

Quite Easy To Spend a Million, If in Marks, Ernest Hemingway

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Single Room in a Hotel Costs 51,000 Marks With Taxes Extra—Costs Money to Go Without Breakfast in Germany Now.

DIFFERENT CLASSES TELL HOW THEY LIVE

The following is the seventh of a series of articles on the Franco-German situation by Ernest M. Hemingway.

By ERNEST M. HEMINGWAY. Special Correspondence of The Star.

Mainz-Kastel, April 22.—One hundred and twenty-five dollars in Germany to-day buys two million and a half marks.

A year ago it would have taken a motor lorry to haul this amount of money. Twenty thousand marks then made into packets of ten of the thick, heavy, hundred mark notes filled your overcoat pockets and part of a suit case. Now the two million and half fits easily into your pocketbook as twenty-five slim, crisp 100,000 mark bills.

When I was a small boy I remember being very curious about millionaires and being finally told to shut me up that there was no such thing as a million dollars, there wouldn't be a room big enough to hold it, and that even if there was, a person counting them a dollar at a time would die before he finished. All of that I accepted as final.

The difficulty of spending a million dollars was further brought home to me by seeing a play in which a certain Brewster if he spent a million dollars foolishly was to receive six million from the will of some splendid uncle or other. Brewster, as I recall it, after insurmountable difficulties, finally conceived the idea of falling in love, at which the million disappeared almost at once only for poor Brewster to discover that his uncle was quite penniless, having died at the foundling's home or something of the sort, whereupon Brewster, realizing it was all for the best, went to work and eventually became president of the local chamber of commerce.

Easy to Spend Million.

Such bulwarks of my early education have been shattered by the fact that in ten days in Germany, for living expenses alone I have spent, with practically no effort at all, something over a million marks.

During this time I have only once stopped at a deluxe hotel. After a week in fourth class railway coaches, village inns, country and small town gasthofs, finishing a seven-hour ride standing up in the packed corridor of a second class railway car, I decided that I would investigate how the profiteers lived.

On the great glass door of the Frankfurter Hof, was a black lettered sign. FRENCH AND BELGIANS NOT ADMITTED. At the desk, the clerk told me a single room would be 51,000 marks "with taxes, of course, added." In the oriental lobby, out of big chairs I could see heavy Jewish faces looking at me through the cigar smoke. I registered as from Paris.

"We don't enforce that anti-French rule of course," said the clerk very pleasantly.

Up in the room there was a list of the taxes. First, there was a 10 per cent. town tax, then 20 per cent. for service, then a charge of 8,000 marks for heating, then an announcement that the visitors who did not eat breakfast in the hotel would be charged 6,000 marks extra. There were some other charges. I stayed that night and half the next day. The bill was 145,000 marks.

In a little railway junction in Baden a girl porter put my two very heavy bags on to the train. I wanted to help her with them. She laughed at me. She has a tanned face, smooth blonde hair and shoulders like an ox.

"How much?" I asked her.

"Fifty marks," she said.

Demands a Real Tip.

At Mannheim a porter carried my bags from one track to another in the station. When I asked him how much, he demanded a thousand marks. The last porter I had seen had been the girl in Baden so I protested.

"A bottle of beer costs fifteen hundred marks here," he replied, "a glass of schnapps, twelve hundred."

That is the way the prices fluctuate all over Germany. It all depends on whether the prices went up to the top when the mark had its terrific fall last winter to around 70,000 to the dollar. If the prices went up they never come down. In the big cities, of course, they went up. A full meal in the country costs 2,000 marks. On the train a ham sandwich costs 3,000 marks.

Last week, investigating the actual living conditions, I talked to, among others, a small factory owner, several workmen, a hotelkeeper and a high school professor.

The factory owner said: "We have enough coal and coke for a few weeks longer, but are short on all raw materials. We cannot pay the prices they ask now. We sold to exporters. They got the dollar prices. We didn't. We can buy coal from Czecho-Slovakia, where they have German mines they got under the peace treaty, but they want pay in Czech money, which is at par and we can't afford to pay. We are starting to lay off workmen, and as they have nothing saved there is liable to be trouble."

How a Workman Fares.

A workman said: "I cannot keep my family on the money that I am making now. I have mortgaged my house to the bank and the bank charges me 10 per cent. interest on the loan. You see, workmen who have plenty of money to spend, but they are the young men who are living at home. They get their board and room free and their laundry. Maybe they pay a little something on their board. They are the men you see around the wine and beerstubes. Maybe their father has some property in the country, a farm, then they are all right. All the farmers have money."

The hotelkeeper said: "All summer the hotel was full. We had a good season. I worked all summer in the high season from six o'clock in the morning until midnight. Every room was crowded. We had people sleeping in the billiard rooms on cots. It was the best year we ever had. In October

the mark started to fail, and in December all the money we had taken in all summer was not enough to buy our preserves and jelly for next season. I have a little capital in Switzerland, otherwise we would have had to close. Every other summer hotel in this town has closed for good. The proprietor of the big hotel on the hill there committed suicide last week."

A Professor's Salary.

The high school professor said: "I get 200,000 marks a month. That sounds like a good salary. But there is no way I can increase it. One egg costs 4,000 marks. A shirt costs 85,000 marks. We are living now, our family of four, on two meals a day. We are very lucky to have that. I owe the bank money.

"People here in town cannot change their marks into dollars, and Swiss francs so as to have them when the mark falls again, as it will as soon as they settle this Ruhr affair. The banks will not give out any dollars or Swiss or Dutch money. They hang on to all they can get. The people can't do anything.

"The merchants have no confidence in the money, and will not bring their prices down. The wealthy people are the farmers who got the high prices for their crops which were marketed just after the mark fell last fall and the big manufacturers. The big manufacturers sell abroad for foreign money, and pay their labor in marks. And the banks. The banks are always wealthy. The banks are like the government. They get good money for bad, and hang on to the good money."

The school teacher was a tall, thin man with thin, nervous hands. For pleasure he played the flute. I had heard him playing as I came to his door. His two children did not look undernourished, but he and his frayed looking wife did.

Can't Trust Government.

"But how will it all come out?" I asked him.

"We can only trust in God," he said. Then he smiled. "We used to trust in God and the government, we Germans. Now I no longer trust the government."

"I heard you playing very beautifully on the flute when I came to the door," I said rising to go.

"You know the flute? You like the flute? I will play for you."

"If it would not be asking too much."

So we sat in the dusk in the ugly little parlor and the schoolmaster played very beautifully on the flute. Outside people were going by in the main street of the town. The children came in silently and sat down. After a time the schoolmaster stopped and stood up very embarrassedly.

"It is a very nice instrument, the flute," he said.

The End