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# A PILGRIMAGE TO GERMANY.

By KARL BARTH

[The following extracts are taken from an interview given by Dr. Karl Barth, the eminent Swiss theologian, to a representative of "Die Weltwoche," of Zurich, which we reproduce by permission of its editor.]

It was not only a tiring but almost an adventurous journey that I had recently in Germany. On this journey I was able to talk once more with my friends of the past and to reknit the bonds broken by the war. This brought home to me most vividly the rightness of a view I had firmly held at all times, that the German people was never the uniform block behind Hitler that it was declared to be in Goebbels's propaganda and could not but seem in the apparent absence of all open opposition.

To begin with there was the Church. Witness was borne with the same courage among Catholics and Protestants, by persons who, as clearly recognisable exponents of resistance, never made any concession even in externals. This common front, incidentally, worked powerfully to bring the two confessions together, not so much in dogma as in human relations.

For the rest, the Protestant side offers a much less uniform picture than the Catholic. The ecclesiastical struggle produced a split among the Protestants that has only now been actually bridged over. It has been a mistake to draw a sharp distinction between black sheep and white, "German Christians" and the Confessional Church. Only in Prussia was there actually an open struggle. In Bavaria, Württemberg, and elsewhere the members of the Confessional Church remained an element of the territorial Church and had mainly to carry on a struggle against the grey sheep, if the term may be permitted—the lukewarm, the appeasers, those who believed that in order to maintain their Church and their confession they must submit to the Nazis in externals.

These groupings show plainly, in any case, not only for the churches but for the German people as a whole, that during this war and this tyranny a very considerable number of brave people maintained their opposition throughout. I made acquaintance with a second locus of resistance, the universities. I visited Freiburg, Marburg, and Bonn, and in all three met a body of courageous professors of all faculties—philosophers, natural scientists, historians, jurists—who, under cover of the formal "gleichschaltung" (enforced conformity), held aloft the spirit of humanity and communicated it to their students.

Thirdly must be mentioned the workers. I talked with two Communists in Frankfort who had carried on their illegal cell activities during the whole time of oppression. The Communist party was the only political group that could come forward immediately in serried ranks after the collapse, as it was already fully organised underground, while the Social Democrats and the Liberals are struggling to this day

with the difficulties of forming a strong nucleus.

In face of these opposition groups we should get out of the habit of seeing in the Germans simply one great horde of Nazis. It is simply impossible for the imagination to grasp what a Terror on such a scale had the power to do; the continual awareness of standing with one foot in the grave could not but have, in the course of years, a paralysing effect. People shake their heads to-day over the fact that nobody will admit having been a Nazi, and they set this down to contemptible cowardice, but anyone who knows the conditions must admit that that repudiation is honest. In the great majority of cases, in point of fact, people were not pro-Nazi, but Nazism came upon them, as it were, as a frightful catastrophe, and their real guilt consists in their passivity, their inability to be heroes.

Consequently it is entirely mistaken to try to set up a great plan of re-education to cure the Germans of Nazism; that cure was effected long ago by the force of facts; out of hundreds of people there will not be one to be found with whom it will not be agreed, in the course of a single minute, that Hitler was clown and devil in one.

No, the real discussion has not started so long as one talks to the Germans only about Hitler. The crucial point is reached when the discussion comes to Bismarck. When the Nazi plaster has fallen away in dust there is revealed in the majority of Germans, even in those who have been active in opposition, the solid brickwork of German nationalism. They regard Nazism as a regrettable incident, but all before it is beyond criticism. They do not understand that Nazism was nothing else than the final outcome of the Bismarckian policy, which forged Germany with blood and iron into a National Socialist, capitalist, imperialist Reich and so into the gravedigger of the vital freedom of 1848.

The Germans no longer need to-day to be convinced of their guilt. The wave that went out from them is striking back with such devastating force that it amounts to an irrefutable de facto refutation of Nazism and an irresistible de facto finding of guilt. One can only wish that every Swiss person who exults at the German humiliation, and thinks no court of justice could be too severe, could spend a quarter of an hour in Freiburg or Frankfort and that he could cast a glance at Silesia or Pomerania, where the German population is being systematically handed over by the Poles to death from starvation.

It is striking how little of the true Nazi ideology as set out by Rosenberg has struck root. I am perfectly sure that even the youth, who are regarded by many people as incurably infected, will not long remain under its influence. Even though Nazi influence reached out to the whole life of the young, it will only need

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the creation of the right environment to turn them quite organically into different beings. The Allies have not yet fully realised what must be the very beginning of the great work of re-education: they are still trying the effect of wireless lectures and films for instructing the German people, while only one thing will be of any real use—their own example. The better outlook on the world must not be administered in lessons but demonstrated in practice. "That object-lesson," people said to me ironically in Germany, "has unhappily not yet begun."

As yet there is no sign of any strong religious movement in the country. The advancing tide in the life of the churches that was to be observed under the shadow of Nazi dominance has unfortunately largely ebbed again. The pastors are working with great devotion at the cure of souls, but the church services I was able to attend in cellars and in the

crypt of the wrecked cathedral at Bonn are no better attended as a rule than, for instance, in Switzerland.

The religious German is inclined to elude political responsibility by immersion in religious forms. It is significant that at the theologians' meetings I attended there was much talk of demons. "We have looked Satan in the face"—such phrases were uttered almost with enthusiasm. Over against that demonised world help and comfort and deliverance were offered by the sacrament, the liturgy, with its invocations and responses. I listened to all this talk of demons for a time; in the end I could keep silent no longer. "Are you not beginning to slip into a magical view of the world?" I asked my friends. "Why are you just talking all the time of demons? Why do you not say plainly, 'We have been political idiots'? Please allow your Swiss colleague to urge you to think in more rational terms."