# Inside the Krankenhaus

I'm learning a lot from the series the Daily Mirror are publishing by Auberon Waugh and his wife ("the brilliant young Waughs," as the Mirror calls them). They're travelling about Europe, sending back a piece a week on the national characteristics of each country they visit.

The Germans are the latest race to come under their microscope. "Our idea of the country," writes Mr. Waugh, "had been formed by seeing war films in which all Germans shout ‘Ach so! Gott in Himmel!'" He was agreeably surprised to find that this was not the case in the Federal Republic today, and almost as surprised by the sheer variety of the German race. "Germans come in all sizes," he reports, "fat, thin, tall, short, dark, fair. Some are cheerful, some gloomy."

Ach so? one feels like gasping. Thin as well as fat? Short as well as tall? Some cheerful, some gloomy? Well, dash it all! Gott, as one might say, in Himmel!

So the old prejudices and misconceptions are at last ex­posed. There's only one thing in which Mr. Waugh thinks the Germans might be deficient, and that's a sense of the ridiculous — a grave flaw, of course, which sets them apart from visiting British journalists and others. Mr. Waugh thinks that their language might be in some way to blame.

"It must be very difficult to keep a straight face," he writes, " if, when you go to visit a relative in hospital you have to ask for the Krankenhaus, or when you want the way out, if you have to ask for the Ausfahrt."

I suppose it must. I'd never thought of it that way before. I suppose life must be just one long struggle to keep them­selves from bursting out laughing at their own language.

It would explain a lot, of course. That's what the object of all that iron Prussian discipline must have been. That's what all those duelling scars were for—camouflage the dirty grins on the faces of people inquiring about the Ausfahrt.

Now that the old traditional codes of discipline have gone it's terrible. The approach to every Ausfahrt, Einfahrt, and Krankenhaus in the Federal Republic is jammed with people falling about and holding their sides. But that's nothing to what it's like inside the Krankenhaus. Inside it sounds like 14 different studio audiences trying to earn their free tickets simultaneously, as the patients describe their various comic ­sounding symptoms to the staff. Here's a new admission scarcely able to speak for giggles as he tells the doctor he has a pain in his elbow.

"A Schmerz in your Ellenbogen?" repeats the doctor without any sign of amusement — he's heard the joke before, of course. "Which Ellenbogen?"

"Both Ellenbogens," replies the patient, trying to pull himself together. "I also get agonising twinges which run up and down my leg from my... from my..."

But it's no good—he's off again. Unable to get the words out for laughing, he points silently from his thigh to his ankle.

"From your Schenkel to your Knochel?" says the doctor, the corner of his mouth twitching very slightly in spite of himself. The patient nods helplessly.

"And sometimes," he gasps, "and sometimes... all the way down my..."

He closes his eyes and vibrates silently, shaking his head from time to time to indicate that speech is beyond him.

"Come on," says the doctor, frankly grinning himself now. "Get it out."

"All the way down my... my Wirb... my Wirbel..."

"You'll start me off if you're not careful. You're what?"

"My Wirbelsäu?häu?häu?häu?häu?häu?häu..."

"Your Wirbelsäule? Your backbone?"

The patient nods, his eyes covered with his hand, his shoul­ders shaking rhythmically. The doctor bites his lip hard to stop himself giving way.

"Any other symptoms?" he demands gruffly.

"Yes," croaks the patient weakly. "Verstopfung!"

At this the doctor can hold out no longer. A great snort of laughter forces its way past his clenched jaw muscles, and he puts his head back and laughs until he cries.

"Verstopft, are you?" he manages at last. "Constipated?"

"Verstopft up solid!"

Eventually they both simmer down a bit, and sigh, and wipe their eyes, smiling anywhere but at each other.

"You know what your trouble is?" says the doctor. "You've got Kniescheibenentzündung. Housemaid's knee."

"Don't!" pleads the patient. "You'll start me off again!"

"And a rather bad dose of..."

"No, honestly, I've got a pain as it is..."

"No, listen, a rather bad dose of Windpo?ho?ho?ho?ho?ho...!"

"Stop! Sto?ho?ho?ho?ho?ho..."

"Wind... Wind?hi?hi?hi?hi?hi...!"

"Oh...! I swear I'm dying..."

"Windpocken! Chickenpox!"

"No, honestly, shut up...!"

"And..."

"I'm not listening!"

"...You've sprained your — no, listen — your nostril, your Nasenflügel...!"

Well, the poor devil's in stitches already, of course. By the time he's had a splint applied to his Nasenflügel and been wheeled out towards the Ausfahrt, he's probably just about what the German doctors callblühendekopfabgelacht— laughed his blooming head off. That's going to take a stitch or two to fix; it's yet another case of someone coming out of the Krankenhaus a whole lot kranker than when he went in.

Gott in Himmel! It makes you glad to be English.