

COMING CHANGES IN CULTURAL RELATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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DURING the past week, many of us, librarians and publishers, scholars and men and women actively concerned in fostering culture, have met in the rooms of the exhibition of German books and portfolios to examine those beautiful works of authorship and craftsmanship, to gain a clearer view of the recent trend of ideas, and to exchange opinions and suggestions. Today, at the close of the exhibition, stimulated by the spirit of goodfellowship and of disinterested devotion to the ideals of civilization, it is natural and fitting that we should shake off at least a part of the grievous burden of discouragement which has lately made our steps heavy and uncertain. For us, the exhibition, more than any other recent event, has marked a happy and promising change in international relations.

There are signs of a new and far-reaching cultural impulse in America. President Butler, in his address of welcome at the recent meeting of the Modern Language Association in Columbia University, expressed the view that the rising tendency in the university study of the modern languages and literatures was to transform the departments of German into departments of Germany, the departments of French into departments of France, and so forth; and he strongly endorsed this tendency. He qualified, indeed, his view by calling it a heresy. But he is so well-known as a conservative man, and in such close touch with the main currents in university education, that one is justified in assuming that his heresy, publicly expressed, will be the orthodoxy of tomorrow.

It is already orthodoxy in the largest national unit of the world. President Butler really restated in his own graphic and forceful terms the gist of the recommendations of the British Commission on

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at a farewell luncheon given on the last day of the exhibition of 12,000 German books and reproductions of works of art and old illuminated texts, January 14th, 1925, at the Hotel Atlantic, Chicago.

Higher Education, formulated in its recent report. According to this report, based on a comprehensive investigation, modern language study in the British Empire should be no longer limited to the different national literatures as such, isolated, as it were, in a cultural vacuum, but be extended to include the main factors of the cultural environments in which those literatures developed, as the arts, the art-craft, architecture, philosophy, history, social conditions.

This transition from a traditional, narrowly formal and verbal view to the view of language as the final storehouse of the entire history of a race foreshadows the coming general introduction into educational practice, of Herder's conception of the universal function of language in the genetic unity of all civilization.

Books are the treasury not only of words, but of the deepest experiences, the best knowledge, the highest faiths and ideals of each people; they are the most complete witnesses to the civilization, the living voice of the spirit, of each race. Out of this conviction, or rather, out of the deepening and widening of the significance of this conviction, has arisen the new aim of modern language study.

There were at the Modern Language Meeting more than a thousand representatives of higher education from the East and the Middle West, and some from the Pacific Coast. One of the principal subjects of conversation was the relation of Germanistics to American culture. Among the leading university teachers the conviction is again finding open expression, that there are only three modern civilizations of absolutely the first rank: the English, the Romance, and the Germanic; and a good will to assist German back to its proper place in American civilization is active in the circles that will ultimately determine the course of higher culture in this country. These men are fully aware of the indissoluble interdependence of the three greatest types of modern civilization; they realize fully the vital injury inflicted on the cultural progress of America by a continued neglect of the works of the German mind; and they are ready to make a reality, more far-reaching and more wholesome than ever before, of the community of the highest values and achievements of humanity.

These men train the teachers in the public schools. Their expanding view of civilization will, partly through their students, partly through the social influence of their words and actions, soon spread to the mind of the public. One must not be impatient. The public mind, overstrained and exhausted by an unprecedented condition of international conflict, has succumbed to a state of inertia which is

slow to yield. That mind, difficult to move at best, requires at the present time, beside the gradual influences of education and reflection, a somewhat dramatic event, an event, the importance, beauty, and significance of which will overcome indifference by the striking freshness and massive force of its appeal.

This exhibition has come at the right time and in the right way. It contains the cream of much of recent German authorship and publication. It represents unsurpassed expertness in the making of books. The perfection of the color reproductions of works of art is unequalled. And the reproductions of the illuminated texts, in linking the present reproducing craftsman with his remote predecessor who made and illuminated the original text, form a bridge spanning the centuries and giving a clear demonstration of the continuity of the highest standards of skill and honor in German workmanship.

The men who brought this collection, at much expense and labor, and by whose unfailing helpfulness and courtesy we all have been touched, and the active members of the American committee have made—I believe this can be said in all soberness—the most momentous advance in the re-establishment of cultural relations between America and Germany. They have vitally promoted the advent, by furnishing the tokens, of a more purposeful sympathy, and of a more substantial vision of a new and greater fellowship, in which all Germans and all Americans who have the highest interests of civilization at heart, can join hands.