

The Association of German Students: Leipzig Students Remember the First Ten Years (1881–1891)

Abstract

A wide variety of student fraternities and associations existed at German universities. Some emphasized religious affiliation (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish); some were traditional, typically stressing dueling and aristocratic connections; and some espoused more liberal ideals. The Association of German Students [*Verein deutscher Studenten*, or V. Dt. St.] was founded in 1881. Its first branches were at the universities of Berlin, Halle, Leipzig, and Breslau. The association adopted a strongly nationalist tone, pledging to defend Germandom, the monarchy, and Christianity. Antisemitism was prominent from the outset, not least because the new association was founded at the height of anti-Jewish agitation in 1881. The association also contributed substantially to the cult of Bismarck. The following reflections were published on the occasion of the association's 50th anniversary in 1931. Written by two members of the Leipzig branch, they reflect the nationalist temperament of the association's founding generation. They include a reference to Diederich Hahn (1859–1918), a founding member of the Leipzig branch and one of the association's most prominent speakers. Hahn was susceptible to Bismarckian hero-worship and later became a leading member of the Agrarian League [*Bund der Landwirte*]; he is believed to have been the inspiration for Diederich Heßling, the chauvinistic protagonist of Heinrich Mann's satirical novel *The Loyal Subject* [*Der Untertan*] (1918). In the last line of the recollections excerpted here, Hahn is said "to have something Siegfried-like about him."

Source

I. One Hundred Semesters of the Association of German Students in Leipzig

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(member from 1903 to 1907)

"Young people must take sides; partisanship means enthusiasm, and what would youth be without enthusiasm?"

These words were uttered by the president of Leipzig University, the theologian Luthardt, on January 18, 1881, at the general evening drinking session for students [*Studentenkommers*], which was being held for the first time in commemoration of German unification. His words met with enthusiastic response at other German universities far beyond Leipzig.

"The dream of the Wars of Liberation has been realized. Through the heroic struggle of the years 1870/71, Kaiser and Reich have been regained for the German people. On new ground, new goals will arise. Today it is not the external enemy who threatens: What is at stake today is standing up for German ways and German customs, for German loyalty, and German belief. The sinister powers of naked selfishness and unpatriotic cosmopolitan attitudes, depravation and de-Christianization are undermining the firm old ground of our popular customs and traditions. Our youth faces enormous tasks. Duty demands that we prepare ourselves for the noble and hallowed calling to serve the fatherland with heart and hand."

Thus read the manifesto of July 17, 1881, which urged German students to attend the Kyffhäuser Festival [*Kyffhäuserfest*] on August 6; the essential part of it had been written by the law student Diederich Hahn, founder of the Leipzig Association of German Students (V. D. St. Leipzig).

“The spirit emanating from your words affords me a look into the future of our German fatherland, and in this I find consolation for the injuries the present has taken on from the past.”

With these words, dated August 2, 1881, Bismarck thanked the V. D. St. Leipzig for a telegram conveying greetings from the last student drinking session of the first summer semester.

In these remarks by the founder of the Reich, the head of the university, and the leader of the youth, we find both the substance and the direction of the V. D. St. Leipzig in outline form: enthusiasm for the resurrected German *Kaiserreich* and preparation for service to the fatherland, so that injuries bestowed upon the present by the past could be healed. With youthful enthusiasm, one took sides, not for a “party” but for a sacred cause, for the fatherland that one saw embodied in the Reich; not in particularism, not in the agitation of parties, not in economic competitiveness and materialistic inclinations but in national sentiment and the desire of a German national tradition that was aware of its individuality and proud of its history. For this reason, one began to observe the anniversary of the founding of the German Reich as a national day of celebration, whereas hitherto this day had passed without ceremony, with neither song nor echo. From the very outset, celebrating national days of commemoration to awaken national consciousness has been part of the program of all German student associations and has been spreading gradually to the rest of the student body. The Reich was a dominant focus in the thoughts of the new generation, which therefore chose the founder of the Reich, Prince Bismarck, as its hero from the very beginning. Empathizing sensibly with the young people’s world of ideas, he welcomed the new movement with delight, despite all the hostility it faced from the public, and despite all the difficulties mounted against it by the academic authorities. Bismarck’s recognition helped the movement overcome those impediments.

Of the first four Associations of German Students—Berlin, Halle, Leipzig, and Breslau—all of which were founded in 1881, Leipzig alone enjoyed the advantage of being immediately recognized by the academic authorities, since the university president at the time, Prof. Luthardt, took the new movement under his wing, and virtually the entire faculty followed suit. As was the case in other university towns, in Leipzig the new movement was partially led by older students whose university days went back far enough to have witnessed the assassination attempts against Kaiser Wilhelm I in the summer of 1878. Since those days, there was an ever growing feeling that national accomplishments were in danger of wasting away and that it was the duty of all students to become aware, even as early as their university days, of the tasks they would subsequently face in public life. An entirely new student movement took shape and managed to unite both fraternity members and unaffiliated students. With some justification, Bismarck has been called the spiritual father of this movement insofar as his thoughts on the internal and external consolidation of the Reich provided the new academic thinking with its essential content. In his book *The Associations of German Students. Twelve Years of Academic Battles*^[1], published in 1895, our fellow fraternity member Hermann von Petersdorff provided a very elegant portrayal of the founding period, which he situated against the backdrop of general historical events; the book is to be warmly recommended to every fellow fraternity member.

The motive for the movement was the national idea. The external impetus was provided by the so-called Declaration of Notables of November 12, 1880, which was signed by 73 [sic] well-known citizens of Berlin, and which took aim at the antisemitic movement that had gained momentum primarily in the Reich capital, and especially at Dr. Bernhard Förster’s idea to send a mass petition against the Jews to the Reich Chancellor. The Declaration of Notables divided Germany’s educated world into two camps. On November 14, 1880, two days after it appeared, the election of the board of the Academic Reading Hall in Leipzig organized a forum in which like-minded students could exchange ideas, and the following day a twelve-member committee was appointed and charged with enlisting support for the student petition that was attached to Förster’s appeal by the student Dulon. The committee called for a student meeting in Trietschler’s Hall on November 22, 1880. This was the first impetus for the Leipzig movement, which

obtained more than 1,000 signatures for the petition by December 25. Apart from Dulon, those most involved were above all Falcke, a native of Bonn and an inactive member of a dueling fraternity, and the subsequent members of the V. D. St.: the theology student von Langsdorff, the law student von Heyden, the history students Wilhelm Grotesend, Hans Grodeck, and especially Christian Diederich Hahn, who gave the first speech at the November 22nd meeting. The Leipzig Committee joined the preexisting Berlin Committee, which was regarded as the central committee, but remained the heart of the endeavor and developed an active recruitment effort at other universities as well.

The speakers at the first meeting in Trietschler's Hall had already warned against disrupting the academic peace by demonstrating against Jewish students; they put forth the motto "*Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo!*" ["Resolute in action, mild in manner"] and emphasized that, as students, they were obliged "to acquire a thorough knowledge of—and the capacity to scientifically assess—those social questions that move our fatherland and toward whose solution we will one day be called to contribute to the best of our abilities." On the recommendation of the Schleswig student Peter Jensen, the entire meeting sang "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles"^[2], a song that had only been sung very rarely in Germany up to that point, and which has since become the banner song not only of the Kyffhäuser Association but also of Germany as a whole. On January 18, 1881, the Committee organized the famous student fraternity evening drinking session [*Kommers*] in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the German Reich. It was held in Central Hall, with Prince Ernst von Meiningen presiding as honorary chairman and Prof. Luthardt delivering the ceremonial address. The *Deutschlandlied*^[3] was heard again on this occasion. This *Kommers*, which drew 2,000 participants, represented the actual birth of the V. D. St. Leipzig. Its formal establishment eventually followed at a February 10th meeting at the inn "Stadt London," and the academic authorities granted their approval within 24 hours. On February 15, the first regular general meeting took place; the group informed Bismarck via telegram that the association's motto was "With God for Kaiser and Reich," to which Bismarck responded: "Sharing both the association's aspiration and its motto, I extend my thanks."

From its negative stand, as represented by the impetus behind the antisemitic movement, the students immediately proceeded to positive goals, as the January 18 celebration and their profession of loyalty to Bismarck clearly proved. On account of this, they were in full agreement with the professorial staff of the university. During the first summer semester, the soul of the association was Diederich Hahn, a student of Frisian-Hanoverian descent who had already fulfilled his compulsory military service at the age of 18, and who now, at age 20, was in his fourth semester. Students from all faculties joined the association, predominantly law and history students, but soon theologians joined as well—and in particularly large numbers, at that. Among them, the Christian Socialist Friedrich Naumann stood out. German-Russians, especially Kurlanders, and Schleswig-Holsteiners also adhered particularly closely to the association, which was 116 members strong during the first summer semester. It made its public debut on May 15 on the occasion of the Reading Hall elections, where it managed to get all its candidates elected. On June 17, at the suggestion of Hahn and Naumann, it organized its first academic lecture evening with Court Preacher Stoecker, who spoke on "Great Times, Great Tasks" in front of more than 1,000 students. When word spread of the Czech riots against German students in Prague, the association convened a general student meeting chaired by Hahn, who pointed out that, as one of Prague's affiliated universities, Leipzig should devote twice as much interest to the events happening there. Thus, a sense of national solidarity with Germans living in what was then Austria was also part of the Leipzig group's world of ideas and emotions. At the final *Kommers* on August 1, 1881, Hahn spoke of the ideals of the young students: "They are Germandom [*Deutschtum*] and Christianity. They are the powerful roots of our strength." In response to the greetings conveyed in that day's telegram, Bismarck wired the encouraging words quoted at the outset of this essay.

Thus, the goals and tasks of the Leipzig Association of German Students in its founding year emerge clearly for us: the German Reich and, additionally, a connection to German popular customs and

traditions that transcended borders in the East and the South, Germandom without state borders, Christianity as the innermost refuge, and the social question as a task whose solution stood to influence the welfare of Germans in the future, as did the insights gained along the way.

Hahn had concentrated most of his energy on preparing the first Kyffhäuser Festival, which was a complete success, and which ushered in a new chapter in the history of the entire German student body. It was held from August 6–9, 1881. Students from all German universities flocked to the festival. Led by the complete band of the 134th Infantry Regiment, a procession of 800 festival participants made its way from the small town of Roßla up to the Kyffhäuser.^[4] In terms of participation, it even exceeded the Wartburg Festival, which had attracted 468 participants back in 1817. High in front of the old castle ruin, Diederich Hahn welcomed festival guests, planting a simple black, white, and red flag firmly in the ground and holding a shiny épée in his right hand. This old Kyffhäuser flag, with its simple bunting and lack of both ornamentation and embroidery, was attached to a rough, black wooden flagpole whose wooden tip had been coated in golden bronze—an appropriate emblem of the plain greatness and serious desire of the founders of our association. It is stored in the V. D. St. as a sacred symbol of the national consciousness that was reawakened among the student body and is carried to every association meeting. At a meeting chaired by Hahn on August 8, the official representatives of the Associations of German Students formed a cartel at Rothenburg Castle. The Kyffhäuser League of the Association of German Students had come into being.

In the winter semester of 1881/82, the students wearing colors left; the association began to develop into a special student fraternity. The following winter semester (1882/83) saw the drafting of procedural rules and the appointment of an honorary council. The association opened that semester with a public meeting, at which the director of the Leipzig Statistical Bureau, Dr. Hasse, gave the lecture “Colonization, an Education of the German People.” Since then, Leipzig has held public lecture evenings on a regular basis; there, lecturers and other well-known personalities speak about issues that concern the life of the nation.

The Reading Hall that had been carried in that successful [student election] attempt during the summer of 1881 was conquered again in the elections of November 12, 1882, and, with the exception of the winter semester of 1889/90—one of the Leipzig association’s slackest semesters—has always remained in the hands of candidates nominated or approved by the V. D. St.

Even if the non-exclusive corporative principle—according to which the association operated during its founding semester^[5]—has been replaced by a policy that precludes membership in other organizations, the association still regards public representation as its primary task, and awakening and reinforcing the national consciousness of the entire student body continues to be its major goal. Consequently, during the association’s first decade, it held almost regular celebrations of its first and last *Kommerse* each semester; these took place in large halls and drew numerous participants from the professorial staff and the student body. Granted, not all of these evenings were as significant as the opening *Kommers* of the 1884 summer semester, which saw Prof. Luthardt deliver the lecture “What is the Association’s Attitude toward Christianity?” in the Red Hall of the Crystal Palace. Still, they were more than just celebratory occasions for association members—they were meant to have an impact on a broader circle. Above all, the Kyffhäuser Association used the celebration of national days of remembrance to spread enthusiasm for the great days of German history and to cultivate that tradition among the entire German student body. This was a task in which the V. D. St. Leipzig also showed an active interest. The annual *Reich Kommers*, the Bismarck and Moltke *Kommerse*, and the Kaiser’s birthday celebrations were devoted to this purpose. On January 18, 1882, the *Reich Kommers* had been chaired by fellow association member and law student M. U. Rosenhagen. The following year, it was held again at the suggestion of the V. D. St., organized as an event for the entire student body, and chaired by the president of the university; the dueling fraternities, who were jealous of the leading position of the V. D. St., declined to participate

but remained the exception in this. At this *Kommers*, and at the third Founder's Day, which took place shortly thereafter on February 10, 1883, the speeches of the Alsatian theology student Schweitzer from Heiligenstein in Alsace were the center of interest, both on account of the enthusiasm with which they were presented and the origins of the speaker, the co-founder and former chairman of the Alsatian fraternity Vogesina in Strasbourg. At the Leipzig students' Reich *Kommers* of January 19, 1885, which was chaired once again by the president of the university, the V. D. St. introduced one of its members, the law student Raeck, as the evening's only student speaker. The fellow association member and law student Röhr was the chairman of the committee responsible for Bismarck's 70th birthday celebration, and the two speakers were chosen from the ranks of the V. D. St. After the Reich *Kommers* of 1886, it was suggested that a permanent committee of the student body be formed. The only group to materialize, however, was a committee of representatives chaired by the V. D. St. During the next two years, the Reich *Kommers* followed the usual format. But the V. D. St. also played a prominent and motivational role on other days of national remembrance or when tribute was paid to German leaders, for example, at the Luther celebration in Erfurt and on the Wartburg (where it represented the Leipzig student body) during the summer semester of 1883, or at the annual Sedan Day celebration in Leipzig, where it carried the university flag as the sole representative of the student body in 1884 and 1885. In the winter semester of 1884/85, the association honored composer Anton Bruckner on the occasion of a performance of one of his symphonies at the New Theater by presenting him with a laurel wreath. At the laying of the foundation stone of the Supreme Court of the German Reich on October 31, 1888, the V. D. St. once again carried the university flag. On March 22, 1887, the 90th birthday of Kaiser Wilhelm I, the chairman of the V. D. St., Richard Heinze, went to Berlin as the sole representative of the Leipzig student body. Thus, looking back on the history of the student body, one could describe the golden age experienced by this student association during the 1880s as rare—rarer still since this golden age occurred during the first years of the association's existence. Here, it is also easy to recognize that this association breathed youthfulness, and that its birth resulted from enthusiasm not reflection.

Starting in 1889, there was a change in the format of the Reich *Kommers*. This celebration had become a custom. Other fraternities wished to have their share in the leadership as well. The committee of representatives thus fell apart when the dueling fraternities left at the suggestion of the regional student associations. The fragmentation of the student body, which the V. D. St. had managed to alleviate to a certain extent, at least with respect to the major day of remembrance in the German Reich, has since reemerged in robust fashion. For the first time, two Reich *Kommers* took place that year, one held by the Convent of Representatives of the dueling fraternities and another by the Unicolor Association^[6] (Paulus, Arion, Lausitz Preacher Society). In order to avoid even greater division, the V. D. St. joined the celebration of the Unicolor Association and maintained friendly relations with its fraternities in other regards as well. For the celebration of Moltke's 90th birthday, however, it managed to reunite the student body in a general *Kommers* on October 28, 1890. This was boycotted only by the V. C., and the fellow association member and law student Rogge assumed the chairmanship. The extent to which the fragmentation had increased, however, became evident in the year 1893, which saw four different Reich *Kommers*; the V. D. St. once again took part in the *Kommers* of the Unicolor Association. But when the Unicolor Association dissolved the following year, the V. D. St. celebrated the 1894 Reich *Kommers* at its own pub. It had fulfilled its mission in this area. Since 1890s, Reich *Kommers* have become and remained common phenomena; they have moved beyond academic circles to become customary in other nationally oriented associations. The Kyffhäuser Association of the German Student Associations deserves credit for awakening the cultivation of traditions linked to this custom.

Since the splitting of the unified student Reich *Kommers* in 1889, the coincidental proximity of the new Kaiser's^[7] birthday and the association's founding day afforded the V. D. St. the opportunity to combine the two celebrations and thus reach out in a way that was new but still motivated by the old spirit. The first joint celebration in the winter semester of 1888/89 already represented a magnificent start. In front of 1,000 guests, among them generals from the officer corps of the Leipzig garrison, the celebrated law

professor Prof. Sohm gave tribute to the Kaiser and the Court Preacher Rogge extolled Bismarck. Since then, the joint celebration of Founder's Day and the Kaiser's birthday has remained a favorite event of the V. D. St. and served as the high point of subsequent semesters right up to World War I. One particularly solemn occasion was the celebration of the 10th Founder's Day in 1891. It took place in the theater hall of the Crystal Palace and was attended by Princes Johann Georg and Max of Saxony, General von Holleben and the officer corps, members of the Supreme Court of the German Reich, and the Superintendent General, etc. Prof. Luthardt, Court Preacher Rogge, and the Reichstag deputy [Max] Liebermann von Sonnenberg[8] delivered addresses. A festival production by Pusch entitled "The Secret of the Kyffhäuser" and a well-executed comedic performance by the Fuxen[9] accompanied the celebration. Once, in the winter semester of 1891/92, the association moved the Kaiser *Kommers* to an external location. Together with an affiliated association from Halle, the group celebrated the occasion in Merseburg, with Senior District Administrator von Diest and the local officer corps in attendance. In 1896, on the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Reich, another Reich *Kommers* involving the entire student body took place at the suggestion of the V. D. St.; it was chaired by the vice-president of the university and attended by all fraternities. The Bismarck speech was given by fellow association member and theology candidate Maurenbrecher. Unity also existed the following year, 1897, with the exception of the dueling fraternities, which bailed out again at the last moment. This time, fellow association member and theology student Schumann gave the speech honoring Kaiser, King, and Reich. Upon Bismarck's death, the Chairman of the V. D. St. Leipzig and science student Fredenhagen suggested that the entire German student body should be represented at the burial. The same suggestion had been made by the Alemannia fraternity in Bonn shortly beforehand, however. As a result, most universities gave the Bonn committee priority over the Leipzig one, and the former ended up coordinating student body participation in the ceremony. The Leipzig student body sent a member of the V. D. St. (Fredenhagen) and one member of a dueling fraternity to the funeral service on Bismarck's Friedrichsruh estate. Prior to this date, on August 2, 1898, the Leipzig students had held an edifying funeral ceremony in the Crystal Palace, with Fredenhagen serving as chair and Prof. Erich Marcks giving the eulogy. The fellow association member and history student Hoetzsch had delivered the solemn promise to adhere to Bismarck's work. And "everyone joined hands, old and young, student and professor, and sang the *Deutschlandlied*."

Cultivating historical traditions and spreading enthusiasm for the great feats of the nation and its leaders was not the V. D. St.'s sole mission, however. The association took the lead wherever it was necessary to represent German popular traditions and customs or the students' view of service to the fatherland. On July 15, 1884, the law student Raeck chaired a student meeting in support of the Prague petition for freedom of movement for medical students, which was sent to the universities of Austria and Switzerland. At the suggestion of A. H. Friedrich Naumann, who was working at the "Rauhes Haus"[10] at the time, the summer semester of 1886 saw the establishment of a committee of the Association for Voluntary Nursing.[11] The committee of representatives of the student body gave the V. D. St. the responsibility of convening a general student meeting, which took place on July 23. It was chaired by Richard Heinze, and speeches were given by Friedrich Naumann and Count Vitzthum, the chairman of the Saxon Regional Association for Home Missions. Participation in "voluntary nursing" has become an obligation for every member of the V. D. St. who is unfit for military service; additionally, everyone was asked to make a monetary sacrifice in the form of a semester fee of half a mark. The V. D. St. was also represented on the committee of the Protestant organization for field-based welfare work. On January 10, 1887, the theology students of the university followed the recommendation of the association in unanimously opposing the motion introduced in the Reichstag to exempt theologians from military service. The address delivered to the Leipzig student body on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the University of Bologna in the summer semester 1888 was written by fellow association member Hilliger, and the student meeting convened by the V. D. St. approved his proposal that "the representative be required to speak German on official occasions." Just as the V. D. St. had taken a stand against the excesses of the Czechs during its founding semester, the riots against students in Prague

during the winter semester of 1897/98 prompted it to convene a student meeting chaired by fellow association member and history student Hoetzsch, with professors Lamprecht and Strohal as speakers. Let this suffice with regard to examples.

As was the case with the committee of the “Association for Voluntary Nursing,” the V. D. St. also sent permanent representatives to a number of national organizations, as long as they were not associated with political parties or founded corresponding local academic branches. In the winter semester of 1886/87, all V. D. St. members joined the German School Association. The association joined the Society for German Colonization that semester as well. During the winter semester of 1887/88, it joined the German Language Association. During the summer semester of 1891, several association members joined workers’ educational associations to acquire a better understanding of the social question through direct exposure to workers’ ways of thinking and feeling. In the winter semester of 1891/92, the association declared its membership in the General German Association^[12], and in the winter semester of 1894/95, it joined the Association of Trade Geography and Colonial Policy. In the summer semester of 1895, it founded the first local academic branch of the Association for the Promotion of Germandom in the Eastern Marks; fellow association member and law student Georgi became chairman. Starting in the winter semester of 1897/98, it had an official representative in the local branch of the Pan-German League. If membership in individual national associations and leagues increased or decreased from semester to semester, depending on the composition of the association membership, the association nevertheless expressed its ongoing desire to participate in national efforts and to expand the knowledge of its own members with respect to national questions.

The association’s major internal events also served the expansion and deepening of its members’ own knowledge. It is characteristic both of the view of its membership and its position among the fraternities that the association’s regular general meetings were lecture evenings, which took place in the early years in the bigger halls, often in the White, Yellow, and Red Halls of the Crystal Palace. Guest participated in these evenings, and the possibility of a debate was offered. After these lectures, drinking evenings were held according to the established drinking rules. Frequently, the newspapers reported on these general meetings. They were the main focus of the club life. For instance, fourteen such meetings occurred in the winter semester of 1884/85; there were eleven in the summer semester of 1885, fourteen in the winter semester of 1885/86, eleven in the summer semester of 1886, etc. The association’s affairs were dealt with in special general meetings; these were the precursors of the later convents [*Konvente*], as they have been called since the winter semester of 1893/94, and their attendance figures were much lower than those of the regular general meetings. This was possible because the club committee had far-reaching authority and was not limited to a rigid set of procedural rules; moreover, the governance [of the association] was based on voters’ trust in the personality of the leader, as a result of which only the most important questions were presented to the special general meeting for approval, whereas the committee took care of and decided on everything else.

Apart from the further education of members, other points of emphasis included physical training and sociability. Each semester, various sections were formed. Starting in the winter semester of 1887/88, these were called divisions [*Abteilungen*]. They were based on the voluntary union of association members who were interested in particular issues. As was stated in the annual report for the summer semester of 1884, “Lively activity developed in six sections during this semester; as a result, there was a meeting held by one of them every evening. These meetings were attended by numerous guests, especially association members.”

II.

In the winter semester of 1884/85, for example, there was a ten-member legal section that had replaced the previous legal and politico-scientific section; additionally, there was a theological section that held its meetings in the club bar “Stadtgarten” and then in a member’s apartment; furthermore, an eight-

member fencing section practiced four times a week on Windmühlenstrasse; there was a choral section, whose eight members held weekly quartet evenings, and a gaming section, whose 10–15 members usually gathered on Saturday evenings at the “Plauensche Hof” to play chess, pool, and skat. The following semester, there was also a gymnastics section, and later on a bowling section existed for a while; more frequently there was a rowing section, and sometimes an equestrian section. The individual sections or divisions changed from semester to semester, depending on the availability of suitable leaders and the number of participants. For instance, for a short time in the winter semester of 1886/87, there were only two sections: the theological section and the fencing section. But the next semester already saw a vigorous revival of internal club life, and seven sections were formed. That year, a new 37-member colonial policy section was added, along with a 15-member Low German language section. In the latter section, the science student Langhans delivered a lecture on “The Struggle of the Flemish against the Walloons in Belgium” and one on “The Expansion of the Low German-speaking Area”; the following semester, Langhans lectured in this section on “The Political Conditions in Belgium with regard to the Ethnic Struggle between the Low Germans (Flemish) and the Walloons,” and the history student Witte spoke on “The Distribution of High and Low German in the Polish Regions of Prussia.” Thus, we can see that in addition to national, political, economic, and social questions, the association was already interested early on in issues concerning popular customs and traditions, issues that were entirely unknown to broad circles at the time and even later on.

In 1889, weariness set in; there were only two divisions left, an economics division and a fencing division; in place of the colonial policy division, though, 12 members enrolled in a lecture by Prof. Hasse on colonies; it was not until the summer semester of 1893 that this division was reestablished. The winter semester of 1889/90 witnessed the association’s first defeat in the Reading Hall elections and the loss of both permanent seats on the Committee for Voluntary Nursing. Membership decreased below fifty; the chronicle remarks for the first time that, by and large, the student body was imbued with national sentiments, that the association had become just another fraternity alongside the existing ones and that its major task was the education of its own members. The drinking evenings were described as “monotonous and barely animated,” the education of the Fuxen was poor, and the annual report indicates that members exhibited “no desire for lectures.” Thus, what emerges is a decline in both intellectual and social life. From the summer semester of 1890 onward, the theoretical activity of the association increased again, with a legal division and a theological division being added to the existing divisions. In the summer semester of 1891, a literary division was established as well. During this semester, a so-called voluntary division also convened to study Social Democratic workers’ associations.

I had moved from Heidelberg to Leipzig during the winter semester of 1881/82. In those days, a mighty tide of patriotic idealism was sweeping through the hearts of the German students. The goal was to defend the great achievements of the German nation under Bismarck’s powerful leadership—achievements embodied in the venerable person of the old Kaiser Wilhelm I in a manner demanding veneration and love—against sinister internal enemies. The subversive poison of the Jewish spirit with its mocking cynicism was gnawing at this magnificent work, as was the internationalism of aggressive Social Democracy, which had been led down a disastrous path at the time. They had reared their ugly head in the Gallic frivolity that had been imported into our literature and then cultivated there, and in the despicable assassination attempts against our kind and fatherly Kaiser. To defend against these phenomena within the circle of academic youth, the V. D. St. had been founded in those days in Leipzig as well. It was the meeting place of all consciously German thinking, and thus the intellectual center of academic life in those days. It was at one of the association’s great events—perhaps the first Founder’s Day?—that I first became acquainted with it. The impression was overwhelming. The big hall was overflowing with fellow students, including entire contingents of fraternities in colors; sitting at the central board, on both sides of the committee, were about 80 professors. The energy, the stirring enthusiasm of the speeches, the manly force of the patriotic songs was captivating. The evening reached its climax, however, when Ecclesiastical Privy Councilor Prof. Luthardt got up to hold the formal address.

In my life, I have gotten to know only a very few men in whom the power of eloquence—that magnificent but often also rather dangerous gift of human genius—seemed to have taken direct hold both internally and externally. Luthardt was one of them. His tall figure, his massive head with its plain long hair pulled backwards, completely exposing his forehead, his noble profile, and his gaunt, cerebral features endowed him with the majestic appearance of a prophet allied with higher powers. Moreover, the content and form of his speeches corresponded with this physical impression. What an abundance of deep thoughts poured forth in the force and magnificence of his words! What greatness and maturity in his genuinely religious and patriotic attitude! How he could rouse, awaken, and thrill us with his warnings, admonitions, and appeals! My conscience, too, had been captivated by him. On that same evening, along with many others, I entered my name on the membership list of the association. During those semesters, Luthardt, an honorary member of the association, was and continued to be its guardian angel. No other professor could match him in terms of the impression his personality left behind. And yet, how many a decent man also stood by us back then! I would like to remember, for example, the history professor Arndt and above all his grand lecture on the patriotic significance of the appearance of Goethe's *Faust* in the period of Napoleonic foreign rule. I would like to commemorate the author Hans von Wolzogen, who familiarized us with Richard Wagner's role as a great herald of German character. I would like to commemorate the old war-disabled fighter Fedor von Köppen, singer and hero all at once, who captivated us young people with the rhetorical energy and honest pathos of his patriotic poetry, and who, as an official speaker, was also an enthusiastic herald of the German idea. At the same time, he was also the most indefatigable and cheerful of drinking buddies—one with whom no one else could easily keep up. But the V. D. St. was more than speeches and parties. If it wished to make a legitimate claim to the leadership of the national student body, then it had to incorporate action. The committee elections for the academic Reading Hall provided it with an opportunity in this respect. The direction in which the Reading Hall was led and the intellectual materials available there had considerable power to influence the student body's position on national issues; powerful currents of influence emanated from it and into the souls of the students. As a result, it was here that opinions diverged most clearly, and a bitter struggle ensued over this position, whose maintenance both sides regarded as a matter of decisive significance. This struggle, which saw the quickest wits from both sides face off at the scene, was followed with feverish tension and expectation. Let me mention our champions here: in Hoeres and Rosenhagen we had distinguished, prudent, and skilful leaders; at their side stood the aforementioned Burkhardt and Troebst, with their sharp rhetorical swords. Even in those days, unless my memory deceives me, Baron von Zedlitz stood out. On April 1, 1885, Bismarck's 70th birthday, I met him once again during that eternally memorable morning pint at the Reich Chancellor's, where I judged him to be one of the best speakers of our great common students' deputation of all universities. Another remarkable personality was the Alsatian Schweitzer, who had already waved the still much-disputed flag of Germandom among the students of his home university in Strasbourg before going to Leipzig, where, with his vigorous speeches at important academic events, he served as living proof of old Germandom in the reclaimed borderland. And how much cheering erupted on November 12, 1882, when we won a glorious victory over the opposing side, which was led mainly by Jews, and when our representatives Walter Burkhardt and Bauer were elected to the committee. From the victory celebration subsequently organized by the V. D. St., I have kept in my files a poem^[13] written specifically for the occasion. It may be a bit coarse for my current liking, but it provides such a fresh introduction to the events back then, and to the atmosphere they generated, that it ought to be shared on this occasion.

Source: Dr. R. P. Oßwald, "Hundert Semester Verein Deutscher Studenten zu Leipzig," in *DStv! 50 Jahre Verein Deutscher Studenten zu Leipzig 1881–1931*. Leipzig: Verlag des A. H.-Bundes des V. Dt. St. Leipzig e.V., n.d. [c. 1931], pp. 3–13.

On the Election Battle for the Academic Reading Hall on November 12, 1882

Sung to the tune of: "Als die Römer frech geworden . . ." ("When the Romans got fresh . . .")

1. When the bell struck eleven;
Last Sunday, one beheld the crowds;
Of students siding in divided might;
Hurling themselves into the heated battle for the vote;
Four of the Bornerianum.

2. Leader of the Yiddish race was;
Schöbel, and upon him in wild hatred;
Followed many a chap who did reveal;
A dreadful, crooked nose;
Flesch and other Flesche.

3. From the German troops stood out;
Young Winzer, Graetzke, Rosenhagen;
And Hoeres, Müller, Troebsten's beard;
Moreover Bosse and of equal mettle;
Many another valiant campaigner.

4. What a battle unfolded right then;
The speeches flung from here to there!
There many a smart word pierced through the air;
And nonsense, too, was to be heard;
In quite enormous quantity.

5. Yet you, Burkhardt, and you, Bauer;
Had sweat on your brow, for difficult and hard;
Can be the role of candidate;
When you have many opponents;
And the necessary stoutness.

6. Oh no, my dears, Schöbel was shouting;
Do not stay over there;
For it gives me awful grief;
That I must see you with those chaps;
Dangerous fellows all of them!

7. If your advantage you desire to keep;
Called out Flesch, do not forsake me!
Naïve and simple German Michels they are;
I myself, however, am a clever child;
Born of the chosen people!

8. They quarreled till hunger set in;
And finally proceeded to voting;
And oh, how our Burkhardt and;
our Bauer won the day so splendidly!
And just how great the joy from this result!

9. One student, though, his name was Schmidt;
Thought to himself: The little mouse shall bite you;
If you ever obtain this office again;
For anyone who is out once;

Will never join the board again.

One fellow student did not see that battle through to the end, since he had moved to Berlin in the meantime; but it would be unjust to omit his name now when our champions of the founding years of the V. D. St. are being praised. The student in question is Diederich Hahn, by far the most important speaker to arise from our midst in those days. This blond German youth had something Siegfried-like about him—not an imposing build, but brightness of character. And how he managed, through the enthusiastic power of his effortless words, to cast a spell over his listeners!

NOTES

- [1] Original German title: *Die Vereine Deutscher Studenten. 12 Jahre akademischer Kämpfe*—ed.
- [2] “Germany, Germany above all,” the subsequent German national anthem—trans.
- [3] i.e., the German national anthem—trans.
- [4] The mountain ridge south of the Harz Mountains in Thuringia, where legend places the sleeping Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa—trans.
- [5] Meaning that members of the association could also belong to fraternities or other student groups—trans.
- [6] German name: *Unikoloren-Verband*—trans.
- [7] i.e., Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was born on January 27, 1859—trans.
- [8] A leader of the antisemitic German Social Party—ed.
- [9] *Fux* (pl. *Fuxen*): a 1st and 2nd semester fraternity student—trans.
- [10] A home mission for at-risk male youths—trans.
- [11] Original German name: *Verein für freiwillige Krankenpflege*—ed.
- [12] German: *Allgemeiner Deutscher Verband*. This organization was the predecessor of the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*)—trans.
- [13] See below.

Source: Dr. Alwin Schmidt, “Aus den ersten Jahren des V.D.St. zu Leipzig,” in *DStv! 50 Jahre Verein Deutscher Studenten zu Leipzig 1881–1931*. Leipzig: Verlag des A. H.-Bundes des V. Dt. St. Leipzig e.V., n.d. [c. 1931], pp. 46–49.

Translation: Erwin Fink

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