

NATIONAL MARTYRS AND MATTERS OF OPINION

BY HERMANN WENDEL

From *Die Glocke*, July 11
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DEVOTEES of the old imperial standard are wildly indignant over the 'Leipzig disgrace.' At that city our judges have lifted one corner of the curtain which still hides Germany's war practices from many a trusting schoolgirl mind, and has given the people a momentary glimpse into the brutal reality that lurks behind it. Accusations that a man dared not whisper during the war, unless he courted a sentence to jail or to the trenches, have been confirmed beyond question by the highest tribunal of the land. Germans have slaughtered unarmed prisoners at the front. Germans have kept children eight and ten years old in prison for months, in violation of every dictate of law or morality. Germans have abused, beaten, kicked, struck with their rifles, war prisoners held in our country. They have compelled sick prisoners to perform heavy labor and trussed them up to posts for any remissness. Finally, Germans have torpedoed hospital ships on the high seas and complacently watched them sink. The first six trials have already brought out this array of atrocities, calculated to bring a blush of shame to any honest German. *Der Tag* is quite right — so far as words go — in its comment: 'Millions of our people are utterly incapable of feeling — or of feeling adequately — the disgrace of such an unprecedented humiliation. They have become callous under our yoke of contempt. They have lost all sense of shame.'

How is this? *Der Tag*, a German nationalist daily, expressing sentiments

so humane, so rational, so wise politically! No fear of that! The words are just as we have quoted them, but the disgrace to which they refer is quite another thing. This outraged editor pours forth the vials of his indignant wrath — because such atrocities have been duly punished. To the whited-sepulchre souls of these pan-Germans, sinking a hospital ship laden with wounded is not a disgrace; slaughtering helpless French prisoners is not even a brutality; abusing little Belgian children is no sin against humanity. The disgrace consists in the fact that men should be haled before a court for committing these atrocities. To this section of the German press these brutes are noble patriots. Their punishment makes them to these editorial eyes, 'martyrs of political justice'! Something more than mere party differences separate us from men who can extol such brutes and beasts as national martyrs. We are divided from them by a moral gulf which nothing can bridge. We are honestly ashamed to belong to the same nation with these eulogists of bestial brutality — we blush to dwell within the borders of the country they inhabit.

These apologists and glorifiers of German war crimes justify their attitude by the war crimes of our enemies, of which they present us a pompous catalogue. Quite true, it is as false to assume that we alone were guilty of tearing the law of nations to shreds with our bayonets, as to fancy that, during the wild revel of carnage through which we have passed, only devils were

ranged on one side and angels on the other. There were only too many Huns and barbarians under both banners. As early as February, 1920, the French Socialist, Vaillant-Couturier, drew up a horrifying list of atrocities committed by the French army. He had personally heard French officers boast of having shot German war prisoners merely to test their revolvers. He had personally witnessed the killing of wounded. He knew the names of officers who had shot disarmed Germans after they surrendered, and had claimed and received promotions for these atrocities. In *Humanité* a well-known writer, Gouttenoire de Toury, charged General Martin de Bouillion, a division commander, with having issued the same inhuman order which the German, General Stenger, was accused of having issued to his troops at the sixth trial at Leipzig — to take no prisoners. By refusing to listen to these charges and others like them, and by passing over their own guilt in silence, the French dishonor themselves; but Germany does not dishonor herself by bringing her war criminals to book for their crimes.

Moreover, these brawling, rowdy patriots of ours do not appeal to the guilt of our enemies in order to hasten a reign of humanity and justice, but because these charges are cheap stimulants of national hatred. When one side clamors: 'See the German barbarians!' they shout even louder: 'See the English slave-drivers! See the French assassins!' But we make no progress that way.

To be sure, our accused appear before the bar of justice in the guise of innocence, convinced of their uprightness and confident of the applause of the gallery. They boldly bluff out their case; and Major Crusius, whom the accumulated horrors of a single day of such carnage so shocked that he suffered a mental collapse, stands out among them as almost humane by reason of

this temporary weakness. The others see nothing in their conduct but virtuous obedience to orders. They all have the same mechanical mental outlook. They all shot men who had surrendered, cursed and maltreated prisoners, threw children into dungeons, sank hospital ships — unconscious that they were violating the most rudimentary laws of humanity and morality, and convinced that they were serving God, King, and Fatherland. Were the criminals brutalized Apaches or slum-bred degenerates, instead of good-natured, frank, blue-eyed, blond-haired, average Germans, it would not be so bad; the most hopeless and depressing feature of these trials is that such crimes are not the excesses of a few abnormal criminals, but the planned and intended product of a pre-devised and perfected system.

What a moral impossibility this system has become is illustrated at Leipzig by the expert witnesses. High army officers, with broad red stripes down their trousers, generals holding places of honor and distinction in our republic, testified that these acts were right and proper, and praised the accused as model soldiers, apparently regretting only that they could not bestow on them some new decoration or distinction. General von Fransecky, when asked whether it was permitted under the regulations to beat prisoners, replied indifferently that it was a 'matter of opinion.' In truth, anything affecting human dignity and human self-respect was a mere matter of opinion for this cold, mechanical, dehumanizing Prussian system, whose creed had no place for anything but force. In peace all must be subordinated to the state, and when weapons are drawn, to the call of war. The handbook of the German General Staff for the guidance of military officers taught that humanitarian considerations, the sparing of human life and property, came into play only

'so far as the nature and object of war permit.' This system, as preached by Hindenburg himself, teaches that the most cruel methods of war are the most humane, because they shorten war. This system burned Belgian villages and executed innocent men *en masse*. This system is responsible for the Belgian deportations, for the creation of the Somme desert, for the destruction of the mines in Northern France, for torpedoing the Lusitania, for tolerating Armenian massacres — and with all these things on their conscience, its champions parade before the public to-day as proudly and defiantly as ever!

Scharnhorst, one of the greatest and perhaps most humane of Prussia's great army leaders, wrote to a friend in 1794: 'Military honor and, I fear, the moral standards of the German nation will be seriously lowered by this war.' That might serve as a text for the war which began a hundred and twenty years later.

What men call military honor has been defiled by the German army practices revealed at Leipzig. The presiding officer of the court, who is certainly no enemy of imperial Germany, admits this. But the vision of the German nation has been also distorted and blinded by the war, that many of our people really think these Leipzig criminals are national martyrs. Let them, if they will, crown these men with laurels and erect monuments to their honor. None the less a day will come when sanity and reason will return, and the most hardened East-Elbe Junker will recall with shame the moral chaos of our morbid days.

For the progressive, sound-thinking masses of the German people, it is no longer a mere 'matter of opinion' that the whole system laid bare at Leipzig must be thrown down; to the last stone, and that even that last stone must be crushed to powder.

THE MARSEILLAISE

BY ROBERT HOHLBAUM

[It is hardly necessary to say that this imaginative version departs somewhat from the true history of the origin of the Marseillaise. Its author is a gifted young Vienna writer, who has recently published a collection of historical tales which is attracting much attention.]

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IN Southern France there is a certain little old-fashioned town. A church-tower rises from its midst, around which its houses cluster as closely as sheep around a wether. The streets are so narrow that people can shake hands across them from the opposite windows. The pavements are dark. But that does little harm, for the sun shines bright in the market-place, and only a couple of steps away, just outside the town gate, lies the public forest. The local wine is clear and golden, and there is always a sunny glow in the people's hearts. So the residents tolerate easily the gloom of their narrow streets.

One of the town's inhabitants, however, was ever impatient of these shady passages. He lived in a high attic, whence he could look out over the neighboring roofs to the tree-clad hills beyond. Every day, as soon as he returned from the gloomy office where he worked, he would gaze in revery over the billowy forest, whether it were green in the full warmth of its summer verdure, or garbed in the brilliant motley of the early frosts, or white with winter's snow; whether the finches and the nightingales were singing in its branches or the stag was calling through its wintry silence.

Rouget de l'Isle, the town clerk, had never traveled beyond the range of his present vision. He seldom made even a

short coach-journey to a neighboring village. On such rare occasions he was homesick and ill at ease until he was safely at home again. Whenever he returned from these short excursions, he would stroll through the narrow streets, stopping before each familiar house, and admiring each beautiful wall or interesting old portal. He would listen to the chimes in the neighboring church-spire, and then retire to his peaceful rest. The next morning, nevertheless, he would again gaze out of his lofty attic window and dream of the lands beyond the distant heights that bounded his farthest vision.

This odd inconsistency in his nature was possibly explained by his ancestry. His mother had been an industrious, home-loving woman, who knew every brick and stone, as well as every human being, in the town; and she loved them the more warmly because a life of strange vicissitudes had forced her to be long an exile from them.

But a *Wanderlust* burned in the veins of Rouget de l'Isle, and fought incessantly against his love of home.

Of his father he knew little. His mother never mentioned him. He conjectured, however, from the gossip of the neighbors, that presumably he was a gentleman of rank who had deserted his humble bride soon after marriage, sending her from time to time barely enough for her support.