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CITIES IN THE NEWS HAMBURG

By T/3 KLAUS MANN.

You have read in the papers that Hamburg has been bombed by the RAF and American Flying Fortresses. "Hamburg blasted again!" the headlines told you, and "Hamburg in ruins . . . Greatest German seaport practically wiped out . . ." And you thought "That's good news—quite a blow to Hitler . . ."

No doubt your elation is completely justified. The destruction of Hamburg is a most important, most encouraging fact—both strategically and psychologically. Yet it is one thing to realize the military significance of a reported event—another thing to gauge its human and cultural implications. What kind of a city was it that has been "practically wiped out" by our heavy bombers?

Of course, you may check any encyclopedia and find all the relevant information: "Hamburg, a seaport of Germany, situated on the right bank of the northern arm of the Elbe; largest seaport of continental Europe; population (1933): 1,079,126; in 1927 the number of ships entering the port was 14,788 . . ." There follow plenty of data concerning Hamburg's ship-building industry and maritime commerce, its churches, its opera house, its museums, its university, its zoological garden and even Hagenbeck's private zoo which is situated in the vicinity.

You may also learn that the city had its origin in a fortress erected by Charlemagne in the year 808; parts of its architecture go back to the thirteenth century, although most of the old buildings were destroyed in the course of the years. In 1501 Hamburg was made a "free imperial city" by the German Emperor Maximilian I. It became the head of the Hanseatic League, which included also the cities of Lubeck and Bremen. In 1871, Hamburg was recognized as a constituent part of the German empire—thus remaining proudly independent from the jurisdiction of powerful Prussia.

It's important to know all this. But it is not everything. A city is an organic being—complex, unique, rich in lovable and irritating features. One has to be acquainted with it—has to have lived with it, to understand its drama.

The announcement that Hamburg has ceased to exist—for the time being at least—as a vital, individual organism, cannot but evoke a profusion of memories and reflections in the minds of all those who have known the place as long and intimately as I happen to know it. Not that I feel sorry for the city and its inhabitants. Did they feel sorry about the bombardments of Warsaw and Coventry, London and Rotterdam? Did they protest against the massive crimes committed by the German army and government in Russia and Norway, Poland and Greece, France and the Netherlands? If the Germans (including the people of Hamburg) disapproved of those outrages, they utterly failed to express their indignation.

No, it's not a question of pitying Hamburg or any other of Hitler's strongholds that has been, or will be, severely punished by the Allied air forces. But it is strange and saddening to contemplate the irredeemable richness of traditions and energies that have to be de-

stroyed—why? Because the German people are in the dangerous habit of following any maniac and charlatan who promises them that they will conquer the world.

The Hamburg I have known will never be again. Of course, the city will be somehow reconstructed; maybe it will regain, in God's good time, its former vigor and prosperity. But its face and flavor will be essentially altered.

Hamburg had indeed a highly personal face and unmistakable flavor. It was a progressive, cosmopolitan place—open-minded and industrious. Its physiognomy and way of life appeared similar, in various respects, to the style of English, Dutch, and Scandinavian cities. The climate of Hamburg is very much like that of London and Amsterdam; even the local dialect has definitely Dutch and Anglo-Saxon accents. The food in Hamburg used to be more tasty and opulent than you could find in any other German community. Hanseatic patricians prided themselves on their ancient lineage, the fine wines in their cellars, the well-kept lawn in their parks, their reserved manners, and their sober, independent views. To them, the social elite of Berlin consisted of hysterical parvenus and plebeians. Hamburg had the reputation of being chilly, stiff, and all too aristocratic. But at the same time its atmosphere was imbued with a certain breezy, adventurous spirit characteristic of all big seaports.

What may have happened to that famous (or notorious) street called "Reeperbahn"—the dynamic center of St. Pauli, the district around the harbor? Something between Times Square and Coney Island, it was one of the most popular spots with the sailors from five continents—gaudy, uproarious, glaring with its cheap illumination and spectacular vices; teeming with truculent males and inviting females; staggeringly vulgar, altogether delightful.

And what about the little literary theater on the stage of which I had my first experience as a playwright and as an actor—impersonating, rather gawkily, a melancholy lover in my first drama? The good old "Hamburger Kammerspiele" (this was the theater's name) is probably all in pieces—the stage, the orchestra, the dressing rooms, the canteen where we used to hang out after the show. And so are—I suppose—most of the streets through which I was wont to pass—all the avenues, quays and squares with their quaint buildings and suggestive names. How odd to remember now my lonely promenades—how many years ago?—along the narrow canals or "fleets" ("Fleeten") by which the old town is traversed. How curious to think of the gregarious evenings in Hamburg's night clubs and studios, its squalid joints and wealthy residences. How many of the people I used to know there may have survived the ordeal of their hometown, the disgrace of their country? Many of them were decidedly anti-Nazi—and I mean not only the organized working men and radical intellectuals but also the patricians who occupied the elegant old mansions on the picturesque Alster river.

True, most of them acquiesced in the Nazi outrages. But there were others who sabotaged and opposed the Nazi tyranny—as openly and as effectively as possible, under the

circumstances. There were acts of individual heroism. The underground was strong in the city of Hamburg.

How did those anonymous, subterranean fighters react to the devastating visit of the Allied fliers?

Just a few days ago, a message from Hamburg reached me—a short communication that had made a long and peculiar journey. It was from a man I knew in those faraway days when the lights were still dancing and glittering on the "Reeperbahn"—friend of mine of good old Hanseatic stock, well-off,

well-bred, intelligent, tolerant. I had not heard from him since 1933. Now he sent me this note:

"My friends and I are with you, with all our thoughts and wishes. Come soon! We are waiting for you. Unchangedly, yours . . ."

The man knows that I am a soldier in the U. S. Army.

He, for one, is likely to hail the Flying Fortresses of democracy—even if they endanger his own life. He may have often risked it while fighting the same enemy whom we have to defeat.

(This is the first article of the series, Cities in the News.)