Subject: Is there such a thing as a good German?

Many good and even some thoughtful persons in my country have asked me from time to time, knowing that I spent so much time in Germany and Austria in critical times, if there is such a thing as a good German. If this question is put to me in my own country, and not infrequently in other countries where I have lived, I do not become impatient. I realize that this question in the minds of many good people arises out of events in German history in the last century. The political behaviour of so many Germans before the first World War and in the interval between the first World War and the second and during the second World War is enough to make some of us who have lived so close to the problems and so close to the German people to ask the same question. I have come to the conclusion that the basic difference between let us say the American and the Englishman is that no amount of bad government will lead us to acceptance of it. We may have to endure it for a time, but we find ways to get rid of bad government. While some of our people may be upset by a form of mass hysteria through the preaching of a political or social creed by some fanatic or a demagogue, we know how to take care of it and it does not last long. We have many examples of it in our own recent history and do not recall with pride the enormous number of people whom Father Coughlin was able to gather around him with his radio broadcasts. Even more recently we have had Senator McCarthy to deal with and to take care of. Few Englishmen are proud of the performance of Moseley, who was endeavoring to implant an imitation of Mussolini and Hitler Fascism in England. We know how to deal with these things because there is a basic sturdiness and independence in our character. There is a basic common sense. Whatever it is that makes up in our country and in England what we call civic courage, it is there. In Germany this has been lacking. The German will resist and make the ultimate sacrifice when there is an external enemy. He is not willing to stand up to the enemy inside. If he finds that it is necessary to lead an ordinary peaceful existence, to go along and to conform with and to accept even such ideas as were imposed on the German people during the Hitler regime, I do
not mean to say that there are no opportunists in the Anglo-Saxon countries, but where we have an opportunist raising up his ugly face in our midst, we know it as an ugly face and know how to take care of it and him. It is the lack of civic courage which has been the disaster of the German people.

When I hear some of my friends say rather too glibly that in case of great stress and real crises the Russian people will not go along with the Communist regime which has enslaved them and lay their hopes for peace, or rather the avoidance of war in that, I really shudder. It brings back so many memories. How many of my fellow countrymen and how many of my friends in England and in France and in Latin American countries said to me in the period before the second World War that there was no real danger of war because the German people would never follow Hitler in an adventure which took him beyond the then-German borders. It was one of the most dangerous illusions that people responsible for action had to deal with in those critical days. It is one of the most dangerous if not the most dangerous illusion that we have to deal with today, when even the more implacable and stronger enemy is looking for the moment to attack us. It is this fear of war, as though countries no longer went to war and therefore we need not fear it actually coming, which is one of the principal difficulties we have in responsible places in the Western world today in dealing adequately and concretely with the problems that present themselves almost every day. It is the illusion that the peoples of Russia will not follow their country, that is their Communist government, which has so totally enslaved them into an aggressive war, that is the other great danger. There are some of us who have lived close to these fears and to these illusions who realize how dangerous they are.

There have been and are today many good Germans. There are some of us like myself, however, who have seen men whom we considered not only good but great Germans and who we considered would make any sacrifice for their principles, not only to become complete opportunists but to actually become the active and perhaps the deadliest
instrument of a man or a regime which they abhorred.

I never knew Dr. Schacht before I went to Germany in 1930. I had heard of him as a great banker. I learned to know him well almost immediately after I came to Germany. There were many good bankers in Germany at that time. Germany had had difficult financial problems to deal with over several decades and perhaps that is why she had produced really some of the great bankers of that period. That Dr. Schacht was the most resourceful of them all I do not think there is any doubt. I have heard him say on more than one occasion in conversation that he was the greatest banker in the world. There is no doubt that he so considered himself. There was no man in Germany who before Hitler came in who more completely abhorred the ideas, whether they were political or economic or social than did Schacht. He was an intelligent man, if arrogant, and egoistic. He realized the dangers of the Hitler movement to Germany and to the rest of the world. He spoke of it to me freely and often. I recall his saying to me so many times that I and others must make it clear to our country how dangerous this movement was, not only to Germany but to us and to the rest of the world, and yet when the Hitler regime came in Schacht was one of the first to conform. I lived so closely to events as they developed in Germany from day to day during those fateful years that it is out of that knowledge that I express the opinion that Dr. Schacht, who was not a Nazi until Hitler came into power and who I believe was never a Nazi at heart, became the principal instrument of the Hitler regime in making it possible for it to establish itself in the position within Germany that it did establish, and therefore to do the harm outside. Had it not been for the financial genius and resourcefulness of Dr. Schacht which he gave without limit to the Nazi regime, it would not have been possible to establish the financial and economic situation within Germany which laid the basis for the building up of its military power and for the regime to maintain itself. I know that this is a very broad and categoric statement, but I wonder whether anyone who saw developing
events in Germany those days and who really realized the weakness of the country when Hitler came in, would differ with me in that opinion. The Hitler regime through Hitler and Goebbels in particular built an ideologic wall around Germany. Through the complete control which they exercised over all information and through all opinion forming means even the intelligent German began to believe the myths of the Hitler regime and the principal one, that the whole world was arming against them, when as a matter of fact it was Germany which was arming against the world. But Hitler and Goebbels and all their cohorts would not have been able to accomplish this if it had not been for what Dr. Schacht did in the financial field. He accomplished what many of us thought was the impossible.

In spite of the fact that in the early days of 1933 it was he and some of the industrialists and a very few of the financiers in Germany who made possible Hitler getting control of the government, in spite of the fact that he during the course of the regime and during the war was perhaps the indispensable prop of the Hitler regime, when he was brought before the Nürnberg Court with the other war criminals in Germany he was let off. It was probably because the court came to the conviction that he was never really in accord with Nazi ideas. In this respect I think the court was right. The fact remains, however, that without Schacht Hitler and Göring and Goebbels and all their crew and later the German army, would not have been able to carry through as they did. Schacht served a modest prison sentence given him by the Nürnberg Court and we can now leave him to his uneasy conscience, which knowing him as I do must trouble him. I knowing him as I did until shortly before the Nazi regime came in could believe him capable of many things, but I could not have believed him and did not believe him capable of the complete opportunism which he later showed. I would say that Dr. Schacht was not a good German.

I recall one incident which I think it is well worth putting down in these notes. Across the street from the building occupied by the Consulate General in Berlin was the building of one of the largest insurance companies in Germany. It
was I believe some six months after the Nazi government had come in at the beginning of 1933 that we had to begin to deal with economic matters at the high level with a Dr. Schaeffer, or it may have been Dr. Scheffler, I shall have to refer to my notes for his exact name. He established his office in this then-insurance company building. I had heard of him as a very sound, capable German businessman and a man generally respected throughout the country. When I called on him for the first time on business of our mission in Germany, I found him a rather short, heavy set, pleasant looking German who received me most courteously. There wasn't an SS or an SA man around his office. The conversation which followed was the kind of conversation one would expect with a man of his reputation and stature, and it was strange to find him serving the Nazi regime. I had frequent necessity to call on him. It was I believe after the second or third call on him I found that there was a door back of his desk open and in the room beyond I could see an officer of an SS or an SA uniform sitting there. The conversation was an entirely different one from the one that I had had on previous occasions. The SS and the SA were already listening to every word that he said and controlling his every action. The conversation that first time the door was open was a reasonable one, but I got no commitments, no results, no definite action, "I will take the matter under consideration and see you soon". As the weeks went on I found that I was no longer dealing with Dr. Schaeffer but I was really dealing with the man in the next room. I cannot adequately express the feelings I had when on one of the last occasions I saw him before going to my new post at Vienna, I saw him wearing the uniform of an SS officer. There cannot have been anything but opportunism that made what had been a good German like Dr. Schaeffer serve the regime. When I came back to Berlin for a few days from Vienna after that dreadful 30th of June 1934 when Hitler got rid of several hundred of his high associates in the regime, that I learned that Dr. Schaeffer had suffered a complete nervous breakdown and was no longer capable of anything. On the night of that famous, or rather infamous 30th of June 1934 Dr. Schaeffer and his wife were awaiting the return of their son at their home for supper. He was an officer in the SA. He
did not return until very late in the evening. When he came in he collapsed. He was a complete nervous wreck. He told his father that as an officer of the SA he had been obliged that day to serve on one of the squads shooting prisoners as they were brought into the Lichtenberg Prison. I understand that Dr. Schaeffer never recovered from that shock and became a complete physical and mental wreck.

When the Nazi regime took over in Germany Dr. Sahm was the oberbürgermeister of Berlin. Dr. Sahm was a magnificent physical specimen of a German. He must have been almost seven feet tall and had a heavy figure but was not corpulent. He was a civil servant of long standing and experience. He was respected by the Berlin population as much as any of the officials of the government. For what reasons the Nazi regime kept Dr. Sahm there for some months after they came in I am not able to say. He was an experienced administrator and the city of Berlin was one of the great cities of Europe. It was perhaps convenient to have a man of Dr. Sahm’s capacity keep on running the machinery of government for the time being. Why Dr. Sahm remained I do not know. Perhaps he was one of those Germans who thought that by remaining he would be able to control the course of events and keep things in moderation. I think that there is no doubt that this was the attitude of Dr. Sahm. I had had frequent opportunities to see him on business. The first time that I went to see him after the Nazi regime came in I could see that the door behind his desk leading into what had been his secretary’s room was open and that an SS or SA man in uniform was sitting there. Dr. Sahm did not remain in the position very long. He was replaced and I heard later of his going as the German Ambassador or Minister to one of the Scandinavian countries. Only Dr. Sahm, whom we considered a great and a good German, can tell why he accepted a post abroad in the diplomatic representation of the Nazi government.

I learned to know Dr. Hans Luther early in my stay in Germany. He was one of the outstanding examples of what had been accomplished in Germany in training what may be called a career service of Bürgermeisters. He was a highly trained,
efficient and effective public servant and had been bürgermeister of several of the larger cities of Germany. He became President of the Reichsbank, the central bank of Germany. He was very short and rotund with a big, round, completely bald head. He made a rather ridiculous figure which was not improved by the way he walked. To me, however, he never seemed like a ridiculous figure. I respected him as a competent, devoted public servant. We found him correct in the dealings we had with him as head of the Reichsbank.

It was shortly after we arrived in Germany that I was asked by Dr. Luther and several other distinguished Germans in business and financial circles to have dinner with them about once a month in a Berlin hotel. It seems that an informal group of some 50 or 50 of the leading German businessmen, industrialists, bankers and outstanding men in various professions from all parts of Germany met about once a month for dinner in a Berlin hotel. It was sort of a Rotary Club idea, as there was usually one representative from every important sector of German life from all over the country. I was told that they had dinner together and after dinner there was one speech, which was always on a non-political subject. I was told that politics were completely barred not only in the speeches but in the around-the-table conversation. I was very pleased that I should be given this opportunity to meet in the early part of my stay in Berlin so many of the leaders in industry and in the professions from all parts of the country. As I recall it, I never saw any other foreigner present at the few dinners that I attended. These dinners were most interesting and it was really an unusual opportunity for me. I found there the men in other parts of Germany whom I wanted to know and whom it was desirable for me to know in the course of my work. During the year preceding the advent of the Hitler government I recall having had one of the greatest disillusionments I had during all the time I was in Germany. Dr. Luther presided at this particular dinner. He was to make the address after the dinner. When he got up I could see that he was visibly excited. He plunged into a political speech. As I looked around the table I could
see lifted eyebrows but not too much disapproval. The theme of Dr. Luther's speech was the split in the German parties. He spoke of the 30 some German parties which were in the Reichstag or which existed in the country. I had always seen him as a calm, contained person. His speech was an impassioned and really demagogic speech. He explained why Germany could never become great again and get her place in the sun until this many-party system was done away with. Seldom was a speech received with a greater enthusiasm and approval. After the speech the dinner broke up but not until three or four of the most distinguished and whom I considered the best balanced men in Germany got up and made equally impassioned speeches. Germany must have her place in the sun. The German people were the greatest people in Europe, Germany had been oppressed. All the smoldering feelings of years in the minds of these men found expression that evening. After that evening I had no more illusions as to what I could expect in the way of sound judgment and reasoned consideration of the problems before the country in the light of the whole world picture. It was a great awakening for me, a great disillusionment, but perhaps it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I was prepared for things to come.

My memory does not at all serve me as to when Dr. Luther was German Ambassador in Washington. I remember dining with him in the German Embassy with my wife on several occasions and I recall the conversations with him, but I cannot place the time. My notes will refresh my memory on this point.

When I think of good Germans and bad Germans one of the names that goes through my mind is that of Dr. Diekoff. Diekoff was a fine looking German. He was a trained officer of the German diplomatic service. He was the head of what is known as the American Section of the Foreign Office in Berlin when we came there in the early thirties. MEK Baron von Neurath was the Foreign Secretary. I have elsewhere spoken of the good opinion which we had of Baron von Neurath. Diekoff was a man of very considerable intelligence and understanding. He had nothing whatever to do with the Nazi movement or the Nazi party and certainly I am sure did not share any of the
Nazi ideology until after the Nazi government came in. For reasons of opportunism he remained in the Foreign Office. Many German diplomats resigned when the Nazi regime came in. Among them was the German Ambassador in Washington, Baron von Prittwitz. He was a career diplomat, a man of principle. I was not at all surprised when he did not resign. I was surprised that other important German diplomats whom I had respected remained at their posts. Dr. Diekoff was a brother-in-law of Ribbentrop. When the Nazi regime came in Dr. Diekoff held this important position as head of the American office in the Foreign Office in Berlin. His brother-in-law, von Ribbentrop, was a champagne salesman.

In these notes I must insert some of my more interesting conversations with Dr. Diekoff and certain observations with regard to him. I must also look up in my notes as to what happened to him. I also wish to insert in these notes at this point something with regard to Dr. Fuchs, who was married to a very charming American woman and who was at that time stationed in the Foreign Office in Berlin.

One of the Germans whom I met first when I came to Berlin was Dr. X. (I will have to refer to my notes for his name). He had been a professor at Cornell University. He had written a three or four volume history of the United States. He was considered in Germany as an authority on American political life and social life and customs. He was the head of the cultural activities fostered by the German government to strengthen the cultural ties between Germany and the United States. It was because of this activity of his that I learned to know him so early. I found him a very intelligent and interesting man. He was one of the most definitely anti-Nazi Germans I knew. He had so much knowledge of the rest of the world that he realized what would happen, not only to his own country but what might happen in the world if the regime came in. When the Hitler regime came in Dr. X found an opportunity to see me and he told me that he had given very careful thought as to what he should do. His inclination was to resign from all his activities but he thought it was best for him to remain. I could see that he was a troubled man. I went from time to time to various meetings sponsored by the organization which Dr. X headed. As
time went on in the early days of the regime I noticed that he became more and more
guarded in what he said, and then one could see first tolerance and then support of
the regime. From then on I did not go to any more of their meetings and ignored the
activities of this organization, as did the rest of us in our mission in Berlin. I
saw him sometime afterward on the street in a Nazi uniform, either SS or SA. I care­fully looked the other way so as not to speak to him.

It was my custom after a long evening's work in the office of the Consulate
General to walk home through the Tiergarten to my home in the Drakestrasse, which was
just off the Tiergarten Strasse. It was not too long a walk and it was pleasant in
the evening walking along. the Tiergarten Strasse, which was always deserted at that
time of evening except for a few passing automobiles. On one side of the Tiergarten
Strasse is the Tiergarten Park. Several times as I was walking home around 9 or 10
o'clock in the evening I saw someone approaching me from the park side of the street.
I had no idea who it was and did not know if it was someone trying to molest me, so
I went to the well lighted side of the street, where the houses face the park. As
I did this I could see the man move away. One evening he approached me and as he was
a little distance off I could see it was Dr. X. He said that he had several times
tried to approach me as I was going home in the evening. He knew that I had this
habit of walking home several times a week. He had finally found enough courage to
come up and speak to me. He wished me to know, he said, why he was doing what he
was. I told him that there was no obligation or reason on his part, so far as I was
concerned, why he should tell me what he was doing. I knew what he was doing. He
then went on to say that he had a wife and several children. His mother lived with
him. He was entirely dependent on what he was getting in the way of pay from the
government. He had always been a scholar. His family and his wife's family did not
have any money. He found that if he left his post and showed his unconformity, that
he and his family would be penniless and without food, and although he had many good
friends, he knew from the experience of others that his friends would not be able to
assist him in any way. He was staying, in short, in his post because it was the only way he could exist and feed his family.

I told Dr. X that I thought it was much better that we not see each other again. I could quite understand the financial situation that he was in. I said, however, that until there were a few Germans who had the civic courage to stand up for what they believed, even if it meant that they would be stood up to the wall, there was no stopping the regime in carrying through its will over all Germany, and he knew what that meant for Germany and for the world.

I knew many men in the same position as Dr. X, not only in scholastic and professional life but in business and in practically every activity of German life. There are many who believe that if the Lutheran Church, particularly its pastors, not so readily conformed to the measures of the regime, that if the Catholic Church had not entered into the arrangement between the Vatican and the German government, and that if important men in German life had stood up for what they believed, in other words if there had been a show of civic courage in the earlier days of the Nazi regime, it would not have been possible for the regime to get the control of all the German people the way it did. There was no civic courage, there was no resistance.

There were of course many good Germans who left the country. Fritz Thyssen, one of the leading industrialists in the country, who had helped to bring the regime in with other friends and who had endeavored to work with it in the earlier days, found the way of getting out of the country. There were many like him but they did not stay at home and stand up to it. The German who was willing to undergo every hardship of war and to offer his life on the battlefield and who made the excellent German soldier which we know he was, did not have that thing which we call civic courage in the Anglo-Saxon countries which enabled him to stand up to what he knew was wrong and dangerous. There were many great and good Germans. When the Nazi regime came in the bürgermeisters of most of the important cities of Germany
were the so-called professional bürgermeisters -- men who had been trained for this work. I knew them almost all. Within a few months after the Nazi regime came in practically all of these bürgermeisters had disappeared. Some of them were killed. Some of them were put into concentration camps and came out complete wrecks or died there. Others became hunted animals and had to go under cover. The bürgermeister of Breslau, I recall, was subjected to indignities before the whole population, marching through the streets with placards on his breast and back. The bürgermeister of Düsseldorf, with whom I had many a pleasant luncheon, was put into a concentration camp and came out a complete wreck and soon afterwards died. A few survived and among them was Dr. Adenauer, the oberbürgermeister of Cologne. I had to make trips to Cologne from time to time as I did to other important cities where we had consular establishments and I had got there to know Dr. Adenauer and later saw him in Berlin, where in connection with his duties he had to make frequent visits. He was a great German and even then already a great man. There were many who realized that Dr. Brüning would not be able to last indefinitely as Chancellor. The hopes of good Germans were centered in Dr. Adenauer, who it was planned would be the next Chancellor. Not only Germany but all of the Western Powers in the free world have to be grateful that Dr. Adenauer is leading the destinies of West Germany today. He had proved himself when I knew him to be a great administrator and a good German. In recent years he has shown himself to be not only one of the greatest Germans but a great statesman. One day lunching in my home in Berlin he saw a woodcut of Antwerp in 1515 which had been given me as a gift by the city of Antwerp on my departure from there after many years as consul general. Dr. Adenauer gave me a woodcut of Cologne in the 16th century, which in spite of the fact that it is some seven or eight feet long, I have carried with me to every post where I have gone in the meantime and which I now have in my home in Cuernavaca. I need no reminder of the friendship and greatness of this good German.
Elsewhere in these notes I shall make reference to men like Dr. Brüning, General von Secht, General Guderian and so many others. Anyone who is really interested in determining what were good Germans, a reference to Wheeler-Bennett's book entitled "Nemesis of Power" will find there a most interesting account of developments in Germany over a period of several decades before and during the last world war and from which he will be able to draw his own conclusions from a very factual narrative as to whether there is such a good thing as a good German and who were the bad Germans.