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TEACHING GERMAN CIVILIZATION[1]

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IN the November, 1935, issue of the GERMAN QUARTERLY I outlined a course in German Civilization in English. Today I shall summarize the principles which should govern, and then take up the objectives, materials, and methods of such a course.

What kind of course?— There have been courses on *Kulturkunde* given in German in a number of universities and colleges for some time, but only recently have a few courses in German Civilization in English sprung up here and there in colleges. These courses consist in a few cases of a series of lectures, sometimes by men from various departments in the college, for instance, music, various sciences, history, etc. There are even music recitals for one or more of the hours. There is illustrated material and visual instruction and of course there are the examinations.

This sort of course has several advantages. It can be arranged without much outlay, can even be made room for by giving up an hour of the first and second year German classes every two weeks. While on this point I may state that this is probably the best way in high school, as it is impossible to arrange a special course for this purpose. While it means extra work to give such a course, one lecturer can take care of all of the sections of first and second year German.

It may be desirable to give about sixteen lectures one year and sixteen other lectures the next. In this way both first and second-year classes can be accommodated in all of the lectures, the entire course now being given every two weeks for two years. Of course one instructor must be responsible for the course and give the examinations. This is probably preferable to a one-year course.

This course has also the advantage that it arouses a certain amount of school-wide interest. It has also very definite disad-

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vantages. There is no way of determining what precisely shall be in the various lectures except those given by the members of the German department itself. The course cannot be a well-planned, systematic whole. Of course the supervisor of the course can give it unity and system through the readings assigned, for certainly there must be readings. However, classroom time, which is of the greatest value, must be sacrificed to outside lecturers. This sort of course cannot be much more than a popular lecture course unless the members of the German department give most of the lectures according to a systematic and pedagogically planned outline of objectives, materials, and method. And we must remember that we are sacrificing one-sixth of our three, one eighth of our four, or one-tenth of our five-hour-a-week course for this lecture course.

Pedagogically, certainly, the course by a single instructor is preferable under these circumstances. The course may still be given as outlined above. If it is decided to have all the members of the department take part, then it should be according to a systematic plan. That is, the lectures should be written out and a syllabus of the course set up by the responsible instructor, together with outline of readings and tests. Under these circumstances we need have no misgivings about giving up an hour every two weeks to this work. Wherever a separate course is impossible, as it probably will always be in secondary schools, the material should be taught incidentally, but systematically.

The objective.—Knowledge of a foreign civilization is considered one of the valid objectives in modern teaching. At present, however, we are not attaining it in our two-year course. And please note that 85 per cent of all modern language students in college or high school take only two years or less. At best the student gets a *Realienbuch* containing a slight introduction to geography and customs. This is fine as far as it goes, but the other readings are generally just stories. Of course I must note that reading is our chief aim which we must guarantee in two years. But reading is a tool merely. It is one of the instrumental objectives, the real object of all modern language study —beyond the immediately practical—is knowledge of the foreign civilization.

We must demand objective teaching. The idea of making propaganda for a foreign culture in our schools is not wanted. We want for young Americans, however, to interpret truthfully the foreign civilization, that is, rationally, not emotionally. The teacher cannot

ingrain this habit by pleading a cause, but by giving ample information from reliable sources and conducting such discussions as will lead the students to interpret objectively. Pleading a cause, always reacting on the basis of a previously accepted viewpoint or feeling, is a sure way to kill objectivity. We see enough of this sort of thing in our newspapers, periodicals, books, radio, even pulpits.

Why should a modern language teacher plead for a foreign country? If he does, he is either a foreigner at heart, or a romanticist. Business men and politicians have financial and political interests at stake and so we can understand why they feel and agitate. But the modern language teacher receives no pay from foreign governments, at least the run of us do not—not even foreign distinctions, orders, and the like. On the other hand, if I interpret American ideals correctly, we don't want modern language teachers to plead—and remember America is paying our salaries! We want teachers whose love and fealty, indeed whose contribution to life is here, who teach foreign civilization as a subject for young Americans to know, so we may have intelligent public opinion on the subject.

The materials of instruction.—I shall now take up the materials to be used. There is a plethora of these, not all in English, but ample even in English. On what shall the stress be laid: on political, economic, social history, physical and biological science, social institutions including education, on philosophy and other social science, all domains of art, including music, the Germans in Germany, or in Europe—there are 20,000,000 of them outside of Germany in Europe —the great inventions and discoveries, German thought in the world, the great men and women, or finally on German literature, and all of these in the past, or in the present?

I mention German literature last since it is probably for us the most important. However, not everyone may want to lay most stress on it. It is probably not more important than some other domains, but we are probably better equipped to teach it. Certainly we should take the term literature broadly enough so we can include the greatest works in several departments, for instance, the biographies written by literary men, and world-famous works of philosophers and scientists, and as far as we have time, biographies of great men. We list below a few readily available books.

Methods of teaching.—We come to our third step, the *How?* Our first step was our objectives, the second the materials through which we plan to reach our objectives, the third is how we will use the ma-

terial. I shall take up literary works first, including biography and what little of learned works we can read. We should, I think, read only those works which either belong to world-literature, or which stand at the very top within the nation. We cannot afford to give our students anything less than the best.

You will understand perfectly when I state that merely assigning a work to be read without any antecedent information or suggestion about it would be futile in case of most of our students, especially under-classmen. We need therefore to bring to their attention at what point of literary and politico-social history the author and his work stand, on whose shoulders they rest and what advance they signfy.

Next, we develop the particular problem or purpose the author had in mind in this particular work. Something must be said to place the work in the author's own life and development, and then we must dig deeper. Merely to tell the student for instance that Schiller's idea in *Tell* was to glorify a people in their struggle for liberty is not sufficient. Let me suggest for illustration a few questions which may set our student to thinking and to keep his eyes open as he reads: Who is the hero of this play, Tell or the Swiss people? List what each did toward freeing his country. Can a whole people be the hero? Who, or what sort of man, was the hero in literary works in the past generally? Give as many examples of great works with an individual hero, a whole people, or a mass of people, as the hero. What is the object of the Keep-building scene? Of Tell's long soliloquy in the Sunken Way? For juxtaposing Tell and the Parricide? What other methods are there of making changes in society besides revolution? Which method do you favor, or have you a new one to suggest.

Method in teaching history and institutions.—The teacher's job is the same as that of any scholar, namely, knowing his field. In our case this is no more difficult than is the historian's who gives a course which comes down to the present time. He must know the best courses of information and how to sift truth and fact from untruth and non-fact on the basis of the best criteria.

History is not a science of direct observation, or very minimally so. It is not an exact science, but for its purposes an objective cast of mind is just as important as for any science. Its data are almost always second or third hand. Its conclusions are reached by chains of reasoning. The chief principles employed in establishing validity may be stated as follows: First, positive internal criticism. What does the author mean? What value have his statements? Negative

internal criticism concerning the good faith and accuracy of the author. Reasons for doubting his good faith: (1) Author's interest. Has he everything to gain and nothing to lose by an honest representation, or by a dishonest representation? (2) Author's sympathy or antipathy. (3) Force of circumstances, as in official or semi-official reports, etc. (4) Author's vanity. (5) Deference to public opinion. (6) Literary distortion to make a good story, etc.

Reasons for doubting author's accuracy: (1) Author is a poor observer or reader, has hallucinations, illusions, prejudices. (2) Author not well situated to observe at the time of observing. (3) His negligence or indifference to facts of the case. (4) Facts are or are not of a nature to be directly observed. (5) Often the report is made anonymously and no credence can be given it. (6) Falsehood is improbable because fact is opposed to vanity or interest of author. (7) The fact was generally known, hence probably true. (8) The fact was indifferent to author. (9) Error improbable because fact was too great to be mistaken. (10) Fact seemed improbable or unintelligible to author. (11) Disagreement between report and other sources of information. (12) Statement is improbable, a miracle, legend, or in conflict with science.

The application of these criteria will enable us to throw out material, not only from the more unreliable sources, but from the more reliable. A scale of reliability as to all but authoritative scientific works may be given as follows in ascending gradation: (1) the radio; (2) the daily press; (3) the more popular and louder periodicals; (4) propagandistic pamphlets and books; (5) periodicals with a good reputation and a long service record; (6) professional periodicals; (7) books by scholars with reputations to uphold; (8) government reports, excepting party reports and war-time reports.

To determine what has been proven is one of the most difficult parts of scientific method. In your master's or doctor's dissertations and in your professional articles you certainly do not set up claims which are not warranted by your facts. Why should we in case of questions which we discuss in our teaching?

One trouble with non-scientific minds is that they attempt to prove too much and wish to dispense knowledge in too great quantities. A good lawyer doesn't need to prove much but he must prove what he proves so surely that his opponent cannot break down the proof.

To be sure, an introductory course in German civilization does

not consist to any great extent of controversial matter. In fact, the literary texts, which may be three-quarters of it, are not controversial, or only mildly so. History down to our own day is not controversial as far as discussed in an elementary course, and for the latest period, we must choose a text which stands well above the controversial and on thoroughly scientific ground.

Some of my hearers may therefore suppose that in this way, the controversial is entirely eliminated. Unfortunately, it is not so. The student does read other books over the period, or if not, he comes from the radio and the newspaper in a thoroughly unscientific frame of mind, with highly emotionalized attitudes, and with a good deal of misinformation.

I think that here the first principle is to establish an atmosphere and a method of work in the class-room which precludes heated discussion. This begins the first day, and even farther back. The emotionalized, non-scientific teacher has no business teaching a course in contemporary civilization. If such a teacher does find himself obliged to teach such work, he will do well simply to confine himself to periods of the past and to strictly non-controversial matter, which is possible, and which especially in high school should possibly be the rule.

As a by-product, the student should get respect for the scientific method, that is, he should finally come to see that we gather data carefully, set up possible solutions and then eliminate all of them but one, by a process of weighing, comparing, etc. This is far removed from the sort of snap judgements which he has seen himself and others indulging in to arrive at conclusions.

Since about one-quarter of our material may be historical, we should school ourselves in the historical method. Here I can recommend as the best book, C. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History* (Holt, New York, 1925).

Here I shall discuss the concrete question of what books I have found most useful for our purpose. There are, of course, literally hundreds of them which treat solely, or in some measure, of German history. What we need is a very brief, trustworthy guide. I have found J. H. Robinson, *An Introductory to the History of Western Europe,* the best. We need only certain chapters. Please note that I am not recommending the two-volume work by Robinson and Beard, the *Development of Modern Europe,* which is not all suited in its arrangement, but the one volume. The latest printing is that of 1924.

Earlier editions will do, excepting Chapter 41, "Europe of Today" and a chapter "The Last Decade of European Politics" inserted after the index of the book, and which was written during the war. Robinson's work is excellent, interesting, terse, and trustworthy. The account of the Franco-Prussian War was also partly rewritten during the World War and needs therefore to be supplemented. All we need of this work in order to cover German history up to the Franco-Prussian War, is seventeen chapters and some pages from two more, or a total of 250 pages.

For the period from 1871 to the present, I have used, at different times, a number of different texts, among them G. P. Gooch, *Germany,* (Scribner, 1925). This was found entirely unsatisfactory, aside from the fact that it is too voluminous for our purposes. This latter consideration rules out also numerous other texts, *e.g.:* Henderson, *Short History of Germany,* and G. M. Priest, *Germany Since 1740.* Gooch's book was written under the dominance of war psychology and does not base on thorough study as one would think a book of so great a historian as Gooch should. In fact, it bears evidence of having been thrown off rather lightly. Next, I tried E. E. Slosson's *Twentieth Century Europe,* Houghton, 1927. It has two rather good chapters on the Empire and the Republic but suffers from being sketchy and not up to date. The latest major history of Europe is Erik Achorn, *European Civilization and Politics Since 1815.*[2] This is a very satisfactory book. A few hundred pages, scattered through several chapters, bring us from the Franco-Prussian War to the present day and to the new set-up under National Socialism. In this is not included the account of the course of the fighting in the World War which I have not found necessary to assign. Achorn bases on the latest researches, contains voluminous bibliographies, and what no other work contains: an excellent account of European culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Surely modern language teachers know that the methodology of teaching a modern language is a matter which cannot be mastered in a day. So there is also a method of teaching history. And merely because one has taught the history of literature is no sign that he can teach history. I suggest that anyone who undertakes to teach German history, as I am proposing, sit in on an elementary history course un-

[2] Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1934. For the period since 1933. I find F. L. Bennes, *Europe since 1914. Supplement.* (Crofts); satisfactory.

der a good teacher of history, and read a few best books and articles on methods of teaching history.

I will here sketch a good method in a few words. The student is required to do a good deal of map-study, which must be taught in class; further, to make topical outlines of his readings. This method must be taught him. It does not consist in noting the chief facts but in finding a logical heading to cover the whole subject under consideration, and under that, logical subheads each covering a subject in itself, and so on until the whole subject in hand is covered. Now one has some possibility of remembering the manifold facts since they are arranged in logical units. Recitation may be by the question and answer method and tests must be frequent.

We cannot depend on the papers for facts about trends in Germany. We must depend upon statistical reports, which are not intended for popular consumption. Besides, information must be checked in more than one sourse, if possible. All this I am saying is prophylactic for the teacher himself. It is, however, rather unavoidable that in class differences of opinion should arise when your students have grown up in an anti-German atmosphere of radio, newspaper, movie, periodical and book, and are still today immersed in the same.

Free and careful discussion, as we propose to foster it, can't help but bring out anti-German reactions. We should not repress these; much more, we should welcome them and meet them honestly. Sidestepping or roughly over-riding them, not only shows ignorance, but fear, and a lack of scholarly attitude. Any question brought up must be honestly discussed, and, of course, not before the teacher is prepared to do so; that is, to give the proper references and to conduct the discussion with some mastery. This kind of discussion may crop up any time and is quite certain to in discussing current history, or in discussing the institutions of Germany.

This brings us to German institutions. By this term, we mean anything through which civilized life expresses itself. Here the individual teacher would take liberty to select the institutions about which he knows most. I have in the course of years selected a list in which I have the greatest interest and on which there was most available material in English, since references to them must be given the class. Thus, the chief statistics on a multitude of subjects can be found in the *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das deutsche Reich.* For statistical publications in English, see bibliography below.

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