

# These Germans

BY WILLIAM C. WHITE

*Two human pictures of the Germany of today*

GENERAL VON SCHMIDT slipped into obscurity after the rise of the German Republic in 1918. Once he had been on Hindenburg's personal staff, the leader of the drive on the northeastern front in 1915, and, later, commander of a sector on the western front until the end of the War. He was retired in 1919, glad in some degree that the Republic honored him by forgetting him, hurt that the Republic forgot his soldiers who should have been honored.

Now he has only his pension — eighty dollars a month, for the inflation wiped out his wealth in bonds and banks. He and his wife live in a three-room apartment in the south of Berlin, but they do not regret the lack of space. With mementoes of their past all around them, the crowded condition of their rooms, stuffed with most of the treasures of their former eighteen-room apartment, brings back the past to them in more concentrated form.

"The old General likes young people around and wants you to come to dinner," a friend told me. "But you had better decline — he would do it in proper style and that would cost

him too much. Say you'll come for supper instead."

I found von Schmidt's apartment in one of those Berlin streets where every window of the six-story apartment houses is a bit of garden, overflowing with petunias and geraniums.

"*Gruess Gott*," the old man welcomed me. He was wearing an old but scrupulously overhauled cut-away. Time had scarcely touched his broad shoulders, but only a wisp of his former military mustache remained.

His wife, in black, with a massive chain of twisted gold supporting a rococo locket on her bosom, seemed just an animated bit of the background. She excused herself immediately and went to the kitchen, while the old man showed me around the crowded rooms.

Paintings covered every possible space on the walls, whether the light on them was good or not. The best placed picture was one of three lads grouped around a handsome officer in full regalia.

"My wife did that," the old man said with well founded pride. "Those were my three sons."

Endless series of drawers and boxes were opened, and Rembrandt etch-

ings, old books, autograph letters of the Prussian kings, water colors by Frau von Schmidt were passed before me with kaleidoscopic speed.

"We have so many things that we love," General von Schmidt added, as if to apologize for what might seem ostentation.

The only thing of the present day in the whole apartment was a signed photograph of Hindenburg.

Supper was on the table — a bowl of pretzels, some pumpernickel and cheese, and butter. A gallon jug of beer stood by the host's chair. Nothing whatever was said as apology for the meagreness of the fare; and that I took as a compliment. Conversation was at first a bit awkward. Outsiders, let alone foreigners, seldom crossed the life of the old couple, who lived so intimately that it was impossible for them to be casual. Any one like myself, perforce, had to share that intimacy and, in so doing, became thereby more of an outsider.

"I was in Belgium during most of the War," the old General began. "I can show you photographs I took there. The Belgians liked us . . ."

"Tell about your great day at the front," his wife prompted him.

"Yes, yes, my proudest day during the whole War!" he smiled broadly. "My division entered a little Belgian village and, after we found billets, I went into the small local church to see what works of art I might find there. I saw an old altar and imagine my being able to decipher the inscription and to be able to prove that it was a Spanish altar of the Tenth Century! I wrote a monograph about it which I shall show you."

"And get your medals, by the way, and show them too," his wife said.

He brought from some closet four large wooden boxes. They were filled with leather jewel cases and each case contained a decoration. There were fifty different kinds — Iron Crosses, the medals of German states and cities, Austrian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian honors — the smaller the country, as a rule, the gaudier the medal. There was a large Chinese decoration and one of the Rising Sun of Japan. "I was an instructor out there before the War," he explained. Of one medal only did he seem proud, the rarely awarded German "*Pour la Merit *."

He replaced them in their cases and smiled, "I should have needed a bosom three times my size to have worn them all at once. I have given orders that all these are to be returned at my death."

I thought his wife nodded assent. He turned to refilling our glasses.

"I AM glad for my quiet life today," he began again. "The War — a nightmare, and what for, what?"

"You lost many friends in it?" I asked — a clumsy question.

"Ach, Gott, yes — and my three sons." He groped for another subject. "My divisions usually faced the English. They are great fighters and fair ones. And your Americans, too. But the French are swine — I have seen them bayonet wounded men."

"Swines and savages," his wife interrupted. "And those people are now our jailers."

"My wife is bitter, naturally," the old man smiled. "But I can forgive the French. Today they are the

wealthiest but most misguided nation in Europe. They are misguided because they have yet to learn that there is neither virtue nor happiness in wealth. This lesson we German folk have learned in the past ten years — and we are a better nation for it. The French, by their conduct since the War, have forced us to learn this. I thank them.”

“I hate them,” his wife said. “Because of them, Germany faces chaos today which will infect all Europe. Europe and America must save Germany.”

“No, my dear,” the old General spoke patiently — this was obviously a subject on which they had long disagreed — “only the German people can save Germany. Neither money nor prosperity nor new boundaries are what we Germans need. We must have a spiritual regeneration if the German of the past is to be reborn.”

“I notice you say ‘German’ and not ‘Germany,’” I commented.

“The Germany of the past, autocratic and imperial, is dead, and can never be reborn,” von Schmidt replied positively. “The Kaiser fled and with him he took far more than his life — our one-ness, our faith. He was my commanding officer, he was the symbol of unity for all our German folk. I remember the morning at headquarters, in November, 1918, when the message came saying that he had deserted. I disbelieved it, I laughed. Well, he fled. And he took with him the possibility of there ever being another Hohenzollern in Germany.”

“By the way, Herr Excellenz,” I asked from curiosity, “where were you on the morning of the Armistice?”

He had no time to answer, for his wife interrupted, “Hohenzollern or not, Germany must have a Kaiser! That is what is wrong with us today — no unity —”

“You will find no one who wants a Hohenzollern,” von Schmidt replied. “But you will find millions who long for the regeneration of the German of old — fearless, free, part of a unified whole, seeking the opportunity to realize the best that is in him. The Versailles Treaty, in part, prevents us from doing that. But no force or nation can hold sixty million people prisoners.”

“It is the French —” his wife said bitterly.

“It is the French,” the old man continued quietly, “to whom, in many ways, we owe thanks. They have taught us, for one thing, the real value of wealth.” He turned abruptly to his wife. “Are we not happier here, this way, you and I?”

She made no reply. I saw her lift her eyes to the portrait of her three sons.

“And the French have given to the German people their greatest opportunity —”

“You always say that,” the old lady interrupted, “and I never understand.”

General von Schmidt paused to light a cigar. “It is the French who have given the German people a chance for new world leadership. The whole world today lacks unity and is lost, just as we Germans are. Can the French, with their psychology, in spite of their wealth, lead us? Everything the world over seems relative, transitory. We search for permanency, for a solid foundation. In the search for that, Germany can

lead. In a suffering world, those folk who have suffered most can best find the truth because of the depth of their experience. And we Germans know now that there is nothing permanent in so-called material things. A nation that sets those things up as its gods worships a force that can only bring destruction. Was there ever a war not caused by those idols? Was there ever a war with spiritual causes?"

The General's wife had perhaps heard her husband speak thus before; she rose and began to clear the table.

"In the Eighteenth Century," my host continued, "there was the same state of mind as today — uncertainty, a search for permanency, the crashing of certainties brought about by your English philosophers, Locke, Berkeley, Hume. It was a German, Kant, who found a basis of permanence on which philosophy could rest for some generations after him — that truth lies in the way one looks at the world. And it will be so today — the German people can lead the world to a spiritual regeneration, to greater selflessness, to a new way of evaluating life."

I wanted to bring the conversation back from metaphysics to something more concrete. "But what must happen here in Germany before what you prophesy will occur?"

"A spiritual regeneration of our people," the old man snapped.

"Under what kind of government?"

"Neither that of Hitler, which is based on selfishness, nor that of the Republic, which is full of dishonesty and greed —"

"There have been more political

scandals in the past ten years under the Republic," his wife added, re-joining us, "than there were in the preceding five hundred years of our history."

"Have you heard of the Sklarek case?" von Schmidt asked. "Some Jewish contractors stole more than a million dollars from the Berlin city treasury, their trial has been going on for a year and a half and they have not yet come to the presentation of the charge."

"But what kind of government would you like?" I asked.

"There are men who could have run the Republic honestly — not Socialist grafters, but former army officers. No, I'm not speaking for myself — but men who loved Germany above party or self. The form of government is unimportant — the spirit is everything. We German people must be purged, our faith renewed. The new Germany will be something new — a land spiritually reborn."

"I don't understand much of what you mean," his wife commented.

"I mean that we shall be a nation that does not have the acquisition of wealth as its objective. Today we are all poor, together. Reparations have taken much of our wealth and we are done with them today. You will find no man, from Hindenburg to the dirtiest communist, who expects to see another *pfennig* paid for tribute. In these years we have found the value of simplicity. My wife and I have greater riches here than when I had my estates and my inheritance. Things will be all right so long as Germany avoids inflation —"

"Inflation —" his wife echoed the word. It meant bad memories.

"The German people want no more of it. It could not be! From my own point of view, what would happen to a fixed pension with inflation today? No, no, it is unthinkable!"

He rose from the table. "Let me show you the photographs which I took at the front — I hope no one will ever have a chance to take such pictures again. And there is no reason why there should ever be another war."

"Not even against France?" his wife asked.

"French people have their national pride — we are rewelding ours. If they will admit our right to be a free nation, there is no reason why two proud nations, like two proud families, should not be able to live side by side. We want nothing that they have. We are not 'seeking our place in the sun.' We ask only a little of its light!"

It was growing late and I could see that Frau von Schmidt was tired. I rose to go, although the old General would have detained me. "There are still three albums of photographs which you have not seen. Well, perhaps another time. . . ."

As I reached the door he stopped me. "You asked a question at supper which I did not answer. You understand, it recalled such painful memories — that last morning at the front, when the news of the Armistice reached us. Well," he hesitated, "I went to my men and told them the news. Then, although we were retiring in defeat, I gave them the order that weary Germany needs today — 'Soldiers, forward march!'"

## II

HERR KNOBLAUCH and his wife called unexpectedly one night at the home of a Berlin merchant where I had dropped in for a late supper. They entered very enthusiastically, having come directly from a Hitler mass-meeting at the Sports Palast, and they were bubbling over with the after effects.

"Such a crowd; such a crowd," Herr Knoblauch began. "Twenty thousand people! The cheering when he appeared! He spoke for two hours — I could have listened for two days. Every time I hear him I am all the more convinced that he alone can save us."

"Adolf Hitler is our only salvation," his wife agreed.

Knoblauch was a slightly built chap of thirty. He wore one of those suits of clothes which seem to delight the middle class in Berlin, and which look to the foreigner as if the cloth had been struck by a particularly jagged bolt of purple lightning and cut by a uniquely absent-minded tailor. His wife was a very plain blonde with a luxuriant but lifeless crown of braided hair. In the presence of her husband she said little, and spoke only in undertones. Her whole attitude resembled that of the lady who wrote for advice about a wayward husband to one of the "heart problem" columns in a Berlin newspaper, and began her letter saying, "*Mein Mann ist mein Gott!*"

"Tonight Hitler said —" Knoblauch began to quote paragraph after paragraph from what must have been an unusually successful speech. ". . . then listen to this —

he said that the Jews are nothing but an ignorant and barbaric people, the abomination of the race of men. They are like lice infesting the bodies of strong men that eventually weaken and corrupt them by their unending blood-sucking."

"Yes, Heinrich," his wife agreed, "and he said . . ."

My host was not interested in politics or in anti-Semitism, and he tried to change the subject, but without success. Knoblauch continued to quote the speech, unconsciously mimicking the gestures and the intonation of the speaker. His wife sat at the other side of the table, next to our hostess, smiling, happy and proud.

My first impression had been that Knoblauch resented the presence of a foreigner, but suddenly he turned to me. "You aren't Jewish?" he asked. "Your name in German is 'Weiss,' isn't it? The chief of the Berlin police force has that name and he is a Jew — that's why I asked. You have nothing in America like the Hitler movement? Of course, in America, you have no one dominant racial strain as we Nordic Germans have. But such a movement is the only defense against the greediness of the Jews and the anarchy of communism. Communism is all Jewish — look at Karl Marx, and Trotsky, and Lenin —"

"But Lenin was a Russian," I objected.

"By birth, perhaps, but he lived with Jews so long abroad that he acquired a Jewish psychology, and that's the same thing," the little man said triumphantly. His wife nodded her agreement.

My host seemed to feel that if the

conversation were going to stay on politics he would talk about something in which every one was interested. "Did you see the new emergency decree this morning ordering an increase in taxes?" he asked.

"And you still support the Republic that issues those decrees!" Knoblauch replied. "How can any man carry on his business and accumulate even a little wealth under the ruinous system of taxation which we now have? Ten to fifty per cent income tax on any salary over one hundred and twenty-five marks a month (\$32.50), one per cent for 'crisis tax,' one per cent for a tax to support the churches —"

"But our churches could not keep open without that," his wife said. "It's hard enough now for the pastors. You know that Pastor Dorn had to give up his automobile, although his is a very wealthy parish —"

"Yes, but people can avoid that tax by registering at the tax office as unbelievers," Knoblauch insisted. "Everybody — or nobody — should be forced to pay it."

"But people who don't pay it can not have their children baptized!" Frau Knoblauch said, shocked.

"At least, they avoid paying the church tax!"

For a moment interest was focused on the plates of *blutwurst*, *bockwurst*, *bratwurst*, *mettwurst*, *liverwurst*, *Thuringia wurst* and *zervelatwurst*, and on the bowls of potato salad, red cabbage cole-slaw and sliced tomatoes which covered the table. A half-dozen varieties of cheese completed the "simple" meal. There was a

copious supply of beer brought in a cannister from a nearby saloon.

"At least this Republic will soon run out of new ways to raise money," Knoblauch said. "Now we have a thirty-five per cent tax on beer, taxes on cigarettes, on matches and even on rents. And all of it to be paid as tribute — tribute to the French or to the Jews."

"The world wide economic crisis might have something to do with it," my host suggested.

"It is the selfishness of the French and the greed of the Jews that caused the crisis," Knoblauch replied.

"That's what Adolf Hitler said, too," his wife added.

"The French dictated the 'slave treaty' which started our trouble, and the Jewish control of the banks at home completed it," Knoblauch explained. "The German people do not realize what control the Jews have — the truth is published only in the Hitler newspapers. The largest newspaper publishers in Germany are Jews, Mosse with the *Tageblatt*, and Ullstein. They hate Hitler more than they hate the communists — that's a proof of the kind of loyalty they feel to Germany! The Jewish fungus grows everywhere. Who owns the large department stores in this city?"

He turned to me, "It was one of your American Jews who dared to film *All Quiet on the Western Front*, that insult to German bravery. The Jews are always out for what they can get for themselves, even if it means sacrificing national pride, or even a nation itself. In my business, making cutlery, the Jew predominates. And their banks dictate to me whenever I need credit. How can

any one become wealthy, having to support that breed of parasites?"

"You may think that it is the Jews that keep you from growing wealthy," interrupted my host, "but I don't see what you are going to do about it. It's one thing to talk and another thing to think out a plan of action. Did you hear about the man who went into a store and asked for a 'Hitler herring'?"

"I never heard of such a thing," said Knoblauch.

"That's just what the storekeeper said, too. Then the customer explained that a 'Hitler herring' was a Bismarck herring without any head!"

"Remarks like that are almost blasphemy," Knoblauch replied, a trifle angered. "We do know what to do. We will deprive the Jews of all citizenship rights. We will take over all the banks and control interest rates. Just think how I could run my business if I knew I could borrow money without having to worry about paying exorbitant interest. I believe that a man has a right to grow as wealthy as he can, so long as he is honest. The great wrong in our society today is interest-servitude! We shall abolish it. Then the whole German people, struggling with mortgages and obligations held by Jewish bankers, will prosper. That is what Hitler means when he says, 'Germany, awake!'"

THE maid cleared away the remnants of sausages and cheese and set a large round *pflaumkuchen* — a plum cake — in the centre of the table. By its side she put a bowl of whipped cream.

"Money, after all, is anything

that the Government chooses to declare as money," said Knoblauch, heaping whipped cream atop a piece of cake. "Under Hitler the Government will issue coupons which will serve as money. They will be acceptable anywhere inside Germany. Thus we shall have no need to issue interest bearing State bonds, and we shall be free from servitude to gold! We are trying out such a system in some towns at present, in Rendsburg, in Holstein, for example."

"How does it work?" I asked.

"Well, we are having difficulty because the Ministry of Finance opposes us. But we shall soon sweep that gang away."

"Aren't such systems a form of inflation?" I inquired.

He hesitated for a moment, then replied, "Inflation will do us good — that is, controlled inflation. Some inflation is what we need. It will raise prices, put more money into circulation, and increase our foreign trade. It would, for example, help my own business tremendously. At present I find it difficult to compete with British manufacturers. With some inflation we can undersell the world!"

"That's what my brother-in-law, in Bavaria, says too," Frau Knoblauch added. "He makes toys."

"How will you carry on business relations with the rest of the world if you have your own currency as you describe it?" I asked.

"We will pay for foreign goods in gold," Knoblauch explained. "But we shan't buy much abroad. We are going to make Germany a closed economic unit, an 'autarchy'! We will come in contact with outside

lands only in selling them goods. Today, for example, we import every year nearly a half billion dollars' worth of foodstuffs — we, with twelve million acres of untilled land that could be used to raise food."

"Some of that is swamp land, isn't it?" my host asked.

"Yes, but we will reclaim that. We will take our unemployed from the cities, put them on the land, grow food — and thereby make ourselves all the more independent!"

"How are you going to sell German products to other lands if you don't buy their agricultural produce from them?" my host inquired.

"We always have sold things abroad, haven't we? Excellence of German production is the best argument. My own factory turns out better stuff than the English factories, yet, at the present time, with England on an inflation basis, I can't compete. But Germany will awaken! Hitler will come to power yet. Old man Hindenburg can not live forever!"

In the meantime Frau Knoblauch and our hostess had dropped out of the conversation and were discussing household problems.

"The idea of any servant asking that money!" I overheard Frau Knoblauch say. "Doesn't she know that there is a crisis? I dismissed her and now I have a new girl for three marks less per month — and she works two hours more per day!"

Their conversation turned to the Knoblauch neighbors. "A former captain in the army, his wife, and his wife's parents. Such pride as they have! They scarcely speak to us — we're only tradesmen, bour-

geoisie! The captain likes people to call him 'Captain' but I always make a point of calling him 'Herr.' He gets a pension and his father-in-law gets one too. Between them they must have seven or eight hundred marks a month. Yet you see War cripples, who had the misfortune to be only privates, begging on the streets while these former officers live in comfort!"

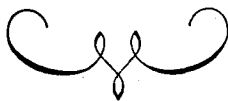
"His wife is always talking about the estates they used to have in Pomerania," Frau Knoblauch added.

"The difficulty is that they are Hitlerites too," Knoblauch continued. "I think they're expecting soft jobs when Hitler comes to power. They're wrong if they think Adolf Hitler is going to surrender his movement to these old stiff-necked

officers. After all, Hitler was only a common soldier in the War, and he suffered just as much from the arrogance of this caste as any one — "

It seemed, fortunately, that there was no more food to follow. It was growing late and I asked my host the best way to get back to the centre of Berlin. Herr Knoblauch interrupted and offered to take me back in his car. "It's right on our way," he said. "You'll have to sit in the rumble seat, but you can see how much more comfortable German automobiles are than American ones."

In ten minutes we were driving down the street, quiet and deserted on this winter night. Where I was sitting I could hear wisps of conversation, from inside the car, about the mass meeting at the Sports Palast.



# The Slump in Letters

BY C. HARTLEY GRATTAN

*It is stated that politics, economics, science and even internal decay are reducing literature to an avocation, but there is another side to the argument*

IN THIS essay I should like to gather together certain facts and opinions that go to illustrate the conviction that literature is on the decline and that the place of the writer in society must be radically redefined if he is to survive at all. Of course this conviction has gained force in many earlier periods. Writers have been in difficulties before. But literary theorists are not prepared today to admit that just around the corner there is an era of compromise and prosperity during which the artist will recover his former balance. They are now maintaining that certain forces have been let loose in society which have brought about a catastrophic crisis from which there is little prospect that the literary man will escape alive. The conviction is abroad that something more disturbing than a mere revolution in taste is this time upon us.

The destructive forces are alleged to stem from various levels of the general cultural complex. Political, economic and scientific reasons are advanced in explanation. It is argued that the coming of democracy in the late Eighteenth Century, with its

emphasis on universal education, marked the first step in the fall of the writer. Instead of strengthening his position by broadening his potential audience, universal education is alleged to have weakened him by opening the door to the wide diffusion of mediocre art and worse and so leading inevitably to the debasement of taste. The literary artist, preoccupied with more special and personal problems has never found it possible to redefine his art, which was for many centuries identified with aristocracy, on a democratic basis. True, certain writers, like Charles Dickens, have succeeded in striking a line which may be called bourgeois or middle class and at the same time appealing to all classes. But it is notable that fiction writers like Dickens and poets like Longfellow have always been severely criticized by the less adaptable critics — though often allegedly æsthetic reasons for renouncing them have obscured the social nature of the bias.

The number of truly democratic writers of quality has been infinitesimal. Early in the present century Edward Garnett found that the most