

**ENGLAND
OR GERMANY?**

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England or Germany? by Frank Harris

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FRANK HARRIS

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OR GERMANY?**

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FOREWORD

Some of the best heads in the world have written about this war, and yet no one stands out as having approached impartiality. The first half dozen sentences always show on which side the sympathies of the writer are engaged. The Germans all believe that they have been attacked: Herr Von Jagow declares that the plot against them was got up by England; Hauptman is confident that all Germans feel they are in the right; Harden asserts that Germany is a law to herself. On the other hand, the Allies consider Germany as the aggressor: Anatole France throws down his pen and enlists at nearly seventy to fight the "barbarians"; Wells professes to regard the Germans as "inferior" beings; Sir Edward Grey believes that they desire "universal domination"; even Bernard Shaw appears to have regretted his attempt to see things as they really are and agrees that the Germans must be crushed. And now comes M. Fa-guet, eager to show that a really eminent literary critic may also be blinded by prejudice.

He begins by stating that the Germans are hated by all nations, and he infers therefrom that they are hateworthy, lacking at least in amiable qualities. The inference is plausible, but hardly more. M. Fa-guet appears to have no notion of the fact that men are apt to hate their superiors just as they like their inferiors; in proportion as a man rises above the ordinary he is sure to be disliked. That is the lesson

of all genius: Socrates was hated in Athens not because he was unamiable, not because he "corrupted the youth," as his indictment phrased it; but because he was more reasonable, wiser, braver and more pious than other men. We mortals crown our greatest with thorns. The Germans are hated because they have done great things in the last twenty years; they are not only strong in a military sense, but they have shown themselves as successful in business as in music and philosophy. Their population and wealth have grown by leaps and bounds, and, strange to say, they have been wise enough at the same time to do away with poverty. Much less would have sufficed to earn them general dislike, even if their manners had been as urbane and distinguished as they are reputed to be rude and aggressive.

Partisans, especially English-speaking partisans, are pretty sure to condemn this book of mine as if it were written in a spirit of bitter prejudice. There is probably an inclination in me to take the weaker side, the side of those who have the odds against them, for I have often noticed this inclination in other Celts; but this tendency, if it exists, is not the bias usual among American writers. In self-justification I say that those who would stand upright must lean against the prevalent wind in proportion to its strength. Of course, one may lean too far and lose balance; if I have done that, it is involuntary and I shall have to pay for the folly.

One curious fact has given me a good deal of confidence. I had practically written this book before I came across the "Englische Fragmente" of Heine. I was astounded to find that the conclusions to which Heine came after visiting England three-quarters of a century ago were almost exactly the conclusions which had gradually forced themselves in on me and I had set down after living and working twenty-five years in the country. Now Heine was a Jew, and

apt, as most Jews are, to honor success and material prosperity such as England possesses, unduly; yet Heine condemns English laws and the modern English ideals as passionately as I do: Jew and Celt examining the subject from opposite viewpoints and arriving at the same result!

We both condemn the English oligarchy, English snobbishness and English hypocrisy; we were both struck with horror by the incredible cruelty with which the English treat the poor, and the unimaginable savagery of their laws, mainly directed against the weak. It was Heine who taught Matthew Arnold to see the "degradation of the English working class," "the ignorance and sordid narrow-mindedness of their middle-class," and the "barbarianism" of their nobility. Heine left England, he tells us, to get away from "gentlemen" and live among ordinary knaves and fools as the only man with a clear understanding of human squalor.

Yet, though I agree with Heine in his condemnation of much in England, I differ from him in having some hope. The vices of the English governing class and the savagery of their laws only serve to set in relief the fact that such of the working-class as enjoy decent conditions of life are among the finest specimens of humanity to be met with anywhere. There is, so to speak, a well of pure loving-kindness about the heart of them which is amazing and a sense of humor as well. What shall be said of that English soldier who, after an unsuccessful sally against the German trenches, called out to his foes: "Don't be downhearted, Dutchies; you'll get home yet."

It is my admiration of such Englishmen that lends passion to my hope that there may be a social revolution in Great Britain as an outcome of this war, a revolution which will put an end forever to the selfish, senseless domination of the titled class and set