

Extract from letter of R.B. MacLeod

"You asked me in one of your letters how my McGill preparation fitted me for the requirements of the German university, with a view to possible improvements in the McGill curriculum. That is a hard question to answer, because the German requirements are so indefinite. However, judging from the subject matter in the lectures, the discussions in the colloquium and many conversations with students, I don't think you need fear any comparisons. I think I can say, without assuming any credit for myself, that my general knowledge of psychology will stand up pretty well against that of any of the German students who are getting their degrees now. In fact I have been going through a slow process of disillusionment with reference to German academic standards, and though I'm still impressed by German scholarship and German devotion to science, I can't see that the university standard is any higher than our own. A German degree certainly represents neither as broad nor as thorough a training as an American Ph.D. Probably the quality of German research is as high as our own, but quite often the student knows little beyond the range of his own immediate problem. Most of the students I've talked with would be hopelessly lost if they were presented with the general exam. we have to pass one year before graduation.

"There seems to be an essential difference between the German and the American university, and I think the difference becomes clear when one remembers the question you asked me. I can't imagine a German professor with the concern for his students revealed in your question. The German Psychological Institute exists for psychological research; students may help occasionally if they don't get in the road, and the professors give occasional lectures in order to justify their salary from the university. The American Department of Psychology exists to give students a comprehensive and balanced training in psychology, and carries on as much research as it can besides. My own interest is in the latter type of institution. However, I've learned a lot from studying in Germany, and I think our own system could be improved so as to develop the German virtues without losing its own. When working in the Berlin Institute one cannot escape the impression that psychology is still first and foremost an experimental science, with most of its experiments still lying in the future. It is tremendously stimulating to feel oneself actually in the presence of creative work, to have unsolved problems stated in the classroom and see them being investigated in the laboratory. If I could suggest anything for McGill it would be a greater emphasis on systematic investigation, if necessary at the expense of some of the teaching. In Berlin there are in general three investigations going on, Köhler's work on visual perception, Lewin's on Willenspsychologie, and Rupp's in Psychotechnik, each employing from five to ten investigators and all the problems in each field more or less connected. The students can actually see the work develop from semester to semester. I'm hoping the proposed experimental work in Psychology of Language will prove suggestive,