

**THE NEMESIS OF
DOCILITY; A STUDY OF
GERMAN CHARACTER**

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The Nemesis of docility; a study of German character by Edmond Holmes

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EDMOND HOLMES

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THE NEMESIS OF DOCILITY

A STUDY OF GERMAN CHARACTER

BY

EDMOND HOLMES

"Your enemy becomes a mystery that must be solved,
even though it takes ages; for man must be understood."

Light on the Path, by M. C.

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole
world, and lose his own soul?"—*ST. MARK* viii. 36.



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FOREWORD

THE word *docility* is not quite strong enough for the purpose of this book. But *servility*, which seems to be the only alternative to it, if not too strong, has too narrow a range of meaning. Let me, then, explain that by *docility* I mean readiness to obey for the sake of obeying, avidity for commands and instructions, reluctance to accept responsibility or exercise initiative, inability to react against the pressure of autocratic authority. *Docility*, in this sense of the word, when it is a national characteristic, may become a destructive force of extreme violence. For a docile majority implies a dogmatic and domineering minority; and the docile majority may carry *docility* so far as to become dogmatic and domineering, in imitation of their masters, whom they naturally make their model. Thus it is possible for a people to be as clay in the hands of ambitious and unscrupulous rulers, and yet to be arrogant, aggressive, and self-centred in their bearing towards the rest of the world. When this happens, the materials have been laid for a great conflagration, and only a spark is needed to set them ablaze.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE GENESIS OF GERMAN DOCILITY	I
II	A DOCILE ARMY	32
III	A DOCILE PEOPLE	52
IV	THE DREAM OF A DOCILE WORLD	78
V	DEADENED BY DOCILITY	110
VI	BRUTALIZED BY DOCILITY	140
VII	BETRAYED BY DOCILITY	173
VIII	THE MENACE OF GERMAN DOCILITY	198
IX	OUR DEBT TO GERMAN DOCILITY	218
X	OUR DEEPEST DEBT TO GERMAN DOCILITY	247

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE NEMESIS OF DOCILITY

CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF GERMAN DOCILITY

THE Germans are the most obedient people on the face of the earth. To say that they obey orders unhesitatingly, ungrudgingly, and punctiliously is to do them less than justice. They do more than obey orders. They wait for them, look out for them, are lost without them. The old legalist formula "Is it so commanded?" and the complementary formula "Is it so permitted?" are ever rising to their lips. At every turn in life they are met by the warning word *Verboten*, and they are glad that this should be so. But their spirit of obedience carries them further than this. They not only do what they are told to do and leave undone what they are forbidden to do; they also think what they are told to think, believe what they are told to believe, say what they are told to say. And this is not all. So docile are they that they even feel what they are told to feel. They are told to feel patriotic; and they sing with enthusiasm *Deutschland ueber alles*. They are told to desire war; and they straightway burn with martial ardour. They are told to be

world-ambitious; and they duly toast "the Day." They are told to hate France—Russia—Japan; and they hate each of those countries with a right good will. Finally they are told that England is their arch-enemy; and their outraged feelings find relief in rancorous hymns.

This is a singular phenomenon. How are we to account for it? The explanation, whatever it may be, is almost certainly historical, not racial. In the days of Tacitus the Germans were famous above all peoples for their love of freedom. They jealously guarded their liberties, not only against foreign domination but also against domestic tyranny. When the political organization of a people is tribal, as that of Germany was in those days, there is a danger lest the chief, the symbol and centre of tribal unity, should become an autocrat, and the tribesmen should become his subjects, and at last degenerate into his slaves. Against this danger the Germans seem to have taken ample precautions. The power of their kings was "neither unrestricted nor arbitrary." They "chose their commanders for valour," expected them to fight in the forefront of the battle, and followed their lead rather than obeyed their orders. Their gods alone had the right to punish them, a right which they were supposed to delegate to the priests, but to no one else. Nor did the Germans, as individuals, allow their freedom to be crushed by the undue ascendancy of the State. On all matters of public importance the final decision rested with the assembly of the freemen, who came armed to the place of meeting, listened to the proposals of their chiefs (who owed their authority to