

Student Days in Germany

(Continued from last week.)

SOCIAL life was much more formal in Germany than in England, and visiting among friends not so common as here. The free mixing of the young people of both sexes that we regard as natural in English countries would have been called in question there. One requires to spend a considerable time in a foreign country in order to learn the conventions of the society in which one lives. I soon learned that I was expected to lift my hat to my men friends as well as to ladies; after a time it never struck me as strange to lift my hat even to a policeman when I accosted one to make an inquiry.

We probably do not realise ourselves how many of our ordinary practices are purely conventional, and yet we regard their observance as highly important. I found that some of our conventions would have been regarded as the height of ill-manners in Germany and vice-versa. Many of you have probably read "Elizabeth in her German Garden"; in it the differences in the conventions of the two countries (England and Germany) are well expressed, often in very humorous fashion.

I did not live quite the life of the ordinary university student, since I was anxious to learn German as thoroughly as possible. How little I knew for a start may be gathered from the fact that I have at times in the first month risen from the dinner table still hungry because my knowledge of German was not sufficient to enable me to ask for what I wanted, and I was ashamed to point at it.

For three months I walked everywhere, because I was not sure enough of my German to ask for a tram ticket to the place that I wished to reach. In those days I hungered for the sound of English spoken by English people, and in Berlin this made me a regular attendee on Sundays at church. Actually, I attended the American church, but I found large numbers of English there.

The American church was a wonderful place for social intercourse, and special arrangements were made to attract the young people whose homes were in English-speaking countries. For most of my stay in Germany I lived in a German home, where I spoke German only, and as I was fortunate in being taken in by a very delightful family of well-educated people, it gave me exceptional opportunities of observing social life, among very pleasant people.

In less than six months I was able to note that a number of Germans did not always speak grammatically, and then I realised that my own study of the language was progressing. At the end of six months, while travelling in the South of Germany, I was highly flattered by an inquiry as to which German State I came from, the inquirer stating that I was obviously not a South German. However, I need not have been so flattered, since I noted later that the peasants of North-east Germany could frequently not converse with those of the South-west. On one occasion my landlady sent her new servant, a native of north-east Prussia, to buy supplies in the market place from the peasant women from just across the Rhine in Alsace. They could not understand what each other said, and the servant had to carry out her business by signs.

Racial Differences.

AS I became more accustomed to the language and the people I grew rather more at home in the country, but it was nevertheless a wonderful experience to go over to England for most of my vacations. I always found the German people most kind, and I could not have had greater consideration shown me anywhere. And yet those two years showed me how lucky we are to live under the Union Jack.

The differences between our two peoples are not those of language only, but it sometimes takes residence in a foreign country to bring that fact home. I missed the sense of freedom that is natural to us here without our knowing it. Three days after I reached Berlin I received orders from the district police office to report there at a certain day at a certain hour to be questioned. Arriving there I was required to state my age, date and place of birth, where my mother and father were born and when, how many brothers and sisters I had, and numerous other details.

Soon afterward I moved my place of residence to a different police district, though in the same town, and I had to go through the same performance again. As I felt that they asked too many intimate questions and showed my feelings in the matter, the mustachios of the police officer who questioned me positively bristled, and I believe that the other Germans who were waiting their turn to be questioned expected me to be deported.

All the national systems seemed to work by a series of prohibitions and repressions instituted by a too paternal government. In a public building one saw many doors marked "Entrance forbidden," in the woods there were paths with signs forbidding their use; one ultimately developed the feeling that one was at liberty to do anything that was not expressly forbidden.

The Great War.

I HAVE frequently been asked whether I noticed in Germany any marked preparations for the Great War. Undoubtedly the militaristic spirit was strong. Although we have heard that conscription was unpopular, there is no doubt that it was regarded by working class families as an honour to have a son even as a private in the Army.

The arrogance of army officers, particularly toward civilians, was noteworthy. In some cafes frequented by officers, strongly nationalistic songs, such as "Deutschland über alles," were sung with fervour almost every evening, and foreigners found it desirable to keep very quiet. In most towns, but more particularly toward the borders, intensive drilling was carried on daily. At that time too, the importation of meat into Germany was practically forbidden, and the opinion was the Government was desirous of making the country independent of foreign supplies in the event of war.

Although the Germans are in many respects among the best educated people in the world, I was amazed to find among well educated people a belief that New Zealand as well as other British Dominions was garrisoned by English regiments, and that in the event of war, the Dominions would rise against England.

Through English friends I made the acquaintance of a young Englishman whose parents lived in Berlin and who had naturalised as a German in order to qualify as a lawyer. He is the only

Englishman I know to have naturalised as a German. He had served as a one-year soldier, and on the occasion of the King's Birthday, when regular military drills were in abeyance and all ranks were celebrating the great occasion, he took me through the cavalry stables and into the army barracks at the great military training centre at Spandau, just out of Berlin. This was a most unusual experience for a foreigner like myself. In Spandau, you may remember, the Germans kept stored for emergencies, all in gold the great sum paid in indemnity by France immediately after the Franco-Prussian War.

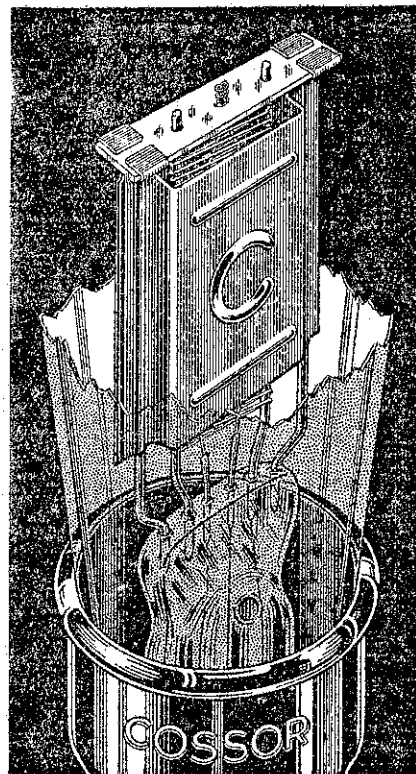
At the time of my stay in Germany, Prussia was obviously the domineering as well as the dominating influence in the confederation of German States, and at times the other States chafed under it. There was a current saying applied outside of Prussia to any young man of domineering character, "So young, and already a Prussian." There was considerable difference in the characteristics of the people from one State to another, and the students from

Saxony were delightful fellows, indeed our English students said they were almost like Englishmen.

My talk has been over-personal, but the nature of my subject demanded it. It has been scrappy, too, but it is impossible to give you in 15 minutes anything like a resume of my main impressions of two years' experiences. I should have liked to tell you something of South Germany, the Black Forest, the wonderful country along the Rhine, agriculture, the Zeppelins, early aviation in Germany, winter sport, the theatres and opera houses, and Christmas and New Year celebrations, and to have taken you with me on a month's trip through Denmark and Southern Sweden into Norway, but time has not permitted me to deal as I would have liked even with the part I have touched on. However, I can say that my two years gave me a wonderful experience in work, in play, and in social contact with the life of a most interesting people, and the memories of that time will last throughout my life.

Also, Gute Nacht.

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