

Beer and the Germans

Marlis Post

The popular notion that beer is the "national beverage" of the German nation appears to be justified in a way by figures, for statisticians have found out that last year every citizen in the Federal Republic of Germany consumed 95 litres of beer on an average. Beer brewers can be satisfied with their annual sale of 53.7 million hectolitres. And yet: it would be wrong to call the Germans a nation of beer drinkers. They consume and love many other types of beverages, and there are regions with a very small beer consumption. Beer, however, nourishes and has also been called "liquid bread" by many people.

Beer definitely is popular, and always has been: an old German law of 1564 says that this beverage must be made only from four basic components—barley, hops, yeast and water. This law in essence is still valid today, and strictly adhered to. German beer grows ever more popular abroad, as the export figures show. In 1960 no less than 915,000 hectolitres of beer were exported, which is nine per

cent more than in the previous year.

Germany, however, is not the country where beer originated. The old people of Babylon and of Egypt, five thousand years ago, did already number this beverage amongst the basic elements of their diet. Greek and Roman historians later on reported that the original inhabitants of Germany, the Germanic tribes, were beer brewers. But the Germanic nations in those days loved another beverage much more dearly: mead, a beverage made of water and fermented honey.

The oldest German breweries were established in the 12th century in Southern Germany, where, by the way, more beer is consumed than elsewhere. Soon the art of beer brewing was known all over the country. World-fame came to German beer, however, only in the middle of the nineteenth century, when due to a far-reaching modernization of brewery operations, Germany became Number One amongst the beer brewers in the world.

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Nine out of ten adult Germans occasionally drink beer. Many drink it regularly, others use it only to quench their thirst. Every region enjoys its type of local brew. For example, in North Germany a light-coloured, strong beer, rich in alcohol is preferred. Usually pure and strong hard liquors are taken with the beer. This habit will even make the somewhat reserved and surly inhabitants of the Northern provinces pleasant, amusing and sociable fellow-citizens, the Southerners say.

It is a fallacy to think that in the Rhineland, where the famous German wine is grown, less beer is drunk. For a few rural areas this may be true, but in the large cities, like Duesseldorf and Cologne,

people like to crowd around the bar in pubs, and to talk over a glass of dark "old beer."

In South Germany, however, people order their beer in mugs, known also as steins, taking as much as one litre. Foreign tourists apparently like Bavarian beer; for many of them are regularly seen enjoying it, in old pubs. This beer is a little sweeter, and has a little less alcohol than the northern brews. Experts say that there are no less than 800 different brews of beer in Germany. The figures, however, show that although beer is popular here, the German nation does not drink more than other people. On the contrary, several other countries are known to consume more per capita, but proverbially the Germans are held to be a beer-drinking nation.

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