

#### The German Historical Seminar.

[Extracts from Professor F. M. Fling's account of the German Historical Seminar published in the April and May numbers of the *Academy*.]

About two weeks after the opening of the semester, the first meeting of the seminar occurs. What I describe is what I actually experienced. Whether this picture is true, in all its details, of work in other universities, I am unable to say.

An American needs all of his mother wit to enable him to make his way during the first few months at Leipzig. The buildings of the academic department alone occupy nearly all the space enclosed by four streets, and the interior courts, intricate passages and antiquities of a like nature, are quite sure to perplex a man coming from a city where all the houses front on the street and every foot of ground is not utilized for building purposes. The rooms of the historical seminar are at No. 7 *Universitätsstrasse*.

On the fourth floor, I paused before two substantial hardwood doors, very modern in appearance, bearing above them in large letters, "*Historischer Seminar*." At this side of the door, was a German boot-cleaner with its brushes on top, sides, and bottom. Passing through a convenient ante-room, with its coat and umbrella rack and its bowls with running water and an abundance of soap and towels, suggestive of clean hands and consequently unsoiled pages, I entered room No. III.

The whole number of rooms devoted to the work of the historical seminar, inclusive of the ante-room, is five. Three face upon the street; No. I, ancient history; No. II, used for a library; No. III, mediæval and modern history, while No. IV, a small back room of No. III, extending into the court, is used by students that are writing their theses and preparing for examination. The corresponding departments from the ground floor up are used for the various seminars and institutes.

All the members of the different divisions were present in room No. III, on this evening, as Dr. Maurenbrecher, the director, was to organize the work. I was acquainted with no one but the professor, and naturally did not feel quite "*zu hause*." As I entered the apartment, at a few minutes after six, I was at once captivated by the scene taken in at a glance of the eye; the room was well filled with students, some reading at the long tables, some standing in little groups engaged in low conversation, while the shaded lights and the book-cases in the dusky background, gave a charm to the picture that I at once acknowledged.

The hands of the clock indicated the first quarter after six, and suddenly a solemn stillness pervaded the apartment. Each man standing up by his chair turned his face towards room No. IV, at the door of which Professor Maurenbrecher appeared. A chair had been placed for him at the extremity of the short arc of the table, and near the door through which he had entered. Reaching this he acknowledged the presence of the students by a bow and a "good evening, gentlemen," and then with a wave of the hand, requested them to be seated, while he remained standing, his hand on the back of the chair.

The professor is the life of a seminar, almost everything depends upon the individuality of the man, as it gives the color to the whole work. Maurenbrecher has made a name as a writer on reformation history, and it is from that period, for the most part, that he selects the subjects for study and discussion. To sit at the same table with a man who has spent forty years of his life to the investigation of an historical period, to listen to his criticisms and suggestions, will fire a young student as nothing else can.

The remarks of the professor that evening might be summed up under three heads; (a) preliminary remarks, (b)

hints upon historical investigation and study, and (c) rules and regulations of the seminar. He stated that the attendance, 56 in all, was larger than ever before. Consider in connection with this that there are more than 3000 students at the university, and it becomes at once evident that a relatively small number are studying history. On the second point, he gave as the rule of investigation, the advice once given by Sybel, "Follow up your subject until no man on God's earth knows more about it than you do." He then read the rules and regulations, keeping up a running commentary and softening his remarks upon fines by a good-natured laugh. I drew from his remarks that the rules were the outgrowth of experience, and that the welfare of the seminar demands a rigid enforcement of them. The professor then informed us that as our names were called we could come forward, receive the *handschlag*, and obtain a card and key.

The following Wednesday evening at a quarter after six, the students received Professor Maurenbrecher with the same respect, and were recognized by him in the same gracious manner as on the previous Saturday. This bearing of the German student toward his instructor makes a vivid impression on an American, it is so radically different from what we are used to at home; for with us, however much we may honor a man, we are not accustomed to make a little god of him. This evening the professor's easy chair had been placed at the head of the long arm of the table, toward the street, and he was obliged to make quite a detour before reaching it. The students stood in silence on both sides of the I-shaped table, and, as Maurenbrecher passed, they turned about so that their faces were constantly toward him. A second later, we were all in our places, our eyes fixed upon the big man at the head of the table. Note books, paper, pen, and ink, and pencils were in use on all sides and the students were busily engaged in taking notes on the literature and divisions of the subject to be studied, "*The Augsburger Reichstag*."

I was very curious to learn just how the work would be laid out, and followed the "order of business" quite closely. The first topic taken up was the literature of the subject. This consisted of, first, the letters and reports of those who had taken an active part in the affairs of the Reichstag, hence, eye witnesses; second, letters and reports of contemporaries, who did not get their material first hand, but being personally interested, were likely to draw it from reliable sources; third, works of later historians covering this ground. There was no extended discussion of the merits or demerits of the works, farther than an occasional statement that the writer was not in a position to obtain reliable information, was not an eye witness, or gave only one side of the story, while at the same time witnesses were named who supplied the counter version. Every book was expected to be within reach of the students, if these were not to be found in the seminar library the senior librarian was instructed to bring them from the university library and retain them during the semester.

The second topic was the divisions of the subject; there were nine. The professor enumerated them, and indicated the ground covered by each. The distribution of the topics was particularly interesting. Looking around the table in a good-natured way, Maurenbrecher asked who would take the first, some one at once volunteered, and was received with a smile and, "Ah! I thank you." Sometimes the students rose, at other times they did not, and "I'll take that" was the customary expression. The whole affair was very informal, and whenever during the evening the men spoke, it was always with the utmost freedom and the evident feeling that they stood on an equal footing with the professor. I do not recall that two men ever volunteered to take the same topic; had that occurred, Maurenbrecher would, doubtless, have exercised his