

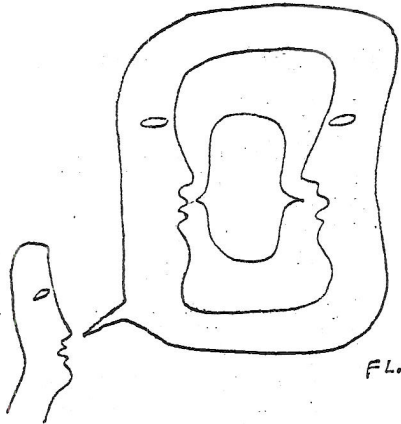
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Hans, Who Was Tiresome

By Russell Baker

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1—It is in very poor taste to go around talking about bombing all the time. If there is some bombing going on, it is unfortunate, particularly if innocent people are being hurt. Nobody likes to see innocent people hurt, but sometimes it cannot be helped. "You have to break a few eggs to make an omelette," as someone once said, maybe Lenin.

Lenin is also in bad taste, extremely bad taste, but there are some things we can learn about from the Communists. And so our leaders may have to bomb once in a while for the greater good. Is that any reason why somebody should go on all the time wailing about bombing, bombing, bombing?

It gets to be a bore. Who wants to hear about it? Who wants to read about it? Who wants to have somebody in during the holidays for a few drinks and, you know, get a little *gemutlichkeit* going, and then find that you have to listen to a lot of tiresome



Douglas Florian

moaning about bombing from one of the guests?

It's impolite.

I bring this up because of my old friend Hans. One holiday night we were at the *Bierstube* with a few of our friends singing the old songs—"Stille Nacht" and "Tannenbaum"—Ach!, how beautiful they are!

And as we were singing that beautiful carol—"Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht"—Hans, always the spoilsport about that boring war, interrupted to ask how we could stand to sing about a *Heilige Nacht*, when our bombers were off somewhere giving it to a lot of people whom we did not even care about.

Frankly, we were all embarrassed. Anybody with sensitivity would be embarrassed to see a beloved old friend like Hans give in to such emotional behavior in public.

If people were going to allow them-

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selves to become emotional about every bombing, correct social behavior would become a thing of the past. As I told Fritz afterwards, a man can deplore the bombing without making a public scene about it.

"It is definitely incorrect social behavior," Fritz said.

Later in the week I invited several guests for an evening, and both Otto and Franz remarked, in accepting, that they certainly hoped nobody was going to spoil the entire evening by bringing up the dreary subject of the bombing or the war in general.

"*Ich spreche* like a Dutch uncle," I told Hans. "Lay off the bombing talk when you come to the house. *Verstehen sie?*"

"*Was gibt mit dem sprechen* like ein Dutch uncle?" Hans asked.

"Hans," I told him, "everybody knows it is too bad about the bombing. When you tell them it is too bad about the bombing, you are simply telling them what they already know. In that way, Hans, you are boring them."

"That is precisely why I carry on and wail and moan," Hans said. "In that way I hope to shock them out of their bored complacency."

"But by getting emotional about it, you are merely embarrassing them," I explained.

"*Emotional ist nich gut?*" Hans asked.

"*Haben sie nicht genoticed dasz everybody ist geloooken at you lately like sie sind in the head soft gegone?*"

When Hans heard that, he swore that he would turn over a new leaf. ("*Jetzt bin ich wie eine blume.*")

On the night of the party, he was exceedingly correct at first and did not even make his usual Prussian ethnic joke when Von Maltke lost his monocle in his beer stein.

Later, however, when Ehrhardt the classicist began talking about the fall of Rome, Hans suddenly declared that Attila the Hun was no worse a human scourge than the *Luftwaffe* had just proven itself over Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry and London.

"What bad taste!" some people murmured.

"He is too emotional," said others. "One can see that from his tendency to make too much of a little bombing."

"What a bore," still others remarked, leaving Hans feeling ignored and out of it.

It was a good lesson to him. Later in the war he joined the Gestapo and hung a number of us by our thumbs in dreary, boring cellars.