

IN GERMANY TO-DAY

By W. R. LESTER, M.A.

Matters of business brought me to Germany in July. For an ex-enemy the errand was a delicate one, as it was to obtain information about a certain kind of coal in which the Germans have specialized, and in the working of which they are the acknowledged masters. At once let me say that though a stranger and without introductions, from start to finish I met with not a single rebuff, but on the contrary was shown the greatest kindness and offered every help. One could not but wonder what would be their fate to-day were Germans to visit our country on a like errand.

The first place of call was Cologne, where I presented myself, not without fear and trembling, at the offices of the great Rheinland Brown Coal Syndicate, which is the Cartel that works all the Brown Coal Beds of this Province. There, after being handed from one department to another, I at last reached the responsible party, who, after a long and interesting talk, was so kind as to give free permits to visit their principal mines in order that I might see everything for myself. On this work the next day was spent, and again every kindness was offered by the local mines managers. At every turn in these mines and factories one is struck by the thoroughness of organization and the efficiency of the plant on which no money has been spared. Everything to the last detail is thought out; nothing is makeshift; nothing is scamped. So the finished article in the form of briquettes is produced at a very low cost indeed.

Compared with other kinds of coal, the quality of Brown Coal is low, and as an indication of enterprise under difficulties, I was informed that the output in Germany is now very much greater than before the war (about double), and that this has taken place in order, so far as possible, to make good the loss of their better coalfields under the Treaty of Versailles, and the export of their better qualities as reparation to the Allies. These losses they have already almost made good by developing the Brown Coal.

Among the other uses to which this inferior coal is put, is to feed the immense factories for the extraction of nitrogen from the air which since the war have come into being. These nitrogen factories have had to be built to produce the nitrogen which the Germans are no longer able to buy from South America. I was informed that "necessity is the mother of invention," and that the necessity has proved fortunate for Germany after all, as they now manufacture cheaper than they can import. But difficulty still faces them, as the French, not satisfied with what they already get, threaten also to take the coal which goes to those works. If this happens the output of nitrogen will fall, and the fertility of the land, to maintain which it is used, will fall with it. Thus, they say, they are strangled wherever they turn. The principal of these Nitrogen Works I saw near Halle in Saxony. It is immense and, I should say, stretches along the railway line for at least one mile, having both a passenger and goods station of its own. It employs many thousands and has built quite a small town for its own people. All this has been done since the war.

From the Rhine Provinces the course was up the industrial Ruhr Valley (occupation of which is continually threatened by France) and through the Midlands to Saxony, which is the Lancashire of Germany. Again the process of feeling one's way with firms to whom one was a perfect stranger was repeated, with the same happy result as on the Rhine, though one of the Managing Directors started off by volunteering the information that when he visited Scotland some years ago to learn something of the Scottish Oil Industry no facilities whatever were granted him. This was not a hopeful start, but later on he thawed and gave much help. With many of these business men I opened up the general question of Germany's present

position and prospects, and their views seem pretty well to agree. They all agree that the Allies have them "by the throat," and that unless the demands for reparations are modified Germany will go down and drag the rest of Europe along with her. With these demands hanging over her the Constitutional Republic cannot continue to exist and will succumb either to reactionary militarism or to Bolshevism. Asked if they recognize the duty to pay any reparations at all, they replied that they do, on condition that the amount is fixed and just. If that were conceded there would be no further difficulty. But France, they declare, is determined to break them utterly, and when it is pointed out that we have no such aim and that public opinion in Great Britain has sobered down and now only desires to get the world's industrial machine to work again, and therefore is ready for modification of the reparation demands, one is met by the cynical question, "Why, then, do you not stop this nonsense?" Here I should say that against Britain no feeling seems to exist. They only regard us as weak in our dealings with our Allies. All the bitterness is reserved for France, with whom they look for the inevitable day of reckoning. This distinction is also made between the individual soldiers of the different Rhineland armies of occupation, the English being regarded by everyone I asked as models of correctness and decency. However much the British occupation may be resented, the men themselves are invariably well spoken of.

By the way, a very distinct difference in the bearing of the people is to be noted between the occupied Rhine Provinces and other parts of Germany. One cannot fail to remark on the weary, joyless, spiritless look of the people in Mainz and Cologne. But beyond the Rhine the old German "Gemütlichkeit" is still in evidence. The armies of occupation have left their mark and it will take some washing out.

Travelling through Germany to-day one is struck, as in the past, by the well-cultivated, tidy look of the land and the clean, roomy farmhouses. To the casual onlooker there is no falling-off in this respect, but one is told everywhere that this is only apparently so, and that in reality the produce per acre has considerably lessened. For instance, milk is practically unobtainable, and all butter comes from abroad. I found no milk in any hotel, and for the public outside it is still rationed. Long queues of women and children are to be seen waiting for it, just as at home in war time. I found no one who had much in the way of opinions on the land question itself, but was told more than once that the Church is perhaps the largest landowner in Germany. Many peasants on their deathbeds are prevailed on to leave their land to the Church, which thereafter draws the rent. One can scarcely think that this system will be an aid to land reform. I broached the question of Free Trade *versus* Protection with several business men and others. They declare it is not an issue in Germany to-day. Each one said that, in the abstract, Free Trade is best, but that, in her present plight, Germany has no alternative to heavy import duties. However, not one was able to explain just why this is so.

As to the general industrial situation, all factories are feverishly busy and there is no such thing as unemployment, but the complaint from every class is that the purchasing power of wages and salaries is much less than before the war, and that although there are few external signs of poverty, it is widespread none the less. One thing I did notice, and never before have I seen it in Germany, where children at least have always been well-dressed and well looked after: I mean the spectacle of bare-footed children, and even of tiny mites picking scraps from the rubbish heaps. These sights are common in the working quarters now. I talked with a young American who had come to study in Germany, and had taken up his quarters with an average middle-class family. Though appearances were fully kept up, he found the living so meagre that in a month his weight had gone down by 10 lb., and his general state

of health so reduced that he could not do the hard work required of him. With regret he had to leave his friends and put up in an hotel. He states that this is typical of middle-class families, whose salaries have risen very much less than the cost of living.

In the case of the working class, it seems that in the towns at least, the common labourer has, comparatively speaking, improved his position more than any other class. He now commands as high a pay as the skilled artizan, viz., from 1,000 to 1,250 marks per week of 48 hours. Before the war wages were about 20 marks for the labourer and 30 marks for the skilled man.

The following table gives the approximate cost of some principal articles of consumption before and after the war:—

| | Before the War. | Now. |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Bread .. | 30 pfennigs per kilo. | 12 marks |
| Eggs .. | 1 mark 20 pf. per doz. | 90 marks |
| Boots .. | 12 marks | 800 marks |
| Shirt .. | 3 marks | 200 marks |
| Suit of clothes | 50 marks | 5,000 marks |
| Butter .. | 2 marks per kilo. | 150 marks |
| Potatoes .. | 2 marks 50 pf. per 50 kilos. | 400 marks |
| Beef .. | 1 mark 25 pf. per kilo | 90 marks |
| Meal in cheap restaurant.. | 60 pfennigs | 30 marks |

N.B.—There are 100 pfennigs in the mark, and a kilogram equals about 2 lb.

It will thus be seen that while wages have risen from 40 to 50 times (measured in marks) the cost of leading articles of consumption has risen from 40 to 100 times. I believe that one important item of expenditure has not risen—the rent of houses. This is because of the Rent Restriction Act. An ordinary four-room house in Cologne rents for 150 marks per month, which is only about three per cent. of a man's wage. The rooms are large and are fitted with electric light and all modern improvements. This I can confirm as, when in Cologne, I stayed in such a house which belonged to a railway booking clerk, who had to try to supplement his wage by taking lodgers. All hotels being full I fell a victim to his wiles, but, as the event proved, I was made most comfortable and the experience was very valuable.

The housing problem is as serious in Germany as it is here. In Frankfurt, I was told, there are 70,000 people who have no house of their own and have to crowd into lodgings. In Cologne there are 50,000 in a like plight.

On all sides one hears of the evil effects of the fall of the mark. Though the Germans were notoriously a thrifty people, nobody thinks of saving now. This is in part because, even to maintain a lower standard of living, every mark earned must be spent, and in part because with a constantly falling mark, to save would be folly. So instead of saving, everyone of every class seems desperately anxious to spend every mark he has in order to get at least something for it while it has still any value at all. This is "the flight from the mark." To some extent this may account for the well-dressed appearance of everyone, as well as for the busy shops and beer gardens, but if it continues, debasement of the national *morale* will surely result.

The general impression left after a visit to Germany and intercourse with many people is that, provided she is given a fair chance, she will win through. Everyone is working with tremendous energy. Even their pleasures seem to be taken with extraordinary vim, if one is to judge by the crowds who leave the towns in the very early hours of Sundays for the forest, the river or the mountains, men and women alike carrying their full kit on their backs and not returning till dark. It is a sight to be seen at the railway stations of large towns like Frankfurt. These people

take their pleasures simply as well as strenuously. Fourth class on the trains is in great demand.

They are determined to make good their losses under the Versailles Treaty, and even claim to have already done so. I have spoken of coal and nitrogen in this connection, and was told that under the Treaty 5,000 locomotives, as well as 150,000 carriages and wagons, had to be given up. These have already been replaced. The shipping of the Port of Hamburg has regained its pre-war level. All the best Rhine barges (carrying 1,000 tons and over) and all the best tugs had to be surrendered, but new ones have been built to more than replace. I travelled the Rhine from Mainz to Cologne and was told this by the Chief Engineer of the ship. The power of recuperation after war is wonderful, as Henry George said thirty years ago. Given free access to land and freedom of trade, how much greater might it not be! But none the less, the general opinion is that very hard times are in store for the immediate future. With the mark at its present value, manufacturers cannot purchase materials abroad, or, if they do so, the price is enormous. This means a constantly rising price for their products (as I found by experience when there), and the time will soon come when, at such prices, no purchasers will be found. This process has already begun and a slackening is already perceptible. As this gains way, they anticipate unemployment such as no other country has had the misfortune to face. And it will not be the orderly unemployment we have in England, for the coffers of the German State are empty and doles will be out of the question.

With the mark at 2,000 to the £, a visit to Germany is for the Englishman extraordinarily cheap. Second-class travel costs about two marks per mile, which is less than one farthing; room in hotel, 1s. 6d.; breakfast, 8d.; lunch with beer, 1s. 6d.; dinner (four courses and beer), 1s. 8d. One can live in quite good hotels for the equivalent of 6s. per day, all meals included. Seats in the opera, from 2½d. in the gallery to 1s. 6d. in the stalls. But, as has already been said, all these rise steadily with the fall of the mark. For the traveller a most desirable system is in general use. No tips are expected or asked in hotels or restaurants. From 20 to 25 per cent. is added to all bills, and this is divided among the whole staff down to the man who shovels in the coal. Waiters tell you the system is good for them, and certainly to the traveller it is a boon and a blessing. Roughly speaking, I should say that the internal value of the mark is three times greater than the external. That is to say, when an Englishman changes his money into marks and spends them in Germany, he buys three times as much as if he had spent his money at home. But this is only an effect of the sudden crash of the mark and cannot be permanent. After each fall there is a steady levelling up of prices, and were the mark once stabilized, external and internal values would soon coincide. Meantime, though Germany and the whole world suffers from the fall, all goes well for the English visitor to Germany, and to any with an open mind, willing to make allowances and to consider the (perhaps very different) point of view of others, I can strongly recommend a stay in the Germany of to-day. Such a traveller will not only meet with kindness but gain instruction and pleasure as well.

Let the comfortable readers of this paper reflect that, what to the vast majority is more worth demonstrating, is "No more Economic War."—that, as the common people have seen one sequence, so they may gradually see another.

Bombs and bayonets are beastly, but how to raise the money for the Bovril and the Glaxo for sick wife or child is a matter that comes more home to those demonstrators. The bread-winner is blown to bits in real war; he is smashed slowly, by weeks and weeks of unemployment, in the economic war. If there is anything more horrible, more deadly, more mean, more unchristian than war, it is a peace like this.—*Col. J. C. Wedgwood, D.S.O., M.P., in the DAILY NEWS, 22nd July.*