

Enigma of the West

"Toward Understanding Germany," by Robert H. Lowie (University of Chicago Press. 396 pp. \$6), is an anthropologist's attempt to explain the nature of the most controversial of modern peoples. Our reviewer, Saul K. Padover, is dean of the School of Politics, New School for Social Research and the author of *"Experiment in Germany,"* an account derived from his special mission to Germany for the War Department in 1946.

By Saul K. Padover

ROBERT H. LOWIE's "Toward Understanding Germany" is of considerable interest for at least two reasons. First, it is an objective appraisal of the Germans, their character and patterns of behavior. Secondly, it applies the methods of ethnology to an historic, highly developed, modern people. Hence it offers the reader something of an intellectual challenge.

Mr. Lowie, at present professor emeritus of the University of California, is a distinguished anthropologist who has now used his great learning and the techniques of his craft to explore the ways of a non-primitive society. As a good scientist, he has gone to many varied sources for his data. He has used diaries, novels, autobiographies, poetry, biography, and history to trace the essential traits of the Germans. The subjects he investigates include: German particularism, class structure, family, anti-Semitism, Nazism, and democracy. All of these topics he has approached ethnologically, that is to say, with an eye to separating what is universally human from what is distinctly German. "It is my conviction," he says in the chapter explaining his method, "that much of what is popularly conceived as German is in reality either generically human or Occidental or Continental European."

Professor Lowie makes it clear at the outset in this study of one of the most complex and controversial peoples in the world today, that he is taking no sides and passing no judgments. Indeed, he expresses scorn for any moralizing. For the ethnologist must be above the battle. "He is," he writes, "a scientist, whose business is not to pass moral judgments but to

describe and, as far as possible, to explain the segment of reality under discussion. What would be thought of a modern zoologist who should denounce the wickedness of a rattlesnake?" The obvious answer is, of course, that there is no record of any rattlesnakes causing world wars and systematic murder.

Despite this strange delusion that, under the guise of "science," it is possible to study mankind without moral judgments, "Toward Understanding Germany" really contains much material to justify the title. At the very least, Professor Lowie's ethnological approach helps to correct many misconceptions about the Germans. It also brings out, explains, or reemphasizes traits in the German character which had long been a puzzle to outside observers.

"I state explicitly," he warns, "that, of course, Germans were not innately incapable of gentlemanliness and that actually many Germans were and are gentlemen. But because there was no established *norm* of gentlemanliness, members of all classes . . . were regularly capable of attitudes, judgments, and demeanor that are inconceivable, or at least of pathological rarity, on comparable levels elsewhere."

Similarly, Professor Lowie gives a sound and balanced account of the German family, whose patriarchal authoritarianism has been blamed by many writers for militarism and despotism. The theory was that because the German father was a despot at home, the German child grew up to accept political or military tyranny in public life. Professor Lowie demolishes this thesis with a mountain of data. He points out (1) that a patriarchal family structure existed in other lands (France, for example) and yet it did not lead to political despotism, and (2) the picture of the German father as "the incarnation of fiendish brutality" was a fantastic distortion of reality.

"Whatever one may say about him," Professor Lowie quotes the French ambassador, François-Poncet, as writing in 1913, "the German is not by nature a warrior. He is a man who delights in family life and demonstrative friendships. He wants only to work and to secure well-being for himself and his kind. Having done his work, he takes his pleasure going to the beer garden and, of a Sunday,

taking a long walk with his family."

Regarding anti-Semitism, the author also follows in the path of balance. He notes the existence of anti-Semitism and its roots in the past, but denies that the Germans are innately anti-Jewish, as Richard Wagner has charged. Even before Hitler, anti-Semitism existed in Germany, but so did philo-Semitism. Professor Lowie cites a number of historic and actual examples of successful and cordial acceptance of Jews in the German Christian community. He rightly reminds us that even under Hitler many Germans were friendly to Jews and that not all the leading Nazis were anti-Semitic (Doenitz and Goering, for example, were not). Hitler was the towering and murderous exception. It was he who imposed his aggressions upon the others.

All this is, of course, true. Nevertheless, this is an explanation that hardly explains. Intolerance has existed, and does exist in other lands, but it does not necessarily lead to systematic and scientifically organized mass slaughter. Why did it happen in Germany? Why on such a scale? How was it possible? What was there in the German society that gave birth to such a cancer?

HERE, indeed, is the fundamental failure of Professor Lowie's method. To write about a highly organized political society without an analysis of politics is to have the proverbial "Hamlet" without Hamlet. The ethnological approach not only eschews values; it also results in a curiously static picture. It gives us silhouettes, and not the whole man. Man—particularly man in society—is most peculiarly a political animal; he is not an exhibit in an anthropological museum. He can be understood only as a being who lives and operates on many levels of feeling, emotion, thought, habit, and belief. Especially belief. He lives on and with values, whether they are noble or ignoble, virtuous or criminal. In any modern society, especially an industrial society, man is also subject to the strains, stresses, and influences of the economic system. This involves almost constant movement and change. In sum, applying ethnological techniques to an urban, historically-conditioned, highly industrial, technological modern society is to take the dynamism out of the dynamo. It is perhaps possible to study primitive society in this way, but in this reviewer's opinion the method is not fruitful when applied to a developed modern culture. Nevertheless, "Toward Understanding Germany" is to be warmly recommended for its many important and solid observations.

Americana

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the greatest domestic achievement of his Administration, the Hepburn Act, he bargained away tariff reform to obtain railroad regulation.

Conservative though he may have been, he anticipated both Wilson and the second Roosevelt in his insistence that the national government should use its power to restrain corporate greed, while at the same time encouraging both labor and farmer organizations to work outside the government toward the same worthy end. In foreign policy he saw clearly the anachronism of American isolation, and unhesitatingly, at Algeciras and elsewhere, used the weight of the United States to help balance the international scales. He was at his worst in dealing with Latin America, but the steps he took had strong bipartisan popular support. He was a nationalist, not an internationalist, but he was convinced (and who is to say he was wrong?) that the United States must exert its strength unsparingly outside its borders to help keep the world at peace.

This is the right kind of book about T. R. Mr. Blum is not one of the "incense-swingers," but neither is he one of the snide critics of a later time who judged Roosevelt by their own age and not by his. Nor does he tire us by repeating the facts we already know so well; the book is an interpretation, not another biography. And it is convincing. Most readers will agree with the author that when Roosevelt is finally weighed he will not be found wanting.

Who's a Loser?

"General Jo Shelby, Undefeated Rebel," by Daniel O'Flaherty (University of North Carolina Press. 437 pp. \$6), is a biography of the Confederate general who refused to fight the Civil War as if it were a tournament of roses. Our reviewer, Bruce Catton, is the Washington newspaperman whose book, **"A Stillness at Appomattox,"** won last year's National Book Award in non-fiction.

By Bruce Catton

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