

# Text for a Tenth Anniversary

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

*You heard that ghost voice, Goering, after the bombs  
Had stopped falling. Goebbels read for the Leader  
His execration of "International Jewry,"  
His talk of God and the Greater German Reich . . .  
And then he told you every individual  
And nation would be weighed within the balance . . .  
Yes. It reminds me of an old, old story:*

**B**ELSHAZZAR the King gave a glittering feast  
For a thousand lords from West and East,  
Of peacock, pheasant, and boar and swine;  
Golden wine for each concubine;  
Swordsmen ranked and armored and grim;  
And a golden canopy over him  
In the huge high hall where his lions ran  
Each with a beard and a face like a man.  
He lolled and rolled in his tufted chair  
While a myriad perfumes filled the air;  
He called for the cups of silver and gold  
That his sire had seized in Israel's hold,  
That his furious sire—doom in his nod—  
Had wrenched from the shrine of the House of God  
When Solomon's temple roared to the night,  
Its Holy of Holies with flames all bright,  
As Nebuchadnezzar in raging ire  
Razed great Jerusalem by fire . . .

So the vessels of the Inner Shrine  
Were filled with pollutions of his wine  
For the gorgeous lords who lolled to dine;  
Golden wine for each concubine!  
Such deeds had this Belshazzar done,  
So glorious was his Babylon,  
So great his roads, canals, and drains,  
Such slaves he had who toiled in chains,  
So rich the yield of field and vine!

In that same hour came forth a sign.  
In that same hour, in that gloating land,  
Came forth the fingers of a hand  
In the light of candles branched in seven  
Where the golden Candlesticks of Heaven  
From the Tabernacle of the Jews  
Glazed with their light all gorgeous hues.  
And high in the golden candleshine  
That burnished armor and gemmed the wine,  
Higher than the Nubian guards stood tall,  
Moved the writing hand on the palace wall.  
Above those blazing shields and spears  
The hand moved writing (*As down the years—  
More than twice a thousand years—  
In God's good time it reappears  
To a heart of lies and a mind deranged!*)

The king's fierce countenance was changed.  
Tensed were his limbs that sprawled at ease,  
Smote together his armored knees.  
Staggering up 'mid the scimitars,  
"Bring the Chaldeans who know the stars!"  
Roared Belshazzar. "Bring here the Wise!  
Hot irons for their rheumy eyes  
An' they construe not this monstrous thing!  
But whosoever," stormed on the King,  
"Shall read this writing, showing to me  
Its inmost meaning, he shall be  
Clothed in full scarlet without fleck,  
With a chain of gold about his neck,  
To rule and reign for many a sun  
Third in the Kingdom of Babylon!"

The soothsayers, in their robes of pride,  
With the Star Men came. And the Star Men died.

Then breathless at the door was seen  
A form like the moon, of a regal mien.

"Oh King, live forever!" breathed the Queen.  
"Nor let thy frenzy trouble thee.  
A slave thou hast, knows what shall be!  
An Israelite, withouten spells,  
In whom the gods' own wisdom dwells;  
He shall read thee what is writ, Belshazzar,  
He whom thy sire, Nebuchadnezzar,  
Made of all sayers of sooth the chief!"

Her vesture rustling like a leaf,  
Her voice a silver clarion-call,  
She cried the Captain down the Hall  
"Bring hither Daniel!" And dark and slim  
Daniel, his servant, came to him;  
Formal profound obeisance gave.

"Art thou that Daniel late a slave  
Of the Children of Captivity,  
That, out of Jewry, came to be  
Chief of the Wise? I have heard of thee.  
Read thou this writing on the wall,  
And of that I promised, thou shalt have all!"

"No," said Daniel. "Yet will I read  
The fiery script. Do thou take heed!"

"Thy father, Nebuchadnezzar trod  
In glory before the most high God,  
Glory and majesty day and night  
On his shoulders perched, like eagles of light;  
The thunder of Heaven was in his beard;  
All men trembled; nations feared—  
Whom would he curse? Whom would he wive?  
Whom would he slay? whom keep alive?  
Whom set up, and whom put down—  
In the lightning-dazzle of his crown?"

"His mind was hardened in its pride.

"His throne dissolved. His glory died.  
He became without the strength to stand,  
In the closing and opening of God's hand.  
He was driven forth from the sons of men  
His heart was wholly a beast's heart then;  
As an ox of the field he fed on grass;  
Drenched by strange dew his body was;  
He fell and crawled on his knees and hands  
And wrenched at roots—who had ruled all lands.

"Thou, Belshazzar, art his son!"

"Great Ruler, being such an one,  
The vessels of the House of God  
Were filled with wine at thy curt nod.  
Thy lords and their ladies have drunk the same:  
Israel's blood in defeat and shame.  
Thou hast exalted in gold and brass  
Gods that shall make thy kingdom pass—  
For they see not, neither hear nor know.  
But the God of thy Breath thou hast let go,  
Cursed and reviled.

Thus the writing stands:

MENE: God hath numbered thy lands,  
Decreeing thy kingdom shall pass away.  
TEKEL: As in the scales they weigh  
Grain, art thou weighed, and wanting found.  
PERES: Thy kingdom—all its ground—  
The Medes and the Persians shall divide!"

Then shook Belshazzar, for all his pride.  
Daniel they clothed in a scarlet gown.  
A chain of gold from his neck hung down.  
The trumpets blew for the Third to reign.

In the dark of that night was Belshazzar slain.  
Doom stopped his breath—as he had not planned.

Darius the Median took the land.

# Germans as People and Prussians

*LISTEN, HANS.* By Dorothy Thompson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1942. 292 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PERCIVAL R. KNAUTH

**D**OROTHY THOMPSON is an American woman whose opinion is respected in every European nation. This is a distinction more unique than might at first be thought. There are not many Americans who command unstinted respect abroad as persons who understand the people of Europe. Generally speaking, we are considered superficial, sensational, and snobbish, content to observe surface manifestations of national character and draw from these some general conclusion. Isolationism and American tourists have left the impression among Europeans that we are scarcely worthy of more intimate confidences.

Miss Thompson in particular knows Germany and the Germans, and she knows them well enough to retain, despite the perversion of Germany under Nazism, her belief in many Germans as persons of good will. Moreover, she has the courage to say this in the midst of war and a growing clamor of many Americans for blind hatred of all Germans, regardless of whatever qualities they may possess which we might use when the war is over and the construction of a lasting peace begins. Again, there are not many Americans of whom this can be said, for it takes—besides courage—a kind of objectivity and long-range vision which most of us conspicuously lack when it comes to talking about European affairs.

"Listen, Hans" is a textbook on psychological warfare as it should be applied to Germany, but it is also the most careful study of the Germans which this country has yet had the good fortune to receive. Dorothy Thompson knows what many Americans have not yet realized: that this is a people's war, and that the people will eventually decide it. In her book she writes about people and speaks to people—directly, to the people of Germany, but indirectly to the American people, who would do well to listen to her words.

In one of her broadcasts to her friend in Germany, she strikes a keynote:

What concerns me is not governments nor the machinations of international cartels. What concerns me is people—suffering, misled, miserable people. I know that these people are the same all over the world and that they want the same things. They want to live in their own countries in their own way and have something to say about the way they are governed. They want to eat three meals a day, that taste good. They want to have children and keep those children around them, and be

able to tell those children what they have learned from life. They want to be able to speak without wondering whether they are speaking to a spy. They want to stop having to go to war every twenty years; and if in the world we live in, with its immense possibilities of production and the exchange of goods, tremendously augmented by science—if in this world we cannot achieve this, why let's give it back to the ants. These are my peace aims—and yours.

Why cannot we all see the war in these clear and simple terms? We sit and argue and theorize about the German people; we drag in history, heredity, ideology, literature, Freudian deductions from psychological phenomena to prove one thing or another—that the Germans are not to be trusted, that they can be trusted but must be watched, that they are hypnotized and a lot of things more. We who are fight-



This photograph of Dorothy Thompson was taken at the now-famous, pre-war meeting of the German-American Bund in New York City, when she disrupted the meeting by laughing openly at the speakers.

ing a war for freedom and brotherhood build higher the barriers of hate and ignorance which are the only architecture of the Nazis, ignoring the great, fundamental bond between the peoples of the earth—the simple bond of common human thoughts and feelings about life—home, government, food, children and a modicum of happiness. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are a foundation of our life at home; yet, once we turn our eyes away from our own shores we obscure these simple principles with a myriad of complex theories which none of us can really understand, since they have no real basis in the roots of life but are gigantic miscreations of minds which could be put to better tasks.

How many of us have tried to picture to ourselves what life in Germany is like? "A normal life to an American," says Dorothy Thompson, "is a

pre-war life. But there has been no normal life for Germans since 1914, since when there has been nothing but defeat, revolution, reoccupation, drastic inflation, feverish artificial boom on the basis of foreign loans, depression, revolution and war. That is the history of this generation of Germans. . . . The German adult has never once lived under a government he liked or that succeeded. The Kaiserreich fell; the Republic was weak; the Hitler Reich took him to war. Hitler's propaganda has made him doubt whether any other governments are much better."

Yet we wonder what is wrong with the German people. We wonder how they, who have risen to such cultural heights of glory with their Bachs and Beethovens, their Schillers, Goethes, and Heines, can at the same time descend to such levels of barbarism as they exhibit under Nazism. We cite a succession of wars throughout the history of Germany to prove that Germans are hereditary militarists and aggressors, but do not stop to think of the deep reasons that impelled those wars, the same longings that prompted the music and the poetry which stirred the world. "In the German mind," says Miss Thompson, "is every cleavage of European history, and those cleavages have never yet been resolved. . . . The history of Germany is the history of a people who became a national state centuries after Britain and France had found their characteristic national forms. . . . That part of the German people unified in the Reich have lived one common national and cultural life for less than half the length of history of the American Constitution." Yet for centuries Germans have been striving for—and always have been stopped short of—the unity which other nations have enjoyed. The confusion and contradictions of their history have produced, as Miss Thompson says, "morbid frustration and despair."

Is this beyond understanding? Is this not the key to the solution of the German problem? We speak—we who fought a Civil War for our unity—of the danger of preserving Germany as a united nation after the war. Yet: "The history of Germany . . . has been a history of coalescence . . . of movement away from particularism toward national unity . . . never furthered by aristocratic, dynastic, reactionary, or caste interests, but by the deepest popular trends in the German masses." We Americans, whose blood consecrates the idea of unity, should be the first to understand this—yet we are in the front ranks of those who demand German dismemberment after the war.

Here is a realistic attitude toward the question: "The world is sick and tired of German wars that are appar-