

The Germans of Tomorrow

By CHARLES J. ROSEBAULT.

EVERYWHERE the youth of today is critical of its forebears. In our own country it has always been inclined to be impatient of counsel, to border upon irreverence if not downright disrespect. Foreign visitors have marveled at its attitude and sneered at the lack of parental discipline. Professional funmakers have found abundant themes in the flippancy of our kids and flappers. Most of us have consoled ourselves with the faith that the apparent disesteem was only a surface aspect, or, at worst, the egoism of virile young America, so concentrated upon its preparations for independent flight that it resented the sheltering wings which would restrain it from precipitancy. We associated it with the independence of democracy, the determination to cut new ways through life's jungle. Our youth was all right, and proved it when put to the test, we said, even if its manners might be a bit rough and its speech seemingly impertinent. With the coming of the war this faith was abundantly proved. We gloried in our fine boys—and in their sisters, too.

But these were not so ready to return the compliment. They were willing to admit that they had done their part, but not that we had any occasion to be proud. With the passing of time this critical attitude has not moderated. Quite the contrary. Nor has our defense been convincing. The tangle of world affairs, the squaring of our promise to youth marching forth to sacrifice and the keeping thereof, our trade and industrial upsets—all combine to indict our administration. Dubs, says the new citizen, of other parents, if not of his own.

In the countries of the Allies the youth has not been behind our own in giving voice to its dissatisfaction. Contempt and derision of the elders and their works have been undisguised in England, in Italy and even in France. And now in the lands of the defeated youth is raising a mighty chorus of protest. The German youth, trained and drilled in obedience and reverence, has finally revolted against the mismanagement of the seignors. As might be expected, where all the traditions of the past have been suddenly thrown into the melting pot, there is consternation all around. The elders are upset and the youth are uncertain. The former are trying to pacify and the latter are disposed to experiment. As it is, the youth of today upon whom will fall the burdens of the morrow this condition ceases to be merely local interest. It is the German youth who must meet the reparations, they who will determine the relations between vanquished and victor and hence the peace of the world.

Conrad Haenisch, Minister of Education, has recently given his impressions of the attitude of the German youth and, more particularly,

of that of the German student. It is clear from his utterances that the desire to calm and mollify has moved him to speak. Not without justice, he admits, does youth see, in the elders those guilty of all the evils which have come upon the Fatherland. Both through the sins of performance and the sins of omission were these at fault. While some gave impetus to the wheel of misfortune, others failed to seize and hold it when they had the opportunity. And when the tragedy arrived it was but a weak and impotent leadership that took command.

The youth of today, and more especially the students, he finds, look upon all the present party strife with indifference or displeasure. All the impressions which count for them began with 1914, while the existing political parties, even those which appeared in new form after the armistice, still retain in their programs their party watchwords and in the mechanism of their organization and agitations the fundamental spirit of pre-war times. Consequently youth stands aloof.

One result has been a new class, from the social and political point of view, which regards the problems of the State and of society from the standpoint of its generation to a degree unknown in the past. Repeatedly youth of different classes and the most diverse shades of opinion have been found standing together, in opposition to projects put afoot by their elders—a situation the more significant because class distinctions were by no means obliterated with the introduction of a democratic form of government, and social and political points of view have increased with every new and radical thought.

Herr Haenisch mentions two instances in particular where this solidarity of youth was manifested in unequivocal fashion. One was a great gathering in the home of the Berlin Society of Teachers several months ago. Here lads and maidens wearing the badges of the multifarious parties and movements, the black, white and red of the German Nationals, the star of the Communists, the emblems of the Pathfinders, Wandering Birds, Democrats, Social Democrats, Christian young people's organizations, stood shoulder to shoulder in united protest against the dismissal of the head of the Nursing Home Lindenhof at Lichtenberg. The other occurred within a few weeks at Hamburg, where the youth of all political and religious views and of all degrees of wealth and social standing joined in a demand that the seriously threatened natural preserve on the

Lüneburg Heath should be maintained in all its original features. It would be easy to multiply such instances, says Herr Haenisch, and it is of impressive significance in the battle against actual smuttiness in word and picture (of which Berlin has for many years been a prolific purveyor), which does not mean that it supports cant or hypocrisy.

He finds also that the academic youth has a pronounced dislike for the realism, so-called, which dominated Germany in the pre-war period, and to which may be traced the cynical views which shocked the world from 1914 on. There is an unmistakable tendency toward transcendentalism, toward religion, even toward mysticism. He confesses to confusion of mind, to inability to interpret all this or to foresee the final goal. Nor is he blind to some disturbing aspects—meaningless anti-Semitism, fury against the flag of the republic, intolerance of opposing opinions, a lack in many directions of good-will, indisposition to realize the feelings and thoughts of the Socialist laborers. Nevertheless, he is convinced that the great mass of students has had no part in the unpleasant public manifestations which added to the disorder of the large cities, and especially of Berlin, within the past months. Most of them have been busy in the laboratories and with their books, working more industriously than has any student body in all history, in spite of unusual deprivations and hardships.

In this conclusion as to the student body in general, including those at the high schools, the professors of the Berlin University concur as to their own undergraduates. The youth that returned from the war was often broken physically, had forgotten much of its learning and had to be treated with generous consideration at the examinations; but it was eager. Not so much for learning per se as to be put in the way of earning a living. There was little of the old pleasure in the life of the cloistered halls. In its place was a fierce desire to be ready for the battle of life. This may have been partly due to the new character of the student body. Here were not alone the aristocrats and wealthy sons, the gentry and heirs of tradesmen, but the children of the higher-paid mechanics. There were more students than ever before.

Privy Councilor Dr. Alois Brandl, Professor of Modern Languages, has found three phases in the development of the returned soldier student. In the first year he observed physical deterioration, shaky nerves, utmost difficulty in concentrating, despite a strong desire to work. In the second year came the second phase,

which was psychological, following the comprehension of the ultimate meaning of the defeat and the gloomy prospects of the future. This was accompanied by apathy. The tasks of the moment received attention and there was the necessary preparation for examinations. Nothing more. Ambition was dead. Now they are in the third phase. Interest has reawakened, but it is not in the formal and conventional. It clings to the problems of the day. Above all, the students will not listen to conclusions. They demand facts and insist upon the right to draw their own deductions. In the meantime they labor under the difficulties inherent in the prevailing conditions. The majority are of the bourgeoisie. The nourishment at home is not what it was and in the Winter days they have to work in cold rooms. Without the supplies received from the American Quakers it would have been impossible to go on. Books are more difficult to obtain. The publishers no longer issue English editions.

Other professors at the university are worried over the fact that the students show a lack of interest in education, for itself, more especially at the unwillingness to give time to study and research which can bring no immediate practical results. Not that idealism is wanting. Most of them are serious. Earnest attention is given to all the new problems developed by existing conditions. But the professors fear that the future of German scholarship may be affected by the eagerness of the students to hurry the appointed tasks and get out into practical life.

In the main the reaction of the German youth to present conditions tends in two directions—to the reforming of an aristocratic leadership and to a union of workers and employers for the redemption of the nation by intensified production. Both agree in condemning the past and in scoffing at the present control. The former believes in the monarchical State, but has no desire to restore the Kaiser. The latter, who calls himself the Man of Change, has thrown all the old cards into the waste basket and calls for a new deal and a new deal. His purpose is to bring together all those who are determined to work for a new Germany, to instill new courage and new zeal into the masses and to rouse them to their utmost endeavors by the promise of a better future. He sees in the compromise between the big employers and the workers, which solved the critical problems of the days following the armistice, the seed for future development. He is devoting himself to convincing the people that this is the sole path of

progress, and he may be found among the workers—even the communists—preaching his gospel with all the zeal and eloquence of our old-time revivalists.

His purpose is definitely to bring together the workers of town and country, so that they may decide the final compromise with the employer. For he has no thought of supporting the oligarchy of industrialists which is rapidly taking control under the present Government. He is ready and anxious to work with a Stinnes but not on the terms of Stinnes. It is not profiteering but patriotism which inspires him. Neither is he a communist nor a Sovietist. His whole inspiration lies in a burning desire to revive the German people and his faith is that this can be done by realizing that they are a nation of workers.

The young monarchist is not so far from the same thought, only he is an individualist and is convinced that the impulse must come from above and not below. An aristocracy formed of selected individuals, who will devote themselves entirely to the welfare of the nation, who shall have no other task than that, is the basis of his theory. It presupposes an idealistic world in which those chosen for leadership shall be superior to the temptation of using their power for personal ends. It seems absurd to the American, but it must not be thought that it is insincere. It is impossible for us to think in the terms of any German probably, and certainly it is beyond us to conceive the world from the viewpoint of the monarchist. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that a large part of the German people are to heart monarchists. As Prince Lichnowsky—an enlightened liberal in many ways—has said, it is difficult to change the viewpoint of a nation which thrived for hundreds of years under a monarchy. But he, too, was convinced that the new monarchy, if it came, would not be like the old. The Hohenzollerns are of the past and the youth of the nation is through with the past.

It would be foolish to suppose, however, that the German youth thinks the Peace of Versailles a just one, or is convinced that its elders brought on a world war. Very likely it will acquiesce in the terms of peace, for there is no other way out. Nor would it be fair to say that it wants to void the bond given in the name of the nation. We don't know that, and it is the American way to give the benefit of the doubt. In the turning of the young Germans from the works of their elders they may have discarded also the psychology which upset the world. Let us hope so.



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