

**CULTURE AND
WAR; PP. 1-61**

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BY

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Climax, Advent Song, etc.*



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CULTURE AND WAR

RECENTLY an American girl obtained entrance to one of the best circles of a German city, and thought it her duty to help others of her race to gain admittance to this group. To her surprise these endeavors were resented. The general feeling was best expressed by a young Englishman, who said that although Germans in England would "make fools of themselves" to gain a knowledge of English, he would never make a fool of himself to understand German. Controlled by this sentiment, he would not put himself in a position where he seemed inferior to a foreign race, and preferred to go home without attaining the real object of his quest. This may be a lofty patriotism, but think of the cost in misunderstanding, opposition and war. A half of the best blood of the English may be sacrificed because they believe they

"make fools of themselves" if they attempt to understand what the German wants. My experience with American students returning recently from Germany shows them equally irrational. They have seen the outside of Germany, and have merely a dictionary knowledge of German thought. They can talk only of the rudeness of officers, of the pettiness of bureaucrats, and of the debauchery of restaurant life. Is it any wonder that our papers are full of such stories, and that we are rapidly drifting into a state of opinion that makes war almost a certainty:

The element that has made the present world conflict inevitable is not the clash of arms, then, so much as the clash of ideals. At this moment America is deciding whether to follow the way of Europe, and become involved in similar struggle because we are victims of the same prejudices, or to go the way of peace and receive the benefits of increased prosperity. Between these alternatives lies our only choice. The road on which we are already starting has war as its goal—war even more grue-

some and extensive than that of to-day. While the way is yet open, is it not advisable to test the other alternative and see if centuries of degradation and misery cannot be avoided? We must either bluff, bluster, prepare, and then fight; or else we must seek to understand our possible opponents and come into accord with them through mutual concession. This latter route, which seems so easy and simple, is a hard, perhaps an impossible road, for the Briton and American to travel. At bottom, we feel a contempt for other races and approach them in an attitude of superiority that evokes opposition. Even conscientious attempts to interpret the thought of Germany frequently take the form of an apology couched in patronizing language that is most irritating to the people it is supposed to defend. Such articles do not help us to understand the modern German, or to appreciate his philosophy. Nor does the German manifesto signed by some ninety professors do other than confuse the issue. The real consideration is not how these professors write for foreign consumption, but

how they talk to their neighbors and scholars. This is what we must find out if we would understand the German mind, and avoid a useless wrangle of words that masks an irreconcilable conflict.

Let me say a word as to my fitness to interpret the thought of Germany. Forty years ago I began my university work there as a student, and by accident found myself in one of the most ardent of the new groups of moderns. At that time the ideas now universally held were only to be found in the university lecture and seminar. I saw Philosophy, Literature, Classicism, and other figures of the dead past driven out of the big lecture-rooms and put back of the staircase, while the apostles of the new Germanism got the front halls and the government plums. I was even more ardent than my fellows for the new culture, and before I left became the "Stammitglied" in a noted seminar. This phase of the modern spirit was a religion to me then, and for a long time after my return. Now, however, I feel that its force is spent, and that there is a beyond. But my early interest is in-

dicative of my fitness to state in English what Germans really think and to present the cause towards which their devotion goes out.

The prime difficulty that faces an interpreter is in the words selected to convey strange thoughts. If he uses the dictionary equivalent of German words some ridiculous doctrine is sure to appear. If he uses the English equivalents, the dictionary student of German asks who said such a thing, and wins a sweeping victory because there is no one from whom I can quote. German modernism has never been really transformed into a philosophy. It is merely a mode of thought in the making. But we demand a philosophy, and I am compelled to state what I think to be the interpretation, and must use formulæ that I confess I have never seen in German. It is well, in any case, to contrast our thought by stating German ideas in terms that parallel English, and in so doing it is necessary to pick from the English language the words and phrases that best represent the essence of German thinking.