

THE GERMAN MIND.

By JOHN BUCHAN.

THERE is no sentence in Burke more often quoted than that in which he forbids us to draw an indictment against a nation. The warning is opportune in times of war, when belligerents exhaust their ingenuity in unfavourable generalisations about their opponents. No sweeping condemnation will cover all aspects of a national life, and you cannot deduce from a generality an accurate judgment of an individual or of a section of the society criticised. Again, national faults are different in kind from the personal failings with which we are familiar. A country publicly disloyal to its bond may boast a majority of strictly honourable private citizens. But Burke's dictum must not be pressed too far. A nation can have national vices, it can sin as a community, and the historian is justified now and then in fastening guilt upon that corporate existence which we call a people.

Very notably a people may go mad. This does not mean that every individual loses his wits, but that the governing and dominant elements in a nation fall into a pathological state and see strange visions. A malign spirit broods over the waters. Something which cannot be put into exact words flits at the back of men's minds. Perspective goes, exaltation fires the fancy, the old decencies of common sense are repudiated, men speak with tongues which are not their own. We are justified in saying that France went mad in the days of the Terror, though there were some millions of sober citizens who repudiated her follies. That viewless thing which we call national spirit had become tainted with insanity. Such communal mania is far more dangerous than the obsessions of individuals, for it is harder to diagnose, to locate, and to restrain.

The position in Germany, judging by her press and the speeches and writings of her public men, has become curious and interesting. While she is still amazingly united in her belligerent purpose, two distinct attitudes have revealed themselves among her leaders. We may call the parties thus created the *politiques* and the fanatics. The first claim the Imperial Chancellor, the Foreign Office, and probably most of the civilian Ministers; perhaps the Kaiser; certainly many of the Army Chiefs, and some of the ablest military and naval critics like Major Moraht and Captain Persius. They recognise that a war of straightforward conquest is no longer possible. They hope for a draw, a peace in which the conditions shall favour Germany. Accordingly they labour to prepare the public mind of the world for it, and have relinquished most of the inflated superman business which was rampant among them at the outset. They are no longer contemptuous in speech of their opponents. They have become complimentary, as towards brave men fighting under a misconception. They talk much of the purity and reasonableness of German aims, of her desire for an honourable peace, and they endeavour to curb the ardent spirits who have already begun to divide up hostile territories. Above all, they are assiduous in their efforts to explain away

the events which led to war and to get rid of the most damning counts against German policy. These explanations are only aimed in a small degree at their own people, for Germany has been long ago convinced on the subject. They are addressed to neutral countries, especially America, and to what German statesmen fondly hope are wavering and uncertain elements among the population of their enemies.

IMPERIAL CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH.

A striking example is to be found in the speech which the Imperial Chancellor made in the Reichstag on August 19th. Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg has never been among the fire-eaters and has lost popularity in consequence. In that speech he laboured to fasten the guilt of war on British Ministers, who, he said, had already violated Belgian neutrality by a secret agreement, and had refused Germany's offer of a pacific alliance, preferring an offensive pact with France. He tried to prove that Germany in the crisis of July, 1914, had striven for peace and had not scorned the proposal for a conference. He talked much of the future of Poland when emancipated from Russian tyranny. He declared that Germany must win the freedom of the seas, "not as England did, to rule over them, but that they should serve equally all people." Germany, he said, would be the shield of defence in the future for small nations. And he concluded with a hope that the day would come when the belligerent nations would exact a terrible retribution from the leaders who had so gravely misled them. "We do not hate the peoples who have been driven into war by their Governments. We shall hold on through the war till these peoples demand peace from the really guilty, till the road becomes free for the new liberated Europe, free of French intrigues, Muscovite desire of conquest, and English guardianship."

There is no need to discuss the arguments of a speech which was convincingly disposed of by Sir Edward Grey a week later. The interesting point is the light it sheds on the rôle which Germany now desires to play in the world's eyes. She stands for reason, public honour, international decency and peace, says the Imperial Chancellor. She has been terribly sinned against, but like a good Christian she will forgive her enemies. There is scarcely a trace of the high-handed superman in his *arguments*. He labours to justify Germany's doings by the old-fashioned canons of right and wrong. He is a *politique*, desirous of preparing the way for an advantageous settlement. That is intelligible enough, but the *conclusion* is inconsequent. It asks for German supremacy, neither more nor less. She is to be mistress, and other nations are to have the measure of freedom which she chooses to give them. In Sir Edward Grey's words: "Germany supreme, Germany alone would be free; free to break international treaties, free to crush when it pleased her; free to refuse all mediation; free to go to war when it suited her; free, when she did go to war, to break again all rules of civilisation and humanity on land and

at sea; and, while she may act thus, all her commerce at sea is to remain as free in time of war as all commerce is in time of peace."

The Imperial Chancellor's conclusion is a *non sequitur*. It does not follow upon his laborious earlier arguments, nay it clashes sharply with them. It is the same conclusion as that of the fire-eaters, who are the more logical inasmuch as they will have none of the Chancellor's premises. The cautious *politique* has been infected with the same disease as the fanatics.

THE FANATICS.

Who are the fanatics? Perhaps three-fourths of the German people. It is more difficult to determine the chief fount of the virus. It is not to be found in the National Liberal and Agrarian stalwarts, who present memorials demanding the annexation of half Europe. They are merely stupid people, swollen with the vainglory of success. It is probably not to be found to any great extent in the Army itself. Its chiefs are professional zealots, who do not, as a rule, trouble their heads about grandiose political theories. Nor is it to be traced to the coterie of Admiral von Tirpitz, for whom Count zu Reventlow plays in the press the part of dancing dervish. The German Navy chiefs have no victories to console themselves with, and their wounded pride makes them vindictive and relentless enemies, soothing their chagrin with violent words. But that is an intelligible human motive.

It is more likely that history will put the blame upon a class which Britain is apt to overlook in the enumeration of her enemies—the German high financial and industrial circles, with their obedient satellites, the University Professors. This class is a comparatively new phenomenon in Germany. For the most part humbly born and often Jewish in blood, it has found itself exalted from social ostracism to the confidence of the Court and a chief voice in the national Councils. It has been astonishingly successful. The industry of the German people exploited by these *entrepreneurs* has produced results which might well leave the promoters dizzy. The standard of living has changed, and extravagant expenditure on luxury has become the fashion among industrial magnates; a fashion which is reproduced in the bourgeois life of the cities. Being genuine *nouveaux riches* they have no tradition to conform to, no perspective to order their outlook on the world. The kingdoms of the earth have fallen to them, and, like Jeshurun, they wax fat and kick.

Some of the wiser brains among the magnates have a reason of policy behind their megalomania. They see that nothing short of a colossal and undisputed victory can safeguard their supremacy. Unless Germany can pay her war bills with indemnities unimagined before in history, there will be bankruptcy to face, bankruptcy which at the best will mean a decade of lean years. The brightest military glory will not restore their overseas trade or redeem the wastes of paper currency. A generation of hard living and preparation for a further effort, which anything less than absolute victory must involve, has no terrors for the hardier souls of the Army or the ancient squirearchy. But it seems the end of all things to the vainglorious kings of German trade. They have become fanatics, partly from policy, and

partly because they have the disease in their blood.

They have strong allies in the academic class. Not all, for there are many professors who have sounded a note of warning and one or two have had the courage to speak unpopular truths. But the intense specialisation of German scholarship and science does not tend to produce minds with a high sense of proportion, and sedentary folk have at all times been inclined to blow a louder trumpet than men of action and affairs. What Senancour called *le vulgaire des sages*, the absorption in dreams and theories to which pedants are prone, is a characteristic of the great bulk of the German teaching profession.

What is the fanaticism which the *politiques* repudiate and to which nevertheless they have fallen victims? It is best described, perhaps, by the French phrase, *folie de grandeur*. As such it must be clearly distinguished from that other vice of success, *la gloire*. The greatest leaders in history—Julius Cæsar, Charlemagne, Cromwell, Gustavus Adolphus, Washington—have striven for a profound political and religious ideal which made mere fame of no account in their eyes. Others, like Alexander, have been possessed by a passion for glory, and have blazed like comets across the world. The most perfect example is Charles XII. of Sweden, who in his short career of nineteen years followed glory alone, and drew no material benefit from his conquests. In his old clothes he shook down monarchies and won thrones for other people. Glory may be a futile quest, but it has a splendour and generosity which raise it beyond the level of low and earthy things. It is to the end of time an infirmity of minds which are not ignoble.

But *grandeur* is a perversion, an offence against our essential humanity. It may be the degeneration of a genius like Napoleon, but more often it is the illusion of excited mediocrities. It is of the earth earthy, intoxicating itself with flamboyant material dreams. Its heroics are mercantile and the cloud-palaces which it builds have the vulgarity of a fashionable hotel. It seeks a city made with hands and heavily upholstered. Its classic exponents were those leaden vulgarians, the later Roman Emperors, of the worst of whom Renan wrote: "He resembled what a modern tradesman of the middle class would be, whose good sense was perverted by reading modern poets, and who deemed it necessary to make his conduct resemble that of Hans of Iceland or the Burgraves." *Grandeur* has always vulgarity in its fibre, vulgarity and madness.

The German fanaticism is compounded of commercial vainglory, and a rhetorical persuasion that the Teutonic race are God's chosen people. This kind of belief is beyond the reach of argument. But what in the Hebrews was a sombre and magnificent confidence, becomes in this modern German imitation something very like smugness. There has always been a tendency towards such racial arrogance in the German mind. It has nothing to do with Nietzsche's doctrines, which do not exalt any race stock, least of all the German. It descends rather from the classic days of their literature—from Hegel, for example, who, contemplating the stately process of the Absolute Will, found its final expression up to date in the Germany before 1840. It blossoms out in humbler quarters in the stupid insolence of German