

NATURAL SELECTION AND GERMAN-AMERICANS

By A. E. ZUCKER

A generation ago the German-Americans were the object of considerable suspicion in this country, and signs point to the possibility that sooner or later much of the history of 1914-1918 may repeat itself. Before excited emotions come into play again, it might be well to attempt an appraisal of this group as a whole, on the basis of objective testimony.

As such a source of calm weighing of evidence I should like to employ a twenty-volume reference work found in every library, the *Dictionary of American Biography*, begun in 1924 and completed in 1937. It was compiled under the direction of our most distinguished professors of American history, aided by a staff working in the Library of Congress who checked every statement of the 2,243 contributors against the evidence of the records. The editors-in-chief were first Professor Allen Johnson of Yale, and after his death Professor Dumas Malone, then in the faculty of the University of Virginia, now of Harvard. They essayed their task "striving to the utmost for impartial and objective treatment." Regarding the purpose of the *Dictionary of American Biography*, they express the hope that it will "contribute to a better understanding of the chief actors on the stage of American history."

The scholars in the field of American history have included among the number of the great in this country 361 men and women born in Germany. They list about twice that number who were born in England, as one would expect, but aside from this, no other country contributed as many as did Germany (not including Austria or territory lost by the treaty of Versailles). Next comes Ireland with 327, then Scotland with 212. France (including Alsace) follows with 162,

while Russia contributed 42, Italy 37, Austria 34, and so on. The 361 Germans are immigrants—I am not counting German-Americans of the second or later generations, whose number would, of course, be very much greater. I should naturally not for a moment want to claim too much for the German-Americans; among the 70 odd who because of their importance are dealt with in longer articles there is not one who was born in Germany. In fact, almost all of these are native-born—only three out of the 70 were born in England: the inventor John Latrobe, the author John Paine, and the preacher George Whitefield. Obviously the adjustments an immigrant must make are a severe handicap in his path to greatness—particularly if he is required to adopt another language.

One common characteristic that stands out very clearly as one reads the lives of these men who left Germany to settle in the United States is love for freedom. They were the independent type who refused to submit to tyranny, who objected to regimentation, and who placed above all else liberty—be it in civil, religious, or academic affairs. Very appropriately, by direct hereditary transmission, the German-Americans have come by their qualities of wishing to lead their lives after their own fashion, and of opposing very firmly any form of interference with their rights as free, untrammeled human beings. The words of the liberty-loving poet Schiller have ever found an echo in German souls, especially among the revolutionaries of 1848, who were ready to die—as indeed many did—for "Gedankenfreiheit" and "Menschenwürde" (freedom of thought and human dignity). For the last two hundred and fifty years, as I shall

show by numerous examples, America has been attracting the Germans who love liberty, whereas Germany, by the same natural selection, has been losing this type of citizen for these many generations.

The first German settlers came to this country, just as did the English, in search of freedom of worship. Thus in 1683 Francis Daniel Pastorius brought a group of German Quakers, for whom conditions in Germany were not to their liking, over to William Penn's colony, where they founded Germantown. His group in 1688 sent out a protest against the keeping of slaves—the first protest of this kind ever to be made in an English colony.

Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf, a wealthy Saxon landowner, devoted his life to the purpose of securing for fellow members in the Moravian Church the opportunity of worshiping God as their consciences dictated. For that purpose he came to this country in 1741 and aided in establishing Moravian settlements in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as well as in many other localities. Zinzendorf, much like William Penn, was a man of position and wealth who devoted his life to the freedom of his co-religionists.

The first major victory for the freedom of the press in this country was won by a German, John Peter Zenger, more than two centuries ago, in 1735. The issue was whether or not an anti-administration paper could criticize the party in power in New York. For the right to print in his paper what he chose, Zenger suffered ten months of imprisonment, until a jury finally vindicated him. Zenger, by the way, is one of the heroes of a contemporary Baltimore journalist of German descent, who has shown that he is equally ready to fight for the freedom of the Press, Mr. Henry L. Mencken.

Another prominent German-American printer was John Henry Miller, publisher of a newspaper in Philadelphia. When in 1765 the stamp act

became operative he announced that he would suspend his newspaper "until it would appear means can be found to escape the chains forged for the people and from unbearable slavery." He was the first to announce to the world the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. When the British occupied Philadelphia in 1777 they suspended his paper and seized his press.

There is little need for me to mention the work done for the sake of American independence by Baron von Steuben, whose statue stands in the park opposite the White House in Washington. Nor that of Baron DeKalb, one of the bravest soldiers in the Revolutionary War. Let me, however, give the account of the last days of this son of Bavarian peasants, as the *Dictionary of American Biography* describes it: "On April 3, 1780, he was ordered to the relief of Charleston, S. C., then besieged by the British. Lack of men and supplies retarded his advance. At Deep River, N. C., he was joined by General Gates, recently appointed to command in the South, who, despite DeKalb's advice, rashly determined to march to Camden to attack the British. Near Saunders Creek they suddenly encountered the army of Lord Cornwallis. The first attack of the British scattered the Virginia and North Carolina militia, who, with Gates, fled. DeKalb, in command of the right wing, three times charged the enemy. In hand-to-hand fighting the issue of the battle was long in doubt. When the American position became hopeless, DeKalb, sword in hand, again led his few men to the attack. Mortally wounded and bleeding from eleven wounds, he fell, and his surviving soldiers retreated. Three days later, on August 19, he died at Camden." Very fittingly a monument was erected in Annapolis to the memory of this soldier in the War of Independence.

Many other Germans took part in the Revolutionary War. I shall not discuss here Nicholas Herkimer and

his fight at Oriskany, nor Pastor Peter Muhlenberg, member of the House of Burgesses in Virginia, who preached his farewell sermon in January, 1776, on the text: "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under Heaven," and at the close of the service cast off his clerical gown, revealing beneath the uniform of a militia officer. These and many other fighters in the cause were German-Americans, born in this country. However, the story of one German immigrant from a humbler walk of life deserves, because it is so characteristic, to be told more fully than the brief reference I can make to it: the Philadelphia baker Christopher Ludwick. "Frugal as well as industrious, at the time of the Revolution he was the possessor of nine houses, a farm in Germantown, and 3,500 pounds of Pennsylvania currency at interest. He actively supported the war, on one occasion subscribing 300 pounds for firearms, and in the summer of 1776 volunteering in the flying camp and refusing to draw either pay or rations. Upon his request Congress gave him permission to visit the Hessian camp on Staten Island, disguised as a deserter. Once among the mercenaries, he reminded them that they were slaves, invited them to follow him to Philadelphia, where they could live in comfort and freedom. Hundreds of desertions followed, and the deserters were placed in Ludwick's charge by Congress, which voted him money for the purpose. His loyalty, integrity, and business ability were so highly regarded that on May 3, 1777, Congress, by a resolution, appointed him superintendent of bakers and director of baking in the Continental Army. He was everywhere known in the army and was permitted almost as much freedom as the Commander-in-Chief himself. Washington was very fond of him, addressed him as 'old gentleman,' and called him 'my honest friend.' He was frequently in private conference with Washington and often dined with him when large companies were present. He was

always referred to as the Baker General, and familiarly called 'General,' although his title was superintendent. . . . When the war ended, Ludwick returned to find that his home in Germantown had been plundered by the British, and that he had scarcely any ready cash; but he would neither borrow money nor buy on credit. In 1785 Washington wrote what might be called a certificate of character for him, attesting his patriotism and other virtues."

Another great lover of freedom, eager to act in its cause, was a former Goettingen student, Justus Erich Bollmann. After Lafayette had aided in the fight for American independence he returned to France, and, true to his ideals, favored the Revolution in France, but opposed Jacobin excesses, whereupon the Assembly in 1791 declared him a traitor. He had to flee, but was imprisoned by the Austrians as one of the prime movers of the Revolution. Bollmann, feeling it a disgraceful thing that so fine a man should languish in jail, went to Austria and aided Lafayette to escape from the prison at Olmütz. Unfortunately Lafayette was recaptured, and Bollmann himself jailed for a while—but such was the type of German who was attracted by American ideals to come to this country, where he was enthusiastically welcomed, particularly by Thomas Jefferson.

The first professor of German literature at Harvard was Charles Follen, a life-long fighter for freedom. As a student at the University of Giessen, not yet seventeen years of age, he joined a company of volunteers in 1813 at the rising of the German people against Napoleon, and served throughout the campaign on French soil. On his return from the war he took an active part in the student movement for a freer Germany than the Metternich regime with all its restrictions of freedom of the press, of assembly, of teaching, and so forth, would permit. Consequently he had to flee, and sailed for America in 1824. He was a most successful teacher at

Harvard, but the University dropped him because Follen openly espoused the cause of freedom for the negro slaves—twenty years ahead of his time. He continued to work in the Abolitionist cause until his untimely death at the age of forty-five (1841).

The scholar who is sometimes called the "father of political science," Francis Lieber, was another typical fighter for freedom. At the age of fifteen he enlisted to fight with Blücher against Napoleon, and in 1822 he went as a volunteer to help the Greeks in their war of independence. In 1824 he was arrested in Germany as a dangerous liberal and imprisoned for half a year. Life was impossible for him in Germany, and therefore he set out for the United States, landing in Boston in 1827. As professor in Columbia University he became a scholar of great influence and fame—one of the first in a long line of Germans who helped to build up our institutions of learning.

A leading economist of the nineteenth century was Georg Friedrich List, one more liberal who was driven out of Germany by the repression of the Metternich regime. He landed in New York in 1825, and was invited by his lifelong friend Lafayette to accompany him on the triumphal tour which the great Frenchman was then making through the Eastern states. List soon became a most potent force in the economic thinking of this country.

When the Revolution of 1848, initiated by many fine idealists, failed and was put down with iron force, hundreds of freedom-loving men from numerous professions came to the United States. In this country they continued to follow their ideals, which fitted in very closely with American traditions. Hence many of them were willing and eager to take their part in the Civil War to win freedom for the slaves. One of these Forty-Eighters who died in Baltimore in 1851 at the age of only 31, and who like most of his generation was an enthusiastic *Turner*—Carl Heinrich Schnauffer—

expressed the ideals of this group in one of his most famous poems:

Denn wo man Joch und Ketten bricht,
Ist mitzukämpfen Turnerpflicht.

(It is the duty of the *Turner*
To assist in every fight for freedom)

This ideal was realized by General Franz Sigel, who saved Missouri for the Union side, and who is commemorated by a statue on Riverside Drive in New York. Friedrich Hecker led an Illinois regiment. The poet Konrad Krez was colonel of a Wisconsin regiment. Peter J. Osterhaus rose to the post of general, and was one of the most effective soldiers in the war, and August V. Kautz became a brigadier-general. Carl Schurz was in the field as a soldier. Julius Ochs, father of the late Adolph Ochs, owner of the *New York Times*, organized and commanded a company of Cincinnati citizens. Frederick Phisterer became nationally famous when he volunteered to carry a message at Stone's River on December 31, 1861. The historian Gustav Struve enlisted as a private at the age of 61. This list could be continued extensively, but these typical examples will suffice to show the patriotism of the immigrants from Germany for their adopted country. Not only in the field did they distinguish themselves—Gustav Körner of Illinois, a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln, was sent as minister to Spain; his chief task in this position was to counteract British and French attempts to bring about a joint recognition of the Confederacy, a task in which Körner succeeded remarkably well.

The famous cartoonist Thomas Nast came to this country at the age of six, after his father had been forced to leave Germany as a political exile. In the work of this artist, the fight for freedom appears continuously. Some of his earliest published drawings depict the funeral of John Brown and the fighting of Garibaldi in Italy. Among his most famous works are "Emancipation" and "On to Rich-

mond," aimed at giving vigorous support to the Union cause. Lincoln declared at the end of the war: "Thomas Nast has been our best recruiting sergeant." To quote from the *Dictionary* article by Professor Allen Nevins: "Ablest of all were the fierce attacks he maintained in the years 1868-72 upon the 'Tweed Ring,' to the overthrow of which he contributed as much as any single man. Caricature has seldom if ever been more impressive than in his drawings, 'The Tammany Tiger Let Loose' (Nov. 11, 1871), 'Who Stole the People's Money' (August 19, 1871), and 'A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to Blow Over' (Sept. 23, 1871). His final triumph was the apprehension of Tweed in Spain through a cartoon which made him recognizable even in that country." It was Nast who gave us the symbols of the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant. Theodore Roosevelt recognized his patriotism by appointing him American consul at Guayaquil, Ecuador, in 1902.

With their background of political agitation, it is surprising that so few of the German immigrants continued in this activity here. There are some, to be sure, such as Friedrich A. Sorge (immigrated in 1852) who is described as "socialist and labor leader" or Johann Joseph Most (immigrated in 1882) who is listed as "anarchist." The vast majority fitted into our political system exceedingly well. A number of them became governors, and the statesmanlike activity of Carl Schurz as senator and secretary if the interior is too well known to need mention. I shall, by way of summary, enumerate the fields in which the 361 German immigrants won their names as great Americans. There were 92 clergymen of numerous confessions—if their number seems a bit out of proportion it should be recalled that many of them were leaders of groups of settlers who helped in the colonizing of the original thirteen states and were particularly prominent in the winning of the West,

they would, in many cases, fall in the classification of pioneers. Of professional men there are 75—among them a famous Marylander, the inventor of the linotype, Ottmar Mergenthaler; the builder of the Brooklyn Bridge, John A. Roebling; the general practitioner in St. Louis whose discoveries anteceded the great Koch, Dr. Emil Noeggerath; the famous law-student and solicitor general during the Taft administration, Friedrich W. Lehmann; and numerous metallurgists, chemists, horticulturists, and foresters. Among the 43 business men we begin with the first John Jacob Astor, and then meet with the three Steinways, piano manufacturers, Gustav Schirmer, the music publisher, and Joseph Zentmayer, manufacturer of scientific instruments. There are 43 musicians, many like Thomas, famous conductors of orchestras, and 16 artists, among them Emanuel Leutze, who painted "Washington Crossing the Delaware." Among the 35 scholars not the least known is the great physicist Albert A. Michelson.

The liberal exiles of 1848 were not only good soldiers, but they distinguished themselves also in many professions and businesses in this country. The German immigrant as a good citizen is not a subject within the scope of this article; I am stressing the fact that the freedom-loving man tended to quit Germany for this "land of the free." This is true in every profession; the great electrical engineer Steinmetz was also a great liberal. The railway financier Henry Villard was likewise the founder of *The Nation*—one more exile of '48. In the field of theology too the conformist remained, and the man of independent, but not necessarily radical mind, emigrated; to illustrate: an "anachronistic"—as the *Dictionary* puts it—Lutheran theologian, Karl Georg Stöckhart of St. Louis, had in 1876 quit the German state church in "a blaze of polemics" and had come to this country. The sculptress Elizabeth Ney in 1872 left Germany to find freedom from convention—she was

quite regularly married to and living with her husband, but she did not wish to acknowledge the fetters of matrimony! Perhaps the most absolute non-conformist was Christian Priber, who in 1734 came to South Carolina to live among the "noble savages"—the only profession listed for this immigrant is that of "Utopian!" It is very striking how large a number of these immigrants left because conditions in Germany were not to their liking, or even because they had to flee for their lives. Thus since the seventeenth century until down to our very day the Germans of independent mind came to the United States, while the conformists stayed at home breeding, no doubt, further generations willing to vote "Ja"; ninety-nine percent—but hats off to

the brave one percent! Even in the eighties and nineties, thousands of young Germans of anti-militaristic turn of mind emigrated to avoid the compulsory military service of two or three years, which represented in their opinion, so much time wasted or worse. Yet it was a German-born congressman, Julius Kahn of California, who as chairman of the committee on military affairs, won distinction by putting through the selective draft act of 1917.

All of this would seem to show, if there is anything in selection and heredity, that, just as Americans differ from the British, so, allowing for due exceptions on either side, the German-Americans are quite unlike the Germans.

GOETHE:

Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,
Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.

All that you have, bequeathed you by your father,
Earn it in order to possess it.

(Translation by G. M. Priest.)