

Austria Rediscovered Herself

9 Österreich erkennt sich
wieder

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THE happy-go-lucky bagpiper and jester of Austrian tradition, Lieber Augustin, who cheerfully crawled out from the dead after the pestilence was over, is perhaps the best symbol of what is happening in Austria today. Life in that unhappy country is certainly hard, except for the few who can afford to pay the fantastic black-market prices. Everything is strictly rationed down to the bare minimum of subsistence, and the housing shortage is simply appalling. (In Vienna, for instance, almost one fourth of the houses were destroyed in the bombardment of spring, 1945.) And yet, after seven years of Nazi repression, the Austrian spirit has survived and, one gets the impression, is healthier than before the war.

There are many signs that the Second Austrian Republic is experiencing something of a cultural renaissance. During the two years of its existence, more books, pamphlets, and magazines were published than in all the seven lean years of the "Ostmark," as Austria was called by the Nazis. Austrian writers seem intent on rediscovering their country's great past and, at the same time, disassociating themselves from the German stream of thought which had dominated their country for so many years. Austrian poets, musicians, painters, sculptors, and philosophers are made the subject of lengthy studies; and emphasis is laid upon the native Kunstgewerbe (arts and crafts), theatre, movies, fashions, and even cooking. Austria's rediscovery of herself resembles the efforts of an amnesia victim, happily recovered, piecing together his past.

PERHAPS history might have taken an altogether different course had Austrians in 1938 thought of their country as a cultural entity worth fighting for, rather than as a satellite of the German colossus to the north. Contrary to popular belief, it was not Austrian military inferiority that brought about Schuschnigg's surrender to Hitler; rather it was the tragic disease of Austrian self-hatred, poisoning and paralyzing the entire country, which made it fall an easy and, in some respects, willing victim of Hitler. Just as ex-

cessive national pride can finally develop the kind of symptoms of aggression and megalomania that one could observe in the modern Prussians, so its almost complete absence, as in the Austrians, can bring about the desire for complete self-effacement.

The first Austrian Republic (1918-38) was, actually, a case for a psychiatrist! Just as there are Jews who would rather be Gentiles, or Negroes who would like to pass for Whites, so a large percentage of Austrians were ashamed of being Austrians, and preferred to consider themselves Germans. With an almost morbid delight they would repeat Mussolini's reference to Austria as a "sputacchiera" (spittoon) or a German diplomat's remark that Austria was a "Dreckstaat" (dirt-state). Hans von Hammerstein-Equord, an eminent writer, who because of his liberal and emphatically Austrian views did not last long in Schuschnigg's cabinet, sadly declared in a lecture in 1935: "Ask a number of good average Austrians what Austria is and you would get various eloquent, for the most part even witty, answers, but . . . none, I fear, would give out the true radiance of a genuine faith."

BUT what "genuine faith" could you expect from the average person if most cultural and political leaders were Austrophobes and Germanophiles? The list of the noted (or shall we say "notorious"?) Austrian Pan-Germans or Quasi Pan-Germans is long and includes such people as the gifted poet and dramatist, Max Mell; the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Innitzer; Social Democratic politicians like Karl Renner (Chancellor in 1919 and again in 1945, and now President of the Second Republic), and the late Otto Bauer (a former foreign minister), as well as their bitter foes, the late Dollfuss and his collaborators, Schuschnigg and Starhemberg. So little has Chancellor Schuschnigg learned in the seven years spent as prisoner of the Nazis that, in his new book, *Austrian Requiem*, he repeatedly stresses his and his nation's "German blood," and insists that the reason he had not entered any coalition against the Third Reich nor

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ordered armed resistance in the days of the Anschluss was because of his unwillingness to spill "German blood." It is hard to understand how an educated man like Schuschnigg could be taken in by the myth of Austria's "German blood." For it is an acknowledged fact that, racially speaking, the Austrians are Celts, with an admixture of German, Mongolian, Slavic, Jewish, Gypsy, and other "blood," who, in the course of centuries, developed an autonomous culture of their own and whose German differs more radically from the language spoken in Hamburg or Koenigsberg, for instance, than the English of the United States from that of Great Britain. Schuschnigg ought to have remembered in 1938, anyway, that Washington and his English-speaking Anglo-Saxon friends did not hesitate to spill "English" blood when their human rights were at stake. . . .

The most notorious representative of Austrian self-hatred was, of course, Adolph Hitler, who emulated the Prussians even so far as diction and accent were concerned. *Mein Kampf* contains almost as many villifications of Austria and Austrian culture as it contains vituperations of Jews, Marxists, Free Masons, Democrats, Frenchmen, Russians, Anglo-Saxons, and so forth. Austria's independence was a constant source of annoyance to Hitler, and in *Mein Kampf* he says, "Even if it [the Anschluss] were harmful, it must nevertheless take place."

THE SOURCE of this unique self-hatred can be traced back to 1866. In that crucial year the technically superior Prussian armies defeated the Austrian troops so quickly and decisively at Koeniggratz, Bohemia, that it seemed almost like one of the miraculous victories in the Book of Maccabees. Many Austrians were so thrilled by the military achievements of Bismarck, whose armies crushed three countries within a few years, that they lost sight of Austria's role as a great unifying and cultural force, and began to experience the ancient Teutonic dream of conquest.

Foremost among those who looked yearningly across the frontier into the Reich to the Hohenzollern emperor and his Iron Chancellor was the leader of the Austrian Pan-Germans, Georg Ritter von Schoenerer, from whom young Adolf Hitler got his strongest inspirations. The violent anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-Marxist riots staged by the Pan-German students in Vienna around 1900 served as models for the SS and SA of 1933. True, the Pan-Germans in Austria were always a small, if vociferous and daring, minority in the Imperial Reichsrath, and many Austrians resented their vulgar and barbaric methods and manners. But some-

how the "trauma" of 1866 continued to work through the decades. Even those Austrians who sneered outwardly at the uncouth and intolerant "*Saupreussen*" (Prussian Swine) subconsciously admired both their impudence and efficiency.

Were there none left then to oppose the persistent infiltration of Prussianism into the soul of Austria, and to keep alive the Austrian live-and-let-live philosophy of life? There were such men, but they were neither numerous nor vociferous, and it was not until after Germany's defeat that their messages and warnings were heard by their countrymen. Probably the most outstanding of the Austrians to pay tribute to the heritage of his country and people was Hugo Hofmann Edler von Hofmannsthal, an outstanding poet in Austria, known here chiefly as librettist of *Der Rosenkavalier* and other operas of Richard Strauss. A man of delicate sensitivity and of vision, he was one of the founders of the famous Salzburg Festivals. Austria, as he conceived it, stood for the avoidance of extremes, for the voluntary blending of many cultures, for the victory of the spiritual over the material, in short, for harmony: "Austria," he remarked, "first became spirit in its music; and in this form it conquered the world."

THERE WERE others, too, who stressed the humanistic, universalist features of Austria at a time when many of their compatriots were more interested in Emperor William's sabre-rattling speeches than in Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, Waldmueller's paintings or Grillparzer's wisdom. "Have faith in Austria!", one writer, Hermann Bahr, begged the youth of his country. "Austria is nowhere but in our longing and our self-reliance." Unfortunately, these words fell on deaf ears.

"Take Austria away from the Austrians, and they would all at once know what they have lost," the aforementioned Hammerstein-Equord said in 1935. Three years later, when "*Gruess Gott*" was forcibly replaced by "*Heil Hitler!*" these words came true. It was under the yoke of Gestapo and Prussian carpet-baggers that the Austrians — or a large number of them — learned the truth about Teutonic superiority and Schrecklichkeit!

The collapse of Hitler's Reich brought about more than the political liberation of Austria; it ended, perhaps for all time, the fatal attraction that Prussianism had exerted for so many years on the Austrian mind. But Austria has suffered some irreparable losses, and the road back, as Austrians are beginning to see, will be a long and difficult one. Many of the country's best writers, composers, painters, architects, teachers and

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scholars were forced to emigrate, some because they were Jews, others because of their opposition to Nazism; other gifted Austrians cannot be allowed to participate in the reconstruction because they were notorious collaborationists.

UNDER these circumstances the cultural achievements of famished postwar Vienna are doubly remarkable. Immediately after the retreat of the Wehrmacht Vienna came to life; theatres, concert halls, and cabarets opened their doors. The opera, because of the destruction of the old house, was moved to the smaller Volksoper Stage, and American soldiers who attended the opening performances were amazed not only by the quality of the performance but also by the beautiful settings improvised out of the cheapest *ersatz* material. The famous Opera Ballet is functioning again, though offering a special problem, since, with only nine hundred calories a day, the dancers must husband their strength at rehearsals in order to retain sufficient vitality for the evening performance. Viennese operettas are once more being presented, and the production of Austrian movies has been resumed after the Austrians had endured, for seven long years, the propaganda-weighted stuff of UFA in Berlin. The famous cabarets have opened, offering skits and parodies, poking fun at the Nazis and former collaborationists, and mildly attacking such nuisances as the black market and the continuous bickering among the occupation force.

The Philharmonic and Symphonic Orchestras are functioning again in the Konzerthaus and Musikvereinssaal. When the First Symphony of the "non-Aryan" Gustav Mahler was heard for the first time in seven years, the concert was opened with the unveiling of a plaque bearing the following inscription: "In Memory of the Historic Date of the Revival of Gustav Mahler's Music in Vienna."

ALTHOUGH there is great activity in the publishing field, most of the books on the market are reprints of Austrian writers, from old Franz Grillparzer, whose dramas influenced such modern poets as Gerhart Hauptmann and Maurice Maeterlinck, to Joseph Roth and Franz Werfel, both of whom died in exile, as refugees from Nazi oppression. One group of publishers have aroused considerable interest with their

superbly illustrated monographs on the Austrian arts and crafts, for instance, on the unique specimens of Old Viennese porcelain, once hailed for its *beauté singulière*, on Altdorfer's wonderful altar paintings at the St. Florian monastery, Upper Austria, or on the Belvedere, the glorious Baroque castle of that great warrior, Prince Eugen of Savoy.

A few responsible Austrian critics are, however, not quite satisfied with the direction in which new Austria's cultural renaissance has been moving. In a thoughtful article (*Oesterreichisches Tagebuch*, November 16, 1946), Eva Priester compares the new literature of her country with that of rejuvenated France, and raises the question: Why do we have many André Gides, but not one Louis Aragon? She charges her Austrian colleagues with being escapists who produce nothing but love stories, or historical novels, thus perpetuating romantic notions about Vienna and Austria that are out of place in postwar Europe. She accuses Austrian publishers of being pussyfooters who discourage any frank political discussions, but she has praise for the realistic writings of anti-Fascists who survived the Nazi death camps.

Bruno Frei in "Ueber das nationale Bewusstsein der Oesterreicher" (On the Austrians' national consciousness, *Erbe und Zukunft*, October-December, 1946), on the other hand, deals with a danger that may not seem imminent, but which should not be dismissed lightly, either: that of Austria's becoming again a satellite of Prussia. There are still some people left who will say: After all, Germans and Austrians participate in the same culture; they talk the same language, they worship the same poets; they sing the same songs. These gullible people, Frei asserts, have fallen victim to Pan-German propaganda. The British, he points out, are as much in debt to Schiller and Kant as are the Austrians, and conversely the Austrians understand and appreciate the genius of Shakespeare even though English is not their native language. A common language does not necessarily create a common culture. Have Brazilians and Portuguese an identical culture, and do they clamor for Anschluss? Have the English and the Americans an identical culture? Ever since the Austrians have come to consider themselves a nation, they have worked to create a national culture of their own. There exists a specific Austrian literature; the Austrian Romantic School,



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represented by Grillparzer, Nestroy, and Raimund, has nothing in common with its German counterpart, the former being a popular, healthy movement, the latter a reactionary flight into the Middle Ages.

MANY more voices could be added to these, but at least two more critics should be quoted. "What we need are poets able to encourage the reader by showing him the reality of things," as Richard Hlatky remarked (in *Plan*, July, 1946). Ernst Fischer, Minister of Education in the defunct Renner cabinet of 1945 and one of the most progressive thinkers in modern Austria, said on the occasion of the opening of popular lectures at the University of Vienna: "The masses need the intellectual, but the latter needs the masses ten times more." He urged Austrian intellectuals not to emulate the German intelligentsia who, alas, spent too much time in the seclusion of their ivory towers, but to imitate those Russian writers who fought against injustice and evil during the very terror of Tsarist Russia!

These then are, in short, the major problems Austria's cultural leaders have to face today: the final liquidation of the Teutonic spirit, and of Pan-Germanism in particular; the revival of true spiritual Austrian values, not to be mistaken for the pseudo values dished out by the novels written for Hollywood; the opening of Austria's gates to the healthy influence of other cultures; and finally the attainment of a more realistic outlook toward life.

TODAY, the most positive and encouraging evidences of cultural revival are offered by Austria's legitimate theatre. The theatre in Austria has always played an important part in the intellectual life of the country. "The first glance of the average Viennese into his morning paper was not at the events in parliament or world affairs," the late Stefan Zweig remarked in *The World of Yesterday*, "but at the repertoire of the theatre which assumed so important a role in the public life as hardly was possible in any other city." Austrian theatres played to full houses even in the dreadful winter of 1918-19, when things were at their worst in that unhappy land. The same theatres were empty under the Nazi regime, for aesthetic, if not for political reasons. Vainly the Nazi burgomaster appealed to the Viennese: "I beg the people of Vienna to heed the call

of the theatre and to give us a shining example of active racial co-operation in this field as well." He appealed in vain — the Austrians refused to patronize the bombastic Nazi theatre.

But let us now look at the 1945-46 repertoire of some of the leading Austrian stages. At the venerable old Burgtheatre, the plays of Molière, Bernard Shaw, Eugene Scribe, Frantisek Langer, Ibsen, Goldoni, and Noel Coward competed with such Austrian dramatists as Grillparzer, Nestroy, Hofmannsthal, Bahr, Beer-Hofmann, Schnitzler, and Csokor. The eighteenth century drama, *Nathan the Wise*, by Lessing, an ardent plea for religious tolerance, was a great success — it had been forbidden under the Nazis. The situation is the same as far as other stages are concerned, such as Theatre in der Josefstadt (formerly run by Max Reinhardt), Deutsches Volkstheatre, Wiener Kammerspiele, and Komoedie. They featured modern American and English plays (for example, John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down*, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and J. B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways*), dramas by Chekhov, Tolstoy, Bourdet, Wilde, Goethe, Brecht, Aristophanes, Strindberg, and Pirandello, and finally Austrian works, from Grillparzer's verse plays to Werfel's *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*. It seems, then, that the Austrian stage has become a mirror of the country's universalist and humanistic mission, as far removed from the clerical obscurantism that prevailed in the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg era as from the "heroic nation philosophy" of the shameful *Ostmark* period.

AS these lines are being written, Allied statesmen are planning to draft the peace treaty to be concluded with Austria. Meanwhile, life goes on in devastated Austria; songs, symphonies, poems, novels are once more written and published, even if the artists' fingers are stiff and blue with cold. To be sure, this art will be of value to the world only if it is truly *Austrian* art, that is to say, if it is an expression of the humanistic, peaceful, and tranquil philosophy of life traditionally associated with the name of Austria. But it is obvious that this cultural reawakening will develop into something sound and lasting only if the country is on a healthy economic basis, and if narrow partisan interests are replaced by genuine parliamentary government which will include the progressive and leftist elements as well as the conservatives.

