

**JAPAN FOR A
WEEK (BRITAIN FOR
EVER!)**

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Japan for a Week (Britain For Ever!) by Alexander M. Thompson

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ALEXANDER M. THOMPSON

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A Sunday in Berlin

TO explain the end of this book it is needful to begin at the beginning. In no other way can I make you understand why two peace-loving citizens of anti-militarist views—one of them a Socialist—became converted to the fine frenzy of patriotic fervour which—

But let us not anticipate.

We were impressed, like all visitors of recent years, with Berlin's brightness : it is now as new and clean as Paris was after Baron Haussmann's clean sweep in the '60's. The floral decoration of the lofty stone houses, the wide streets embellished with trees, grass, and flowers, the display of opulence in the vast villadom of the Thiergarten quarter, have made Berlin the show-town of Europe.

As compared with Paris, it is perhaps over-

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decorated and something stodgy. Kriegesallee, which the Emperor's taste has lavishly speckled with marble effigies of his ancestors, is rather suggestive of a prosperous cemetery, or a glorified Euston Road. But its deliberate stimulation of national pride in national achievement is chastening to the London tripper's rapturous remembrance of Trafalgar Square and the new Valhalla of the Embankment. We have but one statue of Shakespeare, and that an abortion. We have memorials of Mr. Fawcett, Mr. Raikes, and Sir Wilfrid Lawson. The good Prince Albert is lavishly and wonderfully memorialised in gold and marble. But we have no street testimonials of our national pride in Bacon, Locke, Newton, Milton, Spenser, Swift, Sterne, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Handel, Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Meredith, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, or Darwin.

They order these matters better in Berlin. Though Germany is the foremost military nation in the world, its capital has delighted to honour in the national Campo Santo, not only the nation's eminent soldiers, but also its philosophers, poets, painters, and musicians.

The spectacle presented by the beer gardens on the Sunday of our visit was even more disturbing to patriotic complacency. Thousands of men

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and women and children sat at the tables, listening to excellent bands and excellent music, while sipping chocolate, coffee, and tea! In the largest and most densely-crowded of the suburban gardens we saw only one glass of beer, and nowhere any stronger drink.

We visited the Hibbel Theatre, the most artistically-appointed play-house I have seen, where *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, by one Bernard Shaw, a dramatist of world-wide fame whose works are prohibited in England, has been performed over 180 times. The manager, a son of Björnson, the Norwegian writer, pressed us to see the Sunday afternoon performance, which was to be given *gratuitously* to members of workmen's clubs. Sunday performances at many theatres, we were told, were *free to working people*, the seats being paid for, in many cases, by progressive associations or employers!

All these features we fruitfully observed and meekly digested. Then we asked our guide to comfort our patriotism by showing us the slums. He replied that there were none! We laughed at his impudence, and directed the driver to proceed to the poorest quarters. He drove us through miles of densely populated streets, evidently inhabited by working people. But we discovered no Whitechapel, no Hoxton, and no Bermondsey.

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“While women are weeping and children starving; while industrious men and women are herding like beasts in filthy and fever-haunted hovels, to build art galleries and churches, town halls and colleges, is like putting on a muslin shirt over a filthy skin, a diamond crown upon a leprous head.” That is how John Ruskin commented on our British splendours. But in Berlin the magnificence of the clustered palaces and museums in Unter den Linden has not its closely lurking London antithesis of slums and wretchedness.

We saw no rags, no beggars, and not a symptom of the hopeless misery that shuffles piteously through London’s wealthiest streets.

I am bound to suppose that poverty does exist in Berlin, but I know that none was visible amongst the crowds in the spacious streets, public parks, and beer gardens that we visited. Destitution was (to use a hackneyed phrase) *conspicuous* by its absence. The phenomenon was startling, it was sensational; it was, as the Germans say, “kolossal!”

The general air of cleanliness and decency, and the smartness and fine physique of the men—these were the features that most impressed and surprised us on that busy Sunday in Berlin. No slums, no visible destitution, and no broken-down, shuffling Tired Tims or Weary Willies!

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I am prepared to be told in reply that German wages are lower than the British. But wages are not everything. The essential questions are, What do the people get out of life? What joy, culture, and wholesome recreation do they obtain? To these questions I felt bound to answer, as I had previously done in Munich, that superficial evidences are all symptomatic of higher conditions in Germany than in England.

Everything in Berlin suggests systematic efficiency. The people may be over-policed and over-drilled. At least they look fed and fit.

German patriotism may tend to arrogance and domineering. It has at least taught the people to be lords to themselves and to depend on themselves.

Our guide, a cosmopolitan German social student, who is equally at home in Berlin, Vienna, London, Paris, and New York, and who seemed as familiar with hospitals as with beer gardens, with museums as with restaurants, with theatres as with banks, completed our humiliation and discomfiture by his discourse at dinner.

"Germany," he declared, "is younger, stronger, healthier than England. Germany is better ruled, better organised, and in every way more efficient than England. The secret of her efficiency lies in education, conscription, discipline, and the men's physical fitness.