

Germans as People and Prussians

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

Reviewed by PERCIVAL R. KNAUTH

DOROTHY 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-

ently fought by Germany partly for the purpose of determining through them what the German destiny may be. The German mind is contradictory, despairing, and tragic, but we are all heartily sick of suffering with her. If the German mind cannot make itself up, then we must make it up for her, by force. . . . But we should never despair of German aid in achieving that clarity." And we should remember that "Germans who would gladly see Hitler perish and Europe live freely will fight to the last drop of blood for German unity. The fear of dismemberment . . . constitutes Hitler's greatest psychological asset today."

Americans must change their think-

ing about Europe if the United States is to play with dignity and responsibility its part in the postwar world. Our traditional isolationism has not equipped us well for this task. But the difficulties of readjustment are not half as great as we think. Dorothy Thompson found the formula: she looked at the Germans as people. Germans came to this country to find the freedom and unity which they could not create at home; they fought here and died here for those ideals. In America they have not proved themselves militarists and aggressors. If we think of what our nation would be had the United States never found unity, we should be able to understand.

the greatness of the Russian people and while she never learned to like their smell, she learned to admire their spirit.

Leaving the Soviet Union, Miss Moats made her way to the Middle East, digging in for what then appeared to be an impending Axis onslaught. From there she reached North Africa, and the great bulge of West Africa, where she took the flying-boat that deposited her on this side of the South Atlantic narrows. Thus ended an eventful trip around the world.

This book is not the diary of a magazine writer. The author made no attempt to get in touch with the top people in the countries she visited. Nor is this merely the record of the little people in and on the verge of war. This book has a special flavor because it is the story of Miss Moats and the universe, and it is an exhilarating combination.

The picture of the author on the jacket of the book reveals some delightfully photogenic features. In this case it is not irrelevant to know that the author is both young and pretty, because this book is full of youth's defiance of conventions and the arrogance of beauty.

Witty, sophisticated lady authors are in great vogue now that Clare Booth Luce has skyrocketed to phenomenal fame. But Miss Moats is not "catty." She is a wildcat! Almost from the first page of her book she carries on a feud with America's former Ambassador to Moscow, Laurence Steinhardt, and that battle royal is etched so deeply and with such a verisimilitude of life that the book is worth reading for that reason alone. For Miss Moats it was a real fight, but she is too great an artist not to know that venom kills the printed word. Her printed words remain very much alive.

Few people could imitate Miss Moats in blending her most purely personal experiences with a recording of world history. The result is simply irresistible, probably because she has a sharply chiseled personality and also because she is an artist of the expressive word. In other words, this book is one of those "naturals" that happens only once in a great while.

Not Peace But a Distaff

BLIND DATE WITH MARS. By Alice-Leone Moats. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1943. 486 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by EMIL LENGYEL

IN the mid-summer of 1940 Alice-Leone Moats was commissioned by the editors of *Collier's* to write articles for them from the Soviet Union. Since it took many months for Moscow to issue her visa, she was to see a large section of the Far East. First she visited Japan and observed the island-empire in the paroxysm of the super-nationalist exaltation that led to Pearl Harbor. From Tokyo she made her way to French Indo-China, which was soon to become Japanese territory in all but name. Singapore was the next stop in her Far-Eastern odyssey, and there she noticed some of the reasons that accounted for the tragedy of a supposedly impregnable naval base.

From Singapore Miss Moats turned northward and joined a convoy of trucks that reached China via the Burma Road. She spent some time in the capital of Free China, Chungking, and there had her first taste of being bombed.

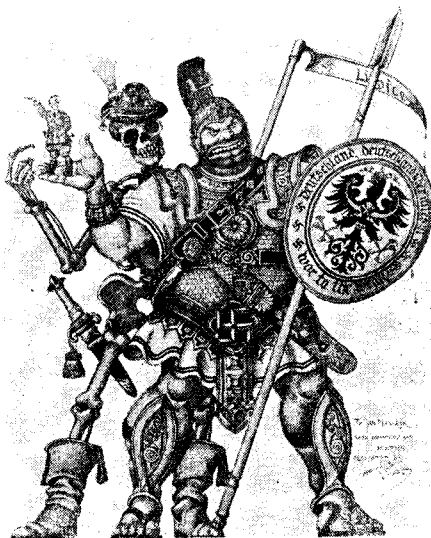
Finally, the Soviet visa reached her and she now flew westward, skirting the great Gobi desert of Mongolia, following the ancient route of silk and tea. She saw enough of Chinese Turkestan to confirm the widely held belief that the Soviets were there in actual control. It was at Soviet Central Asia's Alma Ata that Miss Moats first touched Russian soil.

The bulk of the book is a record of what Miss Moats saw in Russia. She reached Moscow just in time to see it under pre-war conditions. The Ambassadors of Germany and Italy opened their hearts to her and she learned about the impending invasion days before it actually occurred. Either the Axis diplomats were indiscreet or they

were instruments of Hitler's war of nerves.

Miss Moats is frank in her condemnation of the Soviet way of life. Just because she is such an unfriendly critic, her testimony about Russia at war is of great value. More than any other eye-witness, she makes it clear why the Russians are beating the Germans. She saw the women of Russia seizing German incendiary bombs with bare hands and flinging them out of harm's way. Because of innumerable acts of unrecorded heroism, Moscow has suffered comparatively little material damage in this war.

She also saw many heroes of the heroes, the guerrilla fighters, men, women, and children, operating behind the enemy lines, sneaking across the front, reporting to Soviet headquarters. These partisans knew that if they were captured theirs would not be the honorable custody of war prisoners, but the noose of criminals and spies. It was while dodging the bombs in Moscow that Miss Moats discovered



This drawing by Arthur Szyk was inspired by the murder of Lidice.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 463)

WILLIAM S. GILBERT:
PRINCESS IDA

If you'd cross the Helicon
You should read Anacreon,
Ovid's Metamorphoses,
Likewise Aristophanes,
And the works of Juvenal;
These are worth attention all;
But, if you will be advised,
You will get them Bowdlerized.