

BOOKS

INTERNATIONAL MOB SPIRIT.

Germany versus Civilization. By William Roscoe Thayer. Published by Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. Price \$1.00

This volume is characteristic of intellectual states prevailing among certain elements of our citizenship. Mr. Thayer is a graceful and able writer, whose mental balance has been unfavorably affected by the great war. His fundamental thesis is that German human nature is different from other kinds of human nature; and that the war is due to this difference.

Speaking of Belgium's resistance to the German army, the author says, "At Liege, she checked the onslaught of the Germans, who were at first surprised by her foolhardiness, and then infuriated. They quickly threw off the restraints of civilized warfare, in which they never were at ease, and proved themselves in acts the Huns they were at heart, if not by descent" (p. 139). After reciting German cruelties in Belgium, he goes on to say, "In modern war, the brutal passions which were once uppermost in all men (italics ours), burst into fierce activity" (p. 146). Then follows, however, in spite of this admission, an attempt to prove the existence of a special burden of guilt resting on the Germans over and above that which rests on all who have waged cruel war.

While a great deal of evidence is cited which need not here be questioned, Mr. Thayer does not succeed in proving his fundamental thesis that the rape of Belgium was due to some essential difference between the nature of Germans and the nature of other peoples. Instead, all the material which he brings forward lends itself to the conclusion that any race of human beings, having lived in the physical area now called "Germany," in what has been for ages the cockpit of Europe, dominated by a grafting aristocracy, and surrounded by other communities likewise ruled by privileged grafters, would give us the kind of exhibition with which the world is now being favored by Germany.

Mr. Thayer speaks of aristocracy and privilege in contrast with democracy, avowing himself in favor of the latter (226-227), but here again he disappoints by showing that he does not really know the historical and economic implications of these terms. With him, aristocracy and democracy have a purely political meaning. In spite of his inconsequential thesis, however, he is frequently on the scent of real principles. Speaking of the doctrine of the German state, he writes, "In theory, this state was an abstraction, existing above society or the individual. . . .

[But] the real State was no abstraction: it was the Kaiser, the military clique, the Junker aristocracy and their counterparts in other German provinces" (p. 41). Here are facts. But the author does not have the training which would enable him to stick to these facts and study the world war from the standpoint of special privilege as opposed to human rights, not only in Germany, but elsewhere—in Boston, for instance.

The author should quit speculating about the balance of power as between the Junkers and their imperial chief, and pay attention to the sociological

and economic phenomena of Junkerism under various names all over civilization. Junkerism everywhere exploits the masses of the working people through ground rent and taxes, reducing their buying power, and forcing big business into a frenzied competitive hunt for outside markets. Junkerism everywhere exploits real estate values, forcing the price of land up to such a height that business enterprises are hampered, and there is a powerful rivalry among the capitalists of all nations to seek foreign investment opportunities which will bring better interest on their money than they can get at home.

But it would never occur to the author of "Germany versus Civilization" to study war from the standpoint of international rivalry engendered by social injustice. For Mr. Thayer is an academic individualist of the elder American type; and no individualist of that type, lettered or unlettered, has ever understood human history. Such an individualist may have a large quantity of bare facts in his possession; but these facts are necessarily uncorrelated, so that the resulting mental images do not correspond with the realities which the facts represent. Individualism of that kind makes you swear at the man who steps on your corns in a crowded street car, when you really ought to be swearing at the institution of legalized private graft in public franchises values. Such individualism leads to the assumption that human conduct is self-started, and that the mainsprings of morality are geared up to a spiritual mechanism which operates exclusively in terms of the personal equation.

According to the book before us, the Germans are moral self-starters and the present European exhibit is to be judged entirely on the spiritual basis, without reference to the historical, physical, sociological, and economic circumstances which have conditioned the development of the various nations at war. The volume represents a frame of mind which is too common to be ignored, and which prevails not only among the academic, but among the unlettered as well. It is a genteel example of the mob spirit which arrays nation against nation, and meanwhile overlooks the equities of life within the nations themselves.

LOUIS WALLIS.