

Germany's Book Bonfire

NUMBERS HARDLY COUNT in estimating the book-burning festival in Germany on May 10.

Reports range from an estimate of hundreds to tens of thousands of books burned; but the gesture is called symbolical, for it is hopeless to think any book so destroyed would not have a duplicate somewhere safe and sound.

Such American authors as Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, and Louis Fischer, who appear on the black list, perhaps achieve an added mark of fame.

The elements were unfavorable in Berlin, for it rained; the books themselves would not burn easily, and finely bound volumes that were at first dedicated to the holocaust, so H. R. Knickerbocker writes in the *New York Evening Post*, were removed from circulation and preserved under tabu.

The bonfires were "highly symbolic," remarks Walter Lippmann of the *New York Herald Tribune*, but in another sense from that implied by the Nazis using the term. Thus:

"They symbolize the moral and intellectual character of the Nazi régime. For these bonfires are not the work of schoolboys or mobs but of the present German Government acting through its Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment.

"And what is it that they symbolize? Nothing less than the conviction of the present rulers of Germany that violence is the means by which human problems must be solved. Why, for example, do they burn with conspicuous zeal a book like Erich Maria Remarque's 'All Quiet on the Western Front'? That book has nothing to do with Communism or the Treaty of Versailles or the Weimar Republic or the Jews.

"It is a novel which deals with the pitiable sacrifice of mankind in war. It is thrown to the flames in the presence of the Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment as symbolic of the 'awakening' of Germany. Awakening to what? Is it to peace, and to conciliation, and the making of a more just and orderly Europe, or is it to the conviction that the Nazi purposes must be achieved by fire and sword?

"The ominous symbolism of these bonfires is that there is a Government in Germany which means to teach its people that their salvation lies in violence. What else can the civilized world make of these bonfires?

"Had the Nazis burned only the books of the German Republic, or Communist books, the world might say it has witnessed an episode in a civil war. Had they burned only books by Jews, the world might say that the Nazis were persecuting the German Jews. But when they make a special play, with elaborate ritual and under official sanction, of burning the books that point the road to European peace, the conclusion is inescapable, however dreadful it may be to contemplate it, that the Nazis deliberately and systematically mean to turn the minds of the German people to preparation for war."

ONLY a change of heart and mind within Germany, he writes, can restore a sense of peace to the world. "The logic of the present course can lead only to war." Mr. Lippmann shows a fine sympathy with the German people in their present situation, and he goes on to ask if there is any basis for "a change of heart," so much hoped for by the world outside:

"I do not know, unless it be that an economic recovery in the world will lift Germany out of the morass of its distress and restore to the German people their faith in the works of peace. We are entitled to believe that this might happen. For the German nation has shared long and deeply in the labor and invention and spiritual life of Western civilization.

"Those who have known the German people, have traveled among them, have worked with them, have marveled at their skill and the perfection of their workmanship, have understood their deep respect for learning, their kindness and their humor, do not have to believe that these Nazi bonfires symbolize the German spirit.

"In the long history of a people they are the mood of a moment, a mood of wild despair brought to its peak by the intense agitation of the revolution through which Germany is passing. For an analogy one must look, I think, to the darkest days of the French Revolution, to Robespierre, for example, who set out to 'awaken' France with a new State religion under which it was said that 'all were atheists who did not think like Robespierre.'

"These moods pass. These bonfires will be quenched somehow, at worst in the blood and tears of men, but perhaps by cool waters from the springs of human decency."