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The Neuphilologische Verein of Leipzig

Its Social and Scientific Activity

Mein Leipzig lob'ich mir
Es ist ein klein Paris und bildet seine Leute.
Wenn du als Mann die Wissenschaft vermehrest
So kann dein Sohn zu höhrem Ziel gelangen.
—Goethe. "Faust."

Although both pleased and interested by my first visit to the Verein für neuere Philologie, the thought of becoming a member did not occur to me during my early visits to Leipzig. Had I known how much of German student life and German intellectual vigor is revealed to the members of such a body I should have taken the earliest opportunity of seeking an entrance to it. Such an entrance does not come unasked, for in this respect the Verein resembles rather a Greek-letter fraternity than our University College Modern Language Club. Its members use the second person singular, that delightful old custom which takes us back to the days of clan-life and gives a quality of the intimate to one's intercourse for which the English language has no equivalent. In the early Leipzig days the German students whom I chanced to meet proved uncongenial and my Dutzbrüder among foreigners were French or Italian or Hungarian or Spanish-Americans, whose sympathies were not strongly Teutonic. At that time, too, a number of American and British students of marked ability made the attractions of the English-speaking colony prevail over those of the German student unions. The late President Curtis, of Chicago; Dr. Gregory, now himself a Leipzig professor; Dr. Genung, the rhetorician of Amherst; President Stanley Hall, of Clark University; Prof. Wood, of Johns Hopkins; Prof. Carpenter, of Columbia, and Prof. Pierce, of Harvard, with Henry Norman, Dr. Playfair of Edinburgh, and Galway of Belfast, formed a sufficiently distinguished coterie to break up plans that had been formed in previous years. It was not until other years had passed that on a subsequent visit I followed a friend's example and sought and found admittance to membership in the Leipzig Verein.

At the outset let me say that no initiation is necessary. Blood-curdling adventures in springing from terrific heights or being rolled in barrels down long hills or suspended till the very joints crack over a chasm three inches deep—such terrors, in short, as chill the soul of the would-be aspirant to membership in a secret society are inconsistent with the gravity and dignity of the German student. He has his own feats of endurance and performance, some of

which to an American ear would seem quite as silly as our initiation ceremonies do to his, if to enter upon such mysteries were lawful. But the one condition precedent for entrance to the V. f. N. P. was participation in a previous meeting, at which the members have an opportunity of judging the aspirant's capacity and qualifications, social and intellectual. These did not necessarily include a perfect knowledge of German, as certain American members were afterwards introduced who learned their German in the Verein. Needless to say such German is marked by an up-to-dateness only inferior to that of the green room or the printing office.

After joining the Verein its many-sided activities at once became apparent. To the stranger, who read its notices on the university bulletin board in the old Kreuzgang, the only meeting of the society appeared to be the weekly Kneipe, as the student meeting is called, with its carefully prepared paper on a scientific subject, the reading of which lasted perhaps an hour and the debate on which might continue an hour longer. While this was the main meeting it was by no means the only one, nor to the average member the most important. Interesting and instructive as it always was, especially when three or four Ehrenmitglieder were present and the debate might be participated in by some of the professors, what more directly benefited the ordinary student member was the meeting of the so-called sections. These were inner circles, as it were, made up of students specially interested in a subject which was taught in the most familiar tutorial style by an older member of the Verein. Such subjects were Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, Rhaeto-Roumansch, Russian or Conversational French. It may afford a crumb of comfort to Professor Churton Collins (if for him any good thing can come out of Germany) to learn that at the present late day, when Cambridge and Oxford are debating the fate of Greek, there is a section of the Neuphilologen which is engaged in studying that subject. Professor Weigand, who discovered a new dialect in Roumania, was a member of the Verein, and in my first session used to entertain us at the Kneipe with descriptions of his adventures, while pursuing his linguistic studies, among the robber hordes of the Balkans. At another time he would be training some of the members for entrance to his seminar by reading Diez' Romance Grammar with them. To meet an authority in this friendly social way and to listen to his delightful tales of wild life—far wilder than anything in Canada—was a most agreeable introduction to the study of romance philology. One could un-