

IN MEMORIAM
PHILIPP SEIBERTH

Philipp Seiberth, the son of Martin Seiberth and Frau A. Hummel Seiberth, was born at Meckenheim, Germany, on November 10, 1875. When Philipp was six years old, his father brought the family to the United States, and settled first in the Lutheran colony of Elberfield, Indiana, and later at St. Philips, Indiana, where he was the Lutheran pastor until his death. Philipp's secondary education was received at Elmhurst College, which he attended from 1890 to 1894. From this school he went to the Eden Theological Seminary, in which he remained until 1897. Since he had neither studied nor spoken English up to this time, he spent a few months in an American boarding school before entering the University of Indiana in the fall of 1897. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts a year after entering the University, and that of Master of Arts in the following year. From 1899 to 1900 he remained in the University as a student instructor.

The death of his parents, which occurred at about this time, the consequent poverty in which the family of three brothers and two sisters were left, and their loyal determination to assist each other through school, forced him to postpone his graduate studies. From 1900 to 1902 he taught German and French in Indianapolis High School, while his elder brother, Jacob, was completing his work in a medical school. When, in 1903, he was relieved in part of the duty of supporting the family, Philipp entered Harvard, where he spent a year as a student instructor. From Harvard he went on to Columbia University in less straitened circumstances. For, as Assistant in German at Columbia, from 1903 to 1906, and, concurrently, Lecturer in German at Barnard College, from 1905 to 1906, he enjoyed his first relatively comfortable days as a graduate student.

In 1906 he joined the faculty of Washington University, St. Louis, as Instructor in German. A raise in rank to Assistant Professor (1910) made possible what was apparently his first trip abroad, a vacation tour in 1912. The itinerary of this trip may be traced from the dates and places at which he bought books. It is clear that he wandered from one university town to another,

from Oxford to Paris to Heidelberg. And the books that he bought on the way indicate that his final ideas and interests were already fixed. For scientific treatises, handbooks of philosophy, and volumes of literary criticisms are the chief items.

He remained at Washington University, as Assistant Professor, until 1920, by which time his bold, and often tactless, loyalty to the country of his birth had made his position such a painful one that he was forced to resign, and even to abandon, for a time, the teaching of German. During two unhappy years, 1920-1922, as Professor of Modern Languages, he taught French and Spanish in the State Teachers' College at Kirksville, Missouri.

Out of this exile he came to the University of Texas as Instructor in Germanic Languages. He was raised to the rank of Adjunct Professor in 1925, at which rank, except for an absence of one year, he remained in the University until his sudden death on July 30, 1931. The year 1927-28, when the Regents, through some error, failed to reappoint him, on the expiration of his contract, he spent in studying, writing, and traveling in Germany.

His chief publications were the articles: "Four Masters of the German 'Novelle,' " "Novalis," and "An Essay on German Textbooks and Texts" in the Washington University Bulletin; "Principles of Phonetic Change," "The Rhythmic Line," "Musik and Dichtung im 18. Jahrhundert," and "Das Element des Romantischen in Goethe" in the Journal of German and English Philology; and "Romanticism," "Romantik und Realismus," and "Der Sentimentalische Faust" in the Germanic Review. The article "Das Element des Romantischen in Goethe" is listed in the bibliography of the Goethe-Jahrbuch (1928) as "the only foreign essay on Goethe outside of Germany worthy of notice."

A sound and shrewd, though at times paradoxical, scholar, Philipp Seiberth was not a 'teacher' in the usual sense of the word. Certainly, and this lessened his effectiveness as a teacher of beginners' classes, he was not a drillmaster. But in his advanced courses he aroused in his students what the average teacher does not, because he cannot, arouse--intellectual enthusiasm. However, he perhaps expressed himself most fully and exerted his greatest influence as a member of the Fortnightly Club. For something Socratic and controversial in his nature, a kind of

pedagogical daemon, continually urged him to be a teacher of teachers and not of youths. It must be admitted that he frequently offended his colleagues by setting them to rights in matters that they understood and interpreted as well as he, or better; that they were often annoyed by his casuistical way of misdefining and thus discrediting romanticism; that his narrow passion for the contemporary and the utilitarian in literature left him blind to other, and superior, literary values; that his harping upon Bach, Shaw, Zola, and Hauptmann grew tedious; that the socialistic millenium he preached was a cheerless prospect, based, to say the least, upon a romantic misconception of science, economics, and human nature. But the very inconsistency of thought that permitted him to praise classic music and damn classic literature in the same breath made him a delightful and provocative antagonist in any argument. No one, not even his victims, could help admiring Philipp Seiberth's gifts of exact metaphysical terminology, racy speech, dialectical resourcefulness, heavy but telling irony, and sustained extempore reasoning. Everyone respected his intellectual courage and his powerful sincerity. However battered and exasperated they might leave many of us, his argumentative assaults always forced us to think, to redefine, and, in his own favorite word, to re-evaluate our perfunctory beliefs. Secretly he was envied as one of the few men that, in this muddled age, possess a simple and selfconsistent philosophy. He was the Dr. Johnson of the Fortnightly Club, who might aptly have said in the words of a couplet that he admired:

Ich bin kein künstlich ausgeklügelt Buch;
Ich bin ein Mensch mit seinem Widerspruch;

and behind his mask of almost truculent intellectual aggressiveness, one could see the features of the lonely and timid man that he had always been and the unhappily suspicious one that he became,--a man immured in his books, his music, his circle of melioristic dreams, but pathetically eager for human contacts, or, rather, for civilized conversation.

His death leaves all who really knew him with a persistent and melancholy sense of irreparable loss.

J. L. Boysen, Chairman
R. A. Law
R. C. Stephenson