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"Europe - America".

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"Europe - America"

What did we know about America, first of all? - We knew Tom Sawyer, and Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the Leather Stocking - a title which still sounds to me like the poor translation of its German version "Der Lederstrumpf", so familiar to me - , and we knew the names of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and something about President Wilson's "fourteen points" and the American Quakers, who sent bacon potatoes to the starving German children, after the war.

And a little later, we were fascinated by the prose of E. A. Poe, and the reading of Walt Whitman's great poetry meant a stimulating experience to us. And then we became acquainted with Babbitt and Main Street, as Sinclair Lewis describe them, and with the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, and several other "cases, as Upton Sinclair described them, and with Dreiser's American Tragedy. And all of this was very important and exciting for us. But it was not enough.

We adored Charly Chaplin, and were thrilled by jazz music, and gangster stories, and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and by two or three plays of O'Neil, and we admired some novels by John Dos Passos, and tried to imitate the fascinating staccato of Hemingway's narrative style, and we were deeply moved by the poetical prose of Thomas Wolfe. There were other creations of the American spirit we liked and became familiar with; some books by Faulkner or Steinbeck or Thornton Wilder, and some great Hollywood pictures, and a few pages by Miss Gertrude Stein, and a few melancholy and witty poems by Dorothy Parker. It was a lot, but it was still not enough.

When I paid my first visit to this country, in 1927, I was very young, only twenty years old. I crossed the United States three times from coast to coast; from New York City to Californiaⁱⁿ, and back to New York, and back to the Pacific Coast once more. And I saw a great many places and people, and I was enthusiastic about everything I saw - about the gigantic beauty of New York City, and the Canyon, and the "speakeasies," and about the night clubs in Harlem, and the beauty

of Greta Garbo whom I knew in Hollywood, and the conversation of Mr. Mencken whom I met at the Hotel Algonquin, - and I wrote articles about everything. After having written stories about the slaughter-houses at Chicago and Miss Clara Bow and the negro problem, I returned to Europe, and I was a European.

I have never been a German nationalist, never in my life. But I used to be a European nationalist. I am afraid many of us, in Paris, and in Vienna and in Oxford and in Heidelberg and in Rome, never inclined to that silly attitude of the decadent Greeks, who thought everything that was not Greek was "Barbarian." Well, and suddenly we had to find out that dear old refined Europe was not at all being threatened by barbarism from abroad. We recognized the merciless abhorrent foe within our homelands. He was active everywhere, and in some countries he turned out to be victorious. The deadly foe conquered Germany, our country, by means of force and propaganda and abject intrigues, and his helpers were stupidity and cowardice and weakness. All of you are familiar with the name of our horrid enemy who is attacking and destroying everything we like and worship and are proud of. His very name is a falsehood. He calls himself National Socialism, while he has to do nothing whatsoever with Socialism, and is ~~ruining~~ ruining the Nation by driving her into war.

We left Germany, our hearts filled with shame, grief and anger, and we tried our best to fight the enemy of our people from abroad, since we had lost the possibility to do so within the country. We lived in France and Switzerland and England, in Holland, Czechoslovakia and the Scandinavian countries. We found friends and comrades in all of those countries, and we remain grateful to all of them.

But the barbarian enemy gained more and more ground. We lost Vienna and the Sudetenland und Prague and Barcelona and Madrid, like an unhappy general would lose one fortress after the other. That opposition was growing among

oppressed people themselves, we know. The so-called "great Democracies," however, seemed to become weak and weary, always prepared to make senseless concessions to the horrid foe, and even willing, at certain moments, to collaborate with him. Yet the atmosphere in Europe, for a while, was not encouraging for active antifascist. So we came to America. In my special case, I rather should say: I came back to America. And I ~~was~~ still was a European; but a less narrow-minded one than I had been ten years before.

I had realized in the meantime that liberty and social progress and civilisation are not matters of course which we can enjoy conveniently. I had learned that these notions and values are threatened everywhere and that it is our task to defend them and to fight for them. I had understood that Democracy is not anything we possess and can be peacefully proud of. Real Democracy means an aim and a task - not a possession; it means our aim and task. It is our problem and our future, our struggle and our life.

It would be empty flattery to tell you that the Democracy of the United States is the "perfect Democracy," and that I felt like being in paradise when I came to this country. What I really felt and still feel, however, is this: that certain basic and sacred conceptions and values are more alive here and have a sounder reality than anywhere else. People, it seems to me, are less weary, skeptical and resigned in this country than in Europe. If that is a question of the "naivete" and the youthfulness of the American's then it is America's youthfulness that I love. The truth is that I do love this country. I love and admire it, in spite of its hardships and tremendous problems; or, to be more precise, I love and admire it because its people, the intellectuals and the workmen and some of the political leaders, are prepared and willing to face and to solve those tremendous problems and because the majority of the people in the United States realize what Democracy really means: that it is a precious goal to work and fight for.

Sometimes, when I am looking through the window of a moving train, in the Middlewest or the South or in California, I feel productive activity coming from the big centres, like electricity. I can sense the future, the amazing forces which are going to transform these waste plains; I feel possibilities, chances, things to come, since there is room, and human beings to use it. And I have moving thoughts, while I keep looking through the window at this great, apparently endless country.

This great country - I think - and the Europe of the future, the free and united European continent, are going to understand each other. They will make friends, I am sure, they will like each other, and they will collaborate. What fun and joy it will be to show the beauties of the First German Republic to our American friends! I am not what one may call an ardent patriot; but I admit it would make me proud to act as the host of Americans comrades and colleagues whose hospitality and understanding friendship I enjoy gratefully today.

My heart is filled with hopes and gratitude. The hopes and wishes are for Germany's future and the future of Europe. And the gratitude is for the United States, because they have given me back some faith in the possibilities and good chances of mankind.