

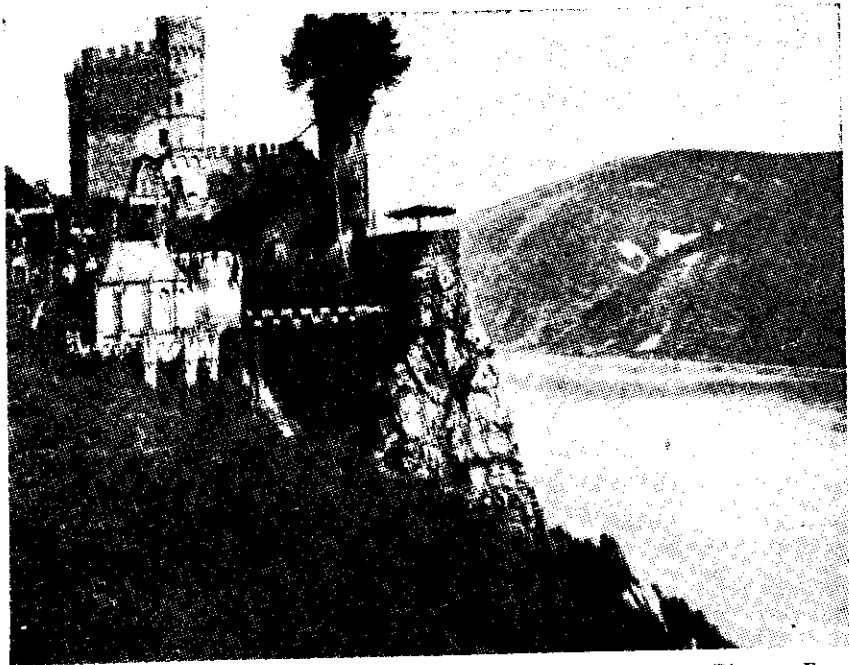
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Hohenzollern, cashed in on the Gospel. Soldiers from the wars returning brought home to Norway and Scotland new tastes and new ideas of comfort. Italian shipmen who had made fortunes conveying and provisioning the crusaders, now met at Suez and Rostov, the caravans from China and India, and delivered into Lombardy their oriental goods to merchants from Mainz and Koln, who sent them to Britain and Scandinavia down the Rhine. All such traffic ran risks of Turkestan robbers and Mediterranean pirates. But it was only on the Rhine that robbery was certain. For these 250 years of Rhineland prosperity—the Golden Age of Germany, when her towns grew strong and cathedralled and her people rich and cultured—were politically a period of anarchy.

While Germany was pouring men south to Palestine, she was also sending them east to less romantic but ultimately more rewarding conquests. In the first years of the 13th century a "Teutonic Order" of Knights was founded to advance as armed missionaries before the colonists, who were making a New Germany among the heathen Borussi. Prussia is by derivation "Borussi-land," and Berlin shows its origin as a colony of the Rhineland in the name of its suburb Neukoln. But "Little Germany in the East" became subject to the Poles after the "Dark Day" of Tannenberg (1410). A South German princeling who had gone into trade thereupon foreclosed his mortgage over the almost worthless Electorship of Brandenburg. One successor secularised the Teutonic Order, i.e., made its lands private property. Another got free of the Poles as "Duke of Prussia." And finally, only 70 years ago, a still later Hohenzollern united all Germans. In the Rhineland scale these dates are modern.

More Innocent Glories

When Germans think of the Rhine, it is of their earlier and more innocent glories. First there are the epic legends of their crude cradle days, with the songs and the natural beauties of the region. And then there is the Golden Age, before the Turkish stoppering up of Mediterranean trade drove Europeans to seek sea ways to the spices and fabrics of the East, and reduced the



The medieval castle of Rheinstein overlooks the Rhine near Bingen. From such strongholds the nobility once exacted toll from all river traffic.

Highway of Europe to a trickling back-water. While the Rhineland barons fought, the Rhineland cities thrived. They drove out their temporal and ecclesiastical overlords, and even established "foreign concessions" in the main ports abroad, precisely as the 19th Century Powers did in China. Minstrels passed freely from town to town, and the merchant and trade guilds found satisfaction in culture as well as wealth. The Black Death, the shifting of the trade routes, the wars of religion, all contributed to the decay of this original Germany. But it was the "realist" policy of Louis XIV. that completed it. The first Churchill certainly stopped him from rounding off centuries of French nibbling into the Rhineland by making the river his boundary. But it was not before systematic destruction of all military and productive installations had given France the "security" of a Germany so weak that it could not resist Prussia.

It is no wonder that the Allied advance to the Rhine must shake Germany psychologically as nothing yet has

or nothing else could. However, it will cost the Nazis material advantages also. Not only is the world's most highly industrialised region (Belgium, North-east France, Luxembourg) already transferred to their opponents, but guns along the Rhine will blast the blast-furnaces of the Ruhr, the mills of Frankfurt and the factories of Karlsruhe—all of which lie close to the opposite bank.

The Rhine is, of course, a defence. North and south of Strassburg it runs fast with many islands down a fertile 20-mile-wide ditch, the sides of which are the pine-clad Vosges and Black Forest ranges respectively. In its middle course it negotiates difficult gorges. Its last third to the sea is over placid plain. But by this time it is half a mile wide and in Holland, not one river, but four parallel branches.

However, only once in history has the Rhine proved a permanent barrier. This was when an army of many United Nations (including Germans), fused into the Roman Empire, watched the wild forest tribes across its waters for 450 years. It will not be so long this time.



BINGEN, with the terraced vineyards clothing the slopes of the Niederwald across the Rhine,