

German Student

By

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Freeditorial 

German student

An examination into the character and behaviour of the German student
The German Mensur
Uses and abuses of use
Views of an impressionist
The humour of the thing
Recipe for making savages
The Jungfrau: her peculiar taste in laces
The Kneipe
How to rub a Salamander
Advice to the stranger
A story that might have ended sadly
Of two men and two wives
Together with a bachelor.

On our way home we included a German University town, being wishful to obtain an insight into the ways of student life, a curiosity that the courtesy of German friends enabled us to gratify.

The English boy plays till he is fifteen, and works thence till twenty. In Germany it is the child that works; the young man that plays. The German boy goes to school at seven o'clock in the summer, at eight in the winter, and at school he studies. The result is that at sixteen he has a thorough knowledge of the classics and mathematics, knows as much history as any man compelled to belong to a political party is wise in knowing, together with a thorough grounding in modern languages. Therefore his eight College Semesters, extending over four years, are, except for the young man aiming at a professorship, unnecessarily ample. He is not a sportsman, which is a pity, for he should make good one. He plays football a little, bicycles still less; plays French billiards in stuffy cafés more. But generally speaking he, or the majority of him, lays out his time bummeling, beer drinking, and fighting. If he be the son of a wealthy father he joins a Korps to belong to a crack Korps costs about four hundred pounds a year. If he be a middleclass young man, he enrolls himself in a Burschenschaft, or a Landsmannschaft, which is a little cheaper. These companies are again broken up into smaller circles, in which attempt is made to keep to nationality. There are the Swabians, from Swabia; the Frankonians, descendants of the Franks; the Thuringians, and so forth. In practice, of course, this results as all such attempts do result I believe half our Gordon Highlanders are Cockneys but the picturesque object is obtained of dividing each University into some dozen or so separate companies of students, each one with its distinctive cap and colours, and, quite as important, its own particular beer hall, into which no other student wearing his colours may come.

The chief work of these student companies is to fight among themselves, or with some rival Korps or Schaft, the celebrated German Mensur.

The Mensur has been described so often and so thoroughly that I do not intend to bore my readers with any detailed account of it. I merely come forward as an impressionist, and I write purposely the impression of my first Mensur, because I believe that first

impressions are more true and useful than opinions blunted by intercourse, or shaped by influence.

A Frenchman or a Spaniard will seek to persuade you that the bullring is an institution got up chiefly for the benefit of the bull. The horse which you imagined to be screaming with pain was only laughing at the comical appearance presented by its own inside. Your French or Spanish friend contrasts its glorious and exciting death in the ring with the coldblooded brutality of the knacker's yard. If you do not keep a tight hold of your head, you come away with the desire to start an agitation for the inception of the bullring in England as an aid to chivalry. No doubt Torquemada was convinced of the humanity of the Inquisition. To a stout gentleman, suffering, perhaps, from cramp or rheumatism, an hour or so on the rack was really a physical benefit. He would rise feeling more free in his joints more elastic, as one might say, than he had felt for years. English huntsmen regard the fox as an animal to be envied. A day's excellent sport is provided for him free of charge, during which he is the centre of attraction.

Use blinds one to everything one does not wish to see. Every third German gentleman you meet in the street still bears, and will bear to his grave, marks of the twenty to a hundred duels he has fought in his student days. The German children play at the Mensur in the nursery, rehearse it in the gymnasium. The Germans have come to persuade themselves there is no brutality in it nothing offensive, nothing degrading. Their argument is that it schools the German youth to coolness and courage. If this could be proved, the argument, particularly in a country where every man is a soldier, would be sufficiently onesided. But is the virtue of the prizefighter the virtue of the soldier? One doubts it. Nerve and dash are surely of more service in the field than a temperament of unreasoning indifference as to what is happening to one. As a matter of fact, the German student would have to be possessed of much more courage not to fight. He fights not to please himself, but to satisfy a public opinion that is two hundred years behind the times.

All the Mensur does is to brutalise him. There may be skill displayed I am told there is, but it is not apparent. The mere fighting is like nothing so much as a broadsword combat at a Richardson's show; the display as a whole a successful attempt to combine the ludicrous with the unpleasant. In aristocratic Bonn, where style is considered, and in Heidelberg, where visitors from other nations are more common, the affair is perhaps more formal. I am told that there the contests take place in handsome rooms; that greyhaired doctors wait upon the wounded, and liveried servants upon the hungry, and that the affair is conducted throughout with a certain amount of picturesque ceremony. In the more essentially German Universities, where strangers are rare and not much encouraged, the simple essentials are the only things kept in view, and these are not of an inviting nature.

Indeed, so distinctly uninviting are they, that I strongly advise the sensitive reader to avoid even this description of them. The subject cannot be made pretty, and I do not intend to try.

The room is bare and sordid; its walls splashed with mixed stains of beer, blood, and candlegrease; its ceiling, smoky; its floor, sawdust covered. A crowd of students, laughing, smoking, talking, some sitting on the floor, others perched upon chairs and benches form the framework.

In the centre, facing one another, stand the combatants, resembling Japanese warriors, as made familiar to us by the Japanese teatray. Quaint and rigid, with their gogglecovered eyes, their necks tied up in comforters, their bodies smothered in what looks like dirty bed quilts, their padded arms stretched straight above their heads, they might be a pair of ungainly clockwork figures. The seconds, also more or less padded their heads and faces protected by huge leatherpeaked caps, drag them out into their proper position. One almost listens to hear the sound of the castors. The umpire takes his place, the word is given, and immediately there follow five rapid clashes of the long straight swords. There is no interest in watching the fight: there is no movement, no skill, no grace (I am speaking of my own impressions.) The strongest man wins; the man who, with his heavilypadded arm, always in an unnatural position, can hold his huge clumsy sword longest without growing too weak to be able either to guard or to strike.

The whole interest is centred in watching the wounds. They come always in one of two places on the top of the head or the left side of the face. Sometimes a portion of hairy scalp or section of cheek flies up into the air, to be carefully preserved in an envelope by its proud possessor, or, strictly speaking, its proud former possessor, and shown round on convivial evenings; and from every wound, of course, flows a plentiful stream of blood. It splashes doctors, seconds, and spectators; it sprinkles ceiling and walls; it saturates the fighters, and makes pools for itself in the sawdust. At the end of each round the doctors rush up, and with hands already dripping with blood press together the gaping wounds, dabbing them with little balls of wet cotton wool, which an attendant carries ready on a plate. Naturally, the moment the men stand up again and commence work, the blood gushes out again, half blinding them, and rendering the ground beneath them slippery. Now and then you see a man's teeth laid bare almost to the ear, so that for the rest of the duel he appears to be grinning at one half of the spectators, his other side, remaining serious; and sometimes a man's nose gets slit, which gives to him as he fights a singularly supercilious air.

As the object of each student is to go away from the University bearing as many scars as possible, I doubt if any particular pains are taken to guard, even to the small extent such method of fighting can allow. The real victor is he who comes out with the greatest number of wounds; he who then, stitched and patched almost to unrecognition as a human being, can promenade for the next month, the envy of the German youth, the admiration of the German maiden. He who obtains only a few unimportant wounds retires sulky and disappointed.

But the actual fighting is only the beginning of the fun. The second act of the spectacle takes place in the dressingroom. The doctors are generally mere medical students young fellows who, having taken their degree, are anxious for practice. Truth compels me to say that those with whom I came in contact were coarse looking men who seemed rather to relish their work. Perhaps they are not to be blamed for this. It is part of the system that as much further punishment as possible must be inflicted by the doctor, and the ideal medical man might hardly care for such job. How the student bears the dressing of his wounds is as important as how he receives them. Every operation has to be performed as brutally as may be, and his companions carefully watch him during the process to see that he goes through it with an appearance of peace and enjoyment. A clean cut wound that gapes wide is most desired by all parties. On purpose it is sewn up clumsily, with the hope that by this means the scar will last a lifetime. Such a wound, judiciously mauled and interfered with during the week afterwards, can generally be reckoned on to secure its fortunate possessor a wife with a dowry of five figures at the least.

These are the general biweekly Mensurs, of which the average student fights some dozen a year. There are others to which visitors are not admitted. When a student is considered to have disgraced himself by some slight involuntary movement of the head or body while fighting, then he can only regain his position by standing up to the best swordsman in his Korps. He demands and is accorded, not a contest, but a punishment. His opponent then proceeds to inflict as many and as bloody wounds as can be taken. The object of the victim is to show his comrades that he can stand still while his head is half sliced from his skull.

Whether anything can properly be said in favour of the German Mensur I am doubtful; but if so it concerns only the two combatants. Upon the spectators it can and does, I am convinced, exercise nothing but evil. I know myself sufficiently well to be sure I am not of an unusually bloodthirsty disposition. The effect it had upon me can only be the usual effect. At first, before the actual work commenced, my sensation was curiosity mingled with anxiety as to how the sight would trouble me, though some slight acquaintance with dissecting rooms and operating tables left me less doubt on that point than I might otherwise have felt. As the blood began to flow, and nerves and muscles to

be laid bare, I experienced a mingling of disgust and pity. But with the second duel, I must confess, my finer feelings began to disappear; and by the time the third was well upon its way, and the room heavy with the curious hot odour of blood, I began, as the American expression is, to see things red.

I wanted more. I looked from face to face surrounding me, and in most of them I found reflected undoubtedly my own sensations. If it be a good thing to excite this blood thirst in the modern man, then the Mensur is a useful institution. But is it a good thing? We prate about our civilisation and humanity, but those of us who do not carry hypocrisy to the length of selfdeception know that underneath our starched shirts there lurks the savage, with all his savage instincts untouched. Occasionally he may be wanted, but we never need fear his dying out. On the other hand, it seems unwise to overnourish him.

In favour of the duel, seriously considered, there are many points to be urged. But the Mensur serves no good purpose whatever. It is childishness, and the fact of its being a cruel and brutal game makes it none the less childish. Wounds have no intrinsic value of their own; it is the cause that dignifies them, not their size. William Tell is rightly one of the heroes of the world; but what should we think of the members of a club of fathers, formed with the object of meeting twice a week to shoot apples from their sons' heads with crossbows? These young German gentlemen could obtain all the results of which they are so proud by teasing a wild cat! To join a society for the mere purpose of getting yourself hacked about reduces a man to the intellectual level of a dancing Dervish. Travellers tell us of savages in Central Africa who express their feelings on festive occasions by jumping about and slashing themselves. But there is no need for Europe to imitate them. The Mensur is, in fact, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the duel; and if the Germans themselves cannot see that it is funny, one can only regret their lack of humour.

But though one may be unable to agree with the public opinion that supports and commands the Mensur, it at least is possible to understand. The University code that, if it does not encourage it, at least condones drunkenness, is more difficult to treat argumentatively. All German students do not get drunk; in fact, the majority are sober, if not industrious. But the minority, whose claim to be representative is freely admitted, are only saved from perpetual inebriety by ability, acquired at some cost, to swill half the day and all the night, while retaining to some extent their five senses. It does not affect all alike, but it is common in any University town to see a young man not yet twenty with the figure of a Falstaff and the complexion of a Rubens Bacchus. That the German maiden can be fascinated with a face, cut and gashed till it suggests having been made out of odd materials that never could have fitted, is a proved fact. But surely there can be no attraction about a blotched and bloated skin and a "bay window" thrown out to an extent threatening to overbalance the whole structure. Yet what else can be expected,

when the youngster starts his beerdrinking with a “Fruhschoppen” at 10 a.m., and closes it with a “Kneipe” at four in the morning?

The Kneipe is what we should call a stag party, and can be very harmless or very rowdy, according to its composition. One man invites his fellowstudents, a dozen or a hundred, to a café, and provides them with as much beer and as many cheap cigars as their own sense of health and comfort may dictate, or the host may be the Korps itself. Here, as everywhere, you observe the German sense of discipline and order. As each new comer enters all those sitting round the table rise, and with heels close together salute. When the table is complete, a chairman is chosen, whose duty it is to give out the number of the songs. Printed books of these songs, one to each two men, lie round the table. The chairman gives out number twentynine. “First verse,” he cries, and away all go, each two men holding a book between them exactly as two people might hold a hymnbook in church. There is a pause at the end of each verse until the chairman starts the company on the next. As every German is a trained singer, and as most of them have fair voices, the general effect is striking.

Although the manner may be suggestive of the singing of hymns in church, the words of the songs are occasionally such as to correct this impression. But whether it be a patriotic song, a sentimental ballad, or a ditty of a nature that would shock the average young Englishman, all are sung through with stern earnestness, without a laugh, without a false note. At the end, the chairman calls “Prosit!” Everyone answers “Prosit!” and the next moment every glass is empty. The pianist rises and bows, and is bowed to in return; and then the Fräulein enters to refill the glasses.

Between the songs, toasts are proposed and responded to; but there is little cheering, and less laughter. Smiles and grave nods of approval are considered as more seeming among German students.

A particular toast, called a Salamander, accorded to some guest as a special distinction, is drunk with exceptional solemnity.

“We will now,” says the chairman, “a Salamander rub” (“Einen Salamander reiben”). We all rise, and stand like a regiment at attention.

“Is the stuff prepared?” (“Sind die stoffe parat?”) demands the chairman.

“Sunt,” we answer, with one voice.

“Ad exercitium Salamandri,” says the chairman, and we are ready.

“Eins!” We rub our glasses with a circular motion on the table.

“Zwei!” Again the glasses growl; also at “Drei!”

“Drink!” (“Bibite!”)

And with mechanical unison every glass is emptied and held on high.

“Eins!” says the chairman. The foot of every empty glass twirls upon the table, producing a sound as of the dragging back of a stony beach by a receding wave.

“Zwei!” The roll swells and sinks again.

“Drei!” The glasses strike the table with a single crash, and we are in our seats again.

The sport at the Kneipe is for two students to insult each other (in play, of course), and to then challenge each other to a drinking duel. An umpire is appointed, two huge glasses are filled, and the men sit opposite each other with their hands upon the handles, all eyes fixed upon them. The umpire gives the word to go, and in an instant the beer is gurgling down their throats. The man who bangs his perfectly finished glass upon the table first is victor.

Strangers who are going through a Kneipe, and who wish to do the thing in German style, will do well, before commencing proceedings, to pin their name and address upon their coats. The German student is courtesy itself, and whatever his own state may be, he will see to it that, by some means or another, his guest gets safely home before the morning. But, of course, he cannot be expected to remember addresses.

A story was told me of three guests to a Berlin Kneipe which might have had tragic results. The strangers determined to do the thing thoroughly. They explained their intention, and were applauded, and each proceeded to write his address upon his card, and pin it to the tablecloth in front of him. That was the mistake they made. They should, as I have advised, have pinned it carefully to their coats. A man may change his place at a table, quite unconsciously he may come out the other side of it; but wherever he goes he takes his coat with him.

Some time in the small hours, the chairman suggested that to make things more comfortable for those still upright, all the gentlemen unable to keep their heads off the table should be sent home. Among those to whom the proceedings had become uninteresting were the three Englishmen. It was decided to put them into a cab in charge of a comparatively speaking sober student, and return them. Had they retained

their original seats throughout the evening all would have been well; but, unfortunately, they had gone walking about, and which gentleman belonged to which card nobody knew least of all the guests themselves. In the then state of general cheerfulness, this did not to anybody appear to much matter. There were three gentlemen and three addresses. I suppose the idea was that even if a mistake were made, the parties could be sorted out in the morning. Anyhow, the three gentlemen were put into a cab, the comparatively speaking sober student took the three cards in his hand, and the party started amid the cheers and good wishes of the company.

There is this advantage about German beer: it does not make a man drunk as the word drunk is understood in England. There is nothing objectionable about him; he is simply tired. He does not want to talk; he wants to be let alone, to go to sleep; it does not matter whereanywhere.

The conductor of the party stopped his cab at the nearest address. He took out his worst case; it was a natural instinct to get rid of that first. He and the cabman carried it upstairs, and rang the bell of the Pension. A sleepy porter answered it. They carried their burden in, and looked for a place to drop it. A bedroom door happened to be open; the room was empty; could anything be better? they took it in there. They relieved it of such things as came off easily, and laid it in the bed. This done, both men, pleased with themselves, returned to the cab.

At the next address they stopped again. This time, in answer to their summons, a lady appeared, dressed in a tea gown, with a book in her hand. The German student looked at the top one of two cards remaining in his hand, and enquired if he had the pleasure of addressing Frau Y. It happened that he had, though so far as any pleasure was concerned that appeared to be entirely on his side. He explained to Frau Y. that the gentleman at that moment asleep against the wall was her husband. The reunion moved her to no enthusiasm; she simply opened the bedroom door, and then walked away. The cabman and the student took him in, and laid him on the bed. They did not trouble to undress him, they were feeling tired! They did not see the lady of the house again, and retired therefore without adieus.

The last card was that of a bachelor stopping at an hotel. They took their last man, therefore, to that hotel, passed him over to the night porter, and left him.

To return to the address at which the first delivery was made, what had happened there was this. Some eight hours previously had said Mr. X. to Mrs. X.: "I think I told you, my dear, that I had an invitation for this evening to what, I believe, is called a Kneipe?"

"You did mention something of the sort," replied Mrs. X. "What is a Kneipe?"

“Well, it’s a sort of bachelor party, my dear, where the students meet to sing and talk and smoke, and all that sort of thing, you know.”

“Oh, well, I hope you will enjoy yourself!” said Mrs. X., who was a nice woman and sensible.

“It will be interesting,” observed Mr. X. “I have often had a curiosity to see one. I may,” continued Mr. X., “I mean it is possible, that I may be home a little late.”

“What do you call late?” asked Mrs. X.

“It is somewhat difficult to say,” returned Mr. X. “You see these students, they are a wild lot, and when they get together—and then, I believe, a good many toasts are drunk. I don’t know how it will affect me. If I can see an opportunity I shall come away early, that is if I can do so without giving offence; but if not”

Said Mrs. X., who, as I remarked before, was a sensible woman: “You had better get the people here to lend you a latchkey. I shall sleep with Dolly, and then you won’t disturb me whatever time it may be.”

“I think that an excellent idea of yours,” agreed Mr. X. “I should hate disturbing you. I shall just come in quietly, and slip into bed.”

Some time in the middle of the night, or maybe towards the early morning, Dolly, who was Mrs. X.’s sister, sat up in bed and listened.

“Jenny,” said Dolly, “are you awake?”

“Yes, dear,” answered Mrs. X. “It’s all right. You go to sleep again.”

“But whatever is it?” asked Dolly. “Do you think it’s fire?”

“I expect,” replied Mrs. X., “that it’s Percy. Very possibly he has stumbled over something in the dark. Don’t you worry, dear; you go to sleep.”

But so soon as Dolly had dozed off again, Mrs. X., who was a good wife, thought she would steal off softly and see to it that Percy was all right. So, putting on a dressinggown and slippers, she crept along the passage and into her own room. To awake the gentleman on the bed would have required an earthquake. She lit a candle and stole over to the bedside.

It was not Percy; it was not anyone like Percy. She felt it was not the man that ever could have been her husband, under any circumstances. In his present condition her sentiment towards him was that of positive dislike. Her only desire was to get rid of him.

But something there was about him which seemed familiar to her. She went nearer, and took a closer view. Then she remembered. Surely it was Mr. Y., a gentleman at whose flat she and Percy had dined the day they first arrived in Berlin.

But what was he doing here? She put the candle on the table, and taking her head between her hands sat down to think. The explanation of the thing came to her with a rush. It was with this Mr. Y. that Percy had gone to the Kneipe. A mistake had been made. Mr. Y. had been brought back to Percy's address. Percy at this very moment

The terrible possibilities of the situation swam before her. Returning to Dolly's room, she dressed herself hastily, and silently crept downstairs. Finding, fortunately, a passing nightcab, she drove to the address of Mrs. Y. Telling the man to wait, she flew upstairs and rang persistently at the bell. It was opened as before by Mrs. Y., still in her teagown, and with her book still in her hand.

"Mrs. X.!" exclaimed Mrs. Y. "Whatever brings you here?"

"My husband!" was all poor Mrs. X. could think to say at the moment, "is he here?"

"Mrs. X.," returned Mrs. Y., drawing herself up to her full height, "how dare you?"

"Oh, please don't misunderstand me!" pleaded Mrs. X. "It's all a terrible mistake. They must have brought poor Percy here instead of to our place, I'm sure they must. Do please look and see."

"My dear," said Mrs. Y., who was a much older woman, and more motherly, "don't excite yourself. They brought him here about half an hour ago, and, to tell you the truth, I never looked at him. He is in here. I don't think they troubled to take off even his boots. If you keep cool, we will get him downstairs and home without a soul beyond ourselves being any the wiser.

Indeed, Mrs. Y. seemed quite eager to help Mrs. X.

She pushed open the door, and Mrs. X. went in. The next moment she came out with a white, scared face.

“It isn’t Percy,” she said. “Whatever am I to do?”

“I wish you wouldn’t make these mistakes,” said Mrs. Y., moving to enter the room herself.

Mrs. X. stopped her. “And it isn’t your husband either.”

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Y.

“It isn’t really,” persisted Mrs. X. “I know, because I have just left him, asleep on Percy’s bed.”

“What’s he doing there?” thundered Mrs. Y.

“They brought him there, and put him there,” explained Mrs. X., beginning to cry. “That’s what made me think Percy must be here.”

The two women stood and looked at one another; and there was silence for awhile, broken only by the snoring of the gentleman the other side of the halfopen door.

“Then who is that, in there?” demanded Mrs. Y., who was the first to recover herself.

“I don’t know,” answered Mrs. X., “I have never seen him before. Do you think it is anybody you know?”

But Mrs. Y. only banged to the door.

“What are we to do?” said Mrs. X.

“I know what I am going to do,” said Mrs. Y. “I’m coming back with you to fetch my husband.”

“He’s very sleepy,” explained Mrs. X.

“I’ve known him to be that before,” replied Mrs. Y., as she fastened on her cloak.

“But where’s Percy?” sobbed poor little Mrs. X., as they descended the stairs together.

“That my dear,” said Mrs. Y., “will be a question for you to ask him.”

“If they go about making mistakes like this,” said Mrs. X., “it is impossible to say what they may not have done with him.”

“We will make enquiries in the morning, my dear,” said Mrs. Y., consolingly.

“I think these Kneipes are disgraceful affairs,” said Mrs. X. “I shall never let Percy go to another, never so long as I live.”

“My dear,” remarked Mrs. Y., “if you know your duty, he will never want to.” And rumour has it that he never did.

But, as I have said, the mistake was in pinning the card to the tablecloth instead of to the coat. And error in this world is always severely punished.

Which is serious: as becomes a parting chapter
The German from the AngloSaxon’s point of view
Providence in buttons and a helmet
Paradise of the helpless idiot
German conscience: its aggressiveness
How they hang in Germany, very possibly
What happens to good Germans when they die?
The military instinct: is it all sufficient?
The German as a shopkeeper
How he supports life
The New Woman, here as everywhere
What can be said against the Germans, as a people
The Bummel is over and done.

“Anybody could rule this country,” said George; “I could rule it.”

We were seated in the garden of the Kaiser Hof at Bonn, looking down upon the Rhine. It was the last evening of our Bummel; the early morning train would be the beginning of the end.

“I should write down all I wanted the people to do on a piece of paper,” continued George; “get a good firm to print off so many copies, have them posted about the towns and villages; and the thing would be done.”

In the placid, docile German of today, whose only ambition appears to be to pay his taxes, and do what he is told to do by those whom it has pleased Providence to place in authority over him, it is difficult, one must confess, to detect any trace of his wild ancestor, to whom individual liberty was as the breath of his nostrils; who appointed his magistrates to advise, but retained the right of execution for the tribe; who followed his chief, but would have scorned to obey him. In Germany today one hears a good deal concerning Socialism, but it is a Socialism that would only be despotism under another name. Individualism makes no appeal to the German voter. He is willing, nay, anxious, to be controlled and regulated in all things. He disputes, not government, but the form of it. The policeman is to him a religion, and, one feels, will always remain so. In

England we regard our man in blue as a harmless necessity. By the average citizen he is employed chiefly as a signpost, though in busy quarters of the town he is considered useful for taking old ladies across the road. Beyond feeling thankful to him for these services, I doubt if we take much thought of him. In Germany, on the other hand, he is worshipped as a little god and loved as a guardian angel. To the German child he is a combination of Santa Claus and the Bogie Man. All good things come from him: Spielplätze to play in, furnished with swings and giantstrides, sand heaps to fight around, swimming baths, and fairs. All misbehaviour is punished by him. It is the hope of every wellmeaning German boy and girl to please the police. To be smiled at by a policeman makes it conceited. A German child that has been patted on the head by a policeman is not fit to live with; its selfimportance is unbearable.

The German citizen is a soldier, and the policeman is his officer. The policeman directs him where in the street to walk, and how fast to walk. At the end of each bridge stands a policeman to tell the German how to cross it. Were there no policeman there, he would probably sit down and wait till the river had passed by. At the railway station the policeman locks him up in the waitingroom, where he can do no harm to himself. When the proper time arrives, he fetches him out and hands him over to the guard of the train, who is only a policeman in another uniform. The guard tells him where to sit in the train, and when to get out, and sees that he does get out. In Germany you take no responsibility upon yourself whatever. Everything is done for you, and done well. You are not supposed to look after yourself; you are not blamed for being incapable of looking after yourself; it is the duty of the German policeman to look after you. That you may be a helpless idiot does not excuse him should anything happen to you. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing you are in his charge, and he takes care of you good care of you; there is no denying this.

If you lose yourself, he finds you; and if you lose anything belonging to you, he recovers it for you. If you don't know what you want, he tells you. If you want anything that is good for you to have, he gets it for you. Private lawyers are not needed in Germany. If you want to buy or sell a house or field, the State makes out the conveyance. If you have been swindled, the State takes up the case for you. The State marries you, insures you, will even gamble with you for a trifle.

“You get yourself born,” says the German Government to the German citizen, “we do the rest. Indoors and out of doors, in sickness and in health, in pleasure and in work, we will tell you what to do, and we will see to it that you do it. Don't you worry yourself about anything.”

And the German doesn't. Where there is no policeman to be found, he wanders about till he comes to a police notice posted on a wall. This he reads; then he goes and does what it says.

I remember in one German town I forget which; it is immaterial; the incident could have happened in any noticing an open gate leading to a garden in which a concert was being given. There was nothing to prevent anyone who chose from walking through that gate, and thus gaining admittance to the concert without paying. In fact, of the two gates quarter of a mile apart it was the more convenient. Yet of the crowds that passed, not one attempted to enter by that gate. They plodded steadily on under a blazing sun to the other gate, at which a man stood to collect the entrance money. I have seen German youngsters stand longingly by the margin of a lonely sheet of ice. They could have skated on that ice for hours, and nobody have been the wiser. The crowd and the police were at the other end, more than half a mile away, and round the corner. Nothing stopped their going on but the knowledge that they ought not. Things such as these make one pause to seriously wonder whether the Teuton be a member of the sinful human family or not. Is it not possible that these placid, gentle folk may in reality be angels, come down to earth for the sake of a glass of beer, which, as they must know, can only in Germany be obtained worth the drinking?

In Germany the country roads are lined with fruit trees. There is no voice to stay man or boy from picking and eating the fruit, except conscience. In England such a state of things would cause public indignation. Children would die of cholera by the hundred. The medical profession would be worked off its legs trying to cope with the natural results of overindulgence in sour apples and unripe walnuts. Public opinion would demand that these fruit trees should be fenced about, and thus rendered harmless. Fruit growers, to save themselves the expense of walls and palings, would not be allowed in this manner to spread sickness and death throughout the community.

But in Germany a boy will walk for miles down a lonely road, hedged with fruit trees, to buy a pennyworth of pears in the village at the other end. To pass these unprotected fruit trees, drooping under their burden of ripe fruit, strikes the AngloSaxon mind as a wicked waste of opportunity, a flouting of the blessed gifts of Providence.

I do not know if it be so, but from what I have observed of the German character I should not be surprised to hear that when a man in Germany is condemned to death he is given a piece of rope, and told to go and hang himself. It would save the State much trouble and expense, and I can see that German criminal taking that piece of rope home with him, reading up carefully the police instructions, and proceeding to carry them out in his own back kitchen.

The Germans are a good people. On the whole, the best people perhaps in the world; an amiable, unselfish, kindly people. I am positive that the vast majority of them go to Heaven. Indeed, comparing them with the other Christian nations of the earth, one is forced to the conclusion that Heaven will be chiefly of German manufacture. But I cannot understand how they get there. That the soul of any single individual German has sufficient initiative to fly up by itself and knock at St. Peter's door, I cannot believe. My own opinion is that they are taken there in small companies, and passed in under the charge of a dead policeman.

Carlyle said of the Prussians, and it is true of the whole German nation, that one of their chief virtues was their power of being drilled. Of the Germans you might say they are a people who will go anywhere, and do anything, they are told. Drill him for the work and send him out to Africa or Asia under charge of somebody in uniform, and he is bound to make an excellent colonist, facing difficulties as he would face the devil himself, if ordered. But it is not easy to conceive of him as a pioneer. Left to run himself, one feels he would soon fade away and die, not from any lack of intelligence, but from sheer want of presumption.

The German has so long been the soldier of Europe, that the military instinct has entered into his blood. The military virtues he possesses in abundance; but he also suffers from the drawbacks of the military training. It was told me of a German servant, lately released from the barracks, that he was instructed by his master to deliver a letter to a certain house, and to wait there for the answer. The hours passed by, and the man did not return. His master, anxious and surprised, followed. He found the man where he had been sent, the answer in his hand. He was waiting for further orders. The story sounds exaggerated, but personally I can credit it.

The curious thing is that the same man, who as an individual is as helpless as a child, becomes, the moment he puts on the uniform, an intelligent being, capable of responsibility and initiative. The German can rule others, and be ruled by others, but he cannot rule himself. The cure would appear to be to train every German for an officer, and then put him under himself. It is certain he would order himself about with discretion and judgment, and see to it that he himself obeyed himself with smartness and precision.

For the direction of German character into these channels, the schools, of course, are chiefly responsible. Their everlasting teaching is duty. It is a fine ideal for any people; but before buckling to it, one would wish to have a clear understanding as to what this "duty" is. The German idea of it would appear to be: "blind obedience to everything in buttons." It is the antithesis of the AngloSaxon scheme; but as both the AngloSaxon and the Teuton are prospering, there must be good in both methods. Hitherto, the German

has had the blessed fortune to be exceptionally well governed; if this continue, it will go well with him. When his troubles will begin will be when by any chance something goes wrong with the governing machine. But maybe his method has the advantage of producing a continuous supply of good governors; it would certainly seem so.

As a trader, I am inclined to think the German will, unless his temperament considerably change, remain always a long way behind his AngloSaxon competitor; and this by reason of his virtues. To him life is something more important than a mere race for wealth. A country that closes its banks and postoffices for two hours in the middle of the day, while it goes home and enjoys a comfortable meal in the bosom of its family, with, perhaps, forty winks by way of dessert, cannot hope, and possibly has no wish, to compete with a people that takes its meals standing, and sleeps with a telephone over its bed. In Germany there is not, at all events as yet, sufficient distinction between the classes to make the struggle for position the life and death affair it is in England. Beyond the landed aristocracy, whose boundaries are impregnable, grade hardly counts. Frau Professor and Frau Candlestickmaker meet at the Weekly KaffeeKlatsch and exchange scandal on terms of mutual equality. The liverystable keeper and the doctor hobnob together at their favourite beer hall. The wealthy master builder, when he prepares his roomy waggon for an excursion into the country, invites his foreman and his tailor to join him with their families. Each brings his share of drink and provisions, and returning home they sing in chorus the same songs. So long as this state of things endures, a man is not induced to sacrifice the best years of his life to win a fortune for his dotage. His tastes, and, more to the point still, his wife's, remain inexpensive. He likes to see his flat or villa furnished with much red plush upholstery and a profusion of gilt and lacquer. But that is his idea; and maybe it is in no worse taste than is a mixture of bastard Elizabethan with imitation Louis XV, the whole lit by electric light, and smothered with photographs. Possibly, he will have his outer walls painted by the local artist: a sanguinary battle, a good deal interfered with by the front door, taking place below, while Bismarck, as an angel, flutters vaguely about the bedroom windows. But for his Old Masters he is quite content to go to the public galleries; and "the Celebrity at Home" not having as yet taken its place amongst the institutions of the Fatherland, he is not impelled to waste his money turning his house into an old curiosity shop.

The German is a gourmand. There are still English farmers who, while telling you that farming spells starvation, enjoy their seven solid meals a day. Once a year there comes a week's feast throughout Russia, during which many deaths occur from the overeating of pancakes; but this is a religious festival, and an exception. Taking him all round, the German as a trencherman stands preeminent among the nations of the earth. He rises early, and while dressing tosses off a few cups of coffee, together with half a dozen hot buttered rolls. But it is not until ten o'clock that he sits down to anything that can properly be called a meal. At one or halfpast takes place his chief dinner. Of this he

makes a business, sitting at it for a couple of hours. At four o'clock he goes to the café, and eats cakes and drinks chocolate. The evening he devotes to eating generally not a set meal, or rarely, but a series of snacks, a bottle of beer and a Belegetesemmel or two at seven, say; another bottle of beer and an Aufschnitt at the theatre between the acts; a small bottle of white wine and a Spiegeleier before going home; then a piece of cheese or sausage, washed down by more beer, previous to turning in for the night.

But he is no gourmet. French cooks and French prices are not the rule at his restaurant. His beer or his inexpensive native white wine he prefers to the most costly clarets or champagnes. And, indeed, it is well for him he does; for one is inclined to think that every time a French grower sells a bottle of wine to a German hotel or shopkeeper, Sedan is rankling in his mind. It is a foolish revenge, seeing that it is not the German who as a rule drinks it; the punishment falls upon some innocent travelling Englishman. Maybe, however, the French dealer remembers also Waterloo, and feels that in any event he scores.

In Germany expensive entertainments are neither offered nor expected. Everything throughout the Fatherland is homely and friendly. The German has no costly sports to pay for, no showy establishment to maintain, no purse-proud circle to dress for. His chief pleasure, a seat at the opera or concert, can be had for a few marks; and his wife and daughters walk there in homemade dresses, with shawls over their heads. Indeed, throughout the country the absence of all ostentation is to English eyes quite refreshing. Private carriages are few and far between, and even the droschke is made use of only when the quicker and cleaner electric car is not available.

By such means the German retains his independence. The shopkeeper in Germany does not fawn upon his customers. I accompanied an English lady once on a shopping excursion in Munich. She had been accustomed to shopping in London and New York, and she grumbled at everything the man showed her. It was not that she was really dissatisfied; this was her method. She explained that she could get most things cheaper and better elsewhere; not that she really thought she could, merely she held it good for the shopkeeper to say this. She told him that his stock lacked taste she did not mean to be offensive; as I have explained, it was her method; that there was no variety about it; that it was not up to date; that it was commonplace; that it looked as if it would not wear. He did not argue with her; he did not contradict her. He put the things back into their respective boxes, replaced the boxes on their respective shelves, walked into the little parlour behind the shop, and closed the door.

“Isn't he ever coming back?” asked the lady, after a couple of minutes had elapsed.

Her tone did not imply a question, so much as an exclamation of mere impatience.

“I doubt it,” I replied.

“Why not?” she asked, much astonished.

“I expect,” I answered, “you have bored him. In all probability he is at this moment behind that door smoking a pipe and reading the paper.”

“What an extraordinary shopkeeper!” said my friend, as she gathered her parcels together and indignantly walked out.

“It is their way,” I explained. “There are the goods; if you want them, you can have them. If you do not want them, they would almost rather that you did not come and talk about them.”

On another occasion I listened in the smokeroom of a German hotel to a small Englishman telling a tale which, had I been in his place, I should have kept to myself.

“It doesn’t do,” said the little Englishman, “to try and beat a German down. They don’t seem to understand it. I saw a first edition of *The Robbers* in a shop in the Georg Platz. I went in and asked the price. It was a rum old chap behind the counter. He said: ‘Twentyfive marks,’ and went on reading. I told him I had seen a better copy only a few days before for twentyone talks like that when one is bargaining; it is understood. He asked me ‘Where?’ I told him in a shop at Leipsig. He suggested my returning there and getting it; he did not seem to care whether I bought the book or whether I didn’t. I said:

“‘What’s the least you will take for it?’

“‘I have told you once,’ he answered; ‘twentyfive marks.’ He was an irritable old chap.

“‘I said: ‘It’s not worth it.’

“‘I never said it was, did I?’ he snapped.

“‘I said: ‘I’ll give you ten marks for it.’ I thought, maybe, he would end by taking twenty.

“He rose. I took it he was coming round the counter to get the book out. Instead, he came straight up to me. He was a biggish sort of man. He took me by the two shoulders, walked me out into the street, and closed the door behind me with a bang. I was never more surprised in all my life.

“Maybe the book was worth twentyfive marks,” I suggested.

“Of course it was,” he replied; “well worth it. But what a notion of business!”

If anything change the German character, it will be the German woman. She herself is changing rapidlyadvancing, as we call it. Ten years ago no German woman caring for her reputation, hoping for a husband, would have dared to ride a bicycle: today they spin about the country in their thousands. The old folks shake their heads at them; but the young men, I notice, overtake them and ride beside them. Not long ago it was considered unwomanly in Germany for a lady to be able to do the outside edge. Her proper skating attitude was thought to be that of clinging limpness to some male relative. Now she practises eights in a corner by herself, until some young man comes along to help her. She plays tennis, and, from a point of safety, I have even noticed her driving a dogcart.

Brilliantly educated she always has been. At eighteen she speaks two or three languages, and has forgotten more than the average Englishwoman has ever read. Hitherto, this education has been utterly useless to her. On marriage she has retired into the kitchen, and made haste to clear her brain of everything else, in order to leave room for bad cooking. But suppose it begins to dawn upon her that a woman need not sacrifice her whole existence to household drudgery any more than a man need make himself nothing else than a business machine. Suppose she develop an ambition to take part in the social and national life. Then the influence of such a partner, healthy in body and therefore vigorous in mind, is bound to be both lasting and farreaching.

For it must be borne in mind that the German man is exceptionally sentimental, and most easily influenced by his women folk. It is said of him, he is the best of lovers, the worst of husbands. This has been the woman’s fault. Once married, the German woman has done more than put romance behind her; she has taken a carpetbeater and driven it out of the house. As a girl, she never understood dressing; as a wife, she takes off such clothes even as she had, and proceeds to wrap herself up in any odd articles she may happen to find about the house; at all events, this is the impression she produces. The figure that might often be that of a Juno, the complexion that would sometimes do credit to a healthy angel, she proceeds of malice and intent to spoil. She sells her birthright of admiration and devotion for a mess of sweets. Every afternoon you may see her at the café, loading herself with rich creamcovered cakes, washed down by copious draughts of chocolate. In a short time she becomes fat, pasty, placid, and utterly uninteresting.

When the German woman gives up her afternoon coffee and her evening beer, takes sufficient exercise to retain her shape, and continues to read after marriage something else than the cookerybook, the German Government will find it has a new and unknown force to deal with. And everywhere throughout Germany one is confronted by unmistakable signs that the old German Frauen are giving place to the newer Damen.

Concerning what will then happen one feels curious. For the German nation is still young, and its maturity is of importance to the world. They are a good people, a lovable people, who should help much to make the world better.

The worst that can be said against them is that they have their failings. They themselves do not know this; they consider themselves perfect, which is foolish of them. They even go so far as to think themselves superior to the AngloSaxon: this is incomprehensible. One feels they must be pretending.

“They have their points,” said George; “but their tobacco is a national sin. I’m going to bed.”

We rose, and leaning over the low stone parapet, watched the dancing lights upon the soft, dark river.

“It has been a pleasant Bummel, on the whole,” said Harris; “I shall be glad to get back, and yet I am sorry it is over, if you understand me.”

“What is a ‘Bummel’?” said George. “How would you translate it?”

“A ‘Bummel’,” I explained, “I should describe as a journey, long or short, without an end; the only thing regulating it being the necessity of getting back within a given time to the point from which one started. Sometimes it is through busy streets, and sometimes through the fields and lanes; sometimes we can be spared for a few hours, and sometimes for a few days. But long or short, but here or there, our thoughts are ever on the running of the sand. We nod and smile to many as we pass; with some we stop and talk awhile; and with a few we walk a little way. We have been much interested, and often a little tired. But on the whole we have had a pleasant time, and are sorry when ’tis over.”