

Strictly Personal...

A STILL SMALL VOICE SPEAKS AND IS ANSWERED BY A LOUD MEDIOCRITY

I WAS much interested in reading Benedetto Croce's "Germany and Europe,"* which consists merely of four short essays, translated, with an introduction by Vincent Sheean. As an admirer of Croce, both for his uncompromising and philosophically grounded stand against fascism, and for his work, with which I have some familiarity, I was anxious to learn what a spirit so lofty, objective, and knowledgeable might have to say about Germany, past, present, and future, in a world where opinions on the subject are largely preempted by opportunistic exploiters of war-time sufferings and psychoses, whose zeal is only matched by their ignorance, mediocrity, and irrationality.

I thought it would be a pleasure to read the ideas of one who was never seduced, as were so many in all countries, by the theories of fascism, who suffered greatly from it, and has seen his country go down to ruin through it, while retaining at all times a serene confidence in its transitory nature.

And, indeed, it was a pleasure, like drinking from a clean cool spring after ditch water, or moving from a babelous market place into a quiet study where reason still reigns.

Not that the essays offer any blueprint for the future peace. They do but elevate a spirit and attempt to correct some current extravagances in the popular judgment of Germany, which, in Croce's opinion contain within themselves much that is itself dangerously fascistic and Nazi.

Having read the little book I was equally interested to read the reviews of it. I found a remarkable similarity among them. All treat it with respect, as is due one of the greatest figures in European thought and a politically guiltless man of estimable character. But all dismiss it, too, as irrelevant somehow. It is clear that the book embarrasses them by failing to echo or ratify current tendencies of thinking on the German question.

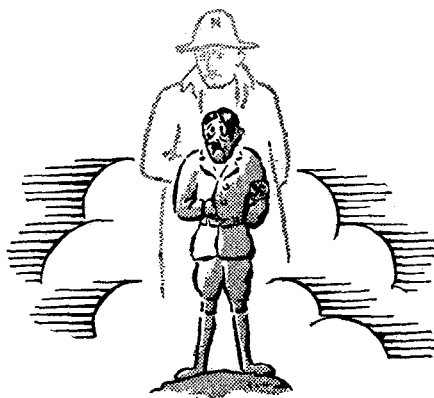
Professor Irwin Edman's review, in the book section of the *Herald Tribune Books*, particularly arrested my attention, by reason of his being a philosopher, or at least a professor of philosophy. Professor Edman, after paying the conventional tribute to the author, falls into the very fallacy which Croce's essays are written to oppose—and, incidentally, without revealing this

fact about them. "Croce," he says, "is very traditionally German, very much a follower of Hegel."

(Since Professor Edman elsewhere criticizes Croce's style in writing, it is not entirely inappropos to wrinkle a nose at Professor Edman's two adverbs, "very traditionally.")

Now, Croce's main thesis is that thought, and systems of ideas, cannot reasonably be endowed with nationality. Hegel must be judged as Hegel, not as a German, and the truth or falsehood of his thoughts and conclusions evaluated in the light of reason. In that light Croce finds much to admire in Hegel and much to condemn as well, as anyone who has read more Croce than is within the covers of this little book well knows. In this very book Croce says, "I have always smiled at the qualification of 'Hegelian' which has been pinned on me, not only because the qualificatory adjectives of all the other thinkers I had likewise studied should have been added, but also because I perceived in such qualification the mental habit of putting writers into some sort of pigeon hole, which is already known, judged, and condemned, so as to . . . throw off the fatigue of trying to understand them."

Croce certainly anticipated the "mental habits" of Professor Edman, for this is exactly what he does. He attaches the word "Hegelian" to Croce, putting him thus in a pigeon hole "already condemned," and without qualifying the title by what Croce—if Professor Edman wants to pin "Germanism" on him—undoubtedly also owes to that most un-Hegelian philosopher, Immanuel Kant. For certainly Croce could as well be called Kantian as Hegelian. Professor Edman thus throws off the fatigue of having to understand why Benedetto Croce has such very different ideas on Germany from Rex Stout, Lord Robert Van Sittart, Sumner Welles, or Professor Edman.



*GERMANY AND EUROPE. By Benedetto Croce. New York: Random House. 1944. 88 pp. \$1.25.

Apparently Croce thoroughly understands the intellectual processes of most political propagandists and professors of philosophy.

Croce pays tribute to German contributions to nearly every branch of European thought and method. But Croce does not see the life of the mind in national terms. Ideas, and all that flows from ideas, such as political and social systems, and concepts of morality as translated into personal and group behaviors, cannot, he maintains, be evaluated according to their national genesis but only in the light of reason and experience. The giving of a nationality to an idea—like "*Deutsche Treue*," "*Deutsche Grossmut*," etc.—like the monopolizing of virtues for a nationality is a Nazi concept. For in Nazism the Nation, or Folk, or Race is the genesis of everything, including thought, the Alpha and Omega of life. "All that is not race is dross," said Hitler, and by that token Spinoza is an idiot because he was a Jew—or Hegel is to be pigeon-holed and condemned because he was a German.

THIS is the great and basic heresy of Nazism from which most of its other aberrations stem, and, according to Croce, we shall be in a bad way if we accept it as a stick to beat the Germans with, however much they deserve the beating.

Croce, who admits his debt to German, Italian, French, and English philosophy, recognizes the debt that Germans have owed to the English and the French and vice versa. If Croce is "Hegelian," so, certainly was Karl Marx, who was a student of Hegel's and took his entire logistics from Hegel. He both added and subtracted from Hegel, as Croce has done. That is not tantamount to saying that the Soviet Union, which acknowledges Marx as its spiritual founder, is the prototype of Hegel's "Prussian State." Neither is Nazi Germany the prototype of Hegel's State. As Shaw once remarked, "Any street walker can call herself a Daughter of Joy."

Ideas, when emanating from the brains of genius, with the power to create in reason and imagination, structures and systems, have a life transcendent to nations. They are fecund, producing new ideas, new structures. A thesis has power even by the creation of its antithesis, and thesis and antithesis often work toward new syntheses. This concept is Hegelian, and is true or not true, but certainly cannot be condemned and pigeon-holed because Hegel was a German.

Croce points out that Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" "found its elements in the English theorists on taste and genius. . . . And Shaftesbury, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Roberts,

and Gibbon were masters for German moralists and historians."

Nazism, also, finds its clearest intellectual origins in two non-Germans, the Frenchman, Gobineau, and the Briton, Houston Stewart Chamberlain. A lot of Nazi theory stems directly from Darwinism and the "Survival of the Fittest."

The American thinkers who furnished the intellectual case for the war of rebellion against Great Britain were immeasurably influenced by British thought. The mental personality of Jefferson is inconceivable without Bacon and Locke. German philosophers immensely influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson. That doesn't make Emerson first cousin to a Nazi. Although to Rousseau we owe many of our concepts of social freedom, to Rousseau, and the ideas which he put into the universe, the Nazis owe many of their ideas about blood and soil and the virtue of barbarity. Thus it goes, and in the realm of ideas we are all members one of another, whether we like it or not.

Thus, it seems to me, Croce argues that, although Nazism is something to be opposed, fought against, and destroyed, one cannot destroy Germany or condemn her in toto, without at once destroying part of oneself. For to Croce, as to Immanuel Kant, there is an indivisible Humanity. Or, to quote John Donne:

No man is an island of it selfe;
every man is a peece of the Continent,
a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the sea,
Europe is the leese, as well as if a Promontorie were,
as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or thine owne were;
any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in Mankinde;
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee.

Within the German tradition, as Croce knows, it is possible to find as strong opponents to the ideas of Nazism as anywhere else. Professor Edman asks skeptically, "Are these German devotees of our ideals in Germany or out of it?" It is an odd question, to me, to be put by a Professor of Philosophy who does not define "our" ideals. Are "our" ideals those of Abraham Lincoln? They are certainly not, south of the Mason and Dixon line, nor did they triumph without compromise in the Democratic convention in Chicago, nor are they present in the transport worker's strike in Philadelphia. Are our ideas of education Jefferson's ideas? Then why have we never put them into operation? Are British ideas about India Burke's? Every British school child reads him, but he has been more honored in the breach than the observance. Yet these ideas are part of

us, even in lip-service and even in eclipse.

Certainly there are Germans in Germany who hold to the ideas of Kant, or he would not have lived on in German universities for a century and half. Nazism and the current behavior of the German State can be condemned root and branch out of the mouths of Kant, Kleist, Leibnitz, Goethe, and Hoelderlin, who are read and believed in by Germans—some Germans—to the present moment. That Germans do not act consistently, as a social and political body, in the spirit of their greatest thinkers is little wonder. Neither do other countries.

A German, Immanuel Kant, might throw some light on why they don't, at least a little more than they do.

The world's improvement depends chiefly on individuals and private endeavors and not so much on governments as some think, since experience teaches us that the ultimate aim of governments is not the promotion of the world's good, but rather the well-being of their own states, through which they hope to attain their own individual ends. Many a ruler still looks upon his people only as part of the Kingdom of Nature . . . and wishes them to have ability but solely to make them

better instruments for the accomplishment of his own purposes. Individuals, however, should reflect upon the development of Humanity, and see to it that it becomes not only skillful but moral, and try to advance posterity further than they themselves have gone, which is the most difficult of all.

Professor Edman ends his review with the remark, "They (the essays of Croce) are not very important as advice on post-war Europe." I am quite sure that Professor Edman is correct, but I can only say the greater the pity. Peace-makers have rarely listened to philosophers, which is probably one reason why we never get peace, but sow in each new arrangement of power the seeds for the next war. Germany will be defeated but a lot of Nazi ideas will be even more thoroughly internationalized, and by persons who little dream of what they are doing.

Nevertheless, all over the world, there will be cousins of the spirit, who, like Croce, have concern for Humanity and Truth. Probably they will never triumph, but they will at least, we hope, compel governments to assume a few virtues which they otherwise might not have.

DOROTHY THOMPSON.

Remembering William Ellery Leonard

(DIED MAY 2, 1944)

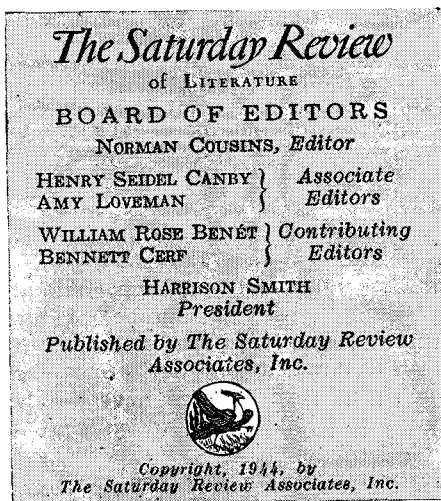
By Gerard Previn Meyer

1.

"HE died at the stake, as every gentleman Must die." We smiled to hear the way he spoke, With such inveterate relish: and there ran Through all our thoughts: "He loves his little joke, His wry wit, lovingly prepared, and flung Into his listeners' faces, to astound With the eccentric brilliance of his tongue, The humor faintly acid, yet profound." And only one remembered how this jester Once on a time had been the public scorn, Pilloried for an innocence of fault, Until he learned that even wounds would fester A little less, if on the light laugh borne, Thus to ride out the tide of time's assault.

2.

Perhaps the thing was planned: for had he not Suffered, and for no fault, the tide of hate That nearly drowned him once, then the dry rot Of pedant passage through the scholar's state Had crumbled him. But since he too had known The contumely, the look that turned aside From the pariah: too, had been alone, He became kinsman to the souls that cried Out of the shadows: the innocent, the scorned, The injured of the earth, the castaways, All who had suffered or were suffering: At every death they died, his music mourned And wreathed them with his pity and his praise. He understood: he too had borne the sting.



GOOD NEWS—AT LAST

AFTER almost uninterrupted grumbling and grumbling on this page about censorship of one kind or another, we are happy to report the prospect of an imminent victory of impressive dimensions. We refer here to the fight over Title V of the Soldiers Vote Act, under which the Army banned for distribution among our fighting men a number of books in the Armed Services Editions issued by the Council on Books in Wartime. A bill to amend Title V was introduced in Congress on August 1—within a few moments after Congress convened—and last week all opposition to the bill was cleared away when leaders of both parties pledged their support to its immediate passage.

Actually, two bills had been prepared, although only one had been submitted. This bill was the joint product of Senator Scott Lucas, of Illinois, and Senator Theodore F. Green, of Rhode Island. The other bill was written by Senator Robert A. Taft, of Ohio, in line with his promise to a group of publishers, authors, and editors at a luncheon meeting held under the auspices of *The Saturday Review* several weeks ago. By way of background, it might also be pointed out that opponents of Title V feared that a necessary liberalizing amendment might be suffocated in endless partisan debate. Obviously the only way the bill could be amended rapidly was through non-partisan action. This was accomplished when Senator Taft agreed to support the Green-Lucas bill, following a series of conferences last week between the three Senators and Army officials, at which several suggestions by Senator Taft were incorporated into the Green-Lucas amendment.

The Saturday Review has been assured by the Army that the liberalizing amendment, as presently constituted, will take care of practically all the Army's needs in administering

its vast educational and informational program. It will have the effect of removing the Army's present shackles in handling newspapers, magazines, books, and motion pictures. As a specific matter, the Army is ready to rescind its ban on "Yankee from Olympus," by Catherine Drinker Bowen, and "The Republic," by Charles A. Beard, among other Council on Books in Wartime selections. We are assured, too, that the new amendment will make it possible for the Army to distribute virtually any book enjoying general circulation in the United States.

The Army has also withdrawn its objections to the motion picture "Wilson," a distinguished new film of uncommon value. The impression has been given in the Army's latest statement concerning the film that "Wilson" had never been banned in the first place. Yet whatever the precise nature of the Army's initial action against "Wilson," the fact remains that the Army has put itself on record in declaring that the picture has not been rejected. The fact also remains that, under the new amendment, "Wilson" is amply protected.

Still a third item of interest on the Army censorship front concerns the stamp of approval finally given to *The Saturday Review* for Army post distribution. Several weeks ago, Army officials drew up a list of 189 "approved" magazines for soldier posts. The list, it was announced, had been based on soldier preferences, although this system was not clearly described. Of the total number, almost two-thirds consisted of comic strip and adventure story magazines. *The Saturday Review*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic* were missing from the list. The editors of *The Saturday Review* did not protest its exclusion, nor did they seek clarification from the Army, either as to the list or the soldier preference system, since the magazine's main battle was over Title V of the Soldiers Vote Act, and the editors did not want to create the impression that their action was motivated by self-interest. But now that the Army has added all three magazines to the overall list, we feel free in reporting the episode and its outcome.

We expect that the Green-Lucas-Taft amendment to Title V, while it should have no difficulty in immediate passage, may not have the support of all liberals. There is an honest difference of opinion here. Those who will oppose the amendment may do so, we expect, on the grounds that it does not *repeal* Title V, that it only *amends* it, and that it continues "restrictive" legislation upon what soldiers may read or hear, however much

more generous in its terms the new bill may be than the old.

For our part, however, we are supporting the bill, and welcome this opportunity to give our reasons. The original Title V caused the Army to water down all its manifold informational activities to the point where the average soldier, as we reported in an earlier editorial, was in danger of being isolated in an idea-proof contamination ward. The Army, declaring it had been admonished to "leave it out when in doubt," said the severity of its interpretation was inevitable considering the wording of the law. Senator Taft, author of the bill, protested the Army's interpretation, and said that the primary purpose of the bill was to prevent the Government from *purchasing* political campaign literature in an election year. The bill, however, according to the Army, went far beyond that.

At that point, the big question was whether Title V could be liberalized sufficiently to enable the Army to keep open the flow of news and reading material to the soldier. Outright repeal of Title V was of course preferable. In fact, it would have been wonderful. But there is no point in deluding ourselves. There was no prospect of getting a repeal bill introduced in Congress; yet even granting that such a bill were introduced and that it could survive committee wrangling, the chances are that it would be kicked about interminably, if not thrown out altogether. Besides, so long as a large bloc in Congress insisted its purpose was to prevent Government funds from being used to spread political campaign literature among the fighting men, it was difficult to wage a winning fight against that particular argument. The big fight was to prevent practically *all* reading material from being classified as campaign literature. This the Green-Lucas bill does. And it does it in a clear-cut way that makes it impossible for such books as Mrs. Bowen's or Dr. Beard's to be rejected, or such pictures as "Wilson" to be barred. And this, we take it, was the basis of the controversy in the first place.

This is no apology. There is nothing to apologize about. We are supporting a measure which liberalizes an illiberal law. To do otherwise would be to prolong the very situation we have been fighting to correct. The important thing is that at last the growing and ominous trend in censorship has been reversed. With this momentum, we shall be in a better position to fight the *Esquire* and "Strange Fruit" cases, as well as a new outbreak in Boston over another book, "The History of Rome Hanks." But about that, more next week.

N. C.

The Saturday Review