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An American Forester In Germany

Hugo Werner, Exchange Fellow from I. S. C. at Tharandt, Germany

Tharandt/Sa.
Burgstrasse 127
Deutshes Reich

GREETINGS from the world’s oldest forestry school. For about four months now I’ve been tramping the woods, sitting in the classrooms, and working over management plans that all date back to the time of Cotta, Pressler, and Judeich.

Grave of Cotta, famous German Forester.

The village of Tharandt is situated in the bottom of a very narrow, damp and foggy three-pronged valley. Upon the heights overlooking these is the grave of Cotta.
I had expected to learn something of student life, but with a student body composed of twenty-one Germans, seven Turks and myself, things are pretty quiet. There is a saying around here that there are more stenographers in the various departments than students attending lectures, so why not make the place a girls’ school.

I encountered a queer experience when attending my first lecture, as I arrived too soon. There is a tradition that exists here known as the academical quarter hour (the student has the supreme privilege of coming late to class, although, I believe the profs take good advantage of the situation and come even later) so that a class scheduled for eight doesn’t get started until eight-fifteen. A number of lectures are scheduled for two hours in a row, which becomes a little tiresome. One of the profs was sick and had to catch up with his lectures; one foggy day (the sun never shines here) he lectured for three hours, and in that time rammed twenty forest finance formulae down our throat. At the two and one half hour mark the sandman flung sand in my eyes to spare my suffering.

The first hour of each lecture was like attending an international philology congress, with only the knowledge of one language. In other words, I didn’t understand much, as the two profs came from Bavaria (not even a native Bavarian can at times understand his own dialect) and I had to accustom my ear to their speech. Once this was done I had no more difficulty in understanding their lectures.

Iowa State always boasts of a great democratic spirit that pervades the student body, but here, I believe, the student body is one furlong advanced. While a prof lectures the students smoke; if they get hungry out comes a sandwich, always carried to the opera, theatre or sport event, and is calmly munched down. The prof also smokes his nine-thirty cigar, and should he say something that pleases the students, a mighty thundering issues forth in the form of trampling feet (really very practical, as it is not so hard on the hands as clapping). The sign of disagreement is the scraping of the feet.

WHEN there are but three or four fellows attending the lecture, as was the case in silviculture, and they don’t feel like listening, they calmly inform the prof that the lecture will not be attended—the student has supreme privileges. Class cutting is known as “Schwänsen,” but this is little done as the student must attend lectures to get his note book as complete as
possible. Text books are so expensive, $15-$17, that the student cannot afford to buy them, and what notes he gathers must be sufficient to fortify him for the "Prufung" (examination). As for the "apple-polishing," it is little done as it pays very low interest rates. The reason for this is that there are but two exams taken throughout four years of study, one a preliminary exam at the end of two years, and the final (like the J. F. only verbally and not written) one upon completion of eight semesters.

When the students have a "fest" (celebration or dance) it is not considered a success if it doesn’t get under way by eight p. m. and last at least until seven a. m. However, these fests are only scheduled once in a blue moon, and so it’s not so hard on one’s constitution to attend.

WHAT is lacking in the way of social and academical life in Tharandt is made up in Dresden ten miles away. But one would think it was fifty, judging from the ride one gets on a third-class railroad car. Here in Dresden was located the capital city of "August der Starke, Kurfurst of Sashen und Konig von Poland." The array of public buildings is indeed a great treasure. For instance, there is the Frauen Kirche which has a large stone dome and was built at a time when all architects said the feat was impossible. However, it still stands today, a silent "moch" to their misbelief.

The art gallery is about the best in Germany, as August der Starke had a very industrious buying agent who did a good job of gathering Ruben’s, Rembrandt’s, de Heem’s, Durer’s, Titian’s, and also by a piece of diplomatic juggling made off with Raphael’s Madonna from some small Italian town. Not only was this agent an ardent collector, but also exerted great efforts to increase the jewelry collection of the "Crown." This is now said to have a value great enough to pay the war debt.

THESE are just a few of the high lights, and as I’m not writing a travel book there is no use continuing with more detail. I would like to mention the fact that Meissen or Dresden porcelain was discovered by a druggist who went to the king and told him he could make gold. The king granted permission for research work to begin, but gold was never made. Instead the discovery of porcelain was stumbled upon—and who knows but what the business of making Dresden porcelain hasn’t been just as valuable as finding gold. Perhaps Dresden can be best summed up by saying that it offers first class music, art, and drama, to anyone who wants to take advantage of the offer.

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AND now for forestry—what I have noticed here. First of all, I can’t make myself believe that the standing timber can be called a forest—to me it’s just plain woods. The Revies (a subdivision like our ranger districts, only much smaller) have first class road systems which gradually branch off to trails and paths. In winter the snow plows clear the first and second class roadways. Then also, I have noticed many, many bird houses nailed to the trees—you see now why I call the Revies, woods. But in their effort to protect game the woods is sometimes sacrificed, for when a planting is made each seedling has an offensive mixture sprayed upon it to repulse the deer from gnawing the tips, else the stand never would become established. Not only that, but great damage from peeling is caused by deer who haven’t anything else to do, so it’s been explained to me, while standing in a dense grove of saplings. Just from plain nervousness they start nibbling on the bark and soon have the entire tree peeled. To prevent this, two remedies are suggested. Either feed the deer something to quiet their nerves, or; as it is done in most cases, tie dead branches around tree trunks in such a way that the deer can’t get at the bark.
Back in the States if one wants to walk in the woods (except the North Woods, of course) one slaps on boots, breeches and stagshirt and equips himself for the brush. Here on a Sunday afternoon the roads and paths are full of people dressed in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes and a cane. I still call them woods.

Those of the 1934 summer camp will remember how forest guard Fuller complained to the ranger that the I.S.C. boys were cluttering up the Olympic Forest by throwing their lunch bags around. In the woods here, that complaint could never be made as the waste paper containers are tacked on trees at very convenient places.

Perhaps a word or two about utilization might be in order. In the first place, the last forest regulation excluded “brennholz” (fuelwood) from the roster of wood assortments. The industries as pulp and paper, rayon, etc., are established and must be supplied with raw material, so to step up the yield, fuel wood is no more. Instead it goes to the pulp mills. All trees are cut about six inches from the ground, and all material down to three inches is known as “derbholz,” that is, it can be used in the industry. What material is left is used by the farmers for fences of all kinds and to whatever use the material can be put to the best advantage. The green twigs are gathered by women who deliver them to the floral shops, where they are made into wreaths—a market which might be expanded in the States. Slash, cones, and bark are no longer allowed to be gathered by the public but must remain in the woods, as serious damage to the site has resulted by the removal of litter.

A another thing that seems strange is that on the farmers’ fields there are no fences around the forties. However, in the woods we find any number of fences protecting experimental plots, game and rifle ranges. The fences are woven wire and are put up with infinite care. Old boundary stones show up here and there with dates as early as 1790 chiseled upon the faces.

Planting of seedlings is all done by women labor. The planting is done much denser, 3’ x 3’, or even rows four feet apart with seedlings set in every six inches. Several systems are used; the bush planting where three or more seedlings are set in one hole—what CCC boys try to do when the foreman isn’t looking—and slant planting, which shows promise.

Instead of planting the trees upright, a slit is made in the ground at a forty-five degree angle and the seedling is inserted. According to the law of heliotropism the tree should

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eventually grow straight. I've seen experimental plots of ten-year-old stock where those planted by the slant method were just as straight as those planted upright. The main advantage lies in the reduced planting costs.

The same enjoyment or pleasure one derives from seeing the world's largest diamond or some priceless treasure, came to me as I got to see the twelve management maps of the Tharandterwald showing periods of ten-year intervals. There before me was 120 years of forestry built up from scratch by Cotta to the present intensive and complicated system. I also saw in Cotta's plans, yields which he stipulated to be harvested in 1945-1955.

I must tell you about living conditions. First of all, blankets are not used. No, I didn't freeze, because sleeping between feather beds is a luxury in any man's language. But the good old feeling of jumping out of bed and whizzing around the valve

A German farmer's woodlot in good condition.

of the steam radiator, or coming into a warm room is not to be had here, as central heating systems are entirely lacking in most homes. All houses in this part of Germany are built of stone, and to talk of a house built of wood is like telling a tall
story. The natives don't believe that it is possible to be comfortable in a wooden structure. Each room is heated by a tile stove, which, when once warm, holds its heat a long time after the fire is out.

I've rented a study-living room plus a bed room, and with the rent the following services are thrown in: Daily shoe shine, cleaning of the room, and early morning coffee (like a penny sale at Katz's). I must buy my own coal, light, and food. I eat my main meal with the students at a "Gasthaus," and supper I gather up myself. Its main items are bread, wurst, cheese and herring. Breakfast I'd rather not mention as it doesn't amount to anything more than three cups of coffee and two small rolls. When I wear my tin cruiser's coat to go shopping and stick a few feet of sausage and a loaf of bread in the back pocket, all the natives in the store stare in awed bewilderment.

I'll be returning to the States this summer. Be sure and save me a copy of the Ames Forester.

Regards to all,

Hugo (Pop) Werner