



WILLIAM KURRELMAYER
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William Kurrelmeyer was born in Osnabrück, Germany on January 17, 1874. As he came to America as an eight-year-old child with his parents, his entire education was obtained in Baltimore, first in the public schools, then in Baltimore City College, from which he graduated with high honors in 1893. Thereupon he entered The Johns Hopkins University, where he received his A. B. in 1896, his Ph. D. in 1899. As he taught for only one year at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from 1899 to 1900, when he returned to The Hopkins, his life until his death on October 9, 1957 was bound up with Baltimore and The Johns Hopkins University.¹ His wife, Carrie Herrman, was a Baltimorean, his children were born and educated in Baltimore and both Carrie May (Zintl) and Bernhard received their doctoral degrees at The Hopkins.

Though he travelled often and much in Western Europe, chiefly in Germany, especially in his late years, and through an intensive correspondence was in constant touch with European as well as American scholars in his fields of interest, Kurrelmeyer rarely moved far away or for long from his home, his library, and the Hopkins precincts. President Gilman was still in his best years when he entered college and most of the original brilliant faculty of the University were still active. So Kurrelmeyer was able to play an important role in the development of the University and its expansion after the removal to Homewood. The Hopkins German Department was not one of those that had been in the beginning staffed with well-known specialists. The modern languages were still in the shadow of the classical languages. The great development of the modern languages as a field for graduate study came after 1900. So Kurrelmeyer, along with his teacher, Henry Wood, and later Hermann Collitz, played an important role in the development of The Hopkins as one of the major research centers in Germanic studies. He was very early put on the editorial board of *Modern Language Notes*, the oldest modern language journal in this country, and older than most of the European journals. Indeed there is only one in Germany that is older and none in any other country. After a very few years he became managing editor, a post which he occupied for decades, setting the standards that still make *Modern Language Notes* one of the most highly respected journals in the modern language field.

Kurrelmeyer's doctoral dissertation already indicated his main interest, the history of the German literary language, not so much the grammatical and phonetic problems nor the prehistoric connections with other languages, as the meat of the language and style, the vocabulary with all its changes and vicissitudes. It was the human aspect

¹ See the obituary by E. H. Sehr in *SHGM*, XXX (1959), 115-6.

of language that interested him, not the mechanics of oral communication. This attitude led him naturally to the field of text criticism. He was curious to learn what happened to a text after it left the hand of a poet, was copied by professional scribes, later printed and in the course of time became, in a measure, distorted.

So, Kurrelmeyer was led inevitably to his first great contribution to scholarship, the critical edition of the earliest pre-Lutheran Bible that was published in ten volumes from 1904-1915 in the great series of the Stuttgart *Literarischer Verein*, printed in Tübingen. This monumental work is really definitive. All other studies, linguistic as well as literary, must be based on it.

Long before the last volume of the *Erste Deutsche Bibel* had come from the press, Kurrelmeyer had started on a special field of text criticism that he made peculiarly his own. This was the influence of *Doppeldrucke* on an author's text. These are unauthorized reprintings by an authorized publisher and must not be confused with *Nachdrucke*, pirated editions from the presses of unauthorized publishers. It was customary in the 18th Century for author and publisher to sign a contract for a fixed number of copies for a lump sum instead of for a royalty of a specified amount per copy. When an edition was exhausted, a new contract was made. However, the publishers often secretly reprinted to avoid paying the additional royalty. These proofs were naturally not submitted to the author. Thus, innumerable errors crept into the text of Goethe which found their way into the "Ausgabe letzter Hand," the edition used as the basis of the *Sophienausgabe*, the so-called Weimar edition, the hitherto most used critical edition of Goethe's works.⁶

Kurrelmeyer set about re-examining the work of an earlier scholar, Michael Bernays, who had first pointed out the existence of *Doppeldrucke* and soon found that Bernays had hardly scratched the surface. With incredible patience and diligence, Kurrelmeyer collected and examined and compared all copies he could find of editions published in Goethe's lifetime. He compared, word for word, letter for letter, even the fonts of type used. A fantastic story gradually unfolded. To cite only one example: The 16-volume edition of Goethe's works appeared in three installments. Contracts and payments were made separately for each installment. Volumes one to eight were printed first. When it came to printing volumes nine to twelve, Cotta, the publisher, found he had underestimated the market, increased the size of the edition and without Goethe's knowledge, reset and reprinted the first eight volumes. The same thing occurred when he came to publish the last four volumes. So there are three separate printings of the first eight volumes, two of volumes nine to twelve, and one—the only one Goethe proof-read—of volumes thirteen to sixteen. Kurrelmeyer, by his work, laid the foundations for a truly accurate text of Goethe.

In the case of Wieland the variations brought about by the secret printings were vastly greater, entire paragraphs having been omitted in the illicit reprints. This was first shown by Kurrelmeyer in his

² See Taylor Starck in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 68, No. 5, (May, 1953).

important monograph, *Die Doppeldrucke von Wieland's Werken*, published in the *Proceedings of the Prussian Academy of Arts and, Sciences*. A critical edition of Wieland's works, not yet complete, was in course of publication by the Prussian Academy. Seven volumes had already appeared. When Kurrelmeyer's findings were made known, the presses were immediately stopped and a large volume of corrections of the first seven volumes was published under Kurrelmeyer's editorship. He was then appointed editor of Wieland's prose works, many volumes of which he published before his death. The remaining volumes are being edited on the basis of Kurrelmeyer's work and notes.

But Kurrelmeyer found time aside from his teaching for the editorship of *Modern Language Notes* and for a considerable number of articles on words not included in the compendious *Deutsches Wörterbuch* begun by the brothers Grimm in 1856 and thereupon often called *Grimm's Wörterbuch*. Though this has now recently been completed in twenty-eight large volumes, a revised edition is under way that takes account of Kurrelmeyer's very considerable contributions.³

All this work Professor Kurrelmeyer carried on together with his editorship of *Modern Language Notes* and the many university studies. At the same time he accumulated one of the great private libraries in Germanic studies, early editions, rare publications and periodicals, thousands of letters and autographs which through his bequest have become the property of The Johns Hopkins University.

His contributions to the work of our Society are a matter of record. After many years of membership, he was elected President in 1939. During his incumbency, Kurrelmeyer worked energetically to increase the membership. He approached all of whom he could learn who had a Maryland German background and still retained an interest in the State, though living far away. Kurrelmeyer did much to stimulate the activities of the Society and to make it more useful. He retired from the Presidency in 1952 and was thereupon elected Honorary President.

In 1932 Kurrelmeyer took a leading role in the establishment of the Maryland Chapter of The Goethe Society of America which is among the more active of such organizations in the country.

But no account of William Kurrelmeyer's life work is complete without a picture of the man that he was. He is unforgettable for those of us who had the good fortune to sit at his feet in undergraduate and graduate years. Though always a sharp critic, who demanded much of himself and expected his students to do likewise, he was one of the kindest and most generous individuals we had ever known. He had a keen sense of humor and always achieved more by holding our stupidity or ignorance up to ridicule instead of chastising us. His sharp criticism was always accompanied by an infectious laugh that took out the sting.

He was never too busy to devote hours outside the classroom to continue the training of his students. Always a generous host, he would invite his more mature students, usually on weekends, to his home in Ellicott City, singly or in pairs. "Come out to lunch and

³ See the various articles in the May, 1953 number of *Modern Language Notes* which was dedicated to Kurrelmeyer.

stay the afternoon!" This often meant not only the entire afternoon but also supper followed by another session in the evening in his wonderful library. "Just see what I got today!", he would say, taking down a book or set of volumes. And if he saw a questioning look in our eyes, he continued, "What? Don't you know about that?" And then followed an impromptu lecture. And the family was always present or in and out: Mrs. Kurrelmeyer and the two children, Carrie May and Bernhard. Mrs. Kurrelmeyer was an excellent musician, so we often had music or talked about it. Kurrelmeyer played no instrument but he loved music and knew a great deal about it. He was an indefatigable opera-goer, especially in late years, every summer in Munich, Bayreuth or Salzburg.

Kurrelmeyer worked hard, but when the time came he stopped and played with equal enthusiasm. In later life he took up *Skat*, and I recall many *Skat* sessions in the summer on Linden Avenue with Kurrelmeyer and Gustav Strube, the founder and first conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. There were arguments, of course. When was there ever a *Skat* game without an argument? Usually the argument started when the last card had been played and it was apparent that Kurrelmeyer had, as he often did, played the role of *Mauermeister*, not bidding his hand up to its full value. "Why should I take a silly chance?", he argued.

And it was just this characteristic of great caution that made him such a great scholar and teacher. He never made a categorical statement unless he was sure of his ground and he remorselessly poked fun at us when we came out with an ill-considered judgment. And it was this characteristic also that made it possible for him to build up the magnificent library that is now at Homewood and a comfortable fortune.

This shrewdness, coupled with his kindness and real interest in his students, is what makes him unforgettable to all of us. He never considered his duty done when we had completed our studies. He kept in constant touch with us; found us positions if we had none; and when he thought we might be better placed, he continued to make our troubles and ambitions his own, criticized our work and made suggestions for further research and tried to place us more advantageously.

That is why the man Kurrelmeyer lives on in the memories of so many of us. What we may have become is in a great measure due to the example he set, to the continuous care, friendship and love that he beamed forth.

TAYLOR STARCK