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WHO ARE THE GERMANS?

By S. K. Padover

THE Aryan myth is not an invention of the Nazis. These neo-Teutons merely exploited a widely-held German belief which dates back to the nineteenth century, when it was developed by the Frenchman Gobineau and later elaborated by the Englishman Chamberlain. Prussia and her sympathizers, then struggling to weld the innumerable German "states" into a nation, found in the doctrine of Aryan, or Nordic, superiority a powerful political weapon. Heine proved himself a tragic prophet when he said: "In a certain tavern in Göttingen I had the opportunity of admiring the precision with which my friends 'the ancient Teutons' prepared the lists of those who would be proscribed by them as soon as they arrived in power. Anyone who was descended, even seven generations back, from a Frenchman, a Jew, or a Slav was to be condemned to exile."

There was a profound psychological reason for the spread of the Aryan race-myth in Germany. Fifteen hundred years of German history had left unhappy memories in the minds of the people who, by the end of the Middle Ages, were split into some two hundred separate principalities with their "particularist" loyalties. As Thomas Mann has pointed out, there seems to be something anarchic in the German character which drives it to extremes. The inability to form a united state, as did France and England and even Russia, gave the Germans a sense of national inferiority. Only against their historical background can their fanatical acceptance of the idea of Aryan superiority be understood. For Aryan — a purely philological term — soon was applied to race and became identified with German. Here at last the Teutonic people, smarting under political and social humiliation, found a secular religion which gave them psychic satisfaction. The French and the English dominated land and sea, but the Germans were the chosen race. All contributions to culture, in all ages and in all civilizations, so said the preachers of the Aryan cult, came from a select group "blessed with Nordic blood." And the Germans were "it."

That there is no such thing as an Aryan race, and that the Germans are neither Aryan nor Nordic nor a race, never troubled the politicians and the chauvinists. The German scientist Virchow

called the theory of an Aryan race "pure fiction." Reinach dubbed it "prehistoric romance." And Max Müller, the German scholar who was responsible for the philological word "Aryan," bluntly rejected the distortion of his concept. "To me," he wrote, "an ethnologist who speaks of an Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar. It is worse than a Babylonian confusion of tongues — it is downright theft. . . . If I say Aryan, I mean neither blood, nor bones, nor hair, nor skull. I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language."

But who, after all, are the Germans?

"Now from this island of Scandza [Scandinavia]," Jordanes, the oldest historian of the Goths, tells us, "as from a hive of races or a womb of nations, the Goths are said to have come forth long ago." Myth or fact, we have no means of determining this, or any other, racial origin. What we do know is that in the early Christian centuries the Germans, driven by famine, began migrating southward into the Roman Empire, spreading throughout Europe, settling here, fighting there, being enslaved elsewhere.

The migration of the Germans took the form of a fan, whose feeding source was in the north and its two extreme points reaching to Spain in the west and the Dnieper in the east. In this way they "inundated" Europe and part of Asia. Everywhere they commingled with and finally disappeared in the local population. The third-century Roman emperor Probus is remembered as the ruler who "Germanized the Roman provinces." He settled Vandals in Britain, Alemanni in Alsace, Goths in Moesia, Franks in Anjou and even in Pontus on the Black Sea. "For us," Probus's biographer boasts, "the barbarians labor, for us they sow."

The northern barbarians — and they came in such hordes that the Lombard historian Paul the Deacon thought the word "Germany" derived from the Latin *germinare*: to germinate — did not break through the Roman defenses until pressed by the Huns under Attila who crashed into the Roman Empire from the heart of Asia. Some bewildered Romans seem to have confused the Huns with the Germans. As a matter of fact, between the eastern nomads and the northern barbarians there was no racial kinship. What the two invaders had in common was an almost equal innocence of civilization and a yearning for the same booty. No wonder, therefore, that German tribes, especially the Thurin-

gians, joined in Attila's savage raids. The nomads finally occupied the Danube valley and left their racial imprint on what is now Rumania, Hungary, and southern Germany.

The second great admixture of races in Germany was the Slavic, whose origins lie in the field of myth and speculation. It would seem that, known as Sarmatians, these people in the time of Herodotus had their home in the Caucasus. They reversed the German process of migration and spread northward. Whatever their "race," the Slavs, who split into many tribes and went by various names, were neither "pure" nor "Nordic." By the second Christian century Slavic tribes had penetrated the Vistula and reached the Elbe. After the great German migration of the fifth century, the Slavs — Wends, Plaben, Lechs — broke through the Elbe line and overflowed the vacated lands as far west as Kiel and as far south as Trieste. Only a strip of land between the Rhine and the Saale was held by the twenty-three remaining German tribes, numbering no more than 1,000,000 people, if that much. Even this "corridor," however, was infiltrated by Slavs.

The Slavs thus probably occupied about two-thirds of the geographic area now known as Germany and made it their home. They held these lands for five hundred, and in some cases, for over a thousand years. The German *Drang nach Osten* — the "reconquest" of the eastern lands — did not begin until the ninth century, at first with small success. For after the year 1000 Boleslav the Brave built a great Polish state and effectively blocked the German thrust to the east. Not until the middle of the twelfth century did German nobles succeed in seizing some north-central lands from the Slavs. In 1140 Count Adolf von Holstein conquered the east coast of Holstein and sent out appeals to west Germany "to the end that all those who had sore need of land should go thither with their household to receive gifts of wide and fruitful soil, abounding in fish and meat and the sweetness of fat pastures." Other German nobles, and even Polish ones who had become Christian — Albert the Bear of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Magdeburg, the Margrave of Meissen — followed the example of Count Adolph and initiated a religious crusade against the Slavs under the slogan: "He who will not be baptized shall die." Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Saxony, Silesia were conquered politically. But the new German settlers did not oust the Slavs, numerically preponderant in most of those regions. The two "races" simply fused or, as German historians state it,

“the Slavs were absorbed.” Eugenically there is nothing to choose between absorption and fusion.

The third large dose of “foreign” blood was infused into Germany in the seventeenth century. Already, as we have seen, Germany was largely Slav in the center and in the east, and partially Hun in the south, not to mention the Rhenish district which was Romanized. Now two great events further served to dilute the “pure” German blood: the Thirty Years’ War, and Brandenburg’s expansion and colonization.

The Thirty Years’ War, fought for politico-dynastic reasons but in the name of religion, left Germany wrecked. One need not detail the horror, the brutality, the conflagrations, the deadly epidemics of that utterly inhuman and senseless conflict. Friend and foe, Swedes and Austrians, Germans and French, Danes and Tatars, Cossacks and Hungarians, Catholics and Protestants, all marched up and down the stricken land, ravaging and burning, raping and killing. One million people were annihilated in Saxony within two years; out of three million Bohemians only some seven hundred thousand remained after the war; Württemberg lost three hundred and fifty thousand out of a total of four hundred thousand people. In thousands of villages ninety-eight percent of the population disappeared; nine-tenths of the cattle was destroyed; three-fourths of the soil was laid waste. “Friend and enemy,” the municipal council of Berlin complained, “have made the land a desert. . . . The fields of the peasants are abandoned. All industry is prostrate. Towns and villages are in ruins; for miles and miles one will find neither people nor cattle, not a dog or a cat.”

The loss in population was the greatest disaster to Germany. When the war broke out in 1618, Germany had had some 16,000,000 people; when the conflict ended in 1648, only 4,000,000 were left. There was a fear that the nation would become extinct. The local diet of Nuremberg proposed that the clergy marry and that each man take two wives. That Germany ever recovered from this loss of three-fourths of her productive population is miraculous.

From the racial point of view, it is important to keep in mind that the Thirty Years’ War was most damaging to those areas where the population was more Teutonic than Slav. For the Slavic northern and eastern lands — Brandenburg, Pomerania, and Prussia — suffered comparatively less than the rest of the

Reich. In the Hohenzollern territories of Brandenburg only a little over half the population was destroyed, whereas the percentage of mortality in the rest of Germany was three-fourths. Berlin may be taken as a typical example; in 1619 it had 12,000 people, and in 1654 only 6,000. The Duchy of Prussia, a Polish land which became the backbone of the Hohenzollern monarchy, was farthest removed from the scenes of conflict and had fewer losses in population than the other Germanic states.

The student of population must not neglect another aspect of the war, namely bastardy. The belligerents, especially the Holy Roman Emperor, unloosed upon Germany a horde of Cossacks and Tatars who both killed and raped. In violence, as perpetrated against women, there was nothing to choose between the European and the Asiatic soldiery. Both, to use a brutal phrase, imposed their paternity upon a reluctant people.

The disintegration of Germany had far-reaching effects upon the national character and institutions. Even the German language became corrupted. At least 2,000 French words found their way into German speech, not to mention Franco-Latin structure and suffixes which completely transformed the German tongue. The great Goethe, as late as the eighteenth century, still used hundreds of non-German words. One cannot read the German of the time without a sound knowledge of French.¹ "I believe," a seventeenth century German writer satirized his contemporaries, "that if one opened the heart of a *Deutschling* and looked into it, one would find there $\frac{5}{8}$ French, $\frac{1}{8}$ Spanish, $\frac{1}{8}$ Italian, and hardly $\frac{1}{8}$ German." Indeed no German scholar, except occasionally Leibniz, used his mother tongue. Latin was the language of science and scholarship, and even politics; French was the language of society.

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) destroyed the last thread of German unity by Balkanizing the Reich. The peace settlement created some two thousand separate Germanies, of which three hundred were sovereign states, each with its own court, administration, flag, army, and loyalties. Some of these sovereign prince-

¹ A typical and amusing example of seventeenth century German is the following lyric (the French words are in italics):

Reverirte Dame,
Phoenix meiner *ame*,
gebt mir *audiencz*.
Eure Gunst *meriten*
machen zu *falliten*
meine *patienz*.

Ihr seid sehr *capable*,
ich bin *préalable*,
in der *eloquenz*,
aber mein *serviren*
pflegt zu *dependiren*
von der *influenz*.

lings ruled two square leagues of territory; others were the autocrats of a few hundred acres of land. Out of this welter of "states" and races Bismarck was to attempt to create a nation; and it was then that the myth of Nordic-German superiority was found to be so useful in restoring the people's self-respect.

The makers of the peace of Westphalia — French, Swedes, and Austrians — further helped to de-Teutonize the Reich by granting eastern Pomerania to the Elector of Brandenburg. Pomerania, supposedly the cradle of the typically Teutonic Prussian Junkers, was, as far back as the ninth century, an entirely Slavic land. Its name, deriving from the Polish word *Pomorze*, meaning "beyond the sea," shows its Slavic origin.

Frederick William, known as the Great Elector of Brandenburg and the real founder of the Prussian monarchy, had no nationalist or racial bias. Having acquired Polish Pomerania, he yearned for more Polish territory. He held the Duchy of Prussia in fief from the Polish crown, for which he paid an annual tribute of 120,000 florins. Two decades after he came to the throne, during the Swedish-Polish war, Frederick William had so unscrupulously manœuvred his position that the hard-pressed King of Poland was compelled to cede Prussia to the Hohenzollerns in perpetuity (1660). Prussia became not only the basis of the Hohenzollern monarchy but also gave that ruling family its royal title.

Neither Prussia nor Pomerania was German land. The Teutonic Order had conquered the Baltic provinces in the Middle Ages (and lost them again in the fifteenth century), but it was only a political conquest; the mass of the population in the towns and villages remained Polish. The ruling class had been Germanic, or Germanized, during the reign of the Order, but Polonized soon after those territories reverted to Poland. In any case it made no difference to the Polish peasants in Prussia whether their overlords were German or Polish; they, the masses, toiled on the land with a total disregard for racial theories.

The German nobles in Prussia had long intermarried with the Polish aristocracy, and many adopted Polish names. Thus von Mortangen became Morteski, Krockow changed to Krokowski, von Konopath was metamorphosed into Konopacki, von Prebendow turned into Przebendowski. In the Prussian diet of 1572 all the deputies, except the voyevoda of Marienburg, spoke Polish and listened to the royal instructions in that tongue. Twenty

years later the voyevoda of Marienburg resigned his presidency of the Senate to a colleague who was more efficient in Polish, "which language," he said, "is now commonly in use." Only some northern towns of Prussia — Marienburg, Elbing, Königsberg — retained their German speech; but they were isolated islands in a Polish sea.

The Great Elector, like the other German princes, was in the pay of France, although not always faithful to his paymaster. In fourteen years, from 1674 to 1688, he received 3,000,000 gulden in the form of subsidies, mainly from Louis XIV; all his ministers were likewise in the pay of the Sun King. Thus when Louis XIV, in 1662, robbed Germany of Lorraine, Frederick William, far from being indignant, received the news with "much courtesy." "He," the French Ambassador in Berlin reported to Louis XIV, "congratulates the king upon it." But Frederick William did more than pocket French gold; he also invited Frenchmen to settle in his depopulated dominions. When in 1685 Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes which had guaranteed religious toleration to French Huguenots, the Great Elector of Brandenburg wisely appealed to the persecuted French Protestants to make their home in his territories. He granted the émigrés every facility for settlement. The Huguenots, comprising some of the ablest and most industrious French citizens, came to Brandenburg twenty thousand strong and finally merged in the German population. To them Germany, especially the Prussian monarchy, owed much of its industry, its horticulture, its skilled crafts, its prosperity.

Three-quarters of a century later Frederick the Great, who in respect to colonization followed his great-grandfather's example, paid these Frenchmen his honest tribute. "The industry of the French," Frederick wrote, "has enriched us with all these manufactures; they established factories of linen, serge, bunting, drugget, grey gown, crêpe, beaver hats, beaver and hare skins, and the dyeing of all these stuffs. Some of them became merchants and retailed the goods of the others. They gave to Berlin goldsmiths, jewellers, clock-makers, and sculptors. Those who settled in the country cultivated tobacco and raised in these sandy regions excellent fruit and vegetables."

When the Great Elector died in 1688 his territories and population had increased by one-third. He had added 13,000 square miles to the original 35,000, and 300,000 people to the 900,000

which he had inherited. The new lands were all Polish, and the new population was Polish and French.

Frederick the Great, the much-invoked hero of the neo-Teutons, was the ruler of an essentially Slavic kingdom and he was neither a racist nor a "Nordic." Like his ancestors, he had a desire for more Polish territory and a love for "foreign" colonists. It is notorious that he disliked everything German, including the language. Prussians, in his opinion, were good only for cannon fodder. But unlike other German rulers who were in the habit of selling their subjects as mercenaries to foreign potentates, the Prussian king never sold his. On the contrary, he increased his population by conquest, colonization, and plain robbery. And the newly acquired subjects were non-Nordic.

In 1741 Frederick, as is well known, seized the province of Silesia from Maria Theresa. This Catholic land, Germanized under the Hapsburgs, embraced an area of 600 square miles and contained 1,200,000 inhabitants. Like the other eastern territories, Silesia was originally Polish, and a portion of it has since reverted to that country. The Hohenzollern crown now possessed a good-sized Polish kingdom: Pomerania, East Prussia, Silesia. But West Prussia, Ermeland, Danzig, and the contiguous lands — the present-day Polish "Corridor" in part — were still under the control of the Warsaw government. For strategic and commercial reasons, Frederick schemed to wrest these provinces from the Poles. For these lands would not only "round out" the scattered Hohenzollern possessions, but would also give Prussia control over the Vistula River all the way to Danzig, and thereby strangle Polish commerce. "We will become," Frederick said frankly, "the master of all Polish products and all imports, which are considerable."

With the aid of Catharine II ("the Great") of Russia, Frederick consummated his project. In 1771 he and the Tsarina concluded a treaty whereby each was to take a specified slice of Polish territory; in the following year Austria reluctantly acceded to this international hold-up. So eager was the Prussian king to lay hands on the coveted Polish lands that even before he signed the treaty — the so-called First Partition of Poland — he sent dragoons into the peaceful province, quartered them upon the Polish folk, taxed them, and confiscated provisions. More than that; the royal friend of Voltaire acted like an Attila. "The King of Prussia," to quote the Saxon Ambassador in Berlin, "has

caused to be taken from Poland nearly 7,000 girls of from sixteen to twenty years of age, and he demands that, from every tract of so many acres, there shall be delivered to him a maiden or girl with cow, a bed, and three ducats of money." A feather-bed, four pillows, and two pigs completed this compulsory dowry. "This rigor," the Saxon diplomat concluded, "has driven the people to despair." The Polish girls were then transported to Pomerania and there forced to marry. Presumably, they became the mothers of pure-Teutonic offspring.

To Frederick, the 644 square miles of Polish territory with an annual income of 2,000,000 crowns which the First Partition netted him, were of greater importance than the 600,000 new subjects. But to the student of population, an addition of over half a million people to a state which totalled no more than three million is a fact of significance. Not counting the Second and Third Partitions of Poland, which brought the Hohenzollerns more Polish land and people, we may conclude that the kingdom of Prussia, the largest state in Germany, was already by the end of the eighteenth century an overwhelmingly Slavic state.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Prussia is all Slav. Its blood is probably only nine-tenths Slav, as in the rest of Germany it is about three-fourths Slav. The other elements in the Reich are Dutch, Bohemian, French, Jewish, and Teutonic. For the colonization policy of the Great Elector was continued by his successors, the first three kings of Prussia. At the end of one century of settlement, in 1770, one-sixth of Prussia's population, approximately 600,000 persons, were either colonists or descendants of colonists, Dutch, Czech and French.

As for the Jews, they had lived in the Reich, particularly in the Rhineland, as long as the Germans, having come there either with or soon after Julius Cæsar. Although the Germans had always treated the Jews brutally, killing them in times of crisis, as during the Crusades, it is obvious that not all the Jews were exterminated. Germany now has only some half a million Jews, an astonishingly small number when one considers merely arithmetical augmentation over a period of more than fifteen hundred years. In the Middle Ages compulsory conversions of Jews to Christianity were frequent. Later, especially in the eighteenth century under the misinterpreted teachings of Moses Mendelssohn, Jewish conversions were so numerous that the historian Graetz was led to exclaim: "It must be considered a

miracle that the entire Jewish party of enlightenment in Germany did not abjure Judaism." As late as 1823 in Berlin 1,236 Jews turned Christian. Inter-marriage followed apostasy. Consequently the percentage of Germans having Jewish blood must be considerable. The accepted figure of partially Jewish Germans is 5,000,000, but it may be as high as 10,000,000.

It is sad that at this late date in Occidental civilization one should have to repeat the obvious: that creative achievements are the result of cross-fertilization of mind and body; that culture is a continuous process to the making of which all nations and "races" have contributed; and that, finally, no one nation can truthfully claim either racial purity or cultural originality.

Modern Germany is a "melting pot" of most of the peoples of Europe, and for that reason it has made fine contributions to European culture in the last century. One need not have the testimony of a scientific German ethnologist, to the effect that only a fraction more than one percent of the Reich's population is Teutonic, to know that there are dark-haired Germans and red-haired, long-headed and square-headed, broad-faced and narrow-faced; there are even blond and blue-eyed Germans.

The pure-race theory is a colossal lie. Only those devoid of self-respect prate about "pure" blood, when all corpuscles look alike under the microscope. At least one fascist dictator knows that. "Of course there are no races left," Mussolini said; "not even the Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the energy and the beauty of a nation. Race! It is a feeling, not a reality . . . National pride has no need for the delirium of race."