
A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Some Impressions of Germany.

A SIX months' stay in a foreign country is long enough to make one hesitant about setting down one's opinions. Travel impressions have a way of revealing even more of the observer than of that which he went out to see. Yet there is to-day so little real contact between the different European peoples, that he who has seen even a little has a responsibility resting upon him to say something about it, and it is a responsibility he would not wish to escape, for it gives an opportunity of returning thanks for kindnesses lavishly shown, and perhaps of clearing away a few of the misconceptions which hinder greater friendliness.

Germany is so vast a land that it is necessary to indicate what parts of it have been visited. There is almost as great diversity of life and outlook as there is variety in the scenery. All kinds of men and opinions jostle one another, as in any other great country, and the average German is as difficult to find as the typical Britisher. The best one can do is to see a little into the German world through the eyes of the Germans one has met. A student is brought chiefly in contact with the student-world. A Baptist gravitates naturally to other Baptists. However valiant the efforts to touch other circles of interest it is of the student world and the Baptist world, and that of the few other groups that intersect them at various points, that one gains clearest insight. This article is based on experiences during a walking tour on the borders of Bavaria and Würtemberg, which included Rothenburg and the glorious valley of the Neckar above Heidelberg, five weeks in Berlin, a University semester in Marburg on the Lahn, a few days in Thuringia, Stuttgart, Tübingen and Hamburg, and flying visits to Eisenach, Kassel, Giessen, Frankfort and Wiesbaden. I travelled usually in company with Germans and lived in their homes. Germany is a great and wonderful country; its forests and rivers, its castles and cathedrals, having been once seen can never be forgotten. A grandness of intellectual achievement is combined with a deep mysticism, and no one who has come really to know Germans can withhold either admiration or affection.

I

Postwar Germany is a new Germany, made new by the tragedy of the war years and the subsequent inflation period. In

England we speak of the years 1914 to 1918, and date the new era from the Versailles Treaty. A German, however, makes the dividing line 1923-24, when after its disastrous drop the currency was stabilised, for not till then were the worst horrors over, nor a new chapter really begun. I spent a few days in Berlin and Dresden in the summer of 1923, when marks were 1,200,000 to the £1 (later, of course, they fell far lower), and I shall never forget the tensity and uncertainty which seemed to brood over everything, as well as the great and obvious physical sufferings. It was then an open question whether the Republican government established in 1918 would maintain itself, whether indeed any system of law and order would stand the strain. Only against the tragic background of what ordinary men and women endured between 1914 and 1924 can the new Germany be understood.

Very obvious outward and inward changes have taken place. Last September I walked down the famous Unter den Linden in Berlin with a bright nine year old girl, and a squad of half-a-dozen soldiers passed us. There is something rather pathetic about the handfuls of soldiers one occasionally sees. To my little companion they were quite new, and she could not understand their purpose, although on the Government buildings just beside us were the marks of bullets fired during the Revolutionary disturbances. The old military aristocracy, and with it a whole attitude to life, has left the stage and retired, often very generously treated, into obscurity. Occasionally there are demonstrations, when they deck themselves out again in their glory, but their passage wakes no general respect or enthusiasm, as under the old régime. Nothing is less likely than the re-establishment of the Imperial house, of this the recent elections give one more proof. Many of the attacks made in Allied countries on the ex-Kaiser are deeply resented, but it is in the spirit of those who feel that, when a man has failed and is down, whatever his faults may have been, he should be left alone. The faithfulness of "Father Hindenburg" to the Republic, since his election as President, and his stolid commonsense, have increased everyone's confidence, and the desire for the efficient development of the new system of government. There are still many problems of internal organization to be faced. We often forget that the Empire dated only from 1871, and that Germany is as yet incompletely unified, some of the old kingdoms still having special privileges, while north and south are not yet quite free from jealousy and distrust. There is a strong movement, which has much to be said for it on ethnographic and economic grounds, though it is at present opposed by some of the Great Powers, for the union of Austria and Germany.

There is everywhere manifest a desire to leave the past behind, and to rebuild the greatness of Germany along new lines. The industry, persistence and thoroughness, long recognized as German characteristics, have already secured a large measure of success, in spite of many obstacles. A German professor, in a recent work on English theology, suggests that the German escapes more easily from the tyranny of the past than does the Britisher. We have more vivid memories, and cannot forget the orthodox Allied version of what took place prior to August, 1914. We find it difficult to get rid of emotional bias in our judgments. I met more prejudice against Germans in my first six days in England after my return, than prejudice against the English in my six months in Germany. Yet the German willingness to forget does not come from fear of the ultimate verdict of history on the events leading up to the War. Dr. John Hutton not long ago described how, when visiting another country, one is confronted with " facts of such a kind, that had one been aware of them, we should have held our own view with less hardness, and might even have held another view." This admirably expresses one's feelings on learning the German version of events in Europe during the last twenty years. No one can hear the account, nor realise the sincerity and conviction with which it is held, and the sacrifices made as a result of it, without feeling ashamed of what Allied propaganda made us believe about our former enemies.

The more one learns, however, about feeling on the Continent the more anxious one becomes about the future. The younger generation do not in general feel (and perhaps this is also increasingly true in England and America), that the lesson to be drawn from events in Europe is that force is a hopeless and intrinsically wrong method of settling disputes. Rather, it is suggested, all that has happened proves that

> Force rules the world still—
> Has ruled it, shall rule it.
> Meekness is weakness,
> Strength is triumphant.

The Allies won the war because of their superiority in manpower and munitions, and through the blockade. They disarmed Germany. They refuse to disarm themselves because they are unconvinced that it is " secure " to be without large armies and navies. That is, they do trust ultimately in force. A Germany whose prosperity in other spheres is increasing will become growingly restive. At present there is a large majority for a vigorous League of Nations policy which aims at " getting something done." Unless the Allies disarm speedily, however,

and by some magnificent gesture seek to undo the tragic effects of the Versailles Treaty and subsequent diplomacy, there seems little hope of preventing that "next war" about which there is increasing speculation. At present, Europe is too weary and poor to resort to arms, but in the Ruhr and the Tyrol, in Poland and in Hungary the seeds of war are being sown. How suddenly feeling might flare up even now was shown in the tensity in certain circles in Germany last November, during the strained situation between Lithuania and Poland. Men said that in the event of war France would seek to send assistance to her ally through Germany, and would be resisted . . . if necessary with knives! There is a pacifist movement in Germany, and it is slowly growing, but one comes away feeling that we must work harder for peace while it is day.

I had often the strange feeling of being very much nearer to Russia. It is, of course, geographically true, but one is conscious of it in a deeper sense. The average Britisher regards the Bolshevik as a kind of outcast, a lower species of humanity, to be kept as far away as possible. Living in an island it is fairly easy to avoid "defilement," particularly when the country has an energetic Home Secretary. On the Continent, however, the segregation of peoples and ideas is impossible, nor is it desired. The Russians to-day are conducting an extraordinarily interesting experiment in a new kind of social organisation. It has been a very costly experiment, and no one at the moment has any wish to imitate them. But it is something to be studied. Responsible Bolshevik leaders, when one meets them, do not prove to be the kind of "savages" one would imagine from reading most of our English press. A much-read book in Germany has been a comparative study of Lenin and Gandhi, probably the two most important figures of the twentieth century. The latter's gospel of meekness does not seem to have met with success. What about that of Lenin? Germany is interested in the question, because modern Germany is experimenting. Old things have been shaken, and in most realms the new and abiding things cannot yet be seen. In spite of the hard work of reconstruction that is going on, there is a sense of disillusionment abroad, and an unwillingness to pin one's faith to anything, however gilt-edged the securities offered. This is a day of experiments, in social organisation and government, in architecture (a visit to the new colonies outside Frankfort and Stuttgart gives one a new respect for the prophecies of H. G. Wells), in diet, in morals, and in religion!

II

Many changes can be seen in the social habits of the people. There is increasing love of the open air, for example, and far more outdoor games are played than before the war. Universal military training being forbidden, German youths are encouraged for patriotic reasons to keep fit by as much exercise as possible. Every University student is required to spend a certain number of hours in the gymnasium or on the playing-field. Actuated by quite different motives, many of the Youth Movements, whose popularity is now perhaps not quite so great as it was a few years ago, have made physical culture one of their chief concerns. There is a great deal of swimming, and the many rivers and lakes around the big cities are now provided with bathing facilities, every section of the community making use of them. The banks of the Neckar at Heidelberg on a sunny day remind one of a crowded sea-side beach. During the summer thousands of people spend camping week-ends beside the lakes near Berlin. Even Kassel is building a promenade and bathing-places.

Older customs, however, survive. Sword-fighting continues in the Universities, though it is not so general as formerly, since there are an increasing number of students, particularly in places like Berlin and Heidelberg, who are not in the student-societies that organise it. Scarred faces are frequently seen, and on a Monday morning the lecture rooms, even of the theological faculty, have many bandaged and plastered heads. In Marburg the fights take place every Saturday from 5.30 a.m. onwards, in a room behind an inn, watched by keen partisans and a few strangers. Each end of the room is roughly curtained off, and behind the dirty sheets are the doctors and their assistants. The combatants, with throat, eyes, chest and right arm protected, as well as any old scars they may have, are so encased that they move with difficulty. The conditions of the fight seem to allow of little skill. Each hacks wildly in the hope that his opponent will flinch or withdraw wounded before he himself is so compelled. All around is a filthy smell, a mixture of beer and tobacco, disinfectant and blood.

The influence of the student-societies in the Universities is not a particularly good one, though on public occasions their banners and bright costumes, with gay-plumed hats, top-boots, spurs and drawn swords, give a romantic touch to the proceedings. Exclusiveness and conservatism are combined with a not very high moral tone. A good deal of drinking goes on. Yet the average German student remains a marvel of thoroughness and industry, and is never tired of an argument. The standard of living

is lower than in England. High thinking is often combined with few and irregular meals, and sometimes meat only once every two or three days. Often an extraordinary number of classes are attended each week. Count Keyserling has recently repeated the dictum that if Germans were presented with two doors, over one of which was written "To the Kingdom of God," and over the other, "To lectures on the Kingdom of God," they would choose the latter. Certainly their capacity for listening to long technical harangues is amazing. At the Reichgründungsfeier in Marburg on January 18th, a celebration similar to our Empire Day, the prelude to the fervent singing of "Deutschland über alles" was a long address by Professor Bultmann on the relations of early Christianity to the State. An essential preliminary to a lecture course in any subject is a lengthy introduction defining one's philosophical position.

The German educational system, however, whatever may be its defects, has resulted in a level of culture higher than that in England. The average person is an able conversationalist, intelligent, keen, wide in his interests. To sit round a table, eating fruit and biscuits, and arguing, is regarded as a very pleasant and profitable way of spending an evening. One could wish sometimes for a little less seriousness, and more lightness of touch, but one cannot withhold admiration. In one of the intervals during a small student conference, I was one of a group which listened to a paper by a classical student on the authorship of the Apocalypse of Peter. The paper was in Latin, and the author was introduced and thanked in that language! It was at first surprising to find how many of the professors' wives in Marburg attended their husbands' lectures. It is evidence, however, of a closer co-operation between husband and wife in intellectual matters than is often the case in this country. The close relations of the professors to their students, fostered by the Seminar-method of instruction, and by frequent walks and general class excursions, are also most attractive.

With a class which had been making a comparative study of the various churches and denominations, I paid a week-end visit to Frankfort and Wiesbaden. Services of all kinds were attended. We were quartered in a Methodist Seminary, and went first to three synagogues, two liberal and one orthodox. One of the liberal synagogues was in a poor part of Frankfort, yet the congregation followed with apparent keenness an address on R. T. Herford's book on the Pharisees! The Baptists, the Mormons, and the Salvation Army were among the groups visited, as well as many Lutheran and Catholic churches. The military parade service in Wiesbaden unfortunately revealed Anglicanism

at its worst. A few of us played truant on one of the evenings in order to go to "Tannhaüser" at the Opera House. The German's love and appreciation of music persists. I do not know which I shall remember longest, the wrapt attention with which the Pilgrims' Chorus was heard, or the way in which Marburg students would stand hours in a closely packed hall in order to listen to some famous pianist, or those evenings at some home when the family would all get out their instruments and play together.

III

A conversation I had with an American from Yale when I had been in Germany three months remains in my mind. We had both been impressed with three things regarding the religious situation. First, liberal theology is under a cloud; secondly, Protestantism is challenged by a growing Catholicism; thirdly, the whole religious attitude to life is increasingly called in question, and probably the gains of the Catholics are not great compared with the losses of the churches as a whole.

The religious life of Germany has changed much since before the war. The old distinction between Lutheran and Reformed has grown very dim; almost complete independence of state-control has been secured by the church (anything like the rejection of the proposed Prayer Book by Parliament would be impossible, I was repeatedly assured); attendance at services has in many places considerably increased; there are abundant signs of new life; and though there remains a gulf between the churches and the proletariat promising efforts to bridge it are being made. The progress of the Catholics during the last few years has been helped by the attitude of the Vatican during the War, by a very ably directed Catholic press, and by a much more effectively organised social work than that done by the Protestants. Yet the latter are alive to the need of more vigorous efforts. Next year is the four-hundredth anniversary of the meeting between Luther and Zwingli in the Schloss at Marburg. After 1529 the two streams of Reformation thought diverged more and more. There are to be celebrations aiming at emphasising the new unity between the different branches of the Protestant church.

The Lausanne Conference seems to have awakened greater interest in Germany than in England. In addition to the well-known ecclesiastical leaders, there were present outstanding thinkers like Deissmann, Martin Dibelius, Heiler, Hermelink, Titius, Wobbermin and Gogarten. They have returned full of

enthusiasm for thorough exploration and study of the diverse church traditions. Much interest is being shown in the Greek Orthodox Church. Independent groups are promoting closer fellowship between Catholics and Protestants, and there are also wider and freer non-ecclesiastical religious groups at work, some of them similar to the movements in which Baron von Hügel was interested. Rudolf Otto has been for some time endeavouring to lay the foundations of a league of religions, and it seems likely that the Pope had in mind this movement, rather than efforts at unity within the Christian Church, when he wrote in his Christmas Encyclical about "Panchristianism."

In England the challenge to religious experience offered by psychology excites much controversy. On the Continent the dominant theological problems are of a different character. Unless one goes to Vienna or Zurich one can find little interest in the psychology of religion. The theologians of Germany are chiefly busied with the writings of Karl Barth and his friends. Their influence is very much greater than that of Otto, though the latter is at present better known in this country. "Das Heilige" has run into many editions, and its phraseology is a commonplace of discussion. Otto has also interested himself in the improvement of public worship, by the use of new liturgies and times for silent prayer, and is one of the editors of a magazine giving suggestions to ministers for the conduct of services. In Marburg the University Church was recently redecorated, and an effort made better to express the numinous; above the simple communion table behind which the minister stands, rises a large silver-painted Cross, at the back of which tower the organ pipes, producing an impressive as well as attractive effect. All these things testify to what Otto has done. And there are other outstanding men in the German theological world, besides the internationally renowned specialists in the various fields of study. A thinker of great prestige is Karl Heim of Tübingen (which still has the largest theological faculty of any German University). His visit to the Jerusalem Missionary Conference will doubtless make him better known outside his own country. Much of his time has been spent in vigorous and able controversy with the Catholics, and he has proved himself the very successful apologist of a somewhat conservative Protestant theology. His work does not, however, excite the same interest as that of Barth.

To understand Barthianism, someone has said, one must know intimately the last hundred years of German philosophy and theology. In the preface to the second edition of his famous commentary on *Romans*, a book whose first issue in 1919 marked the beginning of the new movement, Barth admits that its effect

on immature minds may be unfortunate. Some of the narrower sects of Germany welcomed his message at first, thinking that "criticism" had seen its own folly and that a new ally of their particular kind of Fundamentalism had arisen. They are less certain to-day; many of them are even hostile. And with good reason, for whatever it is Barth is trying to say, it is certainly not a repetition of any pre-scientific kind of orthodoxy.

Barth and his friend Thurneysen—they work in such close accord that they issue joint volumes of sermons without any indication of their separate contributions—were pastors in Switzerland before the war, socialist in sympathy, and the organisers of much institutional work. The war seemed to shatter all their hopes. They saw war-credits being voted by their friends both in Berlin and Paris. Their whole conception of the Kingdom of God was challenged by what they saw happening in Europe. Thurneysen has told how they turned for comfort to a fresh study of the New Testament, and how out of that study came Barth's "Römerbrief," which is not so much a new commentary as the message of a new prophet. An immanent philosophy, the whole modern experiental approach to the problems of religion which goes back to Schleiermacher, a belief in human progress, the picture of Jesus and His teaching given us by liberal theology, all these are rejected, and there is proclaimed with overwhelming power the transcendence of God, and the gulf which separates Him in His terrible Holiness, Majesty and Might from man. "God is not man. Revelation and Salvation are not History. Eternity is not Time," so Barth's message has been summed up. He believes he has rediscovered the meaning of Paulinism, and of Christianity. What it means to be a Christian cannot be understood by the mysticism of Heiler, nor by Biblical criticism, however true and necessary on its own plane that may be, nor by the historical studies of Troeltsch. It can be understood only when man has attained "true creatureliness of feeling" (to borrow a phrase from von Hügel). Barth's is a theology of paradox and of crisis. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. v. 2).

This is not the place to attempt a critical estimate of Barthianism. The pastor has become a professor, first in Göttingen, and now in Münster. He is only forty-two years old. A school of thought has grown up around his writings, with contacts in many directions, and a special periodical, *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Among the contributors to the latter are Brunner, Gogarten and Bultmann. The last-named combines a most radical New Testament criticism with a Calvinistic theology similar to that of Barth. Support is found by the group in the

new Phenomenological school of philosophers connected with Hüsserl; inspiration is drawn from the writings of those intellectual, or perhaps better said, prophetic pessimists of a previous generation, Kierkegaard the Dane, and Dostoievsky the Russian. Much of the strength of the movement, however, comes from the fact that it was born in the pulpit, and is proclaimed as a gospel.

Barthianism is the product of post-war Germany. Out of men's despair has often come an apocalyptic faith. The somewhat contemptuous attitude adopted towards the theological work of the last century has been vigorously combated by veterans like Harnack and Jülicher and Budde. Some shrewd observers believe that in Germany the new movement has already passed the peak of its influence, which means perhaps that it may soon be expected to set foot in England and America.

IV

A word may be said in conclusion about the Baptists of Germany. They were extraordinarily kind and hospitable to me. A Baptist preacher near Berlin gave me some of my first lessons in German. The student-conference already alluded to was held in the Baptist holiday home in Thuringia, and to it came some twenty-five girls and fellows from universities all over Germany. It was genuinely thrilling to be there, for the students were almost all "rebels" against the older generation and its theological traditions, many of them loyal to the Baptist faith as they understand it, under very great difficulties, all of them rejoicing in a week when they could meet others of kindred temper, and discuss frankly without reserve or fear. In Marburg I was generously welcomed by the small Baptist group who meet each Sunday afternoon in a tiny hired room, led by one who used to be a preacher, but was dismissed because his views were too "modern," and who suffered great hardships before he secured his present appointment. After Christmas I attended a Young People's Conference in Stuttgart, and there met a daughter of Julius Köbner, who with Oncken and Lehmann formed the triumvirate which started the modern Baptist movement in Germany. In Tübingen I was with Baptist students, in Kassel I saw the printing and publishing houses, and one of the largest of the chapels. My last days in Germany were spent in the college in Hamburg where there are nearly sixty students training for work in Germany, in Holland and in S.E. Europe.

There are now some 60,000 Baptists in Germany. Increase in the last few years has been relatively slight. Sects like the New Apostolic Church are growing rapidly, but not the Baptists,

and it is recognised that these are critical years. The basis, tradition and outlook are far narrower than in England, so narrow indeed that comparatively few of us would be able to remain in the present Baptist organisation were we living in Germany. Frank speaking on this question is necessary, for every year many able and keen younger men and women are being lost to the Baptist cause in Germany, who might be retained were it made clear that our faith can be intelligently grounded, and our organisation made democratic, and that a cardinal Baptist principle has been intellectual and spiritual freedom. In our desire to unite the Baptists of the world into one fellowship, we have perhaps been in danger of tacitly approving much that is directly contrary to the best Baptist tradition. There is a fight for intellectual freedom going on within many of our continental churches, which may in the long run be even more important than the fight for political recognition in lands like Rumania. At any rate the younger and more progressive elements in Germany need our encouragement, and have much they can give us in return. Everywhere, indeed, among old and young, I found a strong desire for more interchange of ideas, and for closer personal ties. What Dr. Newton Marshall and Dr. Rushbrooke did as young men is still gratefully remembered, but now needs doing again on a larger scale.

Considerable interest is being shown in the Anabaptists, and much fresh material is coming to light. German Baptists are not so chary of owning relationship to Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Thomas Münzer, as the English and American Baptists have usually been. The Anabaptist movement may have much to teach not only us, but Protestantism generally, and it is possible that closer study of it may lead to a broadening of the modern Baptist movement on the Continent.

These years are critical because in them is being decided the whole future of Free Church life in Germany. Baptists, Methodists, and Congregationalists are all comparatively small bodies numerically, and are generally narrow in outlook. They are still looked upon, somewhat contemptuously, as sects, and in contact with them one cannot escape the feeling that they are " foreign " movements, not quite at home in the German religious tradition. Their appeal is limited to a much smaller social group than in England, their relations with the more apocalyptic and ecstatic sects are close and confused. Yet there is great need of Free Church witness along modern evangelical lines, and there is reason to believe that if it were conducted in gentlemanly fashion is would not arouse resentment in Lutheran and Reformed circles. There is, in educated quarters, widespread ignorance of our real

tenets, and within the larger religious bodies there are sections which seem to be groping to a position very similar to our own. As at present organised and directed, and with their present temper, there seems little likelihood of the Baptists rising to their opportunity. The more progressive forces seem in genuine danger of temporary defeat; that it is only temporary is certain, but it may make the present Baptist organisation impotent. We might do more than we are doing, as individuals, to foster contacts with those struggling for a wider conception of the gospel, and increasing knowledge, understanding, and co-operation along these lines would be abundantly worth while as a contribution to the solution of the bigger political and international issues in which Germany and England are concerned.

May, 1928.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

Mr. Payne has translated a valuable paper on the " Tasks of the Baptist Denomination in Germany," by Dr. Herbert Petrick, which will appear in the next issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*.