

THE GERMAN PARADOX

THE GERMAN PARADOX

A study of German political
and economic life, with special
consideration of the problem of
East Prussia

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WISHART & CO.

10 JOHN STREET · ADELPHI · LONDON W.C.2

1933

Printed in England at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & CO. LTD.
Colchester, London & Eton

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INTRODUCTION

THE English people cannot be too thankful for the good fortune which places them on an island within the general civilisation of Europe and yet separates their frontiers from those of other nations. France, Italy, Germany, Poland have all had to work out their destinies in a closer community, with sometimes conflicting interests, so that they have been forced almost inevitably to study one another, to help one another and to quarrel with one another by turns, while for England in the past it has been more easy to develop her own traditions undisturbed, within the security of the sea.

Nevertheless, the times in which we are living, with their new methods of transport and communication, by air and land and water, have altered the nature of Great Britain's isolation just as much as they have changed the conditions under which the nations of the European continent live together. English observers, whether political, financial or commercial, are now studying developments in Europe with closer attention than ever before. Europe itself is realising, especially since the beginnings of the present crisis, that economic collaboration is of greater importance, if it can be achieved, than political individualism at

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the expense of other nations ; and this new conception is finding expression in a mass of literature upon the economic policies of England, Russia and Italy in particular. Quite apart from these expositions of economic theory, or criticisms of them, a practical attempt has been made to introduce a regime of economic collaboration in the Danubian States, with the assistance of the whole of Europe.

By a curious contrast, however, very little examination has been made into the present economic policies of Germany, a country of continental character with interests inalienable from those of the many countries which surround it ; and it is with an idea of supplying that deficiency to some degree that I present the following study to English readers. An explanation should first of all be made of the circumstances under which it came to be written. My original intention was to prepare a short sketch of the dynamics of German post-war development, based upon the excellent statistical and economic works of German scholars. But with every attempt to synthetise that development as something unified and progressive I found myself faced only by divergent arguments and irreconcilable traditions. My work is, therefore, a statement

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of the paradoxes which I had to recognise, for there has been in Germany since the war a growing separation between the natural economic development of the people and the official economic policies of the Government of the Reich.

The prosperity and solvency of Germany are primarily based on the export of manufactured goods, which was, until quite recently, always on the increase ; yet through all the changing administrations at Berlin one policy has been followed of high agrarian tariffs and high prices for food, so that the vital forces of industry are being impaired. This agrarian policy of the Reich is directed against the agricultural countries of Eastern and Central Europe, although they are more valuable customers for German industry than the countries overseas. Successive governments have preached an official gospel of the *Drang nach Osten*—the eastward expansion of Germany—despite the fact that for fifty years past, and still to-day, the movement of population is away from the east of Germany into the central and western provinces of the Reich. At the present moment the eastern provinces of Germany are underpopulated, yet it is exactly upon a pressure of population to the east that German politicians base their claims for the

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annexation of racially alien territories. Here is a paradox in itself, when a nation is given a political direction clean contrary to the direction of its natural economic development, and particularly in the case of a nation which should be, with its decisive civilisation and culture, possessed of self-knowledge above all others.

My investigations, then, have led me by all roads to Germany's eastern provinces, and especially to East Prussia, for they are the key to the whole divergence between political and economic interests, between industrial and agricultural policies in the Reich. Moreover, I hope that my investigations will be of value to others besides Germans and Poles, for many of the discussions in post-war Europe have centred upon that Baltic coast and eastern plain which contain not only the German provinces of Pomerania and East Prussia but also the Polish provinces of Poznanian and Pomorze, the great trade routes from West to East, into Russia, the great waterway of the Vistula from South to North, into the Baltic, the Free City of Danzig, and the new Polish port at Gdynia.

This territory, which embraces Poland's only access to the sea, her main artery of foreign trade and her only seaport, is of vital interest to the Polish people, for whom these pages

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were originally written. It is more important for them than for English readers to have exact knowledge of developments in modern Germany, but the recent difficulties of Germany have focussed the attention of the world upon her, and London is now equally concerned with Paris, Rome or Warsaw to understand the causes and the remedies for the general economic plight of Europe, which depends in large measure upon conditions within the Reich. So it only remains to explain how it is that a Pole can be well fitted to describe without obvious ignorance or undue bias the economic processes of modern Germany.

Everybody knows that Germany and Poland have not yet established the normal economic and political relations of neighbouring States. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the Poles possess, above all other peoples in Europe, a thorough knowledge of the German mind, gained under circumstances which even the Dutch, for instance, or the Swiss have never experienced. For a thousand years Germans and Poles have met not only on battlefields but also at conference tables, in their home circles, at markets, in shops and offices, in schools and churches. They have lived together and worked together. After the Mongol invasions, Polish kings and princes

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called into their country German knights, burghers and peasants, who built up the towns and inhabited the ruined villages. These settlers, whose descendants became excellent citizens of the Polish State, were only one of the waves of German immigration absorbed by Poland, so that to-day many of the most patriotic Poles bear German names, just as there are in Germany many patriotic Prussians with Polish names.

Another great historical process began when Conrad, Duke of Masovia, inadvisedly summoned the Knights of the Teutonic Order to a Crusade beyond the Vistula. The Teutonic Order, having exterminated the Prussian tribes, survived the defeat of Tannenberg in 1410, and the Treaty of Torun in 1466, to become transformed after the Reformation into the Prussian Monarchy, which brought about the dismemberment of Poland. For a century and a half the German division of Poland had then to deal with colonisation on a large scale, which was supported by all the power of the Prussian State and by exceptional legislation. The struggle was for every acre of the soil and for the soul of the people. While it lasted, Poles had to share the life of Germans in field and factory, in the army, in the departments of the State, and they acquired then an insight

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into the German mind hardly possible under other circumstances.

That struggle is over. The Poles, at least, have no desire to embark on it again. After a century and a half of Prussian domination in the provinces of Pomorze and Poznania, after five hundred years of German overlordship in Silesia, they have emerged victorious when there seemed no hope left, stronger in numbers and in full possession of a distinct national character. But they have acquired as well a spirit of equanimity, with a knowledge of the virtues and the defects of the great German race, which enables them to discuss, without rancour, not only the present relations between Germany and Poland but also the inner processes of Germany's political and economic life at the present day.

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Printed in England at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
SPOTTISWOODE BALLANTYNE & CO LTD
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