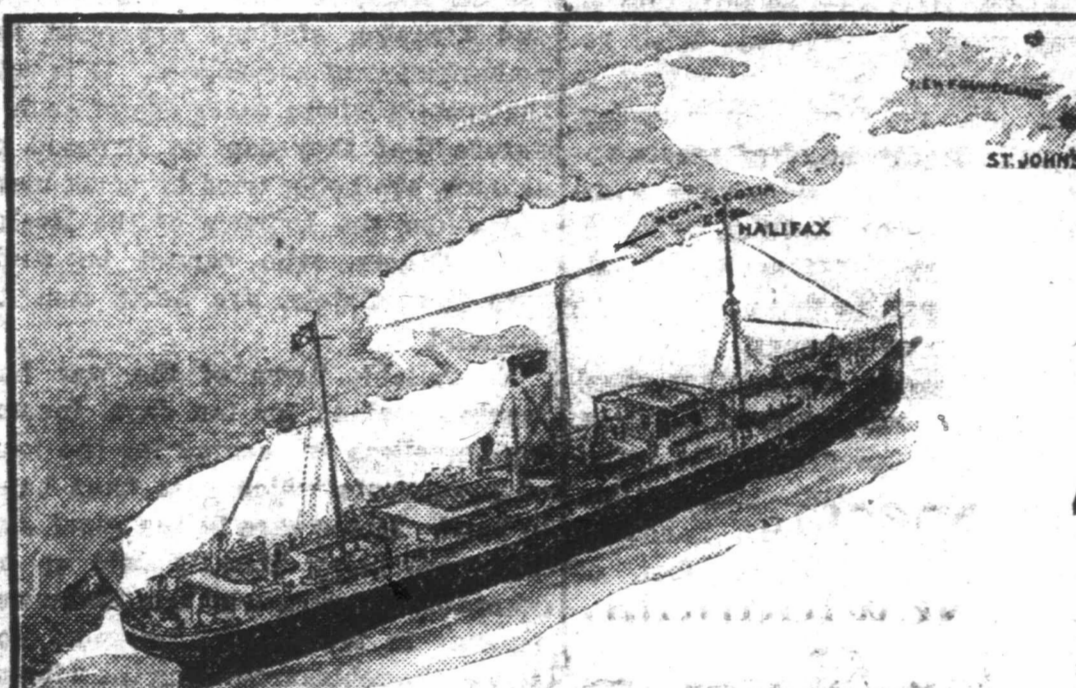
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GERMAN EDUCATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE GERMAN MIND AS SEEN BY MR. CHESTERTON.

It is the work of German education to fill up insufficiency with self-sufficiency. In a sense it is true that the Prussian Government knows how to make its subjects contented: it knows how to make them contented with inferior things. Perhaps the most ignominiously inferior thing is superiority. If making a population of important pigmies is the greatest good of the greatest number, there is really a sense in which Germanic culture and control achieve it. Their sense of perfection makes them permanently imperfect. In the calm absence of all self-criticism there is made possible a fine flower of fatuity not to be found in any less protected land. This enormous inebriety must be touched on with humility, not to say fear. Britain and America have been tempted to such Pharsaic fooleries; but the British and American sense of humor (though the two are very different) have kept such things within bounds. But if Prussia really conquered us, we might all be like that.

It is a fatuity that finds expression in the very style and grammar. I have received a whole sheaf of German-English pamphlets, including a booklet called "War-Chronicle"; and on reading them I am chiefly arrested by the most weird weakness in the mere diction, long before I come to the universal weakness of the case. I will give only one or two instances of a sort of ill-luck in language. Thus, we must expect recriminations about destruction of buildings on one side or the other. But whichever side manages things worse, there can surely be no doubt about which explains them worse.

The first thing I find is a sentence like this: "The church of Langemarck has been completely destroyed owing to French and British shells and shrapnel, as is proved by the many holes in the walls." I can see what the man means; but in the mere logic of language it is hard to see how you make a hole in what is entirely destroyed. We must expect different versions of the responsibility for the death of non-combatants on a battlefield. According to the report of the Russians, the German troops admit that they were reluctantly obliged in the course of these attacks to shoot thousands of Russians, including many women and children." The Germans apparently say, or attempt to say, that this was because the Russians put women and children in the place of peril. But what the Germans actually succeed in saying is this: "Our guns were reluctantly obliged to demand toll of many of their lives."

Have any of my readers ever had the happiness to see a reluctant gun? I like to think of the cannon coyly shrinking from being handled by human beings, but forced by the masterful Germans to come forward and do itself justice. In my Prussian pamphlet the two sentences are put in parallel columns, somewhat innocently purporting to show that the Germans speak the truth and the Russians falsehood. All that the two sentences really prove is that the Russians at least say what they mean to say, and that the Germans cannot even do that.

Yet again, we must expect a rather entangled use of the tongue touching the negotiations before the war. But there are some statements which the Germans really need not ask us to accept, and this one of them: "Graf Metternich's reports in the Winter of 1912 clearly show that the British Ministers then frankly admitted their solicitude for Great Britain's relations with England and France." Surely not I feel sure there is some mistake. Great Britain's relations with England "continue to be favorable," as they say of the King's Speech. Other remarks on the same diplomatic topic are simply impossible to understand. What does this mean, for instance: "Of course, the present war is shown as an example for German slyness. We do not want to disturb these illusions, but must draw attention to the remarkable fact that the English proclamation as supporting the statement that the war is one of German aggression refer to faithless Italy."

Why should we show an example for German slyness? What does he mean by saying that we refer to faithless Italy? Surely he cannot mean that we refer to her as faithless. "Faithless" appears to be of the nature of a short, sharp cry, breaking involuntarily out of him in the course of the sentence. But why, then, is it a remarkable fact that we should refer to Italy? I cannot tell. As the German says in Mr. Belloc's book, "It is

Nature-Mother preserved." Now I am not picking hole, or pointing to them, in a merely supercilious and superficial spirit. I do not suggest that the German case is like the church at Langemarck, and is entirely destroyed by having a few holes in it. But I do think one can look through such holes and see something of the German mind.

This state of mind is also revealed in an extraordinary phrase used by a German military leader, General von Disfurth: "The commonest, ugliest stone put up to mark the burial place of a German grenadier is a more glorious and venerable monument than all the cathedrals of Europe put together."

When people who talk like that try to make a cathedral, it is likely to be a heap of the commonest and ugliest stones. If the General had said that the soul of a grenadier, or of a garrotter, is more glorious than all the cathedrals he would only have been saying what all the cathedrals exist to say. But since most cathedrals are not only concerned for the souls of the dead, but are full of the bodies of the dead, it is logically certain that the General was not speaking of a human body and a human soul, but specifically of a German and specifically of a grenadier.

The General really means that the difference between Germans and non-Germans is so great that German trifles are more important than non-German treasures, as a giant's toothpick might be taller than a man's walking stick, or an archangel's feather might be larger than a sparrow's wing. In other words, the General is mad. He sees something that is not there.

For a real giant could walk across Europe from the Latins to the Slavs, and right through the Germans, without seeing any difference beyond a slight dullness and tameness in the central populations." The mere external system of civilization, at least, would strike the giant's eye as pretty much the same everywhere. If he were a simple giant he would see that the civilization was common to the French and Germans. If he were a learned giant he would know it was mostly copied from the French.

But no giant in the wildest fairy tale could entertain the fancy of there being such a difference as the poor General's distinction implies—by which one dead German weighs more than fifty dead Frenchmen. He would merely wonder what such a statement could possibly mean. It only means something which always produces simultaneously the wildest thought and the weakest art. It only means self-satisfaction, which is the death of self-expression.

For it should be noted that the cathedrals also, in a sense, began with the common soldier and the common stone. But they began in a certain spirit, a spirit which is not content with its surroundings because it is not content with itself. It can never do enough for the subject, and therefore can never do enough with the substance. There is no end to what it would do for the soul, and therefore no end to what it can do with the stone.

General von Disfurth, being a German soldier and thinking there can be nothing so good as a German soldier, is content to remain as stony as the stone and as stiff as the grenadier. He can apply what is called "organization" to the stone, as to the German soldier. That is, he can copy the common ugly stone and turn it into a long row of common ugly stones, parallel to the long row of common ugly Germans whom he drills and parades in patterns. But they are not patterns that any person of taste wants to look at. If he can pick up a scrap of sculptured stone from the shattered towers of Rheims, multiplication may or may not be vexation, but certainly it is not creation. German efficiency, which makes the utmost possible uniformity over a large space, merely gets further and further from mediæval inspiration, which made the utmost possible variety in a small space. There is a stale joke about some unlettered person who said, "If you give him a hinch he will take a hell," but it is really true that if you gave the mediævals an inch they could produce a hell, with heaven and purgatory thrown in.

There are corners of carving and illuminated lettering where we have all seen them. You do not touch the fringe of this creative faculty by mere largeness or even by mere arrangement. You do not do it by turning men into mile-stones, and in the dear secret of the all-wise then boasting of the number of miles

they cover. In all such operations, however elaborate, there remains a basic satisfaction with the commonness and ugliness of the stone or of the man's mind. In this matter, if you make an idol of a stone you seldom make a statue of it.

The floundering in German phraseology to which I have referred correspond to certain floundering in philosophy. For instance, the German does not reach the point of describing a gun as being reluctant to kill a woman, through a mistake in his mechanical creed. The mistake is that he does instinctively think it is the gun that kills the woman; he is drilled to forget that it is really a man who kills her. Then his sentimentalism begins to soak through his systematizing; and the bashful piece of artillery is the remarkable result. And a brief study of the sentence about the wall with holes in it will afford the young student an excellent model of the dangers of saying a thing first and attempting to prove it afterwards.

Some letters from Professor Deissman, of Berlin, which accompany the little book are marked also by this curious collapsible style. They are further marked by a reeking cant of humanitarianism used in palliation of inhumanity, with which I will not pretend to patience. If it is really part of the Prussian's duty to butcher my brothers (and sisters), I should be very much obliged to him if he would not weep over them. He assures me that there is no hatred in his heart, the state of which organ does not interest me, because it is quite clear that, whatever may be in his heart, there is nothing in his head to stop him from going on as he does; and nothing short of a bullet in his head seems likely to have that effect. I will give one case of the curious confusion of words which in so many of these cases covers an equally curious confusion of conscience.

Speaking of some Lutheran assembly or other, he says, "The Synod expresses its grateful satisfaction that synods, congregations, and individual Christians of America have courageously and vigorously protested against the American export of ammunition for the enemies of Germany and its allies, as contradicting Christianity, and therewith connects the expression of hope that our fellow-believers across the ocean will continue to maintain this standpoint. At the same time, the Synod requests the High Administrative Body of the Church to make efforts toward the Committee of the German Evangelical Churches for a similar publication in the name of Evangelical Christianity in Germany."

I fear we must not find, in the haziness of the style, hope that the Synod is asking the Evangelical Christians in Germany not to manufacture munitions. Yet it is difficult to see how the Synod can, with any consistency mean anything except this. What is the sense of saying that an American is not a Christian if he makes a gun to be fired off, and then saying that a German is a Christian when he makes a gun and fires it off himself? Alone among the nations, the Yankees are to be the Quakers, solely in order that the Germans may be the only militarists. America is to be superior to armaments, that Prussia may be superior in armaments. But whether the Professor and his Synod mean this or mean the opposite, or mean anything at all, the quality of the diction makes it difficult to determine.

There are other passages which are not particularly obscure, but are extremely laborious, and have something indescribably amusing about them, if you read only a little of them at a time. It is one of the peculiarities of this deep-headed German way of writing that it is either impossible to see the point at all or it is possible to see the point a long time before the explanatory writer gets to it. Much of it is concerned with the higher criticism of the Bible, a sport held dear in their dark forests, and of what Professor Deissmann calls "the blessed reciprocal effect of international Biblical research."

Tallest Man in The World Dead

New York, April 28.—Hugo, a circus giant, who was said to be the tallest man in the world, died here Sunday of pneumonia. He was 8 feet, 4 inches high, and normally weighed 536 pounds. He was 47 years old, was born in Italy, and was known among circus people only as Hugo.

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