

One regrettable effect of the great war is likely to be a perceptible lessening of the respect paid to the professorial profession, even to higher scholarship.

It is not strange that the German war party and German diplomatists should labor to misrepresent the facts relating to the cause of the war, to weave fictions, spin illusive theories and concoct misleading special pleas to deceive the people of neutral countries to deceive whom is in Germany's interest. That is part of the war game. It is not strange even that the mass of the German people should believe that the cause of their fatherland is just, for they have but little means of knowing the truth, the ruling powers having shut off from them all sources of accurate information and fed them with lies.

But one would suppose that the leaders of German thought and learning, the professorial exponents of German "kultur," would have made some endeavor to learn the truth, and having learned it, to utter it. It does not appear, however, that of all the hundreds of these German scholars, there is a single one who has ventured publicly to state the facts of the war situation. On the contrary, scores of them have made themselves ridiculous before the world by publishing over their signatures statements which are so glaringly untrue and pleas which are so childish that one regards them with mingled disgust and amusement. And not the professors only, but profound theologians and philosophers and eminent scientists and artists.

What is the explanation? It would almost seem that a whole nation had become afflicted with some contagious mental or moral disease which makes the worse appear the better cause, and obscures the moral sense. And indeed something of that sort is the matter. When one reads the extravagant eulogies of the German people, of the German mind, of German culture, of German powers and potentialities, by Germans, one is tempted to conclude that the whole nation is smitten with national and racial megalomania, and is in danger of brain-storm.

Perhaps it is not quite so bad as that. But this is certain—that amid the welter of Teutonic vain-glory no saving sense from German scholarship and philosophy shines forth conspicuously. The savants and philosophers and divines share the national and racial weakness. Do they, like the diplomats who are well-enough informed but who make a practice of deceit as a matter of principle, seek to deceive the people of their own and other countries? Or are they themselves deceived by the men in power? We prefer to believe that they are themselves deceived and are cherishing delusions of which they will yet be ashamed. But, viewing their case in the most favorable possible light, it must be admitted that these famous Germans—and justly famous too—are lamentably weak in one respect: they are lacking in common sense. It is possible for a man to be intellectually great, a giant in his own field of thought or knowledge, and yet be singularly unsophisticated in the ordinary business of life—so childishly credulous as to be easily duped, and subject also to childish petulance and prejudices. James the First of England was a very learned man, but his contemporary, Henry IV. of France, justly called him "the wisest fool in Christendom."

The puzzling problem presented by the utterances of German professors on the subject of the war and its causes can, we believe, be solved by assuming that these learned men are deficient in what many ordinary men possess in abundance, "saving common sense," a homely quality, but one that is often useful in restraining folks from making asses of themselves. And not for a generation to come will the typical German professor be regarded as he has been by the students of other countries—as a sort of intellectual demigod, a fountain of pure wisdom, a never-failing source of "sweetness and light."