GERMANY AND AMERICAN OPINION.

PROFESSOR ALBION SMALL TO PROFESSOR GEORG SIMMEL.

For the following communication, addressed by a representative American sociologist to a German sociologist no less representative, we are indebted to Professor Charles A. Ellwood, of the University of Missouri, who writes: It may be of interest to the members of the Sociological Society to know the trend of academic opinion in the United States, and especially of American sociologists, regarding the present war. I have tried to keep in close touch with this matter, and I think it safe to say that nine out of ten American academic men in responsible positions are non-sympathetic with Germany in this war, in spite of the systematic campaign which German professors have undertaken to influence the opinions of their American colleagues, and in spite of the traditional influence of German over American universities. The enclosed copy of a letter from Professor Albion W. Small, of the University of Chicago, to Professor Georg Simmel, of the University of Strassburg, well illustrates the attitude of those Americans who have been most friendly to German scholarship. As your readers know, Dr. Small is editor of the *American Journal of Sociology*, is a leader of sociological thought in America, and was for two years president of the American Sociological Society. He has always been a protagonist of German scholarship in the social sciences, and is closely related by family ties to the German people. His letter was written in reply to one of Dr. Simmel's claiming that "all the world is believing lies about Germany."

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,
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Professor Dr. Georg Simmel, Strassburg.

My dear colleague and friend,—

A message from you is always welcome, but I share most genuinely with you the pain of the occasion which gives rise to any conferring at all upon the subject which is uppermost in my mind, as it is in yours. Indeed, I have postponed my reply from day to day because I felt unequal to the delicate problem of conveying on paper precisely my own reaction, which so far as I can discover is substantially that of nine out of every ten academic men in the United States. There are certain things which must be emphasized: first of all, that in a mere measuring of sympathy with the various peoples of Europe, apart from any judgment upon specific issues in controversy between them, American academic sentiment for the past thirty years, and to-day as emphatically as ever, is overwhelmingly in favour of the Germans. We do not express

ourselves in the German way. We do not pronounce German civilization as a whole superior to other civilizations. We think that is repeating in varied form our own naive blunder in the formative days of our nation, viz., for nearly a hundred years it was the almost unchallenged American formula that our Constitution is not only the best possible for ourselves at the given moment, but that it is the only government fit for progressive human beings anywhere. We have changed our minds about that. So we try to restrain ourselves from violations of courtesy when we encounter, face to face, German expressions of the German estimate that German culture is superior to that of the rest of the world. We think—or at least the Americans who know the Germans best think, and say very freely—that the Germans are particularly strong in traits which we conspicuously lack, and that Americans would be a nobler people than they are if we could reinforce American life with a liberal infusion of German superiorities.

In the second place, it would be a great mistake for Germans to suppose that Americans are relatively misinformed about the great outstanding facts in the European situation. On the contrary, it has been evident from the second day of August that, as compared with the other nations of the world, the Americans are posted up to date. I heard Professor Kühnemann say this with emphasis to a large audience of Germans a week ago. He confessed that he was astonished on arriving here to find out how much more fully informed the Americans are than any of the Europeans about what has actually occurred. The main reason for this is obvious. Not being at war we have no censorship, as each of the belligerents must have. Each of the warring nations gets only such statements about the war as its own censors think it wise for the public to have. We get everything that the wires are allowed to take from every country in Europe, and Amsterdam and Rome send us every day more or less useful means of checking up the statements of the combatants. Our newspapers are the greediest in the world for news. In this upheaval of civilization, the only news that is sure to be read by everybody is that from the different war zones. The great rival newspapers are in the keenest competition to be known as purveyors of the most complete and accurate reports. Every day we read in them side by side the official statements of each of the contending nations, together with all the other evidence that can be collected by their regiments of European correspondents. The sources of these reports are carefully indicated—whether official, semi-official, the unsupported statements of such and such an individual, or mere rumours, the source of which cannot be traced. Each of the leading papers has a staff of so-called "military experts," i.e., retired graduates of West Point and Annapolis, our military and naval academies, who digest the official reports every day, and interpret the strategic meaning of the different situations as they develop. Maps drawn by them are published sometimes as often as every day. These digests and charts are syndicated to the smaller papers throughout the country. Of course, we are not informed of precise military details until they are ancient history, measured by our attentive interest; but the experience of two months proves that our information has kept us in the main accurately informed several days, and often

weeks, ahead of the general public in either of the countries directly involved.

To what extent this is true about the developments in the several countries among the civilians, we are in a less favourable condition to judge. The situation is such that we are evidently more in the dark about the civilians in Germany than in France or England. We had long since made up our minds, however, that we were mistaken in our primary theory as to the probable reaction in Germany. The Americans are extremely rare—I have been unable to find one in my own range of acquaintances—who believed that the governments would allow the spark which started the conflagration to kindle anything more general than a settlement between Austria and Serbia. It was the well nigh invariable opinion here that the governments could not permit themselves to be drawn into the incredible folly of a general war. When we found that the unbelievable was actual, we declared that the great body of the German people certainly could not endorse a war which from our standpoint is the most damning indictment of European diplomacy that has ever been drawn. We were early convinced that we were again mistaken. We now know that the Germans are making one of the most wonderful exhibitions of national unity in the history of the world. We also admire the spirit of this unity while we believe the course of reasoning upon which it is based is one of the most deplorable mistakes in history. I will say more about that in a moment.

In the third place, because of what I have already said you may be able to see at once that two things are quite probable: first, that the lies which have been told about Germany have not had the influence in America which you suppose; secondly, that you do not sufficiently take into account the effect which lies told in Germany about the other nations have had upon the minds of Germans. As to the first, I think it is highly probable that the Americans are the most incredulous people in the world. "That which is written" has notorious potency to palsy the judgment, and Americans are no exceptions to the rule. On the other hand, Americans are omnivorous newspaper readers, and one of the few mitigating circumstances connected with this fact is that it results in a gratifying case under the law "familiarity breeds contempt." We have an unlimited capacity to swallow sensational reports, but we have a corresponding scepticism about their value. In the first days of consternation that war was possible at all, the only reports we could get came from Belgian and French and English sources, and were, of course, of the most lurid character. They had the effect of increasing the general horror and indignation. After there had been time for second thought, and after we had heard substantially the same stories about each of the armies, that whole phase of the situation lost its hold upon our interest. We not only doubt that one army is more guilty than another of unnecessary brutality, but we decline to be excited about the by-products of war so long as the essential barbarity of war itself is unrestrained.

As to the other matter, I may not be able to convince you, but I state the facts as we see them. The German people will some time discover that at least one lie has been in circulation in Germany

about the other peoples of the world for every lie that has been invented elsewhere about the Germans. As we Americans see it, one of the antecedents which have made this war possible, and which have made the Germans regard it as a holy war, is a whole fictitious psychology of the other peoples. A single illustration on which I can give testimony will indicate what I mean. Shortly after your letter reached me I received a paper from Berlin, on the first page of which, under prominent headlines, was an account of an alleged disturbance on the Canadian border, with indications that the United States would presently take possession of Canada! One would hardly suppose that a Berlin editor could imagine that there is a single individual in Berlin stupid enough to regard such a report as worth the ink which it took to print it. There is less probability that such an idea could be taken seriously on either side of the Canadian border than that Saxony at this moment should fear an incursion from Prussia: yet a whole mythology of this sort has misinterpreted the rest of the world to Germany. I do not mean to assert that all Germans have been uncritical about these fables. All that I urge is that it would be extremely hazardous for the Germans to assume that they have clear white light about the other nations, while the other nations are befogged about the Germans. It is perfectly evident, for instance, that the Germans have taken for granted many things that are wide of the facts about the relations of the British colonies to the mother country, and that these misconceptions have had not a little weight in calculations of the probable fortunes of war.

Then I want to testify about the American judgment as to the antecedents of the war. In a word, we have debated in private and in public, in newspapers and magazines, on the lecture platform and in the pulpit, the merits of the cases as presented by the warring nations each for itself. We shall doubtless make these claims the texts for much more discussion till long after peace is concluded. But our first reaction has been ratified by the general consensus of our accumulating conviction, viz., "a plague o' both your houses." Our general judgment is that if the controversy were settled beyond dispute, it would merely save the face of one chancellory or another as to the matter of skill in diplomatic manoeuvres. That whole question looks to us unspeakably paltry in comparison with the underlying fact. The essential thing, as we see it, is that all Europe is living on a militaristic basis, and is sacrificing the interests of the citizens as human beings to an arbitrary monster of "military necessity." The report has reached us within a few days that a delegation of German professors will be sent to this country after Christmas to lecture on the German side of the war. They will be welcomed almost everywhere, and audiences will listen to them and applaud them. But so far as changing any one's opinion is concerned, they would do Germany much more good by staying at home than by bringing to us amplifications of the type of argument by which German scholars have thus far tried to support the German programme.

We do not believe the political morality of Germany is either higher or lower than that of England or France. We are not very much deceived about the essence of the Belgian incident. We

know perfectly well that if the objective and subjective conditions had been turned about, and if England or France or for that matter the United States had been in the place of Germany in the closing days of last July, either of the three would in all probability have done just what Germany did in Belgium. Not being directly concerned in the complication, however, we can see that in fact it was an appalling confession of the essential barbarism of a militaristic civilization. To Americans this is not a war of Germans against Slavs, nor of Germans against England. In its ultimate causes and effects we believe it will turn out to be *a war against war*.

Americans are judging the Germans to-day not on the ground of anything that anybody else has said about them, but on the basis of their own declarations about themselves. Nobody knows better than the Germans that they have nowhere more startlingly exemplified their racial superiority of *thoroughness* than in their preparedness for war and in their theories about war. The German literature of militarism from Treitschke—not to go back further—to Bernhardi has not been hid in a corner. In this country we have been reading it, particularly for the last dozen years, but we have regarded it as what Herbert Spencer would call the "professional bias" of the officers. Very few of us have believed, even in our most imaginative moments, that the German people could ever be manoeuvred into a position in which as one man they would regard it as the only moral alternative to endorse that militaristic philosophy. In this country all but a feeble minority regard the militaristic conception as a betrayal of reason and an appeal to chaos as the ultimate cosmic principle.

Kühnemann's address that I referred to above filled two hours, and was the most passionate declamation that I have ever heard. He announced as his subject "German Militarism." It turned out to be one of the most curious webs of fallacy that I have ever met. He never once in the two hours so much as hinted at "militarism" in the sense which every one in this country attaches to that term. He assumed throughout that "militarism" has no other meaning than the "German people armed for defence of the Fatherland," and he wasted his breath defending the right of the Germans to train themselves for military duty. To Americans that sort of thing proves either stupidity or evasion. We mean by "militarism" the creed that war is the foremost means of national self-realisation, and that the "interests of the state" justify the making of war by a stronger nation upon a weaker. Americans do not want any nation of Europe to gain a foot of the territory of any other nation without the free consent both of the nation and of the occupants of the possible cession. They do not believe that there is any difference worth speaking of between the European nations in their willingness to make the most of their military or naval strength in pursuit of the militaristic ideal. They know what is open to all the world, that *Germany has done more than all the rest of the world put together in the way of elaborating and publishing this militaristic ideal*. They do not want Germany humbled, but *they do want this hideous cult so discredited that no nation in Europe will profess it after this war is done*.

When I began this reply I had no intention of letting it run to this length, and what I have said amounts only to the introduction to what I wanted to say; but I must stop. Let me assure you that Americans hate the idea of aggressive might so genuinely that they will have no sympathy with vindictive might, however the war results. So far as I can judge of our whole people by the indexes which I can use, we hope the war will result in an absolute stalemate. We should be delighted if every bit of military and naval equipment of all the nations were to be wiped out of existence to-morrow, without the loss of another life, and if the cabinets should then be forced by the respective peoples to do what was their duty in the first place—join in a candid and rational adjustment of a *modus vivendi*. Our most influential men are talking seriously of proposing to Europe at the close of the war a system of international police composed of quotas of troops from all the nations, representing an international tribunal, and proceeding against any nation which refuses to abide by the findings of the tribunal. Possibly we are so far removed from the fumes of the battlefield that this, which Europe would regard as a diseased dream now, may turn out to be a forward look into the clear air of a better day.

Sincerely,

ALBION W. SMALL.