

THE XXth CENTURY

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IN THE FURNACE

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WHEN on New Year's Eve the midnight hour was tolled from those of the church towers of Germany that were still standing, millions of Germans were in the thick of battle, millions at work in night shifts, millions asleep after a long day's toil in armament plants. In what little leisure they had for reflection, they will have looked back on 1944 as representing the hardest test their nation has ever had to face in its history.

No other nation in modern times has stood a similar test. France, Poland, or Italy, not to mention smaller countries: they all caved in under a fraction of the pressure borne by Germany today. The British are proud of their fortitude in the summer and autumn of 1940 and on it base their faith in the moral greatness of their people. Yet Great Britain, after Dunkirk, was an almost untouched island which had seen no enemy soldier, ringed by a huge navy, and backed up by the resources of her globe-encircling Empire and America's aid. The Bolsheviks base their claim to the superiority of the Soviet system and people on their behavior during the time when the Germans were on the banks of the Volga. Yet in the days of Stalingrad the USSR still had almost twenty million square miles with huge industrial plants, raw materials, and agricultural production on which no enemy plane had ever dropped a bomb. Both Great Britain and the Soviet Union were then only in their second year of the war, and neither of the two had more than one front to look after.

The strain on the Germans in 1944 was incomparably greater. For them 1944 has been a year of terrible setbacks, hardships, and disappointments. During this year, their armies had to abandon areas many times the size of Germany in northern, eastern, southern, and western Europe. Alone they faced the entire manpower and industrial capacity of the USSR and a large part of the manpower and industrial capacity of the USA and the British Empire, not to mention all the many minor states which are lined up all around the German fortress. Three of Germany's allies left her camp in 1944, two being pressed into the service of the Red armies against her. The Atlantic

Wall, although holding up the invasion, did not prevent it. The newspapers were full of obituaries, among them that of the most popular military leader, Marshal Rommel. The country's cities, plants, and railroads were under a ceaseless hail of bombs from up to 2,000 bombers a day, and countless Germans were deprived of all their earthly possessions. Many valuable raw materials, including the oil of Rumania, and territories rich in agricultural production were lost. Neutral countries were forced by her enemies to abandon trade with the Reich. The re-election of Roosevelt emphasized the fact that no sudden change in American foreign policy is likely to relieve the pressure. Day and night, scores of radio stations all around Germany, in programs directed at the German population, painted a black picture of Germany's military and economic position, appealing to the Germans to quit and calling upon the 12 million or more foreign laborers in Germany to rise in revolt.

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Every German knows all this. For, however exuberant German publicity may have been in the earlier stages of the war, it was grimly realistic in 1944 and has left the Germans under no illusions as to the gravity of the crisis through which they are passing.

Yet the strength and determination with which the Germans are fighting and working—and the testimony of their enemies proves this—are as great as if the war had just started. Reports cabled by Allied war correspondents from the front, articles written by the military commentators of their newspapers, even the speeches of Churchill and Roosevelt, express the enemies' amazement at Germany's stand. They cannot understand it. They had figured: the Germans haven't got a chance, therefore they'll quit. That is what France did in 1940. But they find that the German determination is greater in the sixth than in the first year of war, and that the entire nation—men, women, and children—are fighting as one.

How can we account for this? Is it desire for glory, intoxication with slogans, a grand illusion, a Messianic complex, religious madness, the Gestapo, rapacious instincts for world con-

quest? The enemy war reports show that none of these explanations will do. So they look for others. Soviet newspapers allege that the Germans are made drunk before being sent into battle, and Anglo-Saxon commentators harp on the word "fanaticism," a word which explains nothing. Yet the answer to the motives behind the phenomenon of Germany's stand is quite simple.

In the first place it is the nation's tremendous will to live, which manifests itself in the readiness of each German to die that Germany may live; a will to live which knows: only those can truly win life who are willing to risk death; a will to live which has been enhanced by the brutal frankness with which the enemies are discussing the annihilation of a defeated Germany.

In the second place, it is the German sense of duty. It has often been ridiculed abroad and usually misunderstood, because most people have assumed that duty in the eyes of the German means clicking his heels to superiors, while in reality it is the following of inner rather than exterior commands. Immanuel Kant, Germany's greatest philosopher, was the apostle of Duty. It was he who taught the Germans that all other attributes of man—intelligence, courage, wealth, power—may be good as well as evil, while only his good intention is good in itself. Even if a good intention should not be crowned by success, it would, Kant said, "shine like a jewel, as something which carries its value in itself."

Rarely has an entire nation felt what its duty was with such overwhelming and simple clarity as the Germans do today: to fight and to work. Of course, they also place their hopes in the new weapons, in the strength of their fortifications, in the results being achieved by the armed forces of their ally Japan. But this is not what keeps them going. It is not even so much the question of victory or defeat. They feel it simply to be their duty to carry on. The final outcome, the individual German knows, depends on many factors beyond his reach. But what lies plainly before him is his own duty. This

also explains the fact that there is little discussion of postwar plans in Germany today. It indicates not lack of confidence in the future but the irrelevance of such plans at the present time. Fighting as they are for the survival of their nation, the Germans feel no inclination to theorize on what they will do with themselves or others after the fight. They are convinced that, once they come out of this war, there will be no task they cannot master.

In this mental state it is quite immaterial to the German that the greatness of his struggle has only led his enemies to more vociferous hatred and threats of annihilation, and that the same people who heap praise on Tito partisans, French maquisards, or Dutch saboteurs, twist every sign of his extreme heroism into new proof that he is a "war criminal."

Neutral observers have often said: "Would it not be cleverer of Germany if . . ." and then added some political advice. But the Germans are beyond clever considerations today. Each one just does his duty and each one feels: since all 75 million of us are doing it, we cannot be wiped out. The growing emphasis being placed upon the "People's Grenadiers" recruited last summer and the nonuniformed "People's Storm Divisions" recently organized is deeply significant. For Germany the war has become a people's war if ever there was one.

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The homeless war widow who is working in a factory; the farmer's wife who since 1939 has seen her soldier husband only during rare periods of leave and is carrying on her work with the aid of prisoners of war; the man who goes on producing war material in a plant bombed, evacuated, and rebuilt twenty times; the boy or girl who for years has been handling the tasks of an adult; the villager of East Prussia or the worker of the Saar who, leaving his plough or machine, is throwing his heart and "panzer fist" against the enemy tanks—they can all look back on the bitter year of 1944 with pride: all that was petty, selfish, and impure has been burned away in them in the blast furnace of bombed cities and flaming fronts. They have stood the test of 1944.

TO OUR READERS

Our readers may have noticed that THE XXth CENTURY has become thinner in the course of the years. But the more observant among them may also have discerned that it has been our policy to effect the paper-saving necessitated by the war without reducing the magazine's contents. Aside from the fact that the slimmer appearance of the magazine is due partly to a thinner quality of paper, the fewer number of pages has been made up for by the use of smaller type (since June 1944) and, starting with this issue, by a reduction of the margin, which latter adds about 15 per cent to the contents of each page.