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Berlin. Drama of a City.

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B E R L I N

Drama of a City

By Sgt. K l a u s M a n n

The fall of Berlin may not immediately or automatically bring about the end of organized German resistance; but it will be the decisive blow to Hitler's political prestige and military power. Most Germans will realize and admit that they have lost the war, once the enemy has occupied the capital. A Free German government established in Berlin by Field Marshal Paulus or some other prominent anti-Nazi, is likely to be recognized by the majority of the nation.

It is true that the Soviet Union would not have been defeated if the Nazis had succeeded in taking Moscow -- just as the United States might be able to survive, politically and militarily, the loss of Washington. But both Russia and the U.S. -- in contrast to Germany -- have the dimensions of continents; they command vast reserves of space on which they can fall back, if necessary. Neither country depends on any particular nerve center for the maintenance and functioning of its national energies. Germany, however -- though less centralized than France and England -- depends on such a nerve center: Germany needs Berlin.

The importance of Berlin has been steadily increasing, ever since 1871, when the old residence of the Prussian kings was established as the capital of the newly founded Reich, under the auspices of the "Iron Chancellor," Bismarck.

Of course, in the beginning the political and cultural hegemony of Berlin was by no means absolute or undisputed. If the Emperor

over the rest of Germany

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the Capital

resided and ruled in ~~Berlin~~, there still were the minor German monarchs -- kings, princes, grand-dukes, and so forth -- who defended jealously every bit of their independence. In certain parts of the Reich, especially in Bavaria, the sovereignty of Prussia and Prussian Berlin was only grudgingly, if at all, accepted.

With the disappearance of the local princes, in 1918, Berlin's position became more predominant. Under the Weimar Republic, the Reich Capital was for the first time actually the center of Germany's political, social, culturel, and economic life.

That is not to say that the traditional animosities and antagonisms among the various German regions and races disappeared together with the ~~local~~ monarchies. Berlin and the Berliners remained unpopular with the inhabitants of most of the other major German cities. Particularly in Munich -- at that time the citadel of reaction and obscurantism in Germany -- ~~the Capital~~ ^{the Capital} was despised as an international Babel ruled by a rotten gang of Jewish bankers and Bolshevists. If previously Berlin had been disliked by many liberals as the symbol and center of Prussian power policy, it was now hated by reactionaries as the representative of the new democratic state.

Hitler, the Austrian, began his career in Southern Germany. Even before Berlin was aware of his existence, he was a local celebrity in the Bavarian capital -- a revolting and ridiculous character on the Munich scene.

As soon as he came to power, however, it became obvious that his flirtation with Bavarian regional patriotism had only been one of his many demagogic tricks. His most influential backers were not the Bavarian reactionaries but the Prussian Junkers and industrialists. His ideology has its roots, if any, in

Prussian militarism and Pan-German imperialism, rather than in Southern-German provincialism. Munich had been just a stage on the road to power. Berlin was the goal.

It was a cheap gesture, almost resembling mockery, for Hitler to "honor" Munich with the title of "Capital of the Movement." In reality, there was, since the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933, only one German capital -- Berlin. The individual German states lost whatever independence they had still maintained; in fact, they ceased to exist. Berlin was omnipotent. From Berlin, the authoritarian government controlled all activities, public as well as private, within the realm of Greater Germany. From Berlin, the masters of Greater Germany intended to control Europe and finally the world.

Berlin was not a beautiful city. As far as picturesque surroundings and architectural ~~attractions~~ ^{monuments} are concerned, the capital of the Reich could not compete with Paris, London, Rome, Vienna, Prague, -- indeed, not even with some of the more ancient German cities, such as Munich, Dresden, Hamburg, Frankfort-on-the-Main.

Of course, Berlin, too, had some lovely old districts and some fine old buildings, like the famous Zeughaus (Arsenal) and the stately cathedral. Also, there were impressive squares and avenues; the broad, representative gala street, Unter den Linden (even though it fell short of the glorious Champs Elysées, in Paris); the sumptuous Pariser Platz (Paris Square) on which the French Embassy, the swanky Adlon Hotel and the massive Arch of Brandenburg were situated (although it ^{could not} ~~cannot~~ be compared to the matchless Place de la Concorde, in Paris, or to the magnificent Piazza del Popolo, in Rome);

the busy Leipzigerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse (whose business ^{appeared} ~~passed~~ a trifle provincial, ^{in comparison to} ~~if you think of~~ Wall Street or the London City); the glamorous Kurfürstendamm and Tauentzienstrasse -- main arteries of the city's new center in the West -- (whose glamour ^{seemed rather on} ~~slightly paled~~ ^{the phony side to anyone who knew} ~~in comparison to~~ New York's Park Avenue or the Grands Boulevards of Paris).

But most of the city's residential ^(and business) quarters -- both proletarian and middle-class -- were drearily devoid of charm and character. The style typical of Berlin architecture was that of the so-called Gründerjahre -- the "Years of Foundation;" that is, the ^{two or} ~~three~~ decades following the German victory ^{over} ~~against~~ France, in 1871 -- which was one of the most prosperous, but also one of the most vulgar, periods in German history. Indeed, the physiognomy of Berlin, for all its ^{grandeur and} ~~stateliness, and dignity,~~ had irritatingly vulgar features.

On the other hand, it would be unfair to ignore the city's more attractive qualities. Its surroundings, however plain and sandy, were not without a certain austere, unassuming charm. Life in Berlin, at the time I knew it, was pleasant enough; there was something crisp and vigorous about the intellectual and physical atmosphere of the place. The Berliners prided themselves on their flippant wit, their skepticism, their efficiency, their speed or what they used to call their "tempo."

Berlin was an inordinately ambitious city -- always vibrating, quivering with somewhat ~~forced~~ hectic pretensions and aspirations. An upstart among the great capitals of the world, ^{she} ~~it~~ tried frantically to outdo all the others. Everything in Berlin had to be kolossal -- colossal! Parades and pleasure, business and culture -- everything had to be "bigger and better" than anywhere else.

Under Emperor Wilhelm II, Berlin managed to be more imperial and ^{more} imperialistic than any other metropolis. During World War One, it was the most martial, most hysterically chauvinistic capital. After the collapse of 1918, ^{she abandoned herself to} ~~Germany~~ ^{she} ~~assumed~~ apocalyptic moods. Always given to excesses and exaggerations, ~~it~~ ^{she} now reveled, as it were, in depravity and utter wretchedness -- parading ^{her prostitutes} ~~criminals~~, ^{her} ~~degenerates~~, ^{her} ~~sexual degenerates~~ as ~~she~~ ^{she} had previously paraded ~~its~~ ^{her} goose-stepping grenadiers. Bigger and better! The Berlin of the inflation period demonstrated that it could produce bigger and better vices, bigger and better misery, bigger and better despair, than any rival inferno.

With the stabilization of the German currency, the Capital gradually regained its psychological equilibrium. During the following years Berlin assumed a more mellow, more maturely cosmopolitan aspect. The period from 1924 to 1930 -- from the end of the inflation until the time shortly before Hitler's coming to power -- was maybe the most promising and most ^{successful} ~~enjoyable~~ one in the history of the city. Visiting foreigners found the post-inflation, pre-Nazi Berlin stimulating and enjoyable.

Culture flourished in republican Berlin. Friends of music were greatly impressed by the symphonic and operatic performances of such distinguished maestros as Bruno Walter, Furtwängler, Fritz Busch, Klemperer; lovers of the theater came from distant countries to see the dramatic productions of Max Reinhardt and other eminent directors, and to admire the histrionic art of world-famous performers like Alexander Moissi, Elisabeth Bergner, Albert Bassermann, Fritzi Massary, and Conrad Veidt. Berlin's university and various scientific institutions were frequented by scholars from all over the world. Literary connoisseurs agreed that literary life in the German capital was on a

high intellectual and aesthetic level -- with writers like Erich Maria Remarque, Arnold Zweig, Ernest Toller, Lion Feuchtwanger, Bert Brecht, and other talented representatives of the post-War generation, dominating the scene. Students of social conditions were interested in the elaborate and powerful set-up of Berlin's labor organizations. *(Artistically-minded visitors found an abundance of museums and exhibitions,)* gastronomes appreciated the delicious food served in certain high-class Berlin restaurants (the most famous one of which, Horcher, was later to become the favourite hang-out of that big, fat glutton, Göring); erotic experts relished the saucy elegance and the sturdy charms of Berlin's well-built, well-dressed, and often rather easy-going girls.

But under this ^{smooth} surface of urbanity, ~~and in vain~~, there remained always some dark, ominous element -- a secret tension, a dangerous, if hidden, undercurrent. Berlin never seemed to be quite satisfied with its status as a prosperous, normal, civilized capital. ^{She} ~~It~~ wanted to be more! Bigger and better -- that's what ^{she} ~~It~~ wanted to be! It was Berlin's immoderate, frenzied ambition to become the hyper-metropolis, the super-capital of the superman, the city-of-cities, indeed, the queen and center of the universe. That is why Berlin accepted Hitler -- why the Berliners, forgetting all about their much-vaunted common sense and realism, followed the sham-Messiah who promised them might and glory -- bigger and better! kolossal!

Kolossal, indeed! Berlin, once lively and animated, became sterile and dull. The intellectuals, scholars, artists were driven into exile, or they were killed or silenced or corrupted. all social

~~the social structure was destroyed.~~

programs instead of progress! Racial persecution instead of prosperity! Berlin witnessed the burning of books, the suppression of labor unions and political parties, the sadistic practices of the Gestapo. The capital of the Third Reich was the scene of unspeakable horrors and outrages.

Bigger and better! Does not Hitler's Berlin command bigger and better planes, bigger and better guns, a bigger and better army, than any capital of any decadent democracy? Let's use our colossal war machine! Let's challenge -- let's attack the whole world! Let's launch the devastating Berlin-Blitz! May Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Coventry, Sofia, Stalingrad go to pieces! Berlin is safe! Has not Göring promised that no enemy plane will ever reach the Teutonic metropolis?

The drama of Berlin ~~approaches~~ is approaching its grim climax. What the city experiences now, what she has been experiencing during the past year, is tragedy in the fullest, most exact sense of the term -- the inevitable and inexorable punishment of diabolical pride and ambition.

The fall of Berlin, its utter disgrace and destruction, is an event, not only of far-reaching political and military significance, but also of impressive moral implications. It will teach a terrible and necessary lesson, not only to the Berliners, but also to the Germans in general.

Will Berlin ever recover from the nightmare of its present ordeal? Will it be reconstructed to become the capital of a new, purified and pacified Germany? Or will the center of German life be shifted to other regions -- with Berlin remaining in ruins, a ghastly monument

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Bigger and better! Did not Hitler's Berlin command bigger and better planes, bigger and better guns, a bigger and better army, than any capital of any decadent democracy? Let's use our colossal war machine! Let's challenge -- let's attack the whole world! Let's launch the devastating Blitz, made in Berlin! Let's pulverize Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Coventry, Sofia, Stalingrad! Berlin is safe! Has not Göring promised that no enemy plane will ever reach the Teutonic super-fortress?

The drama of Berlin is approaching its grim climax. What the city experiences now, what she has been experiencing during the past year, is tragedy in the fullest, most exact sense of the term -- the inevitable and inexorable punishment of diabolical pride and ambition. Berlin -- torn, ravaged, starving, freezing, blacked-out, crammed with refugees, in a state of panic and disintegration -- pays a terrible price for its own rampant arrogance and aggressiveness.

Will the city ever recover from the nightmare of its present ordeal? Will it be reconstructed to become the capital of a new purified and pacified Germany? Or will the center of German life be shifted to other regions -- with Berlin remaining in ruins, a pathetic monument of its own shame, a warning example to future would-be conquerors?

Nobody knows. But one thing is certain: The fall of Berlin, its utter disgrace and destruction, is an event, not only of far-reaching political and military significance, but also of vast moral implications.

The day on which the columns of the victorious Red Army march through the streets of the German capital will teach a terrible and necessary lesson, not only to the Berliners, but also to the Germans in general. The spectacle of Berlin's humiliation will make them understand that violence doesn't pay, and that he who tries to conquer the world by means of blitzkrieg will perish by an even bigger and better blitz.



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