

Anni Holme

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Dear Mr. Campbell:

Some days ago I received the last message from Leopoldskron, your reminder about my report on the seminar. And, of course, I went into fits of homesickness again for Leopoldskron and those people I learned to know and appreciate there. I have hardly been doing anything else but living the seminar over and over again ever since I arrived home. Those six weeks down there were too happy and beautiful to pass without leaving indelible traces on our minds and a long-lasting homesickness in our hearts. I can speak in plural because the letters of my friends tell of the same feeling. The seminar was a grand enterprise and a greater success than I ever could have expected. In the beginning I heard some of the members say that it was a failure and that some of the organizers of the seminar shared their opinion. I found it a little surprising and overhasty to criticise an enterprise so hard before it had hardly been got going. I do hope you had occasions enough in the course of the six weeks to alter your opinion and first impressions.

The chief aim of the seminar was to make us well versed in American civilisation. For that purpose our academic programme was made comprehensive implying the most important fields of intellectual life and offering us a unique opportunity to get acquainted with many branches and sides of the scientific research work in America, with its methods and how its achievements are applied to the service of general welfare. Lectures and discussions on government, history, democracy, literature, etc. helped us to trace the development of the main currents of American thought from its very springs down to the present day and made us able to form a living background against which to look on things American. We European members, on our part, would have been able to contribute more to the seminar, if we had had an opportunity to read some of the books in advance, not only books dealing with one's own special field but works of the whole range of our programme. It is a great pity to have a chance to study the intellectual and economical development of American nation from so many different sides under the instruction of highly qualified and inspiring teachers and to lose that chance only because of the want of time. -- One thing I missed in the programme: American philology. It might have fallen outside general interest. I am not, however, quite convinced about it. All historical and social development of a nation leaves lasting traces on that nation's language too, and the American English has to offer more interesting examples of this than perhaps any other living language. So I think this subject would not have been too far-fetched. I am sure that many members would have felt living interest in it. I do understand that our morning programme was compact enough, there would not have been room for more lectures. But could it not be arranged in the same way as for ex. Miss Ginsberg's seminar: half an hour's lecture and half an hour devoted to discussion. -- There often arose discussion about the programme of the literary seminars. Some of the members were of the opinion that, instead of concentrating on a few authors, a survey on the whole history of American literature would have been more fruitful. But six weeks would have been hardly enough for anything else but a dry list of names and dates. On the other hand, we can always listen to those ordinary literary lectures at our own universities and I think, moreover, that we were supposed to know, to a certain extent, the main traditions of American literature and that the purpose of our professors was to widen and deepen our knowledge and to quicken

our interest by analyzing works of some of the most outstanding representatives of American literature. One of the most important things was to become acquainted with American literary criticism and to learn to look upon American literary achievements from American point of view. For my own part, I was more than happy to find on our reading list the name of that American author whom I appreciate more than anyone else. Those lectures I heard about this author deepened my appreciation for him and gave me new clues to the understanding of his works. And so it happened throughout the whole range of our programme. Many questions, which until then had only passingly touched the minds, were brought into a new light. The lecture we heard on Huck Finn made me experience the same sensations as when I was rereading Gulliver's Travels after the years of my childhood. What then seemed to be only a series of more than usually exciting events, now appeared in its full social light. This only to mention one example among many others.

Looking back at those six weeks they seem to be formed of an unbroken series of harmonious days. At first sight the three morning lectures and a seminar once or twice a week seemed to be a very scanty programme. I remember how terrified I felt at the thought of having no fixed programme in addition to the lectures. But only a day or two. The lectures gave us so much to think about and to study further, that whatever one was doing at one's leisure hours they kept one's mind in constant preoccupation. Later on it proved to be very pleasant to have so much time left for one's own disposal as Salzburg and its surroundings with concerts, weekend trips, etc. offered so much worth hearing and seeing. Programme enough gave also the representatives of 17 other nations. It was a great wonder how well all these 18 nations got on together so soon after a war that had affected all of us so deeply. Of course, in the beginning, many prejudices had to be conquered, many opinions altered, and much false information corrected to open the minds and hearts for friendly relations and fruitful mutual intercourse. Coming from north and south, east and west, and representing so many different racial characteristics and political, economical, social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds, we were, of course, like a boiling kettle. It is only natural that there was sometimes friction between different points of view, but it gave only color to our community life. On the whole, one cannot stop wondering how well things kept going without any previous experience. Our dormitory life was very pleasant, although the lack of privacy was sometimes felt as a heavy strain on our minds. On the other hand, if we had been living in private rooms, or only a couple of us together, much of the intimacy of our mutual relations would have been lost. Anyhow, we missed in our dormitories some more people to share this lack of privacy with us, we missed American girls. Our life was made as comfortable and free from care as could be. All our wishes were met. We were given every chance for relaxation and amusement. If somebody felt bored, it was his or her own fault. Afterwards I have often felt ashamed that we Europeans did so very little, on our part, to contribute to the comfort and cosiness of the seminar. We took everything for granted waiting for things to be done for us. Perhaps this was only a more example of how thoroughly we felt at home at Leopoldskron.

About what the experience of the seminar meant personally to me, I could write a book. First of all these six weeks were my first decent holiday after the outbreak of the war. I felt so ashamed and annoyed of the break down I had at Leopoldskron, but it was only a natural result of 8 years' overstrain. During these years I have had 33-40 lessons a week at school, 10 classes with 40 pupils in each, each class having a written examination once a fortnight. Even my

summer holidays I have had to devote to those of my pupils who did not pass their examinations at school. All the time I had the gnawing feeling of neglecting the development of my own mind, as I simply had no time for reading. Now Leopoldskron offered that blissful relaxation, and a chance to make up for what I had lost. I have written all this to make you understand that I do not say for the sake of politeness that the seminar was a great experience to me. It was to me like an oasis, in intellectual as well as physical sense, after a long wandering in a desert. In addition to new zeal for work, I acquired every day new intellectual material to work on. To take a degree in aesthetics we have to specialize on either German or French literature, in very rare exceptional cases someone may choose English literature. After this seminar I have all reason to hope to be such exception and to be allowed to take American and English literature.

I am so sorry I cannot yet send you clippings of articles. I have not got any pictures of the seminar, but as soon as I get them I shall send my article to several newspapers.

I do hope that the organizers of the seminar have shared some of the happiness and content we European members felt at Leopoldskron, and that you think your enterprise was worth while. It was an honest invitation to the young academic class of Europe to work together on the basis of mutual good will, understanding, and respect. Future will show of how far-reaching significance it was. If you think that I can be of some use in arranging the future of the seminar, do not hesitate to ask for my help. I shall be only too happy to be able to do something.

Best wishes for a good winter and a happy future of the seminar.

Yours sincerely

Anni Holme