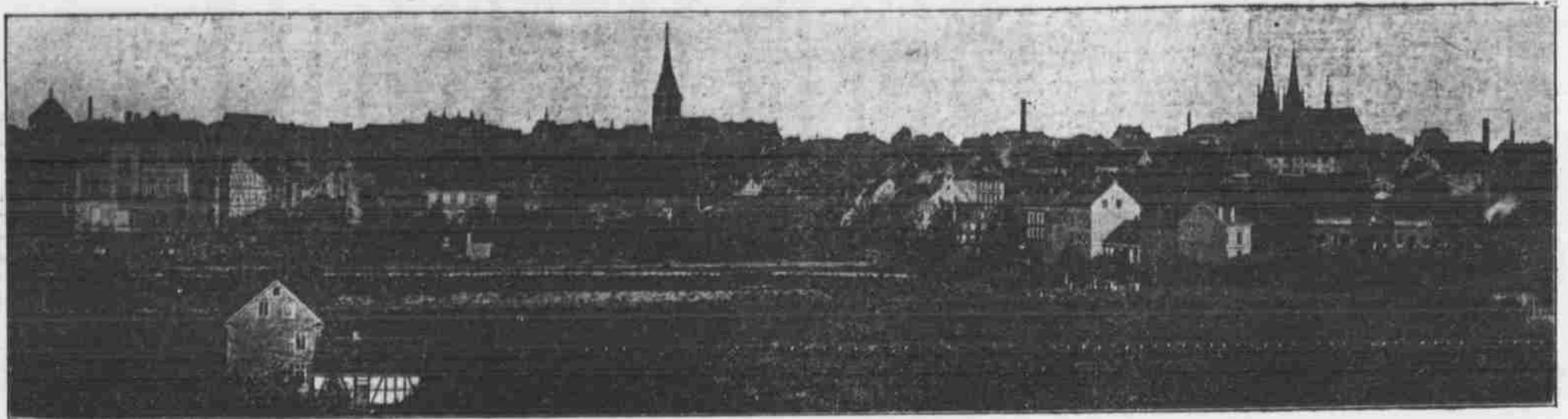


Solingen the Toledo and Sheffield of Germany



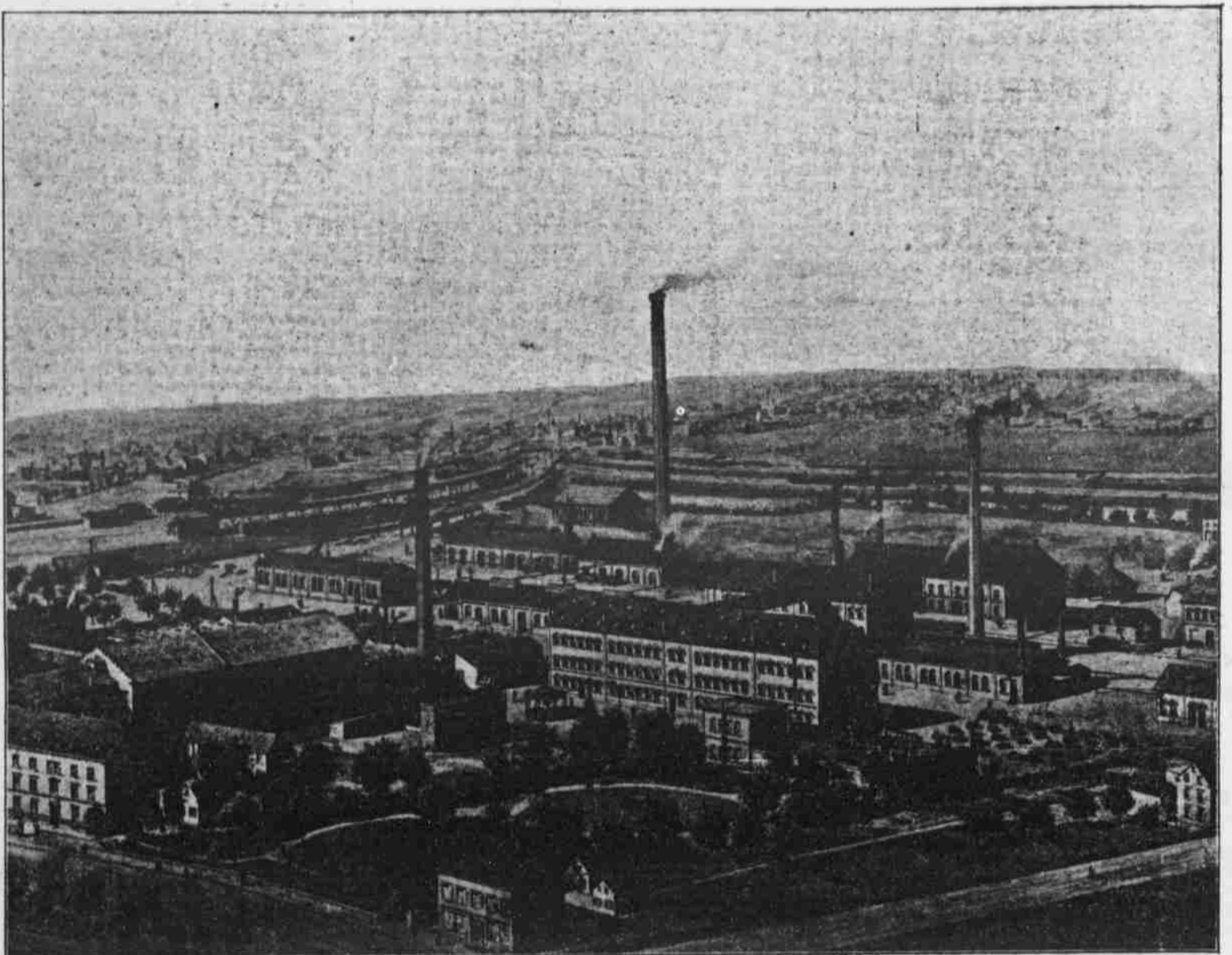
GENERAL VIEW OF SOLINGEN, TAKEN FROM THE FIELDS OUTSIDE THE CITY.—From a Photo by Mertins & Co., Berlin.

THE queen of all weapons with which the Germans fought their battles was unquestionably the one dedicated to the god of battles, Thor, namely the sword. A sword could be found hanging over the couch, at birth; when a youth reached the age of manhood he was girded with a sword; when he became a husband a sword was considered the best wedding present, and when he died his sword was placed at his right. Holy vows were made by placing the hand on the sword blade or kissing the same. It was the chief present of honor for distinguished guests, generals and warriors, and an exchange of swords was considered a lasting tie of friendship. The custom for the vanquished to grasp the point of a sword and hand the hilt to the victor is in vogue to this day. The sword was considered a symbol of justice, strength and might, as well as of dominion, far back into the middle ages. Each sword had its particular ring by which it was known as man by his voice.

The sword occupying a place of honor with heroes and peoples of ancient times, it is natural that also the producer was highly respected, particularly as the manufacture of swords was not carried on on a large scale or in factories, and the whole technical part of the art of making swords was largely a secret. Many stories and fables were circulated in olden times with reference to swords and the making of same, which is also true as to the origin of sword blade making in Solingen. Some chronologists claim that the first sword makers came with the returning crusaders from Damascus, and that the name Solingen is derived from the village of Soil on the isle of Cyprus; others that Steyermarker introduced the making of swords, or that it originated with weapon smiths who immigrated during the Italian wars (1163-1173) from Armata and Bergano. Still others consider Solingen as a branch of old Toledo or ascribe a co-operation in the origin of the Solingen industry to Sheffield, Toledo, Saragossa, Damascus and other olden time places.

For all of this, however, no foundation can be found. That in all probability the Solingen industry originated on the spot without the assistance of outside help is generally overlooked. In evidence of the latter proposition it may be stated that the Teutons understood the manipulating of metals and were active in mining, even if in a primitive way, for centuries back. In Westphalia iron was found in the neighborhood of Marsburg and Ludenscheid in pre-chronological times, and miners' tools, stone lamps, wooden shovels and picks with iron points found near Bensberg. In the city of Duisburg coal was mined as far back as 1129.

If in addition to facts like these we consider the many fables and legends of Westphalia, and Rheinland in particular, which tell us of giant black men with slouch hats and forge hammer and sword-making dwarfs, etc., who dwelt in the mountain hollows along the river Wupper, there is surely sufficient evidence that the Germans were masters in the art of forging, and considering the fact of their being engaged in the mining of ore for centuries



VIEW OF THE FACTORY OF J. A. HENCKLES, SOLINGEN.

back, in connection herewith, it seems plausible that the origin of the German cutlery industry was among the Germans themselves.

Places of note where sword smithies first originated in Germany were Passau, Regensburg, Augsburg and Nuremberg, and in the latter place a guild of sword smiths was formed in the year 1285. Above all, however, it was Solingen which outdid all other places, even Toledo of Spain, Armata and Milan of Italy and Damascus of Syria, and is holding the first place to this day.

"Cologne swords" were already mentioned in the early middle ages, but in all probability the greater part of these were made at Solingen, which place already existed in the year 1600 and was always in very close business connection with Cologne, which, being a large business center, was no doubt the market for Solingen articles.

The first creditable mention of the Solin-

gen sword blade industry dates from the year 1310. At this time grinding mills were already in existence, while "grinders" were spoken of a few years later. The blade industry was protected and favored by the duke of Eerg at this time and given special privileges, which were constantly increased by his successors. In 1401 the "grinders" and "hardeners" were given the privilege of forming a guild. In 1412 sword cutlers and finishers were given the same privilege. The chief object for giving these concessions was to preserve and confine the industry to their district, each member of the Solingen guild, for instance, being obliged to make oath that he would remain in Solingen and never leave the country.

The entire body of laborers divided itself into three distinct guilds, viz., sword smiths, hardeners and grinders, finishers and polishers, and no member of one could become a member of the other also, that

is to say, a sword smith forger could never be a grinder nor a grinder a forger or finisher; to become a member it was necessary to be the legitimate son of a member of the guild. Furthermore, a member of the guild was only allowed to teach his "respective art" to his son, which seems to be an unwritten law up to the present time.

To have a uniform income the amount of the daily production was limited—a sword smith, for instance, was not allowed to make more than four swords per day. Each master was also obliged to stamp every blade he made with his particular "mark" and after the same was thoroughly inspected the general Solingen trademark was affixed by the city drawing master. No sword was permitted to be shipped that was not marked, so that any inferior make could readily be traced to the manufacturer. One of the oldest trademarks is

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GRINDING RAZORS IN THE FACTORY OF DANIEL PERES, SOLINGEN.—From a Photo Made for This Article.



MAKING POCKET KNIVES IN THE FACTORY OF DANIEL PERES, SOLINGEN.—From a Photo Made for This Article.