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University Esprit de Corps—Canadian and German

When the Editor of Varsity asked me to write an article for our undergraduate journal, he suggested that I should discuss some aspect of university life as I had met it in German universities. This proposal did not appeal to me favorably at the time, nor indeed does it yet, but the desire which lay back of the request—to know something more of the ways of our fellow students in other lands—is a laudable one and, therefore, I shall attempt to meet Mr. Editor's request at least half way.

The story is told of an old clergyman who desiring to have "a heart to heart talk" with his congregation and yet not feeling free to dispense with the usual text, selected, after much search, the following: "Brethren, let me speak freely unto you." I feel myself in somewhat the same predicament, both in my desires and in the conditions which exist, for Varsity too has its traditions and the members of the faculty from whom articles have appeared in its columns have so far observed these, that, as a rule, the great currents of student life and thought are left undiscussed by them. Possibly when I detail the conditions under which the following thoughts occurred to me, I may be pardoned the slight violation of these traditions which I may make.

Last winter while at the University of Wuerzburg, I received copies of The Varsity and read with much interest the articles and letters in which the relation of the faculty to the students and the Esprit de Corps of students were discussed. I was almost involuntarily led to consider these questions from the standpoint of my surroundings in a German university, and the reflections which I offer to the student body are those which came to me during the days which immediately followed my perusal of these numbers of the 1904 Varsity.

The first thing which occurred to me was that the problems which students in Toronto seem to find in the subjects under discussion are, so far as my observation has gone, utterly foreign to German university life. They arise, I believe, because our Canadian, and, may I not add, even English idea of a university and its work is fundamentally different from the German idea, rather than from any differences either socially or politically between the two countries.

In Germany a university has as its distinctive mark *Wissenschaft* or as we might say science; not of course science in distinction from philosophy or literature, but science as equivalent to the pursuit of knowledge or research. A Ger-

man university is an institution at which everything takes (at least theoretically) second place to investigation, and I have yet to hear the voice of either professor or student raised against that idea. This view is regarded just as self-evident as we might consider the view that a restaurant is a place to which people go to eat. When students go to a university they expect this; when professors lecture they take for granted that the latest views in a given subject must be considered and hence the lectures of German professors are bristling with problems rather than with mere solutions.

The Canadian idea of a university seems to me different from this in one respect at least; viz.: that the majority of our people, among whom I reckon the students, expect that teaching rather than research must be the part of the university's work to which all else is subservient.

This difference is seen in the different systems under which the universities of Canada and Germany operate. The German professor has generally fewer hours a week in the class room—though I do not consider that an essential difference—and he lectures on one or at most two subjects in any Semester. Herein lies the great advantage of the German system so far as research is concerned, for under such conditions one is able to cover practically the whole of the new literature of a given subject whenever it is lectured upon. The professor, therefore, does not teach, he lectures. Hence it may easily occur that students will listen gladly to a man whose material is not well presented from a pedagogical point of view, but whose lectures bring one up-to-date. A German professor is, accordingly, chosen not for his ability to teach but rather for his mastery of a given subject. In passing, I may add, that one of the great men I heard in Germany, one who is known throughout the whole world in his subject, is without any exception the poorest teacher I ever sat under. He, however, has been called repeatedly to the larger German universities and is very highly valued at the university in which he is; students go even from foreign lands to study under him.

Under this system the problem of the relation of professor and student contains only one essential point—viz.: the intercourse they are able to have in their scientific discussions. The social, even moral, duties which some seem to think part of a professor's obligations in Toronto are thus works of supererogation in a German university—they have all been borne by the teachers in the *Gymnasium*, who, as Professor Keys pointed out in a recent issue of Varsity, do this and a good deal more for the students before they get to the university. The *Gymnasium* is for teach-