

## Berlin, September, 1921

VAST energy wasting itself in confusion; visages sombre browed, tight lipped, lined with grim care; voices harsh but expostulatory rather than combative; movements and gestures abrupt, originating, one feels, in the bony structure rather than in the nerves and muscles; such is one's first impression of Berlin today, as one pushes through the crowd at the station to struggle toward a taxi fit to plow through the cross currents and eddies of traffic. One murmurs one's destination in such German as one can muster and receives an answer in much better English. The chauffeur's face is neither friendly nor unfriendly; it is a good firm face, with level eyes and boundless self-possession, something that is reassuring as one gains his first insight into the Berlin rules of the road. "Blow your horn and drive ahead in God's name; and the Devil take the pedestrian who can't jump." Having to jump, or making other persons jump for their lives produces at first one's most vivid sensations in Berlin. After a few days, however, it sinks into the morass of the commonplace.

How far has the city changed since the time when the Kaiser drove down from Potsdam, dreaming monumental dreams that made Nemesis laugh in her sleeve? In physical appearance the change is great. At present Berlin is a dirty city, that is, dirtier than St. Louis but not so dirty as Chicago. It is a disorderly city. Nothing is verboten. You can go anywhere, at your own risk. There are a few policemen, for the most part strangely undersized and unassuming men whose rule of life seems to be to accept anything rather than trouble. They look better braced up, to be sure, when a demonstration is scheduled. Then they tighten their belts and straighten up, in honor of the army rifles they carry. How they would use them in a seething mob they can no doubt imagine. I was assured by men who seemed to know that the very knowledge that a bullet would burrow through six men before it stopped has a quieting effect on demonstrations. It may be so.

Berlin is a busy city today, one of the busiest in the world. All the factories and workshops seem to be on full time, earning vast quantities of paper marks; all the shops are crowded with customers trying to get rid of their marks before they go lower. Prices, computed in marks, are staggering, and the German public, apparently, has never accepted the fact that the mark is nowadays nothing but a polite fiction. Men still do good hard work for marks: they give up usable

goods for marks; they rack their brains to devise ways of overcharging you in marks, as if that were still possible. Everybody knows the mark is going to fall lower and lower, and the only person I saw who had a plausible hypothesis as to a final limit was a taxi driver, who soberly assured me that a committee of scientists were working on a motor to be driven by marks.

With such a medium of exchange Berlin ought to be utterly dead, economically. It is not. As I said, everybody is working. You see no signs of unemployment, and the few beggars you encounter are the most hopelessly mutilated wreckage of the World War. Everybody is living, somehow. But the working class, at any rate, is living badly. For some hours I watched a workingmen's political demonstration, which closed up everything in the city for the afternoon. Among the unnumbered thousands of marching workingmen I saw not one in good flesh and color. According to an extremely competent and well-informed American newspaper correspondent the average wage falls about one-third short of any tolerable standard of living. Anyone can observe the effects with his own eyes; that is, anyone, except the occasional American tourist who infers from the abundance and cheapness of food in the international hotels that "there is plenty of food in Germany." And worse times are coming, because the summer's drought played havoc with potatoes and hay and pasturage. From want of potatoes and milk, Germany's bread stock will be exhausted painfully early, and how will she manage to import more, as exchange stands? Grim care has settled down upon Berlin, to abide for a time.

But the lot of the working class is harsh just now in other cities as well as in Berlin. How does the old aristocracy fare in Berlin, the aristocrats who used to think familiarly in terms of Germany's mission and *Machtpolitik*? To a remarkable extent, they are ruined, completely, irrecoverably. You meet ladies of cultivation and refinement who tell you that they have, in effect, become janitresses. Perhaps they were millionaires, before the war, deriving luxurious incomes from Russian and Austrian bonds, and maintaining spacious houses in town. Now their capital and income have vanished. They still have their houses, in which the public authorities have quartered the proper contingent of the city's excess population, uncongenial tenants, paying fixed rents that do not know of the fall of the mark, and having full right to

kick about the heat supplied. The rents do not yield enough to pay for coal and janitor service besides. Therefore the proprietress tends the furnace and sweeps down the stairs. One such proprietress told me that her only regret was that the revolution had not moved one spoke further forward, taking the shell of her property as it had taken the kernel. Then at least she would have been freed from care, as most of the population who have nothing to lose.

I heard many tales of the fate of the army officers, those haughty gentlemen who used to consider themselves Germany. Herr X., an authority, not given to overstatement, told me of a friend who advertised for a stable boy. Fifty-four army officers applied for the job. Mostly they were lieutenants, but there were also captains, and two or three colonels. Another person told me where I could find a factory which employed a night watchman who was General Z., whose record on the eastern front had been distinguished. When I discussed the fate of the aristocracy with taxi-drivers and similarly undistinguished people I found that Germans have still a sense of humor. They talked just as lower East Siders might talk if a shift in economic structure were to compel the Union League Club to form in line to apply for the job of stable boy or tenement house janitor. The Berlin proletariat isn't asserting that the Kaiser and the officers brought on the war. They still believe that the war was forced on Germany. But they think the Kaiser and the officers regarded the war as something fine and invigorating. Hence there is a certain satisfaction in aristocratic distress.

It is, however, a faint satisfaction, as with something that happened centuries ago. They tell you where the Kaiser stood when he dictated his ultimatum, just as in Rome they point out the spot where Domitian was assassinated. The pompous monuments of the Hohenzollerns are of whiter marble than the statues of the Flavian emperors. The buildings embodying the Hohenzollern worship of mass and force are scarcely weathered. But for all that the impression of imperial Rome is fresher than that of imperial Germany. The Palatine Hill makes you muse; the royal palace of Berlin bores you, and makes you try vainly to remember something you once knew about it. The sense of dreary oblivion is still heavier at Potsdam, now a city without soldiers or any other reason for existence. A seedy guide, very obsequious to American exchange, takes you from room to room. Here the Kaiser sat down to feast with two hundred persons; here the Kaiserin served tea; here is the table where the Kaiser used to sit, Hindenburg on one side, Ludendorff on the other. Noth-

ing but an undistinguished table and three stupidly designed chairs. You feel moved somewhat, as you would if you saw the nest where the last laying dodo sat on the last egg, sterile, as it turned out, with two other dodos, too old for breeding, solacing its long ordeal with their futile conversation. There is no glory at all hovering around the memory of Wilhelm. He played and lost, and ruined everybody. For that sort of service democracies are ungrateful.

It may be that there is a strong monarchist party somewhere in Germany. There must be monarchists in Berlin, but they are as much under cover as the monarchists of Washington, if there are such. Berlin was not enthusiastic over the Wirth government, whose function was chiefly to eat crow at the behest of the French. Berlin would not be very enthusiastic over any government. The population is composed chiefly of doubting Thomases. The proletariat is well organized for political purposes, and is powerful, but it hasn't a ghost of a notion what to do with its power. If only the reactionaries would start something—then there would be some zest in putting them down. After the Erzberger murder the government excited a momentary interest by closing down various reactionary papers. It was just as if some left-handed Burleson were to close down *Industry*, the *National Civic Federation Review*, *McCall's*, the *New York Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. At this invasion of the liberty of the press I looked for a great storm of liberal protest. There was none. As I am a liberal, convinced that the way to make an idea, even a reactionary idea, innocuous, is to give it air, I ought to have found my heart bleeding over the wholesale suppression of ideas. Yet my heart didn't bleed one drop.

"But the Germans haven't changed a bit," declares the young lady tourist of the type that played at Joan of Arc during the war. "It's all nonsense about the change of heart." For my own part I don't know anything about the German heart. I do know that in the case of the individual, with prosperity the heart waxes proud and with adversity it waxes the other way. Probably the same thing is true of a people. I can guess how the Berliners would behave if Germany had won the war. Certainly they behave quite differently now. It is a very much less difficult thing to do business with them.

"But they hate us, in their souls. How they glare at me," declares my Joan of Arc. They may, though Joan's face is one to draw many an esurient glance which might be mistaken by an American for a hostile glare. Ask a Berliner, and he is likely to tell you that he does not hate Americans or

Englishmen or Italians. He is saving his hatred for the French. If he could send them back beyond the Vosges by any means short of war he would do it eagerly. But as to making war, he is disarmed and helpless, and he knows what that would mean in war. And in his heart he knows he will remain in this condition for a long time. His hatred will have to feed on itself.

It is a rare and in some respects a great character that can make an unflagging passion of hatred. Such characters are few in any population, just as few in Berlin as elsewhere. Any

Berliner will say automatically that he hates the French, but what is actually occupying his mind is the price of bread and beer—thin beer, he comments wryly—the taxes, the ineptitude of the government, the unreasonableness of workers or of employers, according to his economic affiliations, and above all, the Valuta. The Valuta, that mathematical demon that makes the marks in his pocket swell or shrink, but almost always shrink—if it had a trace of tangible form, how eagerly he would declare war on it.

ALVIN JOHNSON.

## America—Holier Than Thou

THE China and Japan mail has just come in, and after wading through the shoals of material printed in this country on the forthcoming Armament Conference I have been reading China's and Japan's views. The contrast has been educative and chastening. It has brought back stabbing little memories of Far Eastern incidents and conversations that had been dulled under the excitement of coming home. It has restored a healthy perspective.

I go back now to these piles of clippings from American publications and re-read them with straightened vision. And in all that has been written here on the Conference I find a significant monotone—the note of self-righteousness. We are about to stand again at Armageddon, again to battle for the Lord. One is reminded of the American peace commissioner's anecdote of Clemenceau's complaint on his doubly delicate task at the Peace Conference, for did he not have to confront Lloyd George, who thought he was Napoleon Bonaparte, and Woodrow Wilson, who thought he was Jesus Christ? There are signs that we are about to anoint ourselves again.

America's aim, say most of our commentators, is to curb Japan, if not to win it back to the path of virtue. Our aim, say the minority, is only secondarily to curb Japan and primarily to curb all the powers, since on all is the mark of the aggressor against China. All of whom are right and all of which is true, only too true. That must be our goal indeed. But if we go to the Conference in that attitude of mind, if we go envisaging that goal only, we shall go seeing myopically. For we must know, and face, and understand this also, that, justly or unjustly, the other powers will come to the Conference with the unspoken but

controlling thought: "And who shall curb America, and how?"

I suppose on the whole it is unjust, for undoubtedly America's career in the Far East has been clean. Possibly it has been clean not so much because we have been virtuous as because we have been innocent; we have not yet had a big enough stake to test us. But clean it undoubtedly has been. Nevertheless, as I go back now and gather up the memories of numerous meetings and discussions these last two or three years in the Far East with men of every color, nationality and stripe of opinion, I find running through them all a single motif: fear of America, of America the aggressor of the immediate future. Their dread is of an impending American invasion, an invasion of dollars rather than of men. Capitalistic imperialism, they call it.

I found it underlying all the calculations of the Japanese of the frankly imperialistic class. I found it giving pause to those Japanese liberals whose mental leanings would incline them to more vigorous opposition to the expansionists. I found it unanimous with the certainty of something predestined among Europeans, especially European liberals. In the light of the thou-betrayest-us attitude of American liberals toward European liberals since the Paris Conference and since the recent resumption of European concessioneeing in China, there has been something ironical in being thus faced with accusation. Ironical, but enlightening and impressive.

Bertrand Russell, for instance, shares this apprehension. I am guilty of no breach of manners in stating openly views expressed in private conversations, because since I left Peking he has expressed more or less publicly his belief that Ameri-