

By Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

What are the women in Germany thinking and feeling? That thought kept running through my mind as I looked at them in the streets, as I sat facing some of the German women journalists in Frankfort, as I talked to two women my own age, one of whom I had known since our school days, and last but not least, as I saw the displaced German women herded in what is known as "The Bunker". This is an old air-raid shelter in Berlin used now as a temporary overnight shelter for men, women and children, who are moving out of the part of Germany ceded to Poland, or out of Sudetenland, or out of Denmark or any other place where they may have been living, sometimes for several generations, sometimes for just a few months.

Berlin, of course, made the deepest impression of misery on me. There seemed to be no young men in the streets and the little groups of elderly women picking up bricks, and little pieces of glass or iron or tin in the heaps of rubble, loading them on little hand-drawn carts and trundling them through the streets, seemed to me pathetic.

In places where there are no goods to buy this salvaging job seemed desperately important. In "The Bunker" where nine people sleep and sit through whatever time they spend there, in partitioned off spaces which

allow for only a little empty space between two rows of side bunks, one has for the first time, a realization of the effect of conditions on people. Even the Germans whom we think of as a clean people, when they are denied facilities for washing and when soap is not available, need to have every individual sprayed with DDT, just as much as the nationals of any other countries! By some miracle the public health doctors have succeeded in keeping down epidemics though they told me that two little girls had just come in with typhus and had been taken to the hospital from The Bunker as I went in.

Children were wandering around the corridors uncared for, unnoticed and I said to the doctor with me: "I should think the mothers would be afraid of losing them". Her answer was: "They have lost so much they are numb, and frequently do not even notice that the children are not with them."

This was borne in on me by the curious apathy of a woman in the dining hall whose little boy, I noticed, would not eat. The food was not very appetizing, just a bowl of potato soup and dark bread, but when only two meals a day are served, hunger makes almost anything seem palatable. I asked her why the little boy would not eat and she said so matter of factly and with apparently no feeling: "He has a fever and will not eat. His sister had a fever yesterday and the doctor saw her. Today she can not get up". There was no expression of anxiety, just acceptance of fate.

As I went out two little children sat with their few belongings on a bench in the hall. The little boy looked about nine years old, and his sister around five. Their mother had gone off with the morning's convoy and forgotten her children. They sat all day waiting for some one to find them a shelter. You might have expected tears or sobs, but these children just sat, as their elders do, and accepted their fate.

On the whole, however, it would seem that the German women in the rural areas, still have comparatively normal lives. They may have to take in families or friends from other parts of the country and by now the goods and foodstuffs which even homes of moderate income had laid up during the war, may be nearly exhausted, but the land is being cultivated and this is the first year that the German women can be said to have experienced what the other women of Europe have known in the way of misery and want for the past five or six years.

There was prosperity in Germany while she was conquering Europe and the goods of the other countries flowed into the German homes. The end of these hoarded goods is now in sight, however, as far as foodstuffs are concerned, and the German women are beginning to worry about feeding their children. They are probably better clothed than the rest of Europe and probably their household goods are in better condition. Their homes in Germany are furnished with utensils and tools taken

from all the conquered countries, but the housewife sees no chance of renewing anything when what she has is worn out. For instance, clocks which the bombs put out of order are keeping all the watchmakers busy since no new ones can be bought.

One wonders if the women of Germany have any idea that they are just beginning to taste the results of what their government and their armies have brought about in so many other countries. My old school friend in Frankfort, who is a very religious woman, said to me ~~when~~ we met that our country was as guilty as the Germans because we did not obey Christ and love each other. I gasped inwardly with a realization that she was just expressing what the civilian population, men and women alike, feel in Germany today. In many cases it does not come from religious teachings, but from political teachings which no child has been spared. They may not feel as my friend did that it was our lack of following Christ's rule of Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself, that brought about the war, but they all feel that the war guilt is surely not on their shoulders alone. They simply followed their destiny when they decided that they were God's chosen people who were to rule the world.

The German people are bound to think of the higher standard of living which Hitler gave them. They know that their houses were good houses, that they had

plumbing which some other European countries lack. They know that they had radios and even automobiles. Some of the little three-wheeled cars that Hitler produced for the benefit of people of small income who needed a sort of combination truck and car, are appearing from the places in which they were hidden during the days of the war.

The fact that employment was based largely on the preparation for war, and that they had to shut their eyes to the concentration camps that always lay over the hill, does not seem to have penetrated the consciousness of the average German.

In the cities where hunger prevails and where the problems are looming day by day, as increasingly difficult, from the housewife's point of view, there is without any question grave anxiety. Everywhere that Germans have been uprooted and moved back into the homeland where they find themselves as unwanted as if they were strangers, there is the same kind of numbness that you find in other uprooted people.

You can not help, in thinking of the German women, comparing them with the women of other European countries. Of course, the British women have not been in an occupied country although they have had all the dangers and difficulties which come with war actually waged on your land from the air, and their food problems have been great, though never as acute as those of women

on the Continent where the enemy was actually on their ^{and} land/dRAINING off everything which could possibly be taken away. The British women are tired and with the end of the war has come a feeling of relief that the bombings have ceased, of thankfulness that the black-out is over, and above all else, gratitude that their men are not being killed. They have hope in the future. The difficulties of daily living, however, as far as restrictions and shortages are concerned, loom even more disagreeably before them because there is nothing more dangerous to distract their attention.

One feels, however, that as soon as some of these shortages can be brought to an end, that physical vitality will return and there is no moral and physical breakdown, so the come-back will be much quicker.

On the Continent, the physical strain and the nervous strain has been so long and so great that even the joy of returning freedom is not going to be able to restore the women to their full vitality and vigor. They will never be affected the way the German women have been, because in no country have they been subjected to the kind of brutalizing discipline and propoganda that existed in Germany. The strain has been such a long one, however, that the return to anything like normal existence is going to take a long time.

Never having been in Russia, I can not speak about their women except from the few contacts I have

had with them outside their own country and at the UNO Assembly. I should say that in their invaded areas the suffering had been acute. In addition, because of the need of ~~suppressing~~ ^{subordinating} everything else to war production their domestic shortages have subjected them to a very great period of strain. One feels, nevertheless, a great vitality in the Russian people and in the Russian women which makes me think they may come back more quickly to normal enjoyments and normal reactions to life than any other women on the Continent of Europe.

There are three rough divisions into which one can divide the German women:

1 - Those who have been fortunate enough to live on the land are even now living fairly normal lives.

2 - Those in the cities have suffered from the intensive destruction of their surroundings and probably for a year now have been anxious about food, heat and shelter.

3 - The displaced women who have lost most of their belongings and have sometimes become separated from their families, are in a category all by themselves.

There is one thing in considering future generations in Germany which we must not forget, namely, that Hitler looked upon all women primarily as a source of population. The young women were taught systematically that it was an honor to bring a German child into the world and it did not matter whether you were married or not, and if your husband was away - the old laws of

morality and fidelity were not to be considered ahead of the needs of the fatherland for population. This has produced a group which might be called unmoral young women. It is one of the things which our Army has discovered and it is perhaps the thing which will have the greatest influence on the next generation since it has changed the whole conception of family life.

In the old days in Germany the family revolved around the father, but these unnatural war years combined with the Hitler doctrine have changed the old conceptions of home life and of loyalty very greatly.

Our many tables show some facts on population which shed light on the importance of the women in Germany.

The ratio of females to males in the total population increased from 1.04:1 in 1939 to 1.32:1 in 1946, and in the working age groups, 14 to 65 years, the ratio increased from 1.06:1 to 1.51:1.

The table further shows a 31 percent decline in the number of ~~females in the~~ ~~ages~~ ~~groups~~ males in working age groups and even a slight decline in the number of females in these age groups, due both to the war dead and to the fact that the declining birth rate during the period 1922 to 1933 is now manifesting itself in these groups. There has been a noticeable aging of the population, both absolutely and in percent of the estimated population as against 1939. The number of males and females under the age

of 14 has increased slightly owing to the rising birth rate from 1933 to 1940.

What will this mean for the next generation? I think it will mean a very slow and difficult return to standards and values as they exist among other people. It may be good not to exalt the man so much, but the loss of real family feeling is irreparable for the child.

Perhaps the first and most serious question to be answered is: "Will the women face the actual conditions in Germany which brought about the war and accept the responsibility for having followed the leadership which led to cruelty towards the Jews, to setting material standards above everything else and finally to war? If they do not accept their guilt, I think it will mean a mounting belligerence and grievance against the world and perhaps instead of a docile people who have been ordered by their government to be the scourge of Europe twice in twenty-five years, we will find them joining the ranks of the revolutionary people and becoming restless and constantly fighting amongst themselves, since they probably will not have the ability to fight on any great scale against anyone else.

Perhaps, however, if the few women whom I saw and who seemed to have an idea that it might be possible to change the thinking of the next generation into more peaceful and constructive channels, succeed

in bringing in books about a less militaristic way of life, it may be possible to bring a new ideal of cooperation amongst the people. In the future, instead of the old feeling of a master race which must dominate the world, they may think it possible to live as friends among equals. If that happens, the women will have to do it and my own feeling is that it will largely be done by the women who live in rural areas and who are still able to lead somewhat normal lives.

Too much suffering numbs people and people without the ability to feel can contribute little to the upbringing of a new generation, or to the rehabilitation of a nation. On the other hand, an unwillingness to face the reality of one's own shortcomings prevents spiritual growth and with all the problems that are going to face the next generation in Germany, it would seem to be essential that the greatest changes should come in their mental and spiritual outlook.