

THE LAUGH THAT THREATENS



*Something More Than Humor
Lies Behind the Jokes Now Go-
ing the Rounds in Nazi Germany*

LAUGHTER, that dark, mysterious force, is often most revealing and the herald of serious coming events. That genial ripple seems to provide a safety valve for pent-up emotions. After long serious strains the human organism seems to thirst for laughter. It seems as necessary as vitamins for the balanced machine. But when a whole nation begins to laugh, then it is a symptom of something socially serious.

It indicates a slipping of public confidence, an indifference that spells disorder. It resembles a flowing quicksand under the pillars of society. This is the first symptom of coming revolt. And this is actually what is going on beneath the surface of the whole of Germany today.

It is only a laugh.

It is light. It is airy. It is a relief from the pressure of existence. But behind these juicy bits of wit something more serious is hidden.

For the past few years Germany, right or wrong, has been fighting desperately for a position in the world. With grim determination she has undertaken new social experiments, new adventures in economics and government. The strain has been long, serious and the compounding of regulations has gone to extremes. Laughter breaks out.

Many of the jokes that are at present circulating the land of Hitleria cannot be told quite openly. They are whispered among friends. But the traffic is great and much whispering is going on. Many people want to laugh. It seems a necessary release.

Moreover, this riptide of humor is none the less ominous for being circulated behind closed doors, in whispered tones. On the contrary, it is the very element of repression which, among other things, makes it so different from normal, free-voiced laughter. The spontaneous laugh fades off into a chuckle, leaving behind nothing more than a momentary sense of amusement. The forbidden laugh turns inward, coloring the viewpoint of those who must smuggle their humor in defiance of the state.

Behind this challenge one can notice a nervous twitch, a convulsion and a hideous grimace on the face of society. How long this social muscular spasm will take to break out into the open is difficult to tell. But this same kind of simple facial twitch preceded the French and the Russian Revolutions. It made itself evident in Spain and in Mexico just before these lands went into upheaval. Is Germany now in danger? Judge for yourself. Nothing is more revealing than humor.

The German public knows very well that Hermann Goering is very conceited, loves pomp, adores gold braid and medals on his many uniforms. He is also fat and quite a few jokes have already been made about the German nation being so lean and Goering so fat. However, in the present stream of humor, Goering is pictured as sitting on top of the Brandenburg Arch driving the great bronze Roman chariot with cracking whip. No one could get him down. Finally his wife, Emmy, comes along and says that there is only one way to get him down. She calls up to him: "Hermann, the tailor is waiting for you." He puts away his whip like a good boy and comes down.

A new joke is now being circulated which alludes to Goering's plumpness. The question is whispered in your ear: "What should a good broiled German goose look like? Brown as Hitler. Fat as Goering. And plucked clean like the Austrians."

In Austria the feeling is quite bitter.

And jokes about the recent annexation are numerous. One of them, typical of the feeling that is prevalent, goes like this: A German boards a streetcar in Vienna. He gives the conductor a five mark note.

"I don't have change," says the conductor.

"I have no smaller money."

"Well then, it's all right. You can ride for nothing."

The German is naturally surprised at the breach of regulations and exclaims: "You Austrians have always been lax and indifferent."

"True, my friend. But now that you have swallowed us you will have to digest us."

Goering is made the butt of a few domestic jokes. Before the baby arrived in his family there was much talk about the proper name for the child. It was decided to call it Hamlet. Why Hamlet? The answer is: *Sein oder nicht Sein*, which really is "To be or not to be," but in German could be translated "His or not his."

Do the people of Germany think very much of their alliance and friendship with Italy? Evidently many are skeptical, otherwise the following two jokes would not have such great circulation. The first has Hitler questioning Mussolini as to what aid he would give if Germany were attacked by outside powers. Hitler wanted to know exactly what message Mussolini would telegraph. Mussolini told Hitler not to worry, that he would say the right thing, but Hitler persisted in knowing at once the contents of the telegram. Mussolini said he would telegraph "Benito" (bin-nit-do), pronounced *bin nicht da*, meaning "am not here."

In the second, the German public reminds itself that Italy in spite of alliances turned against Germany in 1914. The question is asked: "Do you know where Mussolini lived when he was in Berlin? In the Bleibtreustrasse 1914-1918" (Remain Loyal Street 1914-1918).

The Nazi party is of course the main butt of this social twitch that is now

evident throughout Hitleria. A short time ago the party opened its doors for a few more "élite members." Signs were posted which read: *Wir rufen die Letzten*, (We call the last ones). But a pun was made of the word *rufen* and it was in public often pronounced *rupfen* which changed the line to mean: "We pluck the last ones."

Also in connection with the party doors being opened, the following is current: "The party doors are now open," says one. "Thank God!" the other replies. "Let's get out."

The vanity and conceit of Goering is again given circulation in the following. One day Hermann Goering went hunting in the Toutoburger forest. After a while he and his party came upon the Hermannsdenkmal monument (a statue built for the national hero Hermann who fought the Romans in this forest in 9 A.D.). Goering said: "It was really unnecessary to have that statue built here especially for me."

There is also current a joke about a proposed new inscription on the new Opera House. "One leader, one people, one theatre (political spectacle)."

Schacht, the German wizard of financial manipulation who has invented all kinds of paper currency to substitute for money, is also at present included in the humor of Germany. But in the new humor he is treated quite respectfully for there are many today who look upon Schacht as the one who will be called upon when the inevitable crack-up takes place. Goebbels, that loud-mouthed fire-eating leader of propaganda, does not come off quite so well. He seems to be very much disliked. A joke involving Schacht, Goebbels and Goering is going the rounds. It runs as follows: Hitler is much concerned about reports coming to him that Goering, Goebbels and Schacht have been seen late at night in Berlin night clubs. But Hitler's secretary quiets him by saying that all were incognito and could not possibly be recognized for Goering

wore civilian clothes, Goebbels kept his mouth shut and Schacht paid the bill in cash.

Of course a whole new series of jokes has been built about the Aryan grandmother requirement. A certified record of his family tree is needed before a German can enter the party, hold public office or in fact even get a job anywhere. Many were required to write to their home town church for a "grandmother" certificate. Here are extracts from some of the letters received by one church. These lines are typewritten and have been recently circulated among university students:

Perhaps you can help me find my grandmother, whom I have lost entirely.

I have run myself to death trying to find my grandfather. Since he was 50 to 65 years old, his birth must have taken place from 1815 to 1830.

My ancestors were born in many sections or parts of Germany as government officials.

I can not give you more detailed information, since my father is dead at the moment.

Please send an Aryan paragraph about my grandmother.

I am taking the liberty of asking you whether my grandmother has turned up there.

I need my Aryan descent (family tree) very badly.

I am writing you today about a situation which is none of your business. I need my Aryan grandmother, but officially it hasn't been asked for (required).

I can not give you any closer information, since my mother died in 1871 and left me behind as the only legacy.

I beg you to give me information whether my dead grandfather appears in your death register. He died from 1821 to 1850.

My birth took place in your church. Will you please certify this.

Please send me my grandmother. She passed away in 1871.

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Still another type of humor is going

the rounds and this is the "boner." Here are some composition gems culled from the last government essay contest. Because of the strain and inner secret feelings, the "boners" in Hitleria are a little more political than those in other lands. They are also more revealing and help support the conviction that a kind of humor shows the presence of a smoldering flame which may break out any day. These "gems" are also typewritten on thin paper, folded up small and passed around among friends:

If the hereditary health laws hadn't come into existence, we would all be idiots today.

We thank and are indebted to A. Hitler for our entire healthy future generation.

The minister of agriculture called the peasant leaders in, because the pigs eat too much.

From the building of the government highways the worker receives bread and thus can multiply. Through this the official also receives something to do.

In the Red Cross men and women work for love; some do it for nothing, but many are paid for their services.

Marriage (wedlock) is not a secret any more. It takes place before the public and is a service to the nation.

At the time of the mobilization men and women multiplied visibly.

These are samples of the type of thing that is now gaining currency in Germany. Are they a symptom of something very serious, a painful grimace on the face of society, or are they only "a little fun among the boys" type of humor? Time will decide.

—MANUEL KOMROFF

