

GERMAN CULTURE: PAST AND PRESENT

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German Culture: Past and Present by Ernest Belfort Bax

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ERNEST BELFORT BAX

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**GERMAN CULTURE
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GERMAN CULTURE PAST AND PRESENT

BY

ERNEST BELFORT BAX

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"THE ETHICS OF SOCIALISM," "THE ROOTS OF REALITY," ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE

THE following pages aim at giving a general view of the social and intellectual life of Germany from the end of the mediæval period to modern times. In the earlier portion of the book, the first half of the sixteenth century in Germany is dealt with at much greater length and in greater detail than the later period, a sketch of which forms the subject of the last two chapters. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that while the roots of the later German character and culture are to be sought for in the life of this period, it is comparatively little known to the average educated English reader. In the early fifteenth century, during the Reformation era, German life and culture in its widest sense began to consolidate themselves, and at the same time to take on an originality which differentiated them from the general life and culture of Western Europe as it was during the Middle Ages.

To those who would fully appreciate the later developments, therefore, it is essential thoroughly to understand the details of the social and intellectual history of the time in question. For the later period there are many more works of a generally popular character available for the student and general reader. The chief aim of the sketch given in Chapters IX and X is to bring into sharp relief those events which, in the Author's view, represent more or less crucial stages in the development of modern Germany.

For the earlier portion of the present volume an older work of the Author's, now out of print, entitled *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages*, has been largely drawn upon. Reference, as will be seen, has also been made in the course of the present work to two other writings from the same pen which are still to be had for those desirous of fuller information on their respective subjects, viz. *The Peasants' War* and *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (Messrs. George Allen & Unwin).

German Culture Past and Present

INTRODUCTORY

THE close of the fifteenth century had left the whole structure of mediæval Europe to all appearance intact. Statesmen and writers like Philip de Commines had apparently as little suspicion that the state of things they saw around them, in which they had grown up and of which they were representatives, was ever destined to pass away, as others in their turn have since had. Society was organized on the feudal hierarchy of status. In the first place, a noble class, spiritual and temporal, was opposed to a peasantry either wholly servile or but nominally free. In addition to this opposition of noble and peasant there was that of the township, which, in its corporate capacity, stood in the relation of lord to the surrounding peasantry.

The township in Germany was of two