

ANSWER OF LEAGUE OF GERMAN SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS TO THE PROFESSORS OF GREAT BRITAIN

"Kultur" vs. Culture, or, Kant vs. Cant

(On November 11, 1914, THE FATHERLAND published a statement signed by the foremost scholars and artists of Germany. This paper presented the case of Germany with admirable sobriety and distinction. In answer to the arguments contained in that memorable declaration the leading professors of Great Britain in collaboration issued a rebuttal. They presented the very same arguments with which we are so familiar. The Germans had "destroyed such monuments of culture and learning as the library at Louvain and the Cathedrals of Reims and Malines." They had violated the neutrality of Belgium. "England had in common with France, Russia, Prussia and Austria undertaken the solemn obligation of guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium. The preservation of this neutrality was for us a matter of deepest sentiment and likewise of most vital interest. The violation of this neutrality would not only destroy the independence of Belgium, but also the whole foundation on which rests the possibility of neutrality at all and the existence of such States as are weaker than their neighbors." Among the names attached to the English plea are such well-known personalities as F. B. Jevons, Sir Oliver Lodge, Gilbert Murray, William Osler, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Walter Raleigh, William Ramsay and others equally famous. To this statement the German artists and scholars replied herewith.

WE have had the grievous experience that in the present struggle which is waging between nations that rightly were considered until now guardians of civilization, even men intellectually eminent, truth-loving and masters in the use of language, no longer find it possible to understand each other when they belong to hostile parties.

It is on this account that we have up to the present considered it superfluous to reply to those who signed the "Declaration by the Professors of Great Britain addressed to the academical Circles of Germany." It has been reported to us, however, that our silence has been taken by many as an admission that we have good reason to feel ourselves worsted in the controversy, and we would, therefore, earnestly present the following statements to our English colleagues, even at the risk of speaking to no purpose.

I.

The principal defect in the relations which have hitherto existed between the countries now hostile to each other is, as it seems to us, that they have known too little of one another. From this fact alone have arisen the misunderstandings and discords that have finally resulted in the outbreak of a mortal combat. If the educated classes in England had had only approximately a correct view of the sentiments ruling in the German people before the outbreak of the war, they would have avoided adopting the catchphrase spread abroad by journalistic swashbucklers, that the writers Nietzsche, von Treitschke, von Bulow and von Bernhardt exercised a preponderating influence in Germany; a statement that here at home called forth from those who knew the facts only a smile.

The writings of General von Bernhardt had been known only to a very small circle here, before his name was brought to our notice by way of England. The great historian von Treitschke, who has been dead for twenty years, is separated by a generation from the intellectual life of present-day Germany with its mode of thinking upon political questions. Von Treitschke is industriously cited in the writings of Bernhardt, and we take it that from this fact it comes that England shows such a surprising familiarity with the former's words. The poet-philosopher Nietzsche has, in fact, had considerable influence upon a part of the German people, though others have always regarded him as misleading, but, in any case, it can only be through a misunderstanding of single expressions of his that he can be connected with the reproach, that Germany had a desire for universal dominion; for the conflict proclaimed by him was an intellectual one. So far as the fourth of the names mentioned is concerned, we can only suppose that perhaps he is meant, who is the most conciliatory of all German statesmen.

But even if Bernhardt had an influence in Germany, this would never have produced such a disastrous effect as that called forth by the English translation of his book "Unsere Zukunft" ("Our Future"), the title of which was changed in the translation for agitative purposes into quite another: "Britain as Germany's Vassal." This falsification helped to stir up the minds of Englishmen to indignation against Germany. Never has there been in our country

a writer who has given expression so brusquely to his delight in a war between the nations as John Ruskin when he wrote: "By war nations are created, by peace they are destroyed." Nevertheless, we refrain from making use of these words to hurl a reproach at the sentiments of the English people.

II.

When the English scholars assert further that until now it has been only the German army which has intentionally bombarded and destroyed historical buildings and monuments of civilization, such as the library at Louvain or the cathedrals of Reims and Malines, the limitation "until now (bis jetzt*)", if it has reference to the present war, relieves us of the necessity of answering, for in this war the troops opposed to us have had as yet no opportunity of demonstrating how far their love for German works of art extends. If, however, the intention was to draw past times into the comparison, history gives us examples enough of the fighting forces of our adversaries committing acts of devastation, out of mere wantonness and lust of destruction, with which the severity we were compelled to exercise, through the treacherous methods adopted by our enemies, is not to be mentioned in the same breath. For only out of bitter necessity, and with a wish to spare as far as possible, have our guns been directed at objects whose destruction we, with mankind in general, lament as an irreparable loss.

III.

Our English colleagues are certainly right when they express the opinion, that it is difficult for the individual man under his human limitations "to weigh justly the points in dispute affecting his own country," but it seems to us yet more difficult to do the adversary justice in the midst of the hurly-burly of the moment. On this account we do not wonder that the English scholars charge the German government with keeping back the truth, as contrasted with the action of their own government in the matter. Nevertheless, we take the liberty of calling their attention to the fact, that the loss of every man and every ship is communicated to us without hesitancy by our authorities, while, from the very beginning of the war down to the present day, the English press has been charging their army administration with suppressing the news.

We shall never shirk the duty of most accurately testing the facts, but we seek the truth far back of the published diplomatic documents, and it has been established as a truth, that a peace-loving people, with a peace-loving ruler at their head, have for years been driven towards a war, which, although it remained latent until recently, had its virtual beginning with the "encircling" policy of the English King Edward VII. It was only the instinctive shrinking back from such a horrible event which preserved for the world, for a time at least, the appearance of peace. When the matter is regarded from this point of view, the question whether the docu-

* Since we have not been put in possession of the English original of the "Declaration," we are obliged to cite the German text sent us by the signers and in a given case to retranslate this, as nearly as we can, back into English.