

Innocents in the Garden of Beasts

In the spring of 1939 my brother, Larry Carton, and I decided that we would travel to Europe during the approaching summer. Larry was finishing his junior year in college. I was close to the end of my freshman year. We had different agendas for the trip, although we planned to travel overseas together. Once in Europe Larry would join college friends and tour the Continent. I had been studying the German language for the last two years in high school and the first year of college. I wanted to spend the summer in Germany and seek to improve my skills with spoken German. Through connections in Chicago I was able to reserve a place in the summer program at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau in southern Germany.

It is hard in 2012 to realize how wide was the gulf seventy-three years ago between the United States and the countries of Europe. At the time of our trip the United States was a spectator of changes in world affairs rather than a player. Of course our country had been involved in the last year of World War One, but America had had almost no equity in the settlement which arose from that conflict. In the 1930's American newspapers carried reports of changes in Germany and of the shocking treatment of the European Jews by Hitler and his people. All of this was far away and in another world. We lived in a

continent separated from Europe by a broad ocean and a week of travel time.

So, June 14, 1939 found us at dinner with college friends at a restaurant at the New York Worlds Fair. Toward midnight we boarded tourist class in the SS. Hansa of the Nord Deutsches Lloyd line. When morning arrived we were out at sea. Our lives during the next week followed a pattern. We ate, we slept and we socialized. I attempted to exercise my school German in conversation with the stewards and the many German passengers in tourist class. It became immediately obvious that I needed the kind of practice that residence in Germany would bring. From this point of view the trip made sense.

We also read. Larry read Tolstoy's War and Peace, a book which because of its length was likely to keep him busy during the entire trip. This book also was timely because of the importance which the Russians and the Russian Army were to have in the coming years.

I read (in English) The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann. This is the story of Hans Castorp, a nice young man from Hamburg. Hans travels to a tuberculosis sanitarium high in the Alps to visit his cousin Joachim, who is a patient there. Hans stays. In the course of his visit, which lasts seven years, he comes to know a variety of inhabitants of the sanitarium. In 1929 Thomas Mann received the Nobel prize

for literature because of his work on *The Magic Mountain* and other masterpieces. In a way the *Magic Mountain* afforded an introduction to European bourgeois society of the 1930's. Certainly some of the themes were relevant to the times. Among them was an analysis of sickness and death. Although the concentration camps were not opened up to world opinion until after the War, the specter of death hung over the continent. Other themes of European society were represented by the characters. Settembrini represented humanism. The totalitarian Leo Naphta: radicalism. The alluring Frau Chauchat brought the notion of sexual attraction into the sanitarium. Hans' cousin Joachim was an officer in the German army and totally motivated by a sense of duty to the military goals of his country. While we did not visit a tuberculosis sanitarium on our trip, the characters and happenings of this novel served as an introduction to a world far different from the one we had left behind in America.

After six days at sea the *Hansa* tied up at the dock at Cuxhafen, and we had our first glimpse of the Germany which awaited us. On the dock was a crowd of people and a brass band. As the boat approached the dock the crowd broke out in the Hitler salute. The Germans on our boat lined the rails and – with one exception - responded. We watched as a German mother attempted to get her ten year

old Americanized son to join in with the Nazi salute. Every time she lifted his arm up he pulled it down. The kid had been reading American newspapers and knew what was what. They were still struggling with each other when we left the ship.

Our papers were reviewed by SS troopers in smart black uniforms. Our documents seemed OK. We were allowed to land and board the train which ran between Cuxhafen and Hamburg. Once in Hamburg we repaired to a cheap old fashioned hotel, the Hindenburghaus, which had been recommended by an acquaintance on the boat. The hotel prepared for us a tasty meal and we enjoyed a good sleep.

The next morning, June 24 1939, we made our way to the office of Mr. C., the agent in Hamburg of the Chicago meat packer, Swift and Company, to whom we had a letter of introduction through connections at home. Mr. C. was most cordial. We had quite a long talk with him about the situation. He emphasized the devastating effect of the depression in Germany. By the second half of 1932 industrial production had fallen by 42%. The stock index had dropped by more than 2/3rds. Compulsory farm sales had more than doubled. Above all, the country was afflicted by mass unemployment. The total unemployed in the country had exceeded 8 million persons. By the time of

our visit the situation had partially corrected itself. But the national suffering in the early 1930's furnished a background for the rise of the Nazi Party to power. It also explained why American companies had trouble doing business in the country.

Larry and I were not pressed for time. My course at the University of Freiburg would not start for another week. We could look around. It occurred to us to go over and inspect the old Hansa city of Lubeck. Lubeck fronted on the Baltic Sea, only forty-five miles away. We did not have the money to rent a car, but we could afford a motor cycle. Neither of us had ever ridden a motor cycle before, but we were young and thought anything was possible. So off we went, one of us driving and the other behind, holding on. All went well until we started to pass a column of German infantry on a route march. There the motor died. The starter failed. We did not know what to do, but those German soldiers did. A couple of them broke out of the column, got behind us and pushed. Larry put the engine in gear and it started up. We never did get to Lubeck, but we were able to return to Hamburg without further trouble.

Obviously Mr. C. thought we needed guidance. He commissioned his daughter, Louise, to look after us. She guided us to dinner at a restaurant on the Alster and then on to a beer hall, the Zennertal, in the St. Pauli, the

entertainment district of Hamburg. The hall was filled with large bare tables, at which the patrons sat. Attractive well-endowed waitresses in dirndls circulated, passing out large steins of beer. The orchestra played umpa music. The crowd became more and more excited. Soon they started climbing up on the tables. Pretty soon they were all up there, singing, drinking and dancing. It was an orgiastic scene such I had never before witnessed growing up in Lake Forest, Illinois.

The railway line between Hamburg and Berlin is a straight shot, and the train between the cities reached a top speed of 100 miles an hour. After arrival we were soon situated in the Central Hotel on the Friederickstrasse. In the center of Berlin was a large park, the Tiergarten, (the garden of beasts), where well dressed men and women sauntered along garden paths or rested on benches. In the center of the Park was the tall, ornate Victory Column, commemorating the victories over first Denmark and then France in the 19th Century. The whole scene reflected care and pride in the national heritage.

In Berlin changes which had come over Germany since the ascent of Hitler to power as Chancellor in January 1933 were readily visible. The city looked like an armed camp. Soldiers were everywhere. Particularly noticeable were the

infantry sergeants, dressed in smart field gray uniforms and carrying long straight swords. Most of the men who were not in uniform wore arm bands on which the Nazi Hackenkreuz was prominently displayed. Pictures of Hitler and higher Nazi officials testified to the changes which had taken place in German society by 1939. Obviously there were substantial numbers of persons who were not in sympathy with the administration, but they were out of sight.

We have a witness to this revolution. He was William Dodd, the American Ambassador to Germany from 1933 to 1938. Dodd's story is told in a recently published biography by Erik Larson entitled *In the Garden of Beasts*. We remember that Franklin Roosevelt took office in March 1933, so that his period in power and Hitler's were practically coterminous. After his inauguration Roosevelt had difficulty recruiting an Ambassador to Germany. This normally patronage position was offered to Newton Baker, who had been Secretary of War in Woodrow Wilson's administration. He declined, as did Owen D. Young, a prominent industrialist. Finally William Dodd was suggested as ambassador by the incoming Secretary of Commerce, Daniel Roper. Dodd accepted. He was a Professor of History at the University of Chicago, who had been close to previous Democratic administrations. In one

way Dodd and I had had a similar experience which shaped the initial approach to Germany of both of us. He had been a graduate student in Leipzig as a young man and had come to know and respect the old Germany, the country of Goethe, Schiller and Kant. Similarly the authors whose works I and my fellow students read in German studies in our American university were these same representatives of the old cultured Germany of the 18th and 19th centuries. We had come to know Germany by reading the poetry of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the novels of Theodor Fontane. Dodd was to be present as an observer when the country was transformed into the scene which we found when we arrived.

What Dodd found was a determination by Hitler's government to ignore the terms of the treaty which had ended World War I, the Treaty of Versailles. These terms included the following:

- The army was to be reduced to 100,000 officers and men
- Aircraft, armor and offensive weapons were forbidden.
- The General Staff and cadet schools were abolished.
- The Navy was to become a token force with no vessels exceeding 10,000 tons and no submarines

Ambassador Dodd quickly came to the conclusion that the underlying theme of the Nazi movement was to reverse the decision of World War I. He became one of the few voices in the U.S. Government to warn of the true intentions of Hitler and of the danger in America's isolationist stance. In a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull dated August 30, 1934 he wrote, "With Germany united as never before, there is feverish arming and drilling of 1,500,000 men, all of whom are taught every day to believe that Continental Europe must be subordinated to them".

The scene of resurgent militarism that Larry and I witnessed in Berlin was entirely consistent with Dodd's analysis as given above. The delusion held by the victors of World War I that the Germans could be confined to a land army of one hundred thousand men had been exploded by Hitler's administration. Our experience on the streets of Berlin had shown us that by 1939 the Treaty of Versailles had lost its relevance.

We could not see other features of the Nazi program, but they were being realized in other parts of the country. A new submarine fleet was built and commissioned. Pocket battleships represented the resurgent power of the German Navy.

Early the next morning following our arrival in Berlin we caught the Berlin to Basel express, a modern streamlined train. The ride became increasingly beautiful as we ran through the Thuringer forest and then down into the lovely Rhine country, where ruined castles topped vineyard covered hills.

Freiburg in Breisgau was a pleasant old town, with narrow streets and an air of Gothic antiquity. Once more, as in Berlin, evidences of a rearmed Germany were all about us. This time the military personnel were airmen, easily identified by such by the wings over their breast pockets. They were everywhere on the streets of the town.

As noted above, Germany's World War I air force had been dissolved by the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty mandated the destruction of all military aircraft in Germany and forbade the development of an air force. During the 1920's German military pilots were trained in secret in violation of the Treaty. To train its pilots in the latest military aircraft Germany solicited the help of the Russians, the other outlaw nation in Europe. A secret training airfield for German pilots was established at Lipetsk, using mainly Dutch and Russian training aircraft. Just months after Adolph Hitler came to power Hermann Goering, a World War I ace, was appointed National Commissar for Aviation, with the charge of developing a first class national air force.

The merge of all military aviation organizations in the Reich Air Ministry took place in March 1933, the official birthday of the Luftwaffe. From then on there was an intense effort to produce military aircraft and train pilots right through to the outbreak of war in 1939. During the 1930's the German aircraft industry focused on the development of modern military machines. With the onset of war in 1939 the German Air Force had nine fighter wings equipped with Messerschmidt BF104's, four destroyer wings equipped with heavy fighters, eleven bomber wings equipped with Heinkel 111's, and four dive bomber wings.

The Luftwaffe's Condor Legion had experimented with new doctrine and aircraft during the Spanish Civil War. In this combat more than 20,000 German air personnel acquired combat experience, which was helpful to them as World War II started.

Early the next morning after our arrival in Freiburg I made arrangements for admission to the summer program at the University. We then presented ourselves at the office of Herr K., another business contact from Chicago. Here we encountered the big surprise of our trip in the form of a cable from our parents. It contained only two words, but they were significant. They were; COME HOME. Honestly, our parents' concern was understandable. The situation in Europe was becoming

increasingly tense. It was smart to leave for America while it was still possible. .

From a prospective summer student at Freiburg and a sightseeing American we were transformed into refugees hurrying to return to the United States. For Larry all thoughts of touring Europe with friends disappeared. He joined me as we booked passage on the liner Deutschland and jumped on the train to Hamburg in order to board her.

The train trip itself brought fresh evidence of preparation for war. It took us north, past Stuttgart, Mannheim and Frankfurt. Near Hanover we passed a clearing in the woods. The field was filled with big black bombers.

A few miles after the airfield the train stopped, and a squad of German infantry filled our coach. These were sunburned young men with their sleeves rolled up. They obviously were having the time of their lives. They reminded me of a troop of American boy scouts returning from a camp out, except that they were a little older and more robust. I wonder how many of them survived the War.

Back in Hamburg we were again taken in charge by Herr C. and Louise. They guided us to our ship, the Deutschland. To board we needed to pass by a long table

filled with officials of the steamship line. The last two seats were occupied by black uniformed members of the SS. I was dressed conservatively and had no trouble boarding. However, they stopped Larry for questioning. He was wearing Lederhosen, which he had picked up somewhere along our travel route. Initially the SS seemed to think that he might be one of theirs, making his escape to America. Soon they let him go, and we were on our way. A week later, on July 15, 1939 we were in New York. Six weeks after that, . September 1, 1939, the German Army crossed the border into Poland. Two days later the British and French governments declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

On page 269 of the book on Ambasssador Dodd entitled *In the Jungle of Beasts* we read a description of the flight of intellectual and artistic talent from Nazi Germany to America – an exodus that included “Fritz Lang, Marlene Dietrich, Walter Gropius, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Albert Einstein, and composer Otto Klempeerr.” Several of these celebrities came to the surface in Princeton while I was an undergraduate there.

One Sunday afternoon in 1941, during my Senior year, I went out for a walk to clear my mind. On a path near my dormitory I saw approaching me an older guy with a lot of hair. He was dressed in a leather

jacket and wore no necktie. It was Albert Einstein, out, presumably, in an effort to clear his mind. I was tempted to stop him and ask for a short explanation of the Theory of Relativity, but good sense prevailed, and I let him pass by on the other side.

Later in my senior year Professor George Madison Priest, who taught the course at college on the writings of the German poet Goethe, asked me and another student if we would like to have lunch with Thomas Mann. Obviously we said yes. A few days later Professor Priest, Charley Scribner and I were seated at a table in LaHire's Restaurant in Princeton when Dr. Mann walked in and joined us. He was a little stiff and formal in a Prussian sort of way, but basically friendly. I had expected that he would tell us what had happened to Hans Castorp after Castorp left the Magic Mountain. Instead Dr. Mann inveighed against the Hitler Government and all its works. It was easy to agree.

Of course this took place in the last quarter of 1941. On another Sunday afternoon late in that quarter I was sitting quietly in Blair Hall when my roommate, John Stutesman, burst into our room. "Quick", he shouted, "turn on the radio. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." I did indeed turn on the radio and confirmed what John had said. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Now at last the modern world had come.

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