

French Hammer --- German Anvil

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A Talk from 3YA by
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FRENCH relations with Germany are generally considered to be the key to the problem of European stability. This is true, if we do not fall into two mistakes, one, of thinking exclusively of political relationships, and the other, of regarding French and Germans as two types that are poles asunder and doomed to be antagonistic. The truth is that cultural, economic, and social relationships are far more vital, and in many ways more advanced, between the two countries, than purely political ones, which, as usual, lag lamentably behind. Ever since there has been a France and a Germany, each has been acting and reacting upon the other, sometimes to their mutual hurt, more often to their mutual benefit, much as two members of one family mutually affect one another.

Often they stimulate one another to greater efforts; sometimes they are terribly hard on one another's nerves, because of their very similarity deep down, and differences on the surface.

All European nations, and especially these two and ourselves, have roughly the same mixture of discontent, adventure, hypocrisy, idealism, materialism and individualism, together with a socialising instinct which makes us usually very helpful neighbours, but occasionally very bad ones. Through their long history they have abundantly exemplified the proverb, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

It is interesting to analyse the results of 2000 years' cultural interplay. The Huns invade France, and succumb, as conquerors often do, to Roman organisation and Christianity as preached by their victims. Then Charlemagne replaces the Roman social system with the Feudal one, and German chivalry becomes acclimatised in France. Gothic, and the scholastic philosophy, are taken over the Rhine to Germany, and for hundreds of years, till the French revolution, no great discovery or movement in one country fails to make its mark speedily in the other.

Often the results of such movements are far more extensive in the country of their adoption. Thus the Reformation, beginning in Germany, laid France waste with religious wars and disputes for close on a century. And when the successive batches of Protestants were expelled, they went in large numbers to Germany, where they started a second Renaissance, more brilliant for that country than the first had been.

It was sparks from this camp-fire that kindled the bonfire of the French revolutions, which lasted through eighty years and four big upheavals before leaving a relatively stable society.

Napoleon revived the plans of Charlemagne of a European-wide

society with a homogeneous culture, but the main result of his attempt to mould Germany was the introduction into France first of a romantic, then of a scientific, revival on the model of Germany. Then nationalistic barriers began to rise on both sides of the Rhine, and from 1870 on, there has been less and less of the fruitful intercourse of former times.

The crowning estrangement of the Great War saw leaders in science and art and literature mobilised for cultural recriminations which the survivors surely regret now. But once more normal relationships are being resumed. They have taken turn and turn about being hammer and anvil all down the centuries.

Now Germany has got her first revolution safely past, and anxiously looks when the next one will appear. It is her turn to be anvil, and cultural France plies the traditional hammer, rather mercifully than otherwise, if we forget her political dealings.

Meanwhile individual contacts of all kinds are carrying on the same process. At present, for instance, there are over 1000 German students in Paris alone, keen to absorb as much of French culture as they can. It is true that only about fifty French students are to be found in the whole of Germany. But several holiday tours have taken French students into the heart of Germany, and into a full understanding of her problems and achievements. Sport also brings host of French and Germans together year by year. Cycling, track athletics, swimming and football have all international meetings, while for the last Soccer match between France and Germany several thousand Germans made cheap excursions to Paris. An involuntary piece of Franco-German co-operation came near the end of the game, with the score 0-0, when a German mis-kicked and beat his own goalkeeper, winning the match for France.

German artistic and operatic companies also frequently visit France, and the visits are returned less frequently. And a most enthusiastic reception was given in Paris last year the conductor Weingartner, in a concert hall containing 5000 people. Previously his visit had had to be postponed, for the French "Young Patriots" had given out that they would not let him away alive. But the promoters of the visit were too strong and clever for the patriots, and no violence occurred.

In addition to these contacts, there are conferences, mainly during the summer, bringing together all sections of the community on all sorts of subjects. Teachers, students, economists, doctors, workers, children, Catholics, Protestants, Quakers, and workers for peace, social uplift and prison reform meet in a friendly way and help to bridge the gap. The interesting fact is that among the members of these conferences, convinced internationalists of (Concluded on page 30.)

