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GERMAN TRUTH AND A MATTER OF FACT



By the Right Honourable
J. M. ROBERTSON, M.P.

T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.,
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1917.

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IN the last issue of *Le Mouvement Pacifiste*, published from time to time at Berne, there is an interesting revelation which has not, I think, been made current by the British Press, but which clearly ought to be.

It will be remembered by many that at the very outbreak of the war there was published a German report to the effect that French military aviators had not only flown over Belgium but had thrown bombs on the railway near Karlsruhe and Nuremberg. The statement was, in fact, officially made to the French Government on August 3, 1914, by the German Ambassador at Paris as constituting the ground for the German declaration of war. Thus the document ran :—

Monsieur le Président,

The German military and administrative authorities have ascertained (*constaté*) that a certain number of acts of pronounced hostility have been committed on German territory by French

military aviators. Several of these have manifestly violated the neutrality of Belgium by flying over the territory of that country; one has attempted to destroy constructions near Wesel; others have been seen over the region of Eiffel; another has thrown bombs on the railway near Karlsruhe and Nuremberg.

I am charged, and I have the honour, to inform your Excellency that, in view of these aggressions, the German Empire considers itself in a state of war with France.

This assertion was at once denied *in toto* by the French Government, and in view, further, of its extreme improbability, neither Allies nor neutrals have ever had much hesitation in disbelieving it. Its untruth is now established from the German side.

In the *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* (German Medical Weekly) of May 18, 1916, Professor Schwalbe writes as follows:—

In my article, “Französisch-Nationale Medizin” (“French National Medi-

cine ”), No. 11, page 327, first column, I have asserted, in justification of our policy against the accusations of our enemies, that a French aviator had thrown bombs on Nuremberg before war had even been declared. As I now learn, from information which, at his own request, Privy Councillor Riedel (Jena) has obtained from the Mayor (*Magistrat*) of Nuremberg, my memory has somewhat betrayed me. I had, in fact, read in the journals of August 2, 1914, that on that day, according to a statement by the administration of the railways of Nuremberg, published by the official Bavarian Hoffman Agency, “on the Nuremberg-Kissingen line, and also on the Nuremberg-Anspach line, aviators had been seen who had thrown bombs on the permanent way.” From a correspondence which has recently taken place, however, between the Privy Councillor and the Mayor of Nuremberg, it appears that this assertion,

which hitherto has not only not been denied, but, on the contrary, has been generally regarded among us as a proof of the breach of the law of nations by French aviators, is in fact untrue [*“tatsächlich nicht zutrifft”*].

The Mayor of Nuremberg writes on April 3 of this year: “It has never been conveyed to the knowledge of the command of the 3rd Bavarian Army Corps that bombs had been thrown, before or after the declaration of war, by enemy aviators on the Nuremberg-Kissingen and Nuremberg-Anspach lines. All the allegations of this kind and all the reports of the journals have been recognised to be false.”

Privy Councillor Riedel had evidently tried to trace the report to a military authority which had been specified as cognisant of the facts; and the Chief Magistrate of Nuremberg has thus explicitly avowed that all reports of the kind are false. I have not seen the original *Deutsche Medizinische Wochen-*

schrift containing Professor Schwalbe's announcement; but I do not doubt that *Le Mouvement Pacifiste*, which is conducted with great care and a high sense of responsibility, gives an accurate translation.

It may seem to some surprising that a falsehood officially promulgated by the German Ambassador at Paris on August 3, 1914, as the ground for the German declaration of war, and, therefore, universally current in Germany since, should be permitted to be exploded as it has been by Professor Schwalbe. The only explanation I can suggest is that, appearing as it did in a medical journal, it escaped the scrutiny of the German censorship. To three Germans—Privy Councillor Riedel, the Magistrate of Nuremberg, and Professor Schwalbe—must be given every credit for investigating and exposing the false official report. But what is to be said of the German Government, which gave it to the world as its ground for declaring war against France? The story of the bomb-dropping on the Nuremberg railways being admitted

to be false, the stories of violation of Belgian neutrality by French aviators, and the rest, may be taken as sufficiently discredited. In any case, it is admittedly the Nuremberg story that has been relied on in Germany as "justifying" the German "policy."

There can be no pretence that the falsehood was accidental on the side of the German Government. It would be worse than idle to argue that the military authorities could have been deceived on such a point. The Magistrat of Nuremberg expressly rebuts what appears to have been the only pretence of official military knowledge on the subject. We are forced to the one conclusion that the German Government deliberately elected to give to the world and to the French Government, as its reason for declaring war against France, what it knew perfectly well to have been a newspaper canard.

It would be interesting to know whether Professor Schwalbe's article is reprinted or permitted to be reprinted by the German Press in general. The German Government

boast that English and French newspapers are permitted to be sold freely in Germany ; but, on the other hand, as was pointed out by Herr Gothein in the Reichstag on May 30, the journal of the German Peace Society has for a long time been absolutely suspended, though its conductors had always conformed scrupulously to the orders of the censorship. There was a charge that the society had sold copies of the book "J'accuse," in which German policy is so powerfully exposed by a German hand ; but this was proved to be false, the society having expressly treated the book as "defamatory," even seeking to have it answered.

Evidently the German Government relies upon the refusal of its subjects to believe anything said by the enemy Press. But it will not venture to let them face any disclosures which may be made by their own pacifists—or, for that matter, by the pacifists of the nations of the Entente ; for all pacifist literature is equally tabooed. The official tactic is for the Chancellor to announce that

“our enemies repulse our peace proposals with contempt,” while everything that would enlighten the German mass as to the real nature of the problem is suppressed.

The probability is, then, that throughout the war the mass of the German people will remain convinced of the truth of their Government's official assertion that before the declaration of war French aviators dropped bombs on the Nuremberg railways. That belief has probably helped to inspire their exultation over the news of the bombing of non-combatants in England and the sinking of passenger and merchant ships with those on board, though it would be rash to suggest that they would not have exulted in any case. The German Press can probably be trusted not to circulate the disavowal of the Nuremberg Magistrat, whether or not the censorship suppresses the medical journal which published it. And we may be sure that, whatever revelations may take place after the war, German literature will continue to abound in panegyric of “*Deutsche Treue*.”



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