

UNKNOWN GERMANY HAFKESB

Arendt

D
531
.H317

Unknown Germany

AN INNER CHRONICLE
OF THE
FIRST WORLD WAR
BASED ON
LETTERS AND DIARIES

BY
HANNA HAFKESBRINK

NEW HAVEN
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1948

Zeit kaffee Japan
Lena Lefkebrink

Contents

INTRODUCTION	iii
I PROPHETS OF DOOM	i
II ENTHUSIASTIC WELCOMING OF WAR	28
III DISILLUSIONING ENCOUNTER WITH WAR	51
IV QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF WAR	76
V HUMAN IDENTIFICATION WITH THE EN- EMY	107
VI HOPES FOR THE FUTURE	147
INDEX	163

the domination of their lives by church, school, and home responded to Nietzsche's unmasking of the mendacity of bourgeois culture. The philistine became the target of their inexorable criticism. They castigated him as the smug pedestrian whose worship of the fetish of material security dulled his sensitivity to the demands of the spirit. Among many of the young people the awareness of the ills of their time spread a sense of melancholy and despair. Wilhelm Klemm has expressed this feeling in his poem "My Epoch":

Song and great cities, dream avalanches,
withered lands, latitudes without fame.
Sinful women, misery and heroic deeds,
ghostly faces, storms on rails of steel.

Propellers thrum in distant clouds.
Nations dissolve and books turn into witches.
The soul shrivels into dwarfed complexes.
Art is dead. The hours circle faster.

O my epoch! So namelessly torn,
so without star, so meager in knowing!
As you none, none will seem to me.

The sphinx never lifted its head as high!
But on the way at right and left you see
consumed by torture and fearless, the abyss of madness
yawning! ⁴⁰

In a few extreme groups of young artists this desperate antagonism to their time was mingled with nihilistic tendencies. One of the radical art magazines came to the bold and immature conclusion: "Halt! Our culture is rubbish. Come ye Barbarians, Scythians, Negroes, Indians,

⁴⁰. *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung*, ed. by Kurt Pinthus (Berlin, 11.-14. Tausend, 1920), p. 4.

the decision has been made, one breathes a sigh of relief." On July 27 the paper had pointed out the nervous reflex element in the patriotic street demonstrations, which had taken place sporadically before August 1 and which the militarist pressure groups had been quick to exploit for their political purposes. The sober analysis of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* states: "Those not always clearly definable emotions expressing themselves in hurrahing and singing of patriotic songs have given vent to the general excitement of these last weeks. This sort of excitement asks little and weighs nothing: its representatives usually act under the influence of an almost purely physical pressure."

With a sharper polemic edge the Socialist paper *Vorwärts* on July 30 warned against the political misrepresentation of these "patriotic" street demonstrations by the militarist press: "Who looks behind the scenes of war enthusiasm discovers that this momentary outburst is absolutely nothing but confusion, wild despair . . . War will come anyhow, they groan. Rather an end with horror than horror without end. That is despair politics, insanity. A suicidal mood."

The reference to the subconscious and nervous elements in the enthusiasm of August 1, 1914, might suffice as explanation if this enthusiasm had remained a phenomenon of the street and had therefore seized only groups which traditionally are moved by unthinking reactions. But it cast its spell over much wider groups of the population. It had contagious power over highly reflective individuals and even swayed people who by temperament and conviction were opponents of war. Thomas Mann, like many other writers, was seized by this wave of enthusiasm. In an essay written at the beginning of the first World War he comments on the strangely contradictory position of the poets:

How the hearts of the poets flamed high when the present war came—and they thought they had loved peace, indeed they had really loved it, each according to his particular human type, one like a peasant, the other gently and with a consciousness of German cultural tradition. Now they sang the war in rivalry, rejoicing and with a welling up of ecstasy, as if nothing in the world better, fairer, more fortunate could have happened to them and to the people whose voice they are, than that a multitude of enemies should have finally arisen against the nation. . . .⁵

In a similar way the poet Carl Zuckmayer, now in the United States as a refugee, describes in his autobiography *Pro Domo* the strange reversal of attitude he experienced at the beginning of August:

As we read the newspapers in the hotel we noticed nothing whatsoever of enthusiasm or national excitement, instead only disgust and loathing for the incomprehensible, the senseless automatism of this sliding of the sensible world into absurdity—and at night I wrote wildly excited verse condemning war. . . . Three days later I joined in the rejoicing with holy inflamed passion and with deepest sacrificial earnestness. I experienced the excitement as redemption and release from all the oppressing anxieties of our epoch, life, and youth, as the powerful content of every soul thirsting after greatness and fulfillment—and I rushed to enlist immediately.⁶

Coming from one who in the light of recent events must have been embarrassed rather than eager to make it, this admission is significant.

Stefan Zweig, in his autobiography, *The World of Yesterday*, reports a similar experience:

The first shock at the news of war—the war that no one, people or government, had wanted—the war which had

5. Thomas Mann, *Friedrich und die grosse Koalition* (Berlin, S. Fischer, 1916), p. 11.

6. Carl Zuckmayer, *Pro Domo* (Stockholm, 1938), pp. 33-34.

slipped, much against their will, out of the clumsy hands of the diplomats who had been bluffing and toying with it,⁷ had suddenly been transformed into enthusiasm. . . . And to be truthful, I must acknowledge that there was a majestic, rapturous, and even seductive something in the first outbreak of the people from which one could escape only with difficulty. And in spite of all my hatred and aversion for war, I should not like to have missed the memory of those first days.⁸

This statement ought to carry particular weight as the testimony of a man who committed suicide after completing his account of a life he did not care to continue—an account he must have written with the detachment of one who no longer needs to stylize his experiences to find the acclaim of his contemporaries.

The paradoxical simultaneity of hatred of war and enthusiasm at its outbreak in writers like Thomas Mann, Carl Zuckmayer, and Stefan Zweig raises the question of the nature of this enthusiasm all the more urgently, for here it cannot be attributed altogether to the pressure of merely nervous reactions. What then is the content of this enthusiasm on the level of analytical consciousness?

The common denominator of almost all the autobiographical accounts of the war enthusiasm of 1914 is their ecstatic expression of happiness over the sudden and unexpected experience of national solidarity. Germany in

7. Stefan Zweig's phrasing here has a striking resemblance to the conclusion of Lloyd George: "The more one reads memoirs and books written in the various countries of what happened before August 1, 1914, the more one realizes that no one at the head of affairs quite meant war at that stage. It was something into which they glided, or rather staggered and stumbled, perhaps through folly, and a discussion, I have no doubt, would have averted it." Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: Containing an Assortment of Lies Circulated Throughout the Nations During the Great War* (New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1928), p. 59.

8. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (New York, Viking Press, 1943), p. 223.

1870 had reached but an outward and superficial unity through Bismarck's iron policy. The profound dissensions which for centuries had delayed her political and social development had continued to exist as a serious factor of national instability. The country was torn by the cleavages of religious convictions, by the antagonisms of a sharply articulated class structure, and by the tribal particularism of highly self-conscious states. When at the outbreak of the war all these contrasts suddenly merged into a wholly new sense of national unity, it was spontaneously felt as a release from painful tensions. This new communal feeling reached rapturous degrees where, in addition to the traditional dissensions of the country, the loneliness of the individual in modern atomized society was acutely felt. The poet Rudolf Binding has described this sudden feeling of social unity in his autobiography:

A great belief-fulness (*Gläubigkeit*) came over the people and even the Fatherland itself was less the object of this enthusiasm than the belief in a common destiny which lifted people up and made them all equal. No one wanted to be more than the next one. On the streets and in the squares people looked each other in the eye and rejoiced in their community of feeling.⁹

Stefan Zweig has expressed in almost identical words the experience of an atomized society suddenly welded together in one great feeling of fraternity:

As never before, thousands and hundreds of thousands felt what they should have felt in peace time, that they belonged together. A city of two million, a country of nearly fifty million, in that hour felt that they were participating in world history, in a moment which would never recur, and that each one was called upon to cast his infinitesimal self

9. Rudolf Binding, *Erlebtes Leben* (Frankfurt/M., 1928), p. 237. See also Otto Binswanger, *Die seelischen Wirkungen des Krieges* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1914), p. 14.

into the glowing mass, there to be purified of all selfishness. All differences of class, rank, and language were flooded over at that moment by the rushing feeling of fraternity. Strangers spoke to one another in the streets, people who had avoided each other for years shook hands, everywhere one saw excited faces. Each individual experienced an exaltation of his ego, he was no longer the isolated person of former times, he had been incorporated into the mass, he was part of the people, and his person, his hitherto unnoticed person, had been given meaning.¹⁰

Gertrud Bäumer, one of the leading feminists of her time, wrote under the immediate impression of events: "The strongest, most widespread, and most overpowering experience is the revelation of the national consciousness within us. No, we are not isolated human beings in spite of all our individualism, in spite of all differentiating refinements. We are a people."¹¹

Similarly the German philosopher Max Scheler saw the experience of August, 1914, in terms of the elation caused by the suddenly felt unity of the people. In *The Spirit of War and the German War* (1915) which is a strange mixture of profound philosophical analysis and propagandist overstatements intended to serve the political needs of the hour, he wrote:

That we could feel in these hours how a peculiar national fate touches the heart of every man, the smallest and the greatest, and how it predominates and influences each of us, our values, our life history and lifework, this was the most obvious and the most general and yet the most secret and the most individual experience of this peace generation. The great course of world history and the most personal desire of the individual were suddenly tied together and miraculously became dependent upon each other. No more were

10. Zweig, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

11. Gertrud Bäumer, "Einkehr, September 1914," in *Weit hinter den Schützengräben* (Jena, 1916), p. 29.

we what we had been so long: Alone! The broken contact between individual, people, nation, world, and God was suddenly re-established and the exchange of forces was intensified more than it had ever been by any poetry, philosophy, prayer, or ritual. But these are things in the presence of which not only the word but even thought and concept must keep silent in reverence. This miracle is best kept unspoken in the heart.¹²

The almost religious reverence with which Scheler speaks here of the absorption of the individual into the communal whole has a parallel in Marianne Weber's account. In the biography of her husband, the sociologist Max Weber, which is also her own memoirs, she describes the popular mood in Heidelberg in a tone verging on the religious: "The hour has come and it is of unthought-of sublimity . . . an hour of deepest solemnity—the hour of selflessness, of the common urge toward the whole. Great love for all men breaks down the barriers of the ego. They become as of one blood, one body with the rest; united in brotherhood, prepared to destroy the ego in the service of the whole."¹³ It is interesting to note that this lofty and solemn description was written more than ten years after the actual experience, when subsequent events had had every chance to color her memories and to tone down feeling.

Elation over the merging of the individual into the whole found rhapsodic expression in Rilke's poetry. The poet whose profound humaneness had made him a critic of the dehumanizing influences in modern society even in peace momentarily lost sight of the inhumanity of war, in ecstatic happiness that at last his lonely heart "was

12. Max Scheler, *Der Genius des Krieges und der deutsche Krieg* (Leipzig, 1917), pp. 1-2. See also Georg Simmel, *Deutschlands innere Wandlung* (Strassburg, 1914), pp. 2-4.

13. Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: Ein Lebensbild* (Tübingen, 1926), p. 526.

in the Youth Movement had tried to break through the barriers of convention and class and to build a national community in which the estranged social classes would be brought together in mutual understanding. When the communal experience of August, 1914, seemed to accelerate this welding together of a society whose members had become alienated by the barriers of class, the youth greeted the event with exuberant enthusiasm. Zuckmayer, at the time himself one of these young people, points out in his autobiography that there was even a revolutionary element in this enthusiasm:

A revolutionary spirit pervaded the barracks and tent stables of the volunteers and the recruiting depots of August, 1914. . . . The breakdown of class spirit had at that time nothing of organized and regulated nationalism. It was not based upon material concerns, needs, or interests. It had an element of fateful urgency, or at least it was experienced and interpreted as such by us young people. For the first time we sons of the bourgeois class in the midst of spiritual storm and stress felt ourselves lifted above all the prejudices and pettinesses of home and family environment. The trend toward this liberation had long since been peculiar to us, uninfluenced and indigenous, and had found expression in the *Wandervogel* and in similar movements. Now it was no longer confined to Sunday outings and holiday sport. It had become deadly serious and we did not hesitate to recognize the essential significance of the World War in this, and not in the attainment of war aims.¹⁷

In yet another sense the enthusiasm of 1914 reflected a revolutionary temper. It was the rejoicing over the end of the bourgeois philosophy of life. Ever since the great cultural critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had castigated the pedestrian banality

17. Zuckmayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37; see also Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter* (3rd ed., Hamburg, 1932), p. 53; Paul Natorp, *Der Tag des Deutschen* (Hagen i.W., 1915), pp. 44-45.

of bourgeois existence, the best of the young generation had aspired to experiences more profound than those of economic man. When the outbreak of the war menaced the material and moral foundations of this bourgeois world, the young generation to whom a materialist civilization had denied "the moral equivalent of war"¹⁸ greeted the event with solemn hopes for a more intensive existence. In this sense Zuckmayer writes in his autobiography: "As though the dullness and satiety of bourgeois existence had suddenly been illumined by a flash of lightning, people—regardless of class—seemed to have been gripped and shaken by a so-to-speak ecstatic urge for liberating catastrophe, greatness, tragedy, fate and divine judgment."¹⁹

The poet Ernst Jünger describes the mood of August, 1914, similarly. In his war diary *Storm of Steel* he writes: "Having grown up in an age of security we were all of us filled with longing for the unusual, for great risk . . . Surely the war would give us that mighty, powerful, and awesome experience!"²⁰

This urge for a wider horizon of experience had filled Jünger's heart in early youth with an irresistible longing for the dark continent of Africa.²¹ A year before the war, while still a student in the Gymnasium, this desire for intensified experience had led him to a flight to France to join the Foreign Legion—an attempt forestalled only by the intervention of the police mobilized by his anxious parents. To explain his adventure Jünger wrote in an

18. See William James: "The Moral Equivalent of War," *Memories and Studies* (New York, 1917), pp. 267-306.

19. Zuckmayer, *op. cit.*, p. 30; see also Ernst Jünger, *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg, 1934), pp. 152-153; Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

20. Ernst Jünger, *In Stablgewittern: Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stosstruppführers* (10th ed., Berlin, 1929), p. 1.

21. Jünger, *Das abenteuerliche Herz: Aufzeichnungen bei Tag und Nacht* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 34-38.

autobiographical account describing the unproductive years before the war: "I felt within me such an urge for breadth and freedom of living as—and I was probably right—was not possible in the bourgeois Germany of my time."²²

Love of adventure was undoubtedly an important element in Jünger's antibourgeois attraction to war, but in this love of adventure was an ultimate seriousness which lifts it above mere sensationalism and makes it part of the idealist protest against a materialistic culture. It was Jünger's hope to submit his moral personality to the supreme test of extremity. Unable to develop in the narrow range of bourgeois experiences, he sought to school his heart through the severer trials of war.²³

In addition to this moral desire there was an even profounder metaphysical element in Jünger's longing for the test of adversity. It was the urge to find in the upheavals of war openings in the universe which would yield him a glimpse into the inner being of the world which had become all too remote under the crust of bourgeois superficiality.²⁴ The same urge led Goethe's Faust to explore the hidden depths of the universe by descending into the abyss of death and evil.

Only a few of the intellectual youth greeted war with Jünger's metaphysical radicalism; the majority of the idealistic youth responded rather to its moral appeal—an appeal hard for our war-worn and war-wise generation to understand, but which captured a people whose imagination had remained untrained by the experience of war through more than forty years of peace. The young student Otto Braun, in an entry made in his diary before

22. Quoted in Wulf Dieter Müller, *Ernst Jünger* (Berlin, 1934), pp. 16-17.

23. Jünger, *Blätter und Steine*, pp. 152-153.

24. "Suffering is one of those keys which unlocks not only the innermost of one's being but the world as well." *Ibid.*, p. 154.

leaving for his regiment, wrote of his high hopes for the moral training of war: "I am setting out in great joy and expectation, not in search of adventure and the spurious excitement of unknown experiences, but in the firm belief and hope that I shall become manly and firm, fully developed, broadminded, full of power and strength, in readiness for the great life which will be waiting for me later on."²⁵

In the same spirit Rudolf Binding insists that the desire to test for himself his own moral fiber was of prime importance to him when he went to war. In a retrospective analysis of his experience of August, 1914, he writes:

No lust for fame and victory was within me. My pledge to the colors—: not for a moment did I think of that . . . I was concerned with the destiny into which I rode for no other reason than to withstand it. Important to me was how I withstood it. I was feverishly eager for it with the cold fever of resolve and not with confidence in our weapons and our power . . . For I did not believe that it would be more beautiful or sweeter to die for the fatherland than to prove my own worth.²⁶

The moral emphasis in the war enthusiasm of 1914 finds significant confirmation through Gustav Wyneken who as a leader of the Youth Movement was intimately familiar with the thoughts and feelings of the youth of the

25. Otto Braun, *Diary*, p. 125. See also p. 150. Walter Flex, *Collected Works* (München, 1936), I, 374, 376. *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten*, ed. by Philipp Witkop (München, 1928), p. 16: "It was not love for adventure because I had been so content with my existence until now that I could hardly have hoped for anything better. The experiences of the past years had taught me that even the fulfillment of the most ideal wishes, of the longing to widen one's horizon, to see the world and people and to enjoy beauty are without value if the heart does not become steadfast. Thus my decision to go along to war plays a tremendous role in the fight for strength of character."

26. Binding, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

country. In a lecture of November 25, 1914, before the Münchener freie Studentenschaft he pointed out:

Youth in this war is not primarily concerned with its political causes and aims, instead it joyfully grasps the opportunity of at last being able to have its idealism taken seriously . . .

This youth, which one had suspected of moral anarchism, now greets with unabated joy the opportunity for the real fulfillment of duty . . . For youth, war is first of all not a political but a moral experience. Penetrated by the radical immorality of our national life in peace, they greet the change from peace to war as a turning to greater sincerity and deeper honesty, forced upon the nation by distress.²⁷

Besides the moral appeal of duty it was the "readiness to make a sacrifice" which stirred the moral imagination of the young generation.²⁸ Grown up in an economic society providing little opportunity for the creative investment of their moral energies, they greeted with spontaneous satisfaction the prospect that war by its demands for unconditional sacrifice would replace the laws of selfish advantage. This relief over the destruction of an economic order of life was not limited to the young generation. Gertrud Bäumer in her autobiography recalls her own satisfaction over the end of the materialistic outlook

27. *Freideutsche Jugend* (Hamburg, 1915), I, 56. The desire to prove their mettle was apparently not confined to the idealists of the bourgeoisie whose comfortable existence created a longing for sterner tests. The philosopher Natorp relates a little incident which shows that even simpler folk wanted to lift their lives to a higher level of accomplishment. Natorp writes: "We asked our [butcher-boy] who delivers meat to us every day, Well, aren't you going along?—No, unfortunately I am too young.—Unfortunately? Aren't you glad that you don't have to go to war?—No. It doesn't matter whether one lives a few years longer or not. One would like to have something to show for one's life." Paul Natorp, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

28. *German Students' War Letters*, translated and arranged from the original ed. of Philipp Witkop by A. F. Wedd (London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1929) p. 20.

on life: "We were under the jurisdiction of an order other than the materialistic-technical one of the nineteenth century. An order not involving production and pay, profit and loss, cost and gain, but life and death, blood and power unqualified cost in any event."²⁹ In a similar spirit the historian Friedrich Meinecke writes: "And everyone feels that his limited contribution has a universal meaning and connection and that this time hours and energy are not, as ordinarily in civilian life, carefully counted off, but that the individual must devote his whole being to the work in hand."³⁰

The industrialist Walther Rathenau, under no illusions as to what a modern war involved for his country, nevertheless attached hopes to the idealistic renewal this war might bring for a materialistic generation. In a letter of August 19, 1914, he wrote: "The new era which we were to proclaim is dawning; a life which will be stronger and deeper than the sorry end of the epoch just gone by."³¹ The fact that one of Germany's outstanding industrialists had come to question the very system he himself represented shows how widespread the antagonism to the bourgeois philosophy of life was.

The same antagonism was at the root of Thomas Mann's enthusiasm. In his essay *Thoughts in War* he welcomed war for its "contempt for what passes in bourgeois society for security," for its "acceptance of life as danger," its "moral radicalism," its "unswerving devotion," its "blood testimony" and "absolute staking of all the fundamental powers of body and soul."³²

29. Gertrud Bäumer, *Lebensweg durch eine Zeitenwende* (Tübingen, 1933), p. 280. See also Simmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7, 14.

30. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914: Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1914), p. 33.

31. Walther Rathenau, *Briefe* (Dresden, 1926), I, 157. See also *Zur Kritik der Zeit* (Berlin, 1912) and *Von kommenden Dingen* (Berlin, 1917).

32. Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

Besides being welcomed for its stern demands of devotion and sacrifice, war was solemnly hailed as chastisement. Here again the great cultural critics who had foreseen the crisis in their prophetic visions had also preformulated the categories with which the actual experience was now expressed. As these critics had anticipated war as a visitation, as chastisement of a people which had gone astray, many were now ready to accept and praise this chastisement as a means of spiritual rebirth. Thomas Mann has again expressed what many felt with him at the time:

Let us remember the beginning, those never-to-be-forgotten first days when the impossible nevertheless took place. We had not believed in the war; our political acumen had not sufficed to recognize the necessity of the European catastrophe. But as moral beings we had nevertheless seen the chastisement coming and beyond that we had in some sense even longed for it, had in the bottom of our hearts somehow felt that the world, our world, would not go on as it had. We knew this world of peace and its "cancan" outlook better, better to the point of torment, than did the men whose frightful mission, one far beyond their own stature, it was to unloose the flames! With our nerves and our soul we had been able to suffer far more deeply from this world than they. Terrible world which is no more or which will no longer be when the great storm has passed . . . War! It was purification and release which we experienced and a mighty hope. Of this the poets spoke, only of this. What does dominion, commercial supremacy, what does even victory mean to them? Though our victories, Germany's victories, force the tears to our eyes, though we cannot sleep at night for joy, yet they have not been sung. It is significant that there has been no single song of victory. What inspired poets was war in itself, as a chastisement, as moral distress. . . .³³

Rilke was moved by the same rapturous satisfaction over the visitation of war as Thomas Mann. In the first

33. *Idem*, pp. 12-15.

there flashed into everyone's suddenly no longer personal bosom a heart. Hot, an iron heart from an iron cosmos.³⁵

The doubts that here break into the praise of the War God soon outweighed the hopes Rilke had felt at first. A few months later he confessed the grave error of his enthusiasm. In a letter of November 6, 1914, he wrote: "In the first days of August the phenomenon of the war, of the war-god, seized me . . . now the war has long since become invisible to me, a spirit of tribulation, no longer a god but the unchaining of a god over the peoples."³⁶

When asked by a friend for the "Five Songs" of August, 1914, he found himself unable even to copy them,³⁷ so profound was his horror that he could ever have been deceived into praising war. Rilke remained silent through the rest of the conflict. His production was paralyzed in the face of "the nameless human doom that is happening unceasingly day and night."³⁸ With helpless agony he protested against the tortures of a powerless mankind: "Why are there not a few, three, five, ten, who stand together and cry in the public squares: Enough! and who will be shot down and at least have given their lives that it should be enough while those out there are now succumbing only so that the frightful thing shall go on and on and there shall be no taking account of destruction."³⁹

It is noteworthy that Rilke already began to revise his views on war in the first days of August—at a time when Germany's victories in the field were most impressive and might easily have dazzled him. Unlike Thomas Mann who wept tears of joy over the German victories in Sep-

35. *Idem*, pp. 67-68.

36. Rilke, *Wartime Letters*, p. 22.

37. Compare his letter of September 17, 1914, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

38. *Idem*, p. 14.

39. *Idem*, pp. 48-49.

tember, 1914,⁴⁰ and who in December was still able to defend the invasion of Belgium,⁴¹ Rilke's moral conscience reacted to the negative aspects of war almost at once. He thus proved not only the sincerity of his moral enthusiasm of the first days of August but also the inexorable honesty with which he continued to probe into the moral question of war.

The predominance of the moral over the political perspective, characteristic of the German poets and thinkers, was also a decisive element in the popular response to the experience of August, 1914. To be sure, there were the militarists whose imagination was stirred by the prospective glories of a successful war. Their political influence was great—far in excess of their actual numbers.⁴² Their public propaganda was intense and therefore known the world over. But their moral influence among the population was small. The people who have given unofficial accounts of their reaction to the outbreak of the war in private letters, diaries, or memoirs hardly ever mention any political or military aspects. Many, as we shall see, even make a special point of insisting that they are not interested in matters of this nature. This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that strong propagandistic pressure was exerted to create military interests in the population.⁴³ But the prewar influences which had worked

40. Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 14. For Mann's interpretation of his attitude at the outbreak of the war, see his article, "In my Defense," *Atlantic Monthly*, 174, No. 4 (October, 1944), pp. 100-102.

41. *Friedrich und die grosse Koalition*, pp. 33-118.

42. Cf. the excellent article by Sidney L. W. Mellen, "The German People and the Postwar World," *op. cit.*, pp. 601-625. Cf. Arnold Brecht, *Prelude to Silence. The End of the German Republic* (New York, 1944), pp. 8-9.

43. The Pan-German Heinrich Class has published his memoirs under the significant title *Wider den Strom* (Against the Current of Public Opinion), which would hardly be an appropriate title if the majority of the people had been with him.

it seemed as if the war until now hidden in the distant future was beginning here, in this place and in this hour.⁶

The first contact with war came as a shock even to as innate a warrior as Ernst Jünger. The man who for years had longed to explore the dark landscape of war records his first day at the front with a shudder: "What was all this, then? The war had shown its claws and torn off its pleasant mask. It was so mysterious, so impersonal . . . It was like a ghost at noon."⁷

The first encounter with death was an unforgettable moment in the soldiers' gruesome familiarization with the reality of war. Years after the event they recall the shock of this experience. The workman Karl Bröger remembers the frightened glances which were exchanged by his comrades when on their way to the front they first passed death by the wayside: "With anguish we look at each other. No one says a word, but our faces speak convincingly of this first unveiled impression of war."⁸ Ernst Jünger's retrospective description conveys the paralyzing effect of the experience even more impressively: "The first dead soldier, an unforgettable moment which froze the heart into ice crystals. In everyone horror welled up as in a dun, shying horse before a dark abyss!"⁹

The impressions were intensified by the personal experience of actual combat. Again and again one reads in the letters and diaries of the profound horror which

6. Wiechert, *op. cit.*, p. 73. See also *Der deutsche Krieg in Feldpostbriefen*, ed. by Joachim Delbrück (München, 1915), III, 168-169. Toller, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

7. Jünger, *The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front*, trans. by Basil Creighton (London, Chatto & Windus, 1929), pp. 2-3.

8. Karl Bröger, *Der unbekanntes Soldat: Kriegstaten und Schicksale des kleinen Mannes* (Leipzig, 1936), p. 12.

9. Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin, 1936), p. 12.

now . . ." ¹² In a similar vein the painter Franz Marc reflected on the painful contrast between the reality of war and its romantic anticipation in imagination. In a letter of November 11, 1914, he wrote: "I often think how as a child and a youth I deplored not having experienced a great universal epoch of history . . . now it is here and it is far more terrible than anyone could dream. The individual is dwarfed before the tremendousness of events and patiently accepts the place destined for him by fate." ¹³

The first contact with the reality of war did not fail to impress even the regular officers who through tradition and training were more prepared for the test than the young and inexperienced volunteers. One of these men thoughtfully comments in his war diary on the contrast between the playful atmosphere of the maneuvers in peacetime and the dreadful earnestness of actual battle in which every bullet may take a human life. ¹⁴ He speaks of the deep impression the sight of the wounded made on him: "See, this is war," I said to my men; it was something which suddenly oppressed me with incredible heaviness." ¹⁵ Young Bernhard von der Marwitz, who had boasted of longing for the moment when he would hear the cannon roar, ¹⁶ lamented in bitter disillusionment but a few weeks later: "All my enthusiasm has died away. I am weary of this driving and pushing. O that blessed peace might soon come! But how long until this confusion in

12. *German Students' War Letters*, p. 146. See also *idem*, p. 69.

13. Franz Marc, *Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 20-21. See also *Der deutsche Soldat*, p. 32; Jünger, *Copse 125: A Chronicle from the Trench Warfare of 1918* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1930), p. viii.

14. Karl Freiherr von Berlepsch, *Ein Jahr an beiden Fronten: Kriegstagebuchblätter* (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1915), p. 12.

15. *Idem*, p. 24.

16. Bernhard von der Marwitz, *Stirb und werde: Aus Briefen und Tagebuchblättern des Leutnants Bernhard von der Marwitz* (Breslau, 1931), p. 12.

find I do not belong here any more, it is a foreign world. Some of these people ask questions, some ask no questions, but one can see that they are quite confident they know all about it; they often say so with their air of comprehension, so there is no point in discussing it. They make up a picture of it for themselves. . . . I feel no contact here any longer.”²⁵

This attitude of sad and wise superiority toward the unknowing civilians turned into embittered contempt when it was directed against the press. The attempts of newspapers and public speeches to romanticize the untold horrors of the front filled the soldiers with helpless rage. Again and again in their letters and diaries they tried to correct these false impressions. A student of the University of Freiburg, after giving an unvarnished picture of conditions at the front, ended his letter by saying: “. . . the newspapers have probably given you quite a different impression. They tell only of our gains and say nothing about the blood that has been shed, the cries of agony that never cease. The newspaper doesn't give any description either of how the 'heroes' are laid to rest, though it talks about 'heroes' graves' and writes poems and such like about them.”²⁶ A carpenter expresses the same resentment against the propagandistic glorification of war. As early as August 30, 1914, he writes:

You know more about the war theatre than we, except that everything is painted in bright colors for you. Would that some of those propagandists and superpatriots could be in a position now to see the corpses and horse cadavers piled high, and could look at the distress which we have before us hourly. I believe that then many a one would think differently and would be readier with support than with moral-

25. *Idem*, p. 170.

26. *German Students' War Letters*, p. 73. Cf. similar letters on pp. 41, 163, 229, 348.

ogy ruled even more omnipotently in war than in peace. The men who through daring chivalry had hoped to rescue their spiritual selves from the domination of material and technical forces discovered that in the modern war of matériel the triumph of the machine over the individual is carried to its most extreme conclusions. Heinz von Rhoden speaks for many of his fellow students when he laments in his war diary: "Where is the individual heroism of past wars? The present day artillery engagement is like a wretched rabbit chase, and the soul has to remain dumb and passive under the overwhelming power of nature which comes over it. One has no weapon with which to defend oneself. Many a brave soldier feels like a bird in a cage at which the hunter is aiming. Only he who possesses spiritual energies out here remains the victor."³²

With keen disappointment Ernst Jünger felt that the new forms of war no longer trained men in the knightly qualities of the past: "Chivalry here took a final farewell. It had to yield to the heightened intensity of war, just as all fine and personal feeling has to yield when machinery gets the upper hand. The Europe of today appeared here for the first time on the field of battle . . ." ³³ The same disappointment over the mechanization of modern warfare is voiced by Ernst Toller in his memoirs: ". . . instead of heroes there were only victims; conscripts instead of volunteers . . . We were all of us cogs in a great machine which sometimes rolled forward, nobody knew where, sometimes backwards, nobody knew why. We had lost our enthusiasm, our courage, the very sense of our identity . . ." ³⁴

32. *Zwei Brüder: Feldpostbriefe und Tagebuchblätter*, ed. by G. von Rhoden (2 vols., Tübingen, 1917), II, 107.

33. Jünger, *The Storm of Steel*, p. 110. See also *Hundert Briefe aus dem Felde*, pp. 178-179.

34. Toller, *op. cit.*, p. 90. See also Marwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 42; Jünger, *In Stablgewittern*, p. 9.

The poet and cavalry captain Rudolf Binding expressed the sense of desperate impotence of the modern soldier who, instead of feeling part of the shaping of events through active heroism, sees the blind fury of events forcing defenseless individuals into utter helplessness:

Is mankind in this War only a moraine under the weight of a monstrous glacier? This glacier is slowly rolling down the valley; it never seems to get any lighter. When it no longer weighs on the moraine, when it is melted, only worn-out stones will be lying strewn over a wide field and they will not really know anything about the glacier. . . . Such is this War. It is not to be compared with a campaign. For there one leader pits his will against that of another. But in this War both the adversaries lie on the ground, and only the War has its will.³⁵

It is significant that this disappointment resulting from the triumph of the machine over man in modern warfare not only moved men who before the war had begun to question the blessings of a technical civilization but also seized those who through the choice of their vocational training had identified themselves with the advancement of technology in modern society. A student of the Technical Academy of Charlottenburg wrote in a letter of February 4, 1915:

. . . when you simply stand in a trench and mayn't move, while shells and trench-mortars keep coming over, well, that may be fighting but far from doing anything; it is the exact and horrible opposite. And that is the disgusting part of this war: it's all so mechanical; one might call it the trade of systematic man-slaughter . . . The trench-mortars which both sides have recently introduced are the most abominable things of all. They fire noiselessly and a single one often kills as many as 30 men.³⁶

35. Binding, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

36. *German Students' War Letters*, p. 141. See also pp. 240-241.

of the enthusiastic student volunteers who had hoped that the primitivism of war would rescue them from the mechanized existence of modern society. In his essay von Schramm significantly points out the basic identity between the warfare of the first World War and the pattern of the general civilization of the time. With the greater conceptual clarity which retrospective analysis gains over immediate experience, he recognizes what the generation of 1914 discovered painfully step by step, namely, that war does not lie outside the civilization of an epoch but is rather part of it and subject to its laws:

It was not a war for the sake of the deeper ideas of war but only a destructive clash between bourgeois conviction and mechanical civilization. The war was not concerned with intellectual national predominance or the choice between inner values, but rather with practical purposes and ends and material gains. But how many had hoped at the beginning, from war alone, for a radical rebirth of the spirit of the time! But this spirit or demon proved to be stronger than all the initial knightly ideas of war. The worst experience for the young soldier was that even at the front low ideals, bourgeois narrowness, stupidity, and ignorance dominated; indeed, their influence became stronger with each succeeding year of war, even in the face of death fraud and falseness maintained themselves.³⁸

That modern warfare negated all personal values to a generation so eager to regain those very values is the keynote of Werner Beumelburg's analysis of mechanized warfare. Characterizing the battles of matériel in the later phases of the war in which the individual was reduced to an insignificant unit, he writes:

The effect and range of matériel in this battle is so tremendous that man, as it were, is shoved into the background even though it is ultimately his destruction which is at stake.

38. *Ibid.*

The tormented conscience of a student of philosophy found expression in a letter he wrote soon after the ferocious battle of Dixmuidé:

What experiences one goes through during such an attack! It makes one years older! Death roars around one; a hail of machine-gun and rifle bullets; every moment one expects to be hit; one is certain of it. One's memory is in perfect working order; one sees and feels quite clearly. One thinks of one's parents. Then there rise in every man thoughts of defiance and of rage and finally a cry for help: away with war! Away with this vile abortion brought forth by human wickedness! Human-beings are slaughtering thousands of other human-beings whom they neither know, nor hate, nor love. Cursed be those who, while not themselves obliged to face the horrors of war, bring it to pass! May they all be utterly destroyed, for they are brutes and beasts of prey! ⁴²

In a melancholy Easter letter to his father the poet Binding weighed in the moral balance the disillusionment of his war experience: ". . . there is not a single man who will be any better for the War . . ." ⁴³ Earlier in the same letter he spoke of the paralysis of all moral and creative forces:

. . . it is now about two years since the first primitive enthusiasm engendered by the War passed away. All our efforts are so entirely concentrated on warding off dire distress in every form that they even absorb the soul and apply it to the same task. It has no chance to wander free, let alone to soar. No important invention or discovery, no masterpiece of art, no fresh creative development for the State or the community, no noble piece of building, no poem of original feeling have these fallow years produced. No man in the whole of Europe has been able to do what he might have done had his powers had free play, except for perhaps

⁴². *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 149-150. See also Binding, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴³. Binding, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Germany”⁴⁷ represented not only an inspiring sacrifice but an irretrievable loss for the moral future of Germany. Hermann Popert writes in his war diary:

Seldom was there a stronger “renaissance” of idealism than that which flourished in Germany before the war, especially among the German youth of all classes. . . . The war injured this movement terribly, simply because it killed tens of thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of its followers. That through the war people have again become aware of idealism can only be true in so far as the suffering caused by this insane cataclysm has perhaps hammered into the heads of many the idea of international law and order and pacificism . . .⁴⁸

A student of architecture in a letter of March 7, 1915, summarized his melancholy analysis of the moral effects of the war by saying: “. . . our nation was, as I believe, on the right road towards self-regeneration from within, though the powers which were to bring about this regeneration were very limited. Now comes the war, tears everything out of the process of being and developing, and deprives us of just what we most needed—the youth of the present generation, who were growing up with progressive ideas.”⁴⁹

It is significant that the moral revaluation of war set in at the height of German victories in the field—that is, at a time when the advantages of Germany’s military success might easily have blinded more “realistic” soldiers

47. Binding, *op. cit.*, p. 20. See also Marc, *Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen*, I, 143: “How many and how terrible the mutilations which this horrible war may have brought upon our future culture! How many a young genius may have been killed whom we never knew and who bore our future within himself. . . .”

48. Hermann Popert, *Tagebuch eines Sehenden, 1914-1919* (Hamburg, 1920), p. 132.

49. *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 109-110.

than in war I should think it just as perverse and impossible to let any such calculations weigh with me at the present moment as it would be for a man going to the assistance of somebody who was drowning, to stop to consider who the drowning man was and whether his own life were not perhaps the more valuable of the two. For what counts is always the readiness to make a sacrifice, not the object for which the sacrifice is made.¹⁵

// - X

The moral obligation of the defense of the homeland was equally compelling for the internationally minded German workers. Like the French and English Socialists, the members of the German labor unions rallied behind their government when war was declared. In the hour of national danger the urge to protect their native soil against foreign invasion proved more elemental than their political program which had proclaimed the subordination of national to international loyalties. With the rest of the nation they accepted the idea of defense as a convincing justification of their war effort.

The poems which the workers wrote in the early weeks of the war bear witness to their spontaneous identification with their homeland and their readiness to protect its borders. The war poem of a blacksmith from the Rhineland, Heinrich Lersch, became known throughout Germany. It was written on the first day of mobilization and expresses the sacrificial mood which moved the German workers at that time.

Let me go, mother, let me go!
All our weeping cannot help us now,
We go out to defend our Fatherland!
Let me go, mother, let me go.
In farewell I kiss you now:
Germany must live, and though we die!

15. *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 19-20. See also *Kriegsbriefe gefallener deutscher Juden*, pp. 5-6.

now on no man can get by the bloody sea of this war into the past again and live in what lies behind." 66

With their master the disciples of Nietzsche hold that the new era will require virtues of stern virility. War provides that austere schooling of fate which trains the virtues of the future. With words that closely resemble passages in Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom*,⁶⁷ Otto Braun writes in his diary: "War . . . is for us a sublime fate, an inevitable necessity, and we must live through it in order that the spirit of this restless and mobile age may become resolute and stern, solemn and austere, mature and pregnant with the glorious deeds of the future in all their virile beauty." 68

In the same spirit Ernst Jünger looks upon the war as an "incomparable schooling of the heart"⁶⁹ which taught his generation the stern virtues of the future. In his war diary he writes: ". . . we learned once and for all to stand for a cause and if necessary to fall as befitted men. Hardened as scarcely another generation ever was in fire and flame, we could go into life as though from the anvil. . . ." 70 And later, looking back on his experience, he clings to the same interpretation: "Brighter than the dull red gleam of fire we saw the white heat of will glowing, grenades, gas clouds, and tanks: that is probably the most important aspect to those who are moved by either the brutality or the cowardliness of war. To us, however,

66. Marc, *Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen*, I, 131.

67. Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, Book IV, Complete Works, X, 218-219: "I greet all the signs indicating that a more manly and war-like age is coming which will, above all, bring heroism again into honour! For it has to prepare the way for a yet higher age, and gather the force which the latter will one day require,—the age which will carry heroism into knowledge, and wage war for the sake of ideas and their consequences."

68. Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

69. Jünger, *The Storm of Steel*, author's preface to the English ed. p. xii.

70. *Idem*, p. 316.

that means less; it is only the outward appearance, the dreary background out of which a new steel-like race of beings steps into the present." 71

To such soldiers the interpretation of the war in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy of the future emancipates its meaning from too close an identification with the cause of Germany. What is at stake in the great convulsions of the conflict is not the future of Germany but the future of European culture. In this sense Franz Marc states in an article written at the front early in 1915:

We at the front sense most deeply that—physiologically speaking—these horrible months will mean not only the shifting of political power but—in a spiritual sense—will represent a great sacrifice which all nations make together for the sake of a common goal . . . For in this war it is not, as the newspapers and politicians claim, that the Central Powers are fighting an external enemy, or one race warring against another, but this great war is a European civil war, a war against the inner, invisible enemy of the European spirit. This must be said and comprehended and then perhaps we will realize that after the dreadful blood sacrifice of the war is over, we must untiringly continue to fight, with all the weapons at our command, the inner enemy, the demon and evil spirit of Europe, stupidity, indifference, and eternal lethargy, in order to penetrate to clearer tones and to the lucidity of the new European.⁷²

Like Marc, Ernst Jünger transcended the nationalism of war. Although the national communion of suffering and sacrifice had deepened his love for his own country, the depth of this experience had made him even more

71. *Aufbruch des Nationalismus*, by F. G. Jünger, quoted in an article by Karl O. Paetel: "Ernst und Friedrich Jüngers politische Wandlung," in *Deutsche Blätter*, I, Nos. 10, 25.

72. Marc, "Das geheime Europa," in *Das Forum*, I, No. 12 (March, 1915), 632-633, 635. For the same emphasis on Europe as a whole see Natorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

X aware that in this great purifying fire more was at stake than the political and military future of Germany. Looking back on his war years Jünger writes: ". . . at that time no degree of victory and defeat in the sense of war and peace aims seemed to me capable of giving the cataclysm in which we were involved its significant conclusion. What profiteth it a man if he gain the whole world—or gamble it away—" ⁷³ Thus even this most warlike temperament of the first World War sublimated his war experience to give it spiritual meaning.

73. Jünger, *Das abenteuerliche Herz*, p. 162.

For the glory of your land you die,
for the rightness of our cause I stand,
and for each of us the same death is in store.¹

This sense of the mutuality of their fate made the soldiers not only increasingly incapable of hating their enemy but also sharply critical of all forms of propagandist abuse of the foe by others. Ernst Toller was so enraged by the degradation of the enemy in German newspapers that he asked a well-known magazine to publish his protest. He tells of this in his autobiography:

This mania for disparaging, abusing, and calumniating the enemy was so disgusting that I sent a paragraph to the *Kunstwart* deprecating an attitude which could only reflect badly on ourselves. But the editor returned it with a letter that made me despair. One had to bear in mind public opinion, he said. And thus was that public opinion bred which the men at the front came in time to spit upon.²

The same condemnation of the vilification of the enemy is voiced by a company commander who had observed the bitter resentment of his men when they received post cards ridiculing the enemy. In a letter of public protest addressed to a leading Cologne newspaper he spoke for himself as well as for his men:

Perhaps you will be kind enough to publish this letter and thus help to correct an attitude of strong resentment on the part of our troops. At various times while distributing mail to the men, I have noticed postcards which are a vulgar ridicule of the conquered French, English, and Russians. The impression which these cards make on our men is highly interesting. Practically none enjoy them: on the contrary, every one of them expressed his disgust. One man had tears

1. Lersch, *Herz, aufgib' dein Blut!*, p. 44. See also *Frontsoldaten wollen den Frieden* (Berlin, 1937), p. 25; *Der deutsche Soldat*, p. 51: "Poor fellow, you too died for your fatherland."

2. Toller, *I Was a German*, p. 83.

death of a friend, he bursts into rage against the Russians who have killed him. But in the second, written only a day later, he expresses shame for having yielded to the low impulse of hatred in his outburst of the previous day: "Shame on the vengeful thoughts which I had yesterday. I fight like a knight and I am filled with proud joy, but I do not hate my enemies. That is small and mean and can only be explained by depression of mind."⁹

More comprehensive observations confirm the impression gained from these individual statements. Characterizing the attitude of the officers toward their enemies, Richard Dehmel writes in his war diary: "I often had the opportunity at the front to talk with higher officers. I did not meet a single one who did not recognize the enemy's virtues with quiet respect."¹⁰

This attitude is reflected in the practice of the army of according full military honors to enemies fallen in battle.¹¹ There are many crosses on the battlefields of the first World War whose inscriptions bear witness to this sportsmanlike spirit which recognized the valor of foe as well as friend.¹² On the other hand, the interpretation of war as the exclusive task of armies is also reflected in the inexorable punitive measures which many officers decreed for civilian snipers. Whole villages were subjected to stern punishment because some of their inhabitants had participated in this irregular warfare.¹³ When resent-

9. Klimpsch, *Feldpostbriefe eines Fabnenjunkers*, p. 43.

10. Dehmel, *Zwischen Volk und Menschheit*, p. 295. See also *Der deutsche Krieg in Feldpostbriefen*, I, 251.

11. *Feldbriefe katholischer Soldaten*, II, 191. See also *Der deutsche Krieg in Feldpostbriefen*, I, 166.

12. *Feldbriefe katholischer Soldaten*, I, 134-135; II, 138-139. See also *Der deutsche Krieg in Feldpostbriefen*, I, 206-207; IV, 59.

13. "The civilian population seems to think that such aimless shooting is especially patriotic. They do not consider that by doing so they risk not only their own lives and property but those of their townsmen as well. The communication from the German Army headquarters to

at last reach such a point that it might lead to a similar *entente cordiale* between the opposing armies without any diplomatic preliminaries. Then indeed the World War, which began in such a flood of patriotic ardour, would end in farce; but I believe that the history of the world contains other tragicomedies of the same sort, and that not every great mind is afraid to admit the fact; there are sceptics with a sharp eye for such absurd, grotesque and ironical situations, who do not attempt to gloss them over or explain them away.⁶⁹

Ernst Jünger in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* recalls a time when the opponents were thrown together in a communion of extreme suffering:

Surrounded by death and wilderness we lived out our monotonous existence. Battle had long since lost its singularity; it had become a state of being, an element whose phenomena had become as familiar to us as those of the heavens and of the earth. Our earlier life was nothing more than a vague dream with which we seemed more and more to lose association. If we wrote letters home we told of general things and described the externals of war, not its soul. The few of us who knew what it meant knew too that those at home never would understand.

Autumn came slowly.

Then something altogether unexpected happened—something which we never would have believed possible. One stormy night a driving rain beat down upon the trenches. Wet and freezing, the sentries braced themselves against the wind, trying vainly to relight their drenched pipes. Water gurgled in streams down the walls of the trenches and into one's shoes. One sand sack wall and one epaulement after the other collapsed into a sticky pulpy mass. Like swarms of scared rats and covered with muck the soldiers crawled out of their dugouts in which the water was rising steadily. As

69. *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 241-242. See also Natorp, *Der Tag des Deutschen*, p. 33.

morning dawned slowly and sadly behind the mists we realized that a veritable flood had broken over us. Silent and numbed we crouched on the remaining ledges which threatened at every moment to give way. The last curse had long since died away—a bad omen. What to do now? We were lost. Our rifles were crusted over. It was impossible to stay where we were and to show ourselves above ground would be certain death. This we knew from thousandfold experience.

Suddenly a cry echoed across to us. On the other side of the barbed wire and hardly distinguishable from the background of clayey wasteland, figures appeared in long yellow coats. They were English soldiers who, like us, were forced to vacate their trenches. This was really a relief for we were at the end of our resources. We went toward them.

Strange emotions rose in us—so strange that the region about us seemed to dissolve as smoke, as a dream. We had remained underground so long it hardly seemed thinkable to us that in bright daylight one might walk above ground with such unconcern and speak to the other fellow with human speech instead of with the language of machine guns. And now a great common need showed that it was a very simple and natural thing to meet in the open field and shake hands. We stood among the dead who were lying in this area of no man's land and we marveled at all the troops who seemed to appear from every cranny of the trench labyrinths. We hadn't realized what a host of human beings had been concealed in this dead and desolate area.

Soon lively conversations were going on in large groups. Men exchanged uniform buttons, brandy, and whiskey. It was Fritz here and Tommy there. The large churchyard was transformed into a fair. This entirely unlooked-for easing of tension after a month of bitter fighting gave us an inkling of the happiness and purity implied in the word peace. It did not seem unthinkable that some day the best men of all nations would come up from the trenches because of sudden impulse and moral insight to clasp each other by the hand and to be finally reconciled as children who have been fight-

nized industrial worker and the east Elbian farmer. War does not care about class and background, education and wealth. War brings them all together in the damp, slimy trenches to face the enemy and enemy fire. There, in mutual solitude, shut away from the world, from home and all the loved ones who make home precious to us, there war, the cruel one, creates new virtues—comradeship and the comradely spirit.²⁶

A soldier from Hesse says: "You may be sure that all differences which otherwise separate people disappear here. At the front all are equal, whether officer or private. We live together in harmony and each is concerned with the well-being of the other."²⁷

The equalizing experience of the front made a deep impression on many members of the privileged classes who were brought into contact with the other groups for the first time. The letter of a young aristocrat who realizes the revolutionary implications of this development speaks for these:

War is the great equalizer and at the same time the father of our new era and world order. Here for the first time I am aware of the magnitude of this fact. Whether lieutenant, noncommissioned officer, or grenadier, out here one fights for nothing but human beings. I am beginning to understand a great deal about the spirit of our time. Here it was born and here, therefore, it is in its purest form.²⁸

Similarly a lieutenant writing to his wife hails the mass experience of the front as an instrument of progress:

War is the mightiest of all mass actions. Our kind would never have such a chance of living so intimately with laborers and farmers, of knowing their woe and suffering so thoroughly as here at the front where the officer eats, sleeps, and dies with the common soldier . . . The luck I have had in

26. *Feldbriefe katholischer Soldaten*, I, 125.

27. *Der deutsche Soldat*, pp. 426-427.

28. *Idem*, pp. 452-453. See also Flex, *Briefe*, p. 283.

battle lets me hope that I will return unharmed and richer for the mightiest of all experiences. One bears personal inconvenience more easily in the consciousness that right now many millions are faring just as badly and that this mass suffering is an instrument of historical progress.²⁹

The breaking down of social barriers in the community of the front strongly influenced the thinking of the students in the army. They became convinced that the inner reconstruction of their country had to proceed from this point. They could no longer accept a system which permitted the exploitation of the less privileged. The letter of a medical student reflects this newly awakened social consciousness among the young generation:

Truly and honestly, if I ever felt inclined to moralize about my past life, every such thought has vanished now. I am quite convinced that everybody who gets home safe and sound will be a totally different fellow in every way. He will certainly be more considerate towards other people, especially in the matter of exploiting them for his own ends. The habit of comradeship necessitated by the war will have that result.³⁰

A Heidelberg University student writes:

It is a joy to me that my comrades love me; that one of my best friends is a stonemason and another a worker in an iron foundry. It is no pleasure to me that I have been recommended for the Iron Cross, but what does please me is that when men of other sections, and even of other platoons, have a dangerous job on they come and ask me to go with them. I am delighted when I hear them say: "That bloke's a student, but he's a good sort." And yet that "but" has something humiliating in it. At any rate here is the point where the real work of peace begins with all its brutal truth.³¹

29. *Hundert Briefe aus dem Felde*, p. 171. See also Zuckmayer, *Pro Domo*, pp. 36-37; Franz Seldte, *Dauerfeuer* (Leipzig, 1930), p. 79.

30. *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 119-120.

31. *Idem*, p. 167.

to! That is probably the most cherished thought we have. . . .³⁴

Much of the optimism which rings in these student letters from the early part of the war was lost in the later years of the conflict. The cruel intensification of the fighting after the battles of the Somme and Verdun not only took a heavy toll in lives from the ranks of these young idealists but also broke the spirit of many of the survivors. The climate of death was too severe to encourage the tender growth of their hopes. Remarque has spoken representatively for this disillusioned youth: "Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experiences we might have unleashed a storm. Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more."³⁵

More and more the soldiers' being was absorbed by the needs of an overwhelming present which eclipsed both past and future. In an inexorable process of alienation from the world of peace they were drawn ever deeper into the all-pervading reality of war. This mood is expressed by a student from the University of Marburg:

It seems to me as if we who are face to face with the enemy are loosed from every bond that used to hold us; we stand quite detached, so that death may not find any ties to cut painfully through. All our thoughts and feelings are transformed, and if I were not afraid of being misunderstood I might almost say that we are alienated from all the people and things connected with our former life . . . All attempts, however, to put such things into words seem banal and almost sacrilegious; such immense effects cannot be compressed into the tiny compass of human understanding. I

34. *Zwei Brüder: Feldpostbriefe und Tagebuchblätter*, II, 133-134.

35. *Remarque, op. cit.*, pp. 289-290.

have had to live through the experience of seeing my old regiment fight and die, and I cannot talk about it. All we can do is to be silent and hold up our heads: "After the war" expresses an idea which seems miles away from us."³⁶

The same feeling of estrangement from everything that lay outside the boundaries of war is described by Rudolf Binding: "More and more we are to be counted among the dead, among the estranged—because the greatness of the occurrence estranges and separates us—rather than among the banished whose return is possible."³⁷ And a soldier from Kassel expresses this mood of aloofness with the words: "I know only a 'today.' I know no 'tomorrow' and no homeland . . . I do not think of peace, of coming back—all that is too far away—much too far."³⁸

This alienation was sensed especially by the youngest soldiers who had entered the world of war without ever having known a world of peace. Remarque speaks for them with convincing authenticity. Only sixteen years old when the war started, and soon sent to the front, he knew from personal experience how completely war dominated those who were caught up by it before they had taken firm root in the soil of peace:

Our early life is cut off from the moment we came here, and that without our lifting a hand. We often try to look back on it and to find an explanation, but never quite succeed. For us young men of twenty everything is extraordinarily vague . . . All the older men are linked up with their previous life. They have wives, children, occupations, and interests, they have a background which is so strong that the war cannot obliterate it. We young men of twenty, however, have only our parents, and some, perhaps, a girl—that is not much, for at our age the influence of parents is at its weakest and girls have not yet got a hold over us. Besides

36. *German Students' War Letters*, pp. 160-161.

37. Binding, *A Fatalist at War*, p. 11.

38. *Der deutsche Soldat*, p. 202.

this there was little else—some enthusiasm, a few hobbies, and our school. Beyond this our life did not extend. And of this nothing remains.

. . . We had as yet taken no root. The war swept us away. For the others, the older men, it is but an interruption. They are able to think beyond it. We, however, have been gripped by it and do not know what the end may be. We know only that in some strange and melancholy way we have become a waste land.³⁹

But in spite of this widely felt disillusionment in the later years of the war, the devotion to the ideas of peace and democracy remained basically unimpaired. It was merely a temporary disillusionment, a paralysis of hope which relaxed as soon as the prospect of peace eased the burden of war. When Wilson's gospel of world brotherhood reached the front, the old hopes of the future were rekindled at once. In a poem addressed to the soldiers of the Great War, Gerrit Engelke caught the mood of ecstatic expectation which seized many when peace at long last promised to create the possibility of a new life:

. . . Oh, that brother would again call his brother brother!
That east and west might recognize the selfsame worth:
That joy might flame again among the nations:
And man delight in doing good to fellow man!
From front to front and field to field
Let us sing of the festive day of the new world!
Let one sound vibrate in every breast:
The Psalm of Peace, of reconciliation, of exaltation!
And let the song be like the surging of the sea, the muted
song,
The song that transports all feeling, the song of brother-
liness,
The wild and holy song of compassion, let
The song of thousandfold love ring out o'er all the earth!⁴⁰

39. Remarque, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

40. Gerrit Engelke, "An die Soldaten des grossen Krieges," in *Rhythmus des neuen Europas*, p. 108.

p. 34 p. 33 - The sudden transition from 25 to
p. 34 - Overbreak Lloyd George

Something to do for one's life 43

Th. Man 45

Richard 48

The intellectual -- not interested
in what happens or why, but only
in their feelings - 48

sad & wise superiority

Chivalry - Jung 65, 110-111

Only the War has his will - Binding 67

The disparity of means & end - 106

War the equalizer - 156

We will not be able to find one very
any more - 158, to come let among
the dead - 160