

Book Review: Father Land

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Father Land. By *Bertram Schaffner, M. D.* (New York: Columbia Press, 1948.)

Studies based on adequate psychiatric and anthropological methods dealing with cultures other than our own are always of interest and value to psychiatrists. This present volume is unusually well done and represents a definite contribution to this field.

The author begins with an extensive discussion of his methods of study, an important and frequently overlooked part of any work of this type. He then discusses the German family, especially developing the father-mother relationships. This section is of primary importance. The father is depicted as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, the source of all authority, security, and wisdom, and of superior status to every other member of the family. His authority was not attacked by the Nazi government provided he was a follower of National Socialism. Of course, if he were not a Nazi, his authority was replaced by the State which took over the same function with the same prerogatives. A large number of cases are given and Schaffner has well presented his material to demonstrate his point.

The contrast with the mother is also well made and she is presented as completely dependent, working in what is essentially man's domain and having authority only over her kitchen and nursery and the hired help therein. Any authority over the children is of course subject to the approval or disapproval of her spouse. The chapter dealing on the indoctrination of the children into this specific family pattern is of interest in demonstrating the developmental fears of authority, obsessive traits, restrictions, rigidities, and passivities and aggressions of the German child. Such characteristics are familiar to those of us who have had an opportunity to work with German families and as a result of such observations a sort of German national character has been predicated.

Schaffner does not make the mistake of labeling the German family or German society as pathological or of ascribing to them any sort of specific diagnosis. He points out that the familial structure represents only a common denominator useful as a standard of reference and of value to anyone thinking about the present German problems.

Hitler, of course, was well aware of this basic structure and utilized it successfully in his development of the Third Reich. Schaffner has shrewdly pointed out some of the methods employed by Hitler and his associates and has equally well indicated that removal of the Nazi party is not enough to produce an actual shift in German thinking. He stresses the point that anti-Nazis are Germans too and that superficial attempts to change German functional familial patterns are essentially doomed to failure. Schaffner rightly believes that merely stripping them of the trappings of National Socialism will leave an unfilled need for a substitute for the lost father-symbol. Such need may well lead the German to support a new authoritarian government; a problem which has apparently not been adequately met by our own military occupation.

The role of the American soldier as an educator is discussed and the common question resulting from American occupational activities, "How did your Army conquer the magnificently trained German army without discipline?" is forcefully emphasized. It is Schaffner's notion that an American example of functional ability without disciplinary rigidity may be of some value but he also presents many of the well-known problems of the American Occupation which have tended to offset this example.

The author indicates 3 avenues of approach toward modification of the German character and believes that such modification is an important aim of re-education. He does not make the mistake of believing that the Germans as a group are suffering from any mental illness and stresses the point that he does not hold to the idea that the individual German can be regarded as suffering from a national form of mental disease. His feeling is that the problem of the German people at present is in part due to the difference in their personality and character structure from that in Western countries. He would modify this character through political ideologies, changes in social and legal institutions, and changes in interpersonal relations and family life. His discussion of these matters is pertinent and valuable and should be required reading for those military and civilian personnel stationed in Germany.

The last section of the book is a series of appendices discussing screening centers, techniques used, and gives typical histories and examples. This book represents a reasoned study of some of the problems in Germany and is by all odds the best volume dealing with the German national character available to date.

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