

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WILLIAM A. COOPER (1868 - 1939)

In the building up of German departments in the colleges and universities of the United States, a prominent and honorable role has been played by native sons of Anglo-American heritage, who, thoroughly at home in the folkways and the educational practices of their own country, have steeped themselves in the language, literature, and civilization of the German people. It was such a combination of American energy and German scholarship that made William Alpha Cooper, whose death we now record with deep regret, the outstanding educator he became; this enabled him to take over the headship of the German Department at Stanford in the difficult year 1917, just after the United States had declared war upon Germany, and steer its course successfully through the turbulent years that followed. The esteem in which that department is held today is in large measure due to the strong and yet astute leadership of Professor Cooper.

Born October 29, 1868, in Batesville, Ohio, Professor Cooper attended Marietta College, where he not only headed his class during all four years, but achieved the coveted honor of Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year. He received his B.A. degree in 1892 with the predicate summa cum laude, one of the few graduates of the college who have ever earned that high distinction. At once he began graduate study abroad, his interest very likely turning to Germany because his mother was of German stock. After a year of study at Bonn, and one at Leipzig, he spent some months at the University of Paris, and then returned to Marietta College as instructor in German and French, being made Assistant Professor of Modern Languages in 1899. Meanwhile he had obtained his M.A. Degree in 1897, and twenty years later, in 1917, his alma mater awarded him an honorary LL.D.

Professor Cooper's connection with Stanford began in 1901, when he was called here as assistant Professor of German. In 1909 he was made Associate Professor, and in 1917 he was promoted to the rank of Professor and made Executive Head of the Department of Germanic Languages, which position he retained until his retirement in 1934. With rare singleness of purpose he devoted his full strength to the development of his department, of which he was in every sense the executive head. If his list of major publications is a short one, that is due to a deliberate choice on his part. Knowing that the efficient administration of the German department, in the trying years after the World War, called for the full investment of all his powers, he gave unstintingly of his time and strength, and was rewarded by a firm measure of success. Deeply interested in teaching, he not only set a fine example himself but upheld high standards for those associated with him.

Convinced that cultural relations between the United States and the German people should be cultivated in order to vivify and also deepen our own instruction, he began in 1926 to encourage the establishment of student exchanges between the two countries, largely collecting the funds himself. Such international exchanges have now become one of the fixed policies of our educational system, and have continued to grow both in numbers and importance. This cultural pioneering on his part brought him to the favorable attention of the German government, which responded by singling him out for various distinctions. In 1930 he was elected to membership in Deutsche Akademie of Munich, in 1934 he received an honorary Doctor's degree from the University of Cologne, and in the same year he was chosen as one of a select group of teachers of German in this country to tour the educational institutions of Germany under the

auspices of the Vereinigung Carl Schurz in Berlin. In 1938 he was one of three Americans to receive from the German Government a membership in the Order of the German Eagle, with the merit cross, first class.

Professor Cooper was twice married, first to Mary H. Grosvenor of Marietta, Ohio, by whom he had one son, Grosvenor Cooper; second to Anna M. Tietjen of San Francisco. His health impaired by diabetes, he fought a determined but losing fight against death, finally succumbing to pneumonia on September 19, 1939. To the very last he retained, despite declining physical vigor, the mental alertness that had always characterized him.

Professor Cooper's most important publication is his translation, in three volumes, of Bielschowsky's "Life of Goethe," a significant piece of work, for it was Goethe who more than any other poet appealed to him as a model and a guide in life. Like Goethe he clung tenaciously to convictions he had once formed; like him he strove for scrupulous activity in all scientific work; like him he was an advocate of strict justice both in personal and professional relations; like him he knew no limit in his devotion to the tasks that his chosen calling brought with it.

Professor Cooper's finest and most lasting monument is the sincere admiration of all who were privileged to work under him and with him—eloquently voiced in connection with the banquet tendered him upon his retirement in the spring of 1934. His presence and his influence will long continue to be heard in the halls which he had made so effectively his own. Stanford honors herself in honoring him.

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