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October 14

CITIES IN THE NEWS MUNICH

By T/3 KLAUS MANN.

Munich is a buxom Bavarian peasant girl who goes to a masked ball in a sumptuous Italian-Renaissance costume.

It's a beautiful city—one of the finest of the continent; serene and stately, lavishly adorned with statues, fountains and gardens. But despite its population of more than 800,000, it does not have the character of a "big city," in the usual sense of the term. It seems closer to nature than most other places of a similar size. Maybe it is the proximity of the Alps to which Munich owes the tonic, stimulating savor of its air. With mountains and lakes nearby, it's an ideal place for young people fond of swimming and mountain-climbing. The change of the seasons—snow, fall and spring, summer heat, autumn's nostalgic splendor—are more noticeable, more real in Munich than in the stone labyrinths of London or Berlin. Situated on the greenish-gray, fast-moving Isar river, the capital of Bavaria has a rural, somehow village-like charm.

Its Renaissance costume was bestowed on it by several monarchs of the House of Wittelsbach, especially by King Ludwig I who spent as much as 7,000,000 thalers in beautifying the city. Munich's reputation of the "Athen on the Isar," the "Bavarian Florence," is mainly due to this ambitious ruler. As for his successor, King Ludwig II, he was equally imaginative and interested in architecture, but preferred lonely, picturesque spots in the Bavarian mountains for his costly and fantastic structures. A neurotic dreamer, he withdrew to the pompous solitude of his castles and to his morbid reveries imbued with Wagnerian music—leaving his capital to its vigorous, earthly life.

Munich was famed for its beer and its brew-houses, especially the fabulous Hofbrauhaus; for its gaudy carnival—the festive season of merry-making and revelry preceding the gloom of Ash Wednesday; for its cozy old inns and its pretty young girls; for its churches and museums and the humorously coarse dialect of its people. To many foreigners, Munich—the Mu-

nich before World War I—seemed the most attractive place in Germany. Artists and poets settled down in the "Athen on the Isar." It is true that the Bavarian natives—most of them primitive rustics and Philistines—were always inclined to distrust their eccentric visitors. Yet the long-haired Bohemians remained faithful to their beloved Munich, as one forgives a peasant belle for her naivete and clumsiness, in consideration of certain sturdy charms she may have to offer.

I was born and brought up in Munich. I know it more intimately than I shall ever know any other place in the world. The images of its streets and squares and monuments are inextinguishably alive in my memory.

Indeed, the things I saw there when I was a child, are to me the very patterns and models of their respective species. The English Gardens in Munich—an extensive, beautiful park—is in my mind the park "par excellence," the essence of all gardens, the "park of parks," so to speak. The same is true of the Isar River—the representative river to me. Munich's National Theater—temple-like, with its lofty Corinthian portico—remains in my fantasy the ideal edifice for musical and dramatic shows; it was there that I received my first impressions of Verdi and Wagner, Shakespeare and Mollere. The smaller Residence Theater—a jewel of a building, in the purest rococo style—was a superb background for Mozart's operas.

The two towers of the Frauenkirche—Munich's cathedral "of Our Lady"—are more massive and more sacred in my memory than any other steeple in the world. A popular fair—that is to me the "Oktoberfest," a colossal kermess held annually in October, on a vast meadow on the periphery of the city. Everybody got drunk with beer, and dizzy by riding too long on the merry-go-rounds, and full of sausages and sauerkraut. It was a glorious affair—unrolling, sumptuously and hilariously, to the feet of a gigantic bronze statue, the "Bavaria," a hollow female, 65 feet high, cast from foreign cannons, and

commanding views...

endowed with the most impressive curves. It was an unforgettable thrill, to climb the steep, narrow stairs in her inside, up to her voluminous head, and to enjoy the great view through the wide openings of her eyes.

There was Munich, with its towers and bridges. There was the Gate of Victory—a stately imitation of the arch of Constantine in Rome;—and there was the University, and this dreary building was the "Wilhelmsgymnasium," where I was supposed to learn Latin and mathematics, and this tiny thing over there, near the river—look at it!—that was our house! And far away, beyond the city and the plateau on which it is situated, you could discern the rugged contours of the Alps—a distant mirage in the bluish mist.

The "Bavaria" was a portly goddess—stubborn and self-assured; rather dangerous, under circumstances. She didn't like Prussia—an understandable animosity in itself; but it had ominous consequences. Out of their deep-rooted aversion to anything Prussian, the people of Bavaria turned viciously reactionary when Prussia was comparatively liberal during the decade after the first World War. In that time, Munich became the focus and fortress of all hyper-nationalistic currents and conspiracies, the capital of the Nazi movement. It was there that Hitler's career began. It was from one of Munich's famous beer-halls that he launched his first putsch, in 1923. The Brown House was established in one of Munich's finest, most exclusive streets, the Brienner Strasse. The leading newspaper of Bavaria—the arch-conservative "Muenchner Neueste Nachrichten"—consistently backed and fostered the sinister machinations of the Nazi gang.

Munich is not only the city of splendid opera productions and gay outdoor festivities. It is also the place from where the poison of Nazism spread over Germany and infected the world. It was in Munich—characteristically—that the doom of Czechoslovakia and Europe was sealed, in September, 1938. Without Munich, there would be no Hitler—only an anonymous Schickelgruber. Without Munich, there would be no war.

Is it not justified, then, that Munich—more responsible for this war than any other individual city—will have to suffer as do so many other less guilty cities? The "Capital of the Movement" is now within the range of Allied bombers operating from North Africa and Southern Italy. Recently it was visited by the RAF for 25 deadly minutes—with 10 two-ton block-busters falling every minute. May the terrible lesson be instrumental in awakening the blinded people of my former home town! And may our high-explosives have spared some of the people whom I know to be innocent and some of the places which I hope to see again.