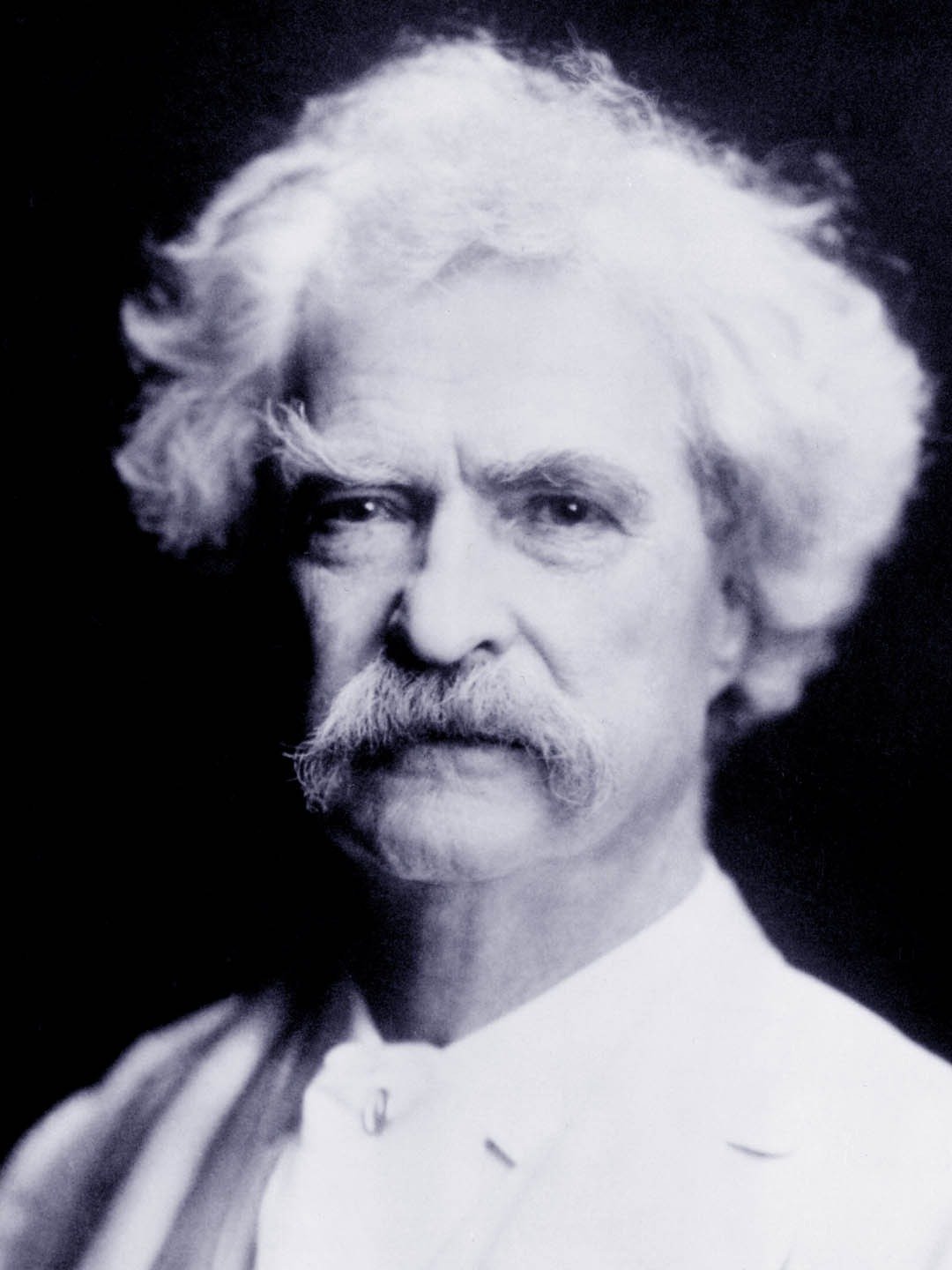
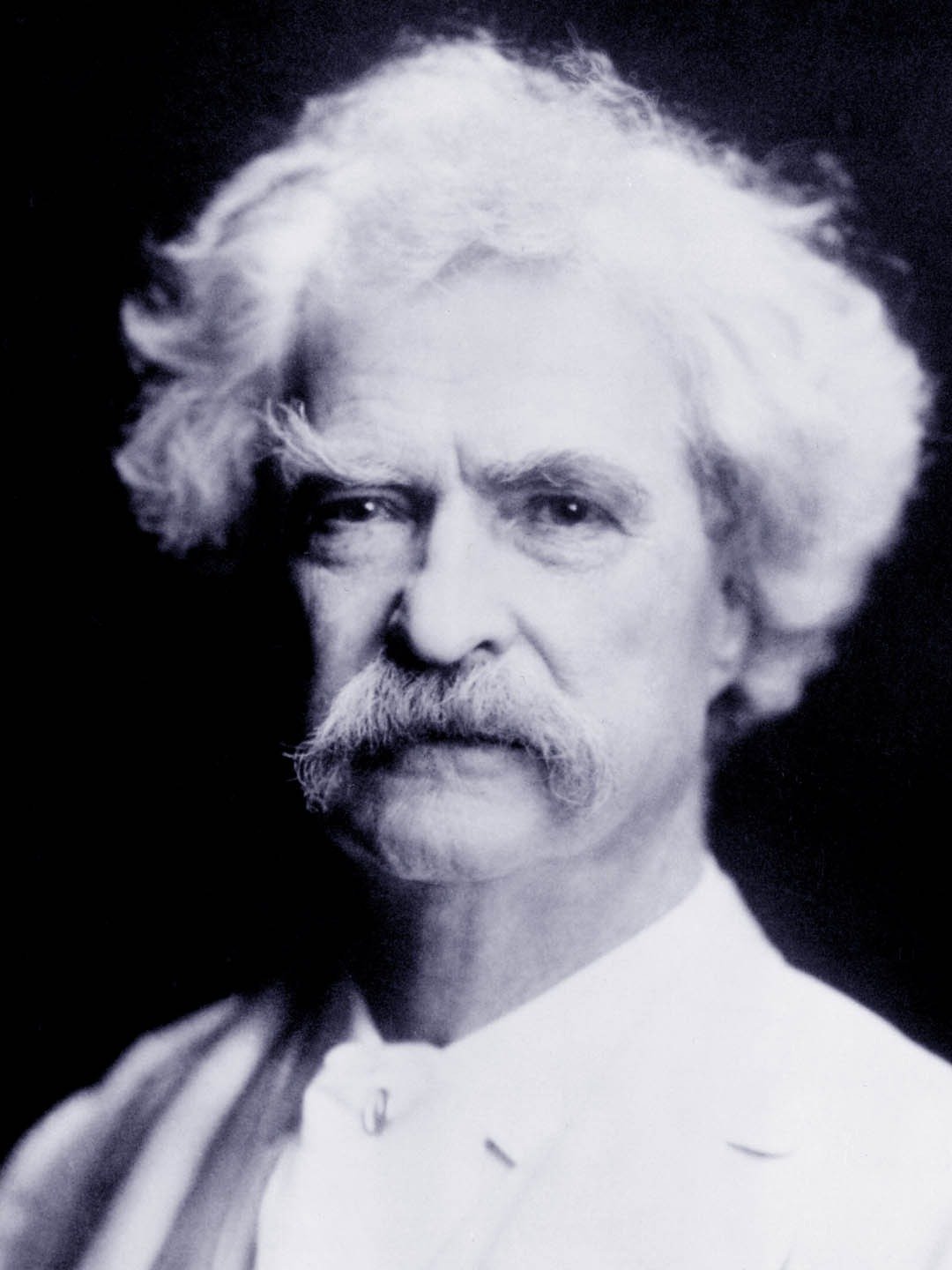
**The Awful German Language**

by Mark Twain





### Table of Contents

## A little learning makes the whole world kin.

## --Proverbs xxxii, 7.

I went often to look at the collection of curiosities

in Heidelberg Castle, and one day I surprised the keeper

of it with my German. I spoke entirely in that language.

He was greatly interested; and after I had talked a while

he said my German was very rare, possibly a "unique";

and wanted to add it to his museum.

If he had known what it had cost me to acquire my art,

he would also have known that it would break any

collector to buy it. Harris and I had been hard at

work on our German during several weeks at that time,

and although we had made good progress, it had been

accomplished under great difficulty and annoyance,

for three of our teachers had died in the mean time.

A person who has not studied German can form no idea

of what a perplexing language it is.

Surely there is not another language that is so slipshod

and systemless, and so slippery and elusive to the grasp.

One is washed about in it, hither and thither, in the most

helpless way; and when at last he thinks he has captured

a rule which offers firm ground to take a rest on amid

the general rage and turmoil of the ten parts of speech,

he turns over the page and reads, "Let the pupil make

careful note of the following EXCEPTIONS." He runs his

eye down and finds that there are more exceptions to the

rule than instances of it. So overboard he goes again,

to hunt for another Ararat and find another quicksand.

Such has been, and continues to be, my experience.

Every time I think I have got one of these four confusing

"cases" where I am master of it, a seemingly insignificant

preposition intrudes itself into my sentence, clothed with

an awful and unsuspected power, and crumbles the ground

from under me. For instance, my book inquires after

a certain bird--(it is always inquiring after things

which are of no sort of no consequence to anybody): "Where

is the bird?" Now the answer to this question--according

to the book--is that the bird is waiting in the blacksmith

shop on account of the rain. Of course no bird would

do that, but then you must stick to the book. Very well,

I begin to cipher out the German for that answer. I begin

at the wrong end, necessarily, for that is the German idea.

I say to myself, "REGEN (rain) is masculine--or maybe it

is feminine--or possibly neuter--it is too much trouble

to look now. Therefore, it is either DER (the) Regen,

or DIE (the) Regen, or DAS (the) Regen, according to which

gender it may turn out to be when I look. In the interest

of science, I will cipher it out on the hypothesis that it

is masculine. Very well--then THE rain is DER Regen,

if it is simply in the quiescent state of being MENTIONED,

without enlargement or discussion--Nominative case;

but if this rain is lying around, in a kind of a general

way on the ground, it is then definitely located,

it is DOING SOMETHING--that is, RESTING (which is one

of the German grammar's ideas of doing something), and

this throws the rain into the Dative case, and makes it

DEM Regen. However, this rain is not resting, but is

doing something ACTIVELY,--it is falling--to interfere

with the bird, likely--and this indicates MOVEMENT,

which has the effect of sliding it into the Accusative case

and changing DEM Regen into DEN Regen." Having completed

the grammatical horoscope of this matter, I answer up

confidently and state in German that the bird is staying

in the blacksmith shop "wegen (on account of) DEN Regen."

Then the teacher lets me softly down with the remark

that whenever the word "wegen" drops into a sentence,

it ALWAYS throws that subject into the GENITIVE case,

regardless of consequences--and therefore this bird stayed in

the blacksmith shop "wegen DES Regens."

N.B.--I was informed, later, by a higher authority,

that there was an "exception" which permits one to say "wegen

DEN Regen" in certain peculiar and complex circumstances,

but that this exception is not extended to anything

BUT rain.

There are ten parts of speech, and they are all troublesome.

An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime

and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column;

it contains all the ten parts of speech--not in regular order,

but mixed; it is built mainly of compound words constructed

by the writer on the spot, and not to be found in any

dictionary--six or seven words compacted into one,

without joint or seam--that is, without hyphens;

it treats of fourteen or fifteen different subjects,

each enclosed in a parenthesis of its own, with here and

there extra parentheses, making pens with pens: finally,

all the parentheses and reparentheses are massed together

between a couple of king-parentheses, one of which is placed

in the first line of the majestic sentence and the other

in the middle of the last line of it--AFTER WHICH COMES

THE VERB, and you find out for the first time what the man

has been talking about; and after the verb--merely by way

of ornament, as far as I can make out--the writer shovels

in "HABEN SIND GEWESEN GEHABT HAVEN GEWORDEN SEIN,"

or words to that effect, and the monument is finished.

I suppose that this closing hurrah is in the nature of the

flourish to a man's signature--not necessary, but pretty.

German books are easy enough to read when you hold them

before the looking-glass or stand on your head--so as

to reverse the construction--but I think that to learn

to read and understand a German newspaper is a thing

which must always remain an impossibility to a foreigner.

Yet even the German books are not entirely free from attacks

of the Parenthesis distemper--though they are usually so mild

as to cover only a few lines, and therefore when you at

last get down to the verb it carries some meaning to your

mind because you are able to remember a good deal of what

has gone before. Now here is a sentence from a popular

and excellent German novel--which a slight parenthesis

in it. I will make a perfectly literal translation,

and throw in the parenthesis-marks and some hyphens

for the assistance of the reader--though in the original

there are no parenthesis-marks or hyphens, and the reader

is left to flounder through to the remote verb the best way he

can:

"But when he, upon the street, the (in-satin-and-silk-covered-

now-very-unconstrained-after-the-newest-fashioned-dressed)

government counselor's wife MET," etc., etc. [1]

1. Wenn er aber auf der Strasse der in Sammt und Seide

gehu"llten jetz sehr ungenirt nach der neusten mode

gekleideten Regierungsrathin begegnet.

That is from THE OLD MAMSELLE'S SECRET, by Mrs. Marlitt.

And that sentence is constructed upon the most approved

German model. You observe how far that verb is from

the reader's base of operations; well, in a German

newspaper they put their verb away over on the next page;

and I have heard that sometimes after stringing along the

exciting preliminaries and parentheses for a column or two,

they get in a hurry and have to go to press without getting

to the verb at all. Of course, then, the reader is left

in a very exhausted and ignorant state.

We have the Parenthesis disease in our literature, too; and one

may see cases of it every day in our books and newspapers:

but with us it is the mark and sign of an unpracticed

writer or a cloudy intellect, whereas with the Germans

it is doubtless the mark and sign of a practiced pen

and of the presence of that sort of luminous intellectual

fog which stands for clearness among these people.

For surely it is NOT clearness--it necessarily can't

be clearness. Even a jury would have penetration enough

to discover that. A writer's ideas must be a good

deal confused, a good deal out of line and sequence,

when he starts out to say that a man met a counselor's

wife in the street, and then right in the midst of this

so simple undertaking halts these approaching people

and makes them stand still until he jots down an inventory

of the woman's dress. That is manifestly absurd.

It reminds a person of those dentists who secure your instant

and breathless interest in a tooth by taking a grip on it

with the forceps, and then stand there and drawl through

a tedious anecdote before they give the dreaded jerk.

Parentheses in literature and dentistry are in bad taste.

The Germans have another kind of parenthesis, which they

make by splitting a verb in two and putting half of it

at the beginning of an exciting chapter and the OTHER

HALF at the end of it. Can any one conceive of anything

more confusing than that? These things are called

"separable verbs." The German grammar is blistered

all over with separable verbs; and the wider the two

portions of one of them are spread apart, the better

the author of the crime is pleased with his performance.

A favorite one is REISTE AB--which means departed.

Here is an example which I culled from a novel and reduced

to English:

"The trunks being now ready, he DE- after kissing his

mother and sisters, and once more pressing to his bosom

his adored Gretchen, who, dressed in simple white muslin,

with a single tuberose in the ample folds of her rich

brown hair, had tottered feebly down the stairs, still pale

from the terror and excitement of the past evening,

but longing to lay her poor aching head yet once again

upon the breast of him whom she loved more dearly than

life itself, PARTED."

However, it is not well to dwell too much on the

separable verbs. One is sure to lose his temper early;

and if he sticks to the subject, and will not be warned,

it will at last either soften his brain or petrify it.

Personal pronouns and adjectives are a fruitful nuisance

in this language, and should have been left out.

For instance, the same sound, SIE, means YOU, and it means SHE,

and it means HER, and it means IT, and it means THEY,

and it means THEM. Think of the ragged poverty of a

language which has to make one word do the work of six--and

a poor little weak thing of only three letters at that.

But mainly, think of the exasperation of never knowing

which of these meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

This explains why, whenever a person says SIE to me,

I generally try to kill him, if a stranger.

Now observe the Adjective. Here was a case where simplicity

would have been an advantage; therefore, for no other reason,

the inventor of this language complicated it all he could.

When we wish to speak of our "good friend or friends,"

in our enlightened tongue, we stick to the one form and have

no trouble or hard feeling about it; but with the German

tongue it is different. When a German gets his hands

on an adjective, he declines it, and keeps on declining

it until the common sense is all declined out of it.

It is as bad as Latin. He says, for instance:

SINGULAR

Nominative--Mein gutER Freund, my good friend.

Genitives--MeinES GutEN FreundES, of my good friend.

Dative--MeinEM gutEN Freund, to my good friend.

Accusative--MeinEN gutEN Freund, my good friend.

PLURAL

N.--MeinE gutEN FreundE, my good friends. G.--MeinER gutEN

FreundE, of my good friends. D.--MeinEN gutEN FreundEN,

to my good friends. A.--MeinE gutEN FreundE, my good friends.

Now let the candidate for the asylum try to memorize

those variations, and see how soon he will be elected.

One might better go without friends in Germany than take

all this trouble about them. I have shown what a bother

it is to decline a good (male) friend; well this is

only a third of the work, for there is a variety of new

distortions of the adjective to be learned when the object

is feminine, and still another when the object is neuter.

Now there are more adjectives in this language than there

are black cats in Switzerland, and they must all be as

elaborately declined as the examples above suggested.

Difficult?--troublesome?--these words cannot describe it.

I heard a Californian student in Heidelberg say, in one of

his calmest moods, that he would rather decline two drinks

than one German adjective.

The inventor of the language seems to have taken pleasure

in complicating it in every way he could think of.

For instance, if one is casually referring to a house,

HAUS, or a horse, PFERD, or a dog, HUND, he spells these

words as I have indicated; but if he is referring to them

in the Dative case, he sticks on a foolish and unnecessary

E and spells them HAUSE, PFERDE, HUNDE. So, as an added

E often signifies the plural, as the S does with us,

the new student is likely to go on for a month making

twins out of a Dative dog before he discovers his mistake;

and on the other hand, many a new student who could ill

afford loss, has bought and paid for two dogs and only

got one of them, because he ignorantly bought that dog

in the Dative singular when he really supposed he was

talking plural--which left the law on the seller's side,

of course, by the strict rules of grammar, and therefore

a suit for recovery could not lie.

In German, all the Nouns begin with a capital letter.

Now that is a good idea; and a good idea, in this language,

is necessarily conspicuous from its lonesomeness. I consider

this capitalizing of nouns a good idea, because by reason

of it you are almost always able to tell a noun the minute

you see it. You fall into error occasionally, because you

mistake the name of a person for the name of a thing,

and waste a good deal of time trying to dig a meaning

out of it. German names almost always do mean something,

and this helps to deceive the student. I translated

a passage one day, which said that "the infuriated tigress

broke loose and utterly ate up the unfortunate fir forest"

(Tannenwald). When I was girding up my loins to doubt this,

I found out that Tannenwald in this instance was a

man's name.

Every noun has a gender, and there is no sense or system

in the distribution; so the gender of each must be

learned separately and by heart. There is no other way.

To do this one has to have a memory like a memorandum-book.

In German, a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has.

Think what overwrought reverence that shows for the turnip,

and what callous disrespect for the girl. See how it

looks in print--I translate this from a conversation

in one of the best of the German Sunday-school books:

"Gretchen. Wilhelm, where is the turnip?

"Wilhelm. She has gone to the kitchen.

"Gretchen. Where is the accomplished and beautiful English

maiden?

Wilhelm. It has gone to the opera."

To continue with the German genders: a tree is male, its buds

are female, its leaves are neuter; horses are sexless,

dogs are male, cats are female--tomcats included, of course;

a person's mouth, neck, bosom, elbows, fingers, nails, feet,

and body are of the male sex, and his head is male

or neuter according to the word selected to signify it,

and NOT according to the sex of the individual who wears

it--for in Germany all the women either male heads or

sexless ones; a person's nose, lips, shoulders, breast,

hands, and toes are of the female sex; and his hair,

ears, eyes, chin, legs, knees, heart, and conscience

haven't any sex at all. The inventor of the language

probably got what he knew about a conscience from hearsay.

Now, by the above dissection, the reader will see that in

Germany a man may THINK he is a man, but when he comes to look

into the matter closely, he is bound to have his doubts;

he finds that in sober truth he is a most ridiculous mixture;

and if he ends by trying to comfort himself with the

thought that he can at least depend on a third of this

mess as being manly and masculine, the humiliating second

thought will quickly remind him that in this respect

he is no better off than any woman or cow in the land.

In the German it is true that by some oversight of the inventor

of the language, a Woman is a female; but a Wife (Weib)

is not--which is unfortunate. A Wife, here, has no sex;

she is neuter; so, according to the grammar, a fish

is HE, his scales are SHE, but a fishwife is neither.

To describe a wife as sexless may be called under-description;

that is bad enough, but over-description is surely worse.

A German speaks of an Englishman as the ENGLA"NDER; to change

the sex, he adds INN, and that stands for Englishwoman--

ENGLA"NDERINN. That seems descriptive enough, but still

it is not exact enough for a German; so he precedes the

word with that article which indicates that the creature

to follow is feminine, and writes it down thus: "die

Engla"nderinn,"--which means "the she-Englishwoman."

I consider that that person is over-described.

Well, after the student has learned the sex of a great

number of nouns, he is still in a difficulty, because he

finds it impossible to persuade his tongue to refer

to things as "he" and "she," and "him" and "her," which

it has been always accustomed to refer to it as "it."

When he even frames a German sentence in his mind,

with the hims and hers in the right places, and then works

up his courage to the utterance-point, it is no use--

the moment he begins to speak his tongue files the track

and all those labored males and females come out as "its."

And even when he is reading German to himself, he always

calls those things "it," where as he ought to read in this way:

TALE OF THE FISHWIFE AND ITS SAD FATE [2]

2. I capitalize the nouns, in the German (and

ancient English) fashion.

It is a bleak Day. Hear the Rain, how he pours, and the Hail,

how he rattles; and see the Snow, how he drifts along,

and of the Mud, how deep he is! Ah the poor Fishwife,

it is stuck fast in the Mire; it has dropped its Basket

of Fishes; and its Hands have been cut by the Scales

as it seized some of the falling Creatures; and one Scale

has even got into its Eye. and it cannot get her out.

It opens its Mouth to cry for Help; but if any Sound comes

out of him, alas he is drowned by the raging of the Storm.

And now a Tomcat has got one of the Fishes and she

will surely escape with him. No, she bites off a Fin,

she holds her in her Mouth--will she swallow her? No,

the Fishwife's brave Mother-dog deserts his Puppies and

rescues the Fin--which he eats, himself, as his Reward.

O, horror, the Lightning has struck the Fish-basket;

he sets him on Fire; see the Flame, how she licks the

doomed Utensil with her red and angry Tongue; now she

attacks the helpless Fishwife's Foot--she burns him up,

all but the big Toe, and even SHE is partly consumed;

and still she spreads, still she waves her fiery Tongues;

she attacks the Fishwife's Leg and destroys IT; she attacks

its Hand and destroys HER also; she attacks the Fishwife's Leg

and destroys HER also; she attacks its Body and consumes HIM;

she wreathes herself about its Heart and IT is consumed;

next about its Breast, and in a Moment SHE is a Cinder;

now she reaches its Neck--He goes; now its Chin--

IT goes; now its Nose--SHE goes. In another Moment,

except Help come, the Fishwife will be no more.

Time presses--is there none to succor and save? Yes! Joy,

joy, with flying Feet the she-Englishwoman comes! But alas,

the generous she-Female is too late: where now is

the fated Fishwife? It has ceased from its Sufferings,

it has gone to a better Land; all that is left of it

for its loved Ones to lament over, is this poor smoldering

Ash-heap. Ah, woeful, woeful Ash-heap! Let us take him

up tenderly, reverently, upon the lowly Shovel, and bear

him to his long Rest, with the Prayer that when he rises

again it will be a Realm where he will have one good square

responsible Sex, and have it all to himself, instead of

having a mangy lot of assorted Sexes scattered all over him

in Spots.

## -----------

There, now, the reader can see for himself that this pronoun

business is a very awkward thing for the unaccustomed tongue.

I suppose that in all languages the similarities of look

and sound between words which have no similarity in meaning

are a fruitful source of perplexity to the foreigner.

It is so in our tongue, and it is notably the case in

the German. Now there is that troublesome word VERMA"HLT:

to me it has so close a resemblance--either real or

fancied--to three or four other words, that I never know

whether it means despised, painted, suspected, or married;

until I look in the dictionary, and then I find it means

the latter. There are lots of such words and they are

a great torment. To increase the difficulty there are

words which SEEM to resemble each other, and yet do not;

but they make just as much trouble as if they did.

For instance, there is the word VERMIETHEN (to let,

to lease, to hire); and the word VERHEIRATHEN (another way

of saying to marry). I heard of an Englishman who knocked

at a man's door in Heidelberg and proposed, in the best

German he could command, to "verheirathen" that house.

Then there are some words which mean one thing when you

emphasize the first syllable, but mean something very

different if you throw the emphasis on the last syllable.

For instance, there is a word which means a runaway,

or the act of glancing through a book, according to the

placing of the emphasis; and another word which signifies

to ASSOCIATE with a man, or to AVOID him, according to

where you put the emphasis--and you can generally depend

on putting it in the wrong place and getting into trouble.

There are some exceedingly useful words in this language.

SCHLAG, for example; and ZUG. There are three-quarters

of a column of SCHLAGS in the dictonary, and a column

and a half of ZUGS. The word SCHLAG means Blow, Stroke,

Dash, Hit, Shock, Clap, Slap, Time, Bar, Coin, Stamp, Kind,

Sort, Manner, Way, Apoplexy, Wood-cutting, Enclosure,

Field, Forest-clearing. This is its simple and EXACT

meaning--that is to say, its restricted, its fettered meaning;

but there are ways by which you can set it free,

so that it can soar away, as on the wings of the morning,

and never be at rest. You can hang any word you please

to its tail, and make it mean anything you want to.

You can begin with SCHLAG-ADER, which means artery,

and you can hang on the whole dictionary, word by word,

clear through the alphabet to SCHLAG-WASSER, which means

bilge-water--and including SCHLAG-MUTTER, which means

mother-in-law.

Just the same with ZUG. Strictly speaking, ZUG means Pull,

Tug, Draught, Procession, March, Progress, Flight, Direction,

Expedition, Train, Caravan, Passage, Stroke, Touch, Line,

Flourish, Trait of Character, Feature, Lineament, Chess-move,

Organ-stop, Team, Whiff, Bias, Drawer, Propensity, Inhalation,

Disposition: but that thing which it does NOT mean--when

all its legitimate pennants have been hung on, has not been

discovered yet.

One cannot overestimate the usefulness of SCHLAG and ZUG.

Armed just with these two, and the word ALSO, what cannot

the foreigner on German soil accomplish? The German word

ALSO is the equivalent of the English phrase "You know,"

and does not mean anything at all--in TALK, though it

sometimes does in print. Every time a German opens his

mouth an ALSO falls out; and every time he shuts it he bites

one in two that was trying to GET out.

Now, the foreigner, equipped with these three noble words,

is master of the situation. Let him talk right along,

fearlessly; let him pour his indifferent German forth,

and when he lacks for a word, let him heave a SCHLAG into

the vacuum; all the chances are that it fits it like a plug,

but if it doesn't let him promptly heave a ZUG after it;

the two together can hardly fail to bung the hole; but if,

by a miracle, they SHOULD fail, let him simply say ALSO!

and this will give him a moment's chance to think of the

needful word. In Germany, when you load your conversational

gun it is always best to throw in a SCHLAG or two and a ZUG

or two, because it doesn't make any difference how much

the rest of the charge may scatter, you are bound to bag

something with THEM. Then you blandly say ALSO, and load

up again. Nothing gives such an air of grace and elegance

and unconstraint to a German or an English conversation

as to scatter it full of "Also's" or "You knows."

In my note-book I find this entry:

July 1.--In the hospital yesterday, a word of thirteen

syllables was successfully removed from a patient--a

North German from near Hamburg; but as most unfortunately

the surgeons had opened him in the wrong place, under the

impression that he contained a panorama, he died.

The sad event has cast a gloom over the whole community.

That paragraph furnishes a text for a few remarks about

one of the most curious and notable features of my

subject--the length of German words. Some German words

are so long that they have a perspective. Observe these

examples:

Freundschaftsbezeigungen.

Dilettantenaufdringlichkeiten.

Stadtverordnetenversammlungen.

These things are not words, they are alphabetical processions.

And they are not rare; one can open a German newspaper

at any time and see them marching majestically across

the page--and if he has any imagination he can see

the banners and hear the music, too. They impart

a martial thrill to the meekest subject. I take a

great interest in these curiosities. Whenever I come

across a good one, I stuff it and put it in my museum.

In this way I have made quite a valuable collection.

When I get duplicates, I exchange with other collectors,

and thus increase the variety of my stock. Here rare

some specimens which I lately bought at an auction sale

of the effects of a bankrupt bric-a-brac hunter:

Generalstaatsverordnetenversammlungen.

Alterthumswissenschaften.

Kinderbewahrungsanstalten.

Unabhaengigkeitserklaerungen.

Wiedererstellungbestrebungen.

Waffenstillstandsunterhandlungen.

Of course when one of these grand mountain ranges goes

stretching across the printed page, it adorns and ennobles

that literary landscape--but at the same time it is a great

distress to the new student, for it blocks up his way;

he cannot crawl under it, or climb over it, or tunnel

through it. So he resorts to the dictionary for help,

but there is no help there. The dictionary must draw

the line somewhere--so it leaves this sort of words out.

And it is right, because these long things are hardly

legitimate words, but are rather combinations of words,

and the inventor of them ought to have been killed.

They are compound words with the hyphens left out.

The various words used in building them are in the dictionary,

but in a very scattered condition; so you can hunt

the materials out, one by one, and get at the meaning

at last, but it is a tedious and harassing business.

I have tried this process upon some of the above examples.

"Freundshaftsbezeigungen" seems to be "Friendship

demonstrations,"

which is only a foolish and clumsy way of saying "demonstrations

of friendship." "Unabhaengigkeitserklaerungen" seems

to be "Independencedeclarations," which is no improvement

upon "Declarations of Independence," so far as I can see.

"Generalstaatsverordnetenversammlungen" seems to be

"General-statesrepresentativesmeetings," as nearly as I

can get at it--a mere rhythmical, gushy euphuism for

"meetings of the legislature," I judge. We used to have

a good deal of this sort of crime in our literature,

but it has gone out now. We used to speak of a things as a

"never-to-be-forgotten" circumstance, instead of cramping

it into the simple and sufficient word "memorable" and then

going calmly about our business as if nothing had happened.

In those days we were not content to embalm the thing

and bury it decently, we wanted to build a monument over it.

But in our newspapers the compounding-disease lingers

a little to the present day, but with the hyphens left out,

in the German fashion. This is the shape it takes:

instead of saying "Mr. Simmons, clerk of the county and

district courts, was in town yesterday," the new form put

it thus: "Clerk of the County and District Courts Simmons

was in town yesterday." This saves neither time nor ink,

and has an awkward sound besides. One often sees a remark

like this in our papers: "MRS. Assistant District Attorney

Johnson returned to her city residence yesterday for the season."

That is a case of really unjustifiable compounding;

because it not only saves no time or trouble, but confers

a title on Mrs. Johnson which she has no right to.

But these little instances are trifles indeed, contrasted

with the ponderous and dismal German system of piling

jumbled compounds together. I wish to submit the following

local item, from a Mannheim journal, by way of illustration:

"In the daybeforeyesterdayshortlyaftereleveno'clock Night,

the inthistownstandingtavern called 'The Wagoner' was downburnt.

When the fire to the onthedownburninghouseresting Stork's

Nest reached, flew the parent Storks away. But when

the bytheraging, firesurrounded Nest ITSELF caught Fire,

straightway plunged the quickreturning Mother-Stork into

the Flames and died, her Wings over her young ones outspread."

Even the cumbersome German construction is not able to

take the pathos out of that picture--indeed, it somehow

seems to strengthen it. This item is dated away back

yonder months ago. I could have used it sooner, but I

was waiting to hear from the Father-stork. I am still waiting.

"ALSO!" If I had not shown that the German is a

difficult language, I have at least intended to do so.

I have heard of an American student who was asked how he

was getting along with his German, and who answered

promptly: "I am not getting along at all. I have worked

at it hard for three level months, and all I have got

to show for it is one solitary German phrase--'ZWEI GLAS'"

(two glasses of beer). He paused for a moment, reflectively;

then added with feeling: "But I've got that SOLID!"

And if I have not also shown that German is a harassing

and infuriating study, my execution has been at fault,

and not my intent. I heard lately of a worn and sorely

tried American student who used to fly to a certain German

word for relief when he could bear up under his aggravations

no longer--the only word whose sound was sweet and

precious to his ear and healing to his lacerated spirit.

This was the word DAMIT. It was only the SOUND that

helped him, not the meaning; [3] and so, at last, when he

learned that the emphasis was not on the first syllable,

his only stay and support was gone, and he faded away

and died.

3. It merely means, in its general sense, "herewith."

I think that a description of any loud, stirring,

tumultuous episode must be tamer in German than in English.

Our descriptive words of this character have such

a deep, strong, resonant sound, while their German

equivalents do seem so thin and mild and energyless.

Boom, burst, crash, roar, storm, bellow, blow, thunder,

explosion; howl, cry, shout, yell, groan; battle, hell.

These are magnificent words; the have a force and magnitude

of sound befitting the things which they describe.

But their German equivalents would be ever so nice to sing

the children to sleep with, or else my awe-inspiring ears

were made for display and not for superior usefulness

in analyzing sounds. Would any man want to die in a

battle which was called by so tame a term as a SCHLACHT?

Or would not a comsumptive feel too much bundled up,

who was about to go out, in a shirt-collar and a seal-ring,

into a storm which the bird-song word GEWITTER was employed

to describe? And observe the strongest of the several

German equivalents for explosion--AUSBRUCH. Our word

Toothbrush is more powerful than that. It seems to me

that the Germans could do worse than import it into their

language to describe particularly tremendous explosions with.

The German word for hell--Ho"lle--sounds more like HELLY

than anything else; therefore, how necessary chipper,

frivolous, and unimpressive it is. If a man were told

in German to go there, could he really rise to thee

dignity of feeling insulted?

Having pointed out, in detail, the several vices of

this language, I now come to the brief and pleasant task

of pointing out its virtues. The capitalizing of the nouns

I have already mentioned. But far before this virtue stands

another--that of spelling a word according to the sound of it.

After one short lesson in the alphabet, the student can tell

how any German word is pronounced without having to ask;

whereas in our language if a student should inquire of us,

"What does B, O, W, spell?" we should be obliged to reply,

"Nobody can tell what it spells when you set if off by itself;

you can only tell by referring to the context and finding

out what it signifies--whether it is a thing to shoot

arrows with, or a nod of one's head, or the forward end of a

boat."

There are some German words which are singularly

and powerfully effective. For instance, those which

describe lowly, peaceful, and affectionate home life;

those which deal with love, in any and all forms,

from mere kindly feeling and honest good will toward

the passing stranger, clear up to courtship; those which

deal with outdoor Nature, in its softest and loveliest

aspects--with meadows and forests, and birds and flowers,

the fragrance and sunshine of summer, and the moonlight

of peaceful winter nights; in a word, those which deal with

any and all forms of rest, respose, and peace; those also

which deal with the creatures and marvels of fairyland;

and lastly and chiefly, in those words which express pathos,

is the language surpassingly rich and affective. There are

German songs which can make a stranger to the language cry.

That shows that the SOUND of the words is correct--it

interprets the meanings with truth and with exactness;

and so the ear is informed, and through the ear, the heart.

The Germans do not seem to be afraid to repeat a word

when it is the right one. they repeat it several times,

if they choose. That is wise. But in English, when we

have used a word a couple of times in a paragraph,

we imagine we are growing tautological, and so we are weak

enough to exchange it for some other word which only

approximates exactness, to escape what we wrongly fancy

is a greater blemish. Repetition may be bad, but surely

inexactness is worse.

## -----------

There are people in the world who will take a great

deal of trouble to point out the faults in a religion

or a language, and then go blandly about their business

without suggesting any remedy. I am not that kind

of person. I have shown that the German language

needs reforming. Very well, I am ready to reform it.

At least I am ready to make the proper suggestions.

Such a course as this might be immodest in another; but I

have devoted upward of nine full weeks, first and last,

to a careful and critical study of this tongue, and thus

have acquired a confidence in my ability to reform it

which no mere superficial culture could have conferred

upon me.

In the first place, I would leave out the Dative case.

It confuses the plurals; and, besides, nobody ever knows

when he is in the Dative case, except he discover it

by accident--and then he does not know when or where it

was that he got into it, or how long he has been in it,

or how he is going to get out of it again. The Dative case

is but an ornamental folly--it is better to discard it.

In the next place, I would move the Verb further up

to the front. You may load up with ever so good a Verb,

but I notice that you never really bring down a subject

with it at the present German range--you only cripple it.

So I insist that this important part of speech should be

brought forward to a position where it may be easily seen

with the naked eye.

Thirdly, I would import some strong words from the English

tongue--to swear with, and also to use in describing

all sorts of vigorous things in a vigorous ways. [4]

4. "Verdammt," and its variations and enlargements,

are words which have plenty of meaning, but the SOUNDS

are so mild and ineffectual that German ladies can use

them without sin. German ladies who could not be induced

to commit a sin by any persuasion or compulsion, promptly rip

out one of these harmless little words when they tear their

dresses or don't like the soup. It sounds about as wicked

as our "My gracious." German ladies are constantly saying,

"Ach! Gott!" "Mein Gott!" "Gott in Himmel!" "Herr Gott"

"Der Herr Jesus!" etc. They think our ladies have the

same custom, perhaps; for I once heard a gentle and lovely

old German lady say to a sweet young American girl:

"The two languages are so alike--how pleasant that is;

we say 'Ach! Gott!' you say 'Goddamn.'"

Fourthly, I would reorganizes the sexes, and distribute

them accordingly to the will of the creator. This as

a tribute of respect, if nothing else.

Fifthly, I would do away with those great long

compounded words; or require the speaker to deliver

them in sections, with intermissions for refreshments.

To wholly do away with them would be best, for ideas are

more easily received and digested when they come one at

a time than when they come in bulk. Intellectual food

is like any other; it is pleasanter and more beneficial

to take it with a spoon than with a shovel.

Sixthly, I would require a speaker to stop when he is done,

and not hang a string of those useless "haven sind gewesen

gehabt haben geworden seins" to the end of his oration.

This sort of gewgaws undignify a speech, instead of adding

a grace. They are, therefore, an offense, and should

be discarded.

Seventhly, I would discard the Parenthesis. Also the

reparenthesis,

the re-reparenthesis, and the re-re-re-re-re-reparentheses,

and likewise the final wide-reaching all-enclosing

king-parenthesis. I would require every individual,

be he high or low, to unfold a plain straightforward tale,

or else coil it and sit on it and hold his peace.

Infractions of this law should be punishable with death.

And eighthly, and last, I would retain ZUG and SCHLAG,

with their pendants, and discard the rest of the vocabulary.

This would simplify the language.

I have now named what I regard as the most necessary

and important changes. These are perhaps all I could

be expected to name for nothing; but there are other

suggestions which I can and will make in case my proposed

application shall result in my being formally employed

by the government in the work of reforming the language.

My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person

ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing)

in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German

in thirty years. It seems manifest, then, that the

latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired.

If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently

and reverently set aside among the dead languages,

for only the dead have time to learn it.

## A FOURTH OF JULY ORATION IN THE GERMAN TONGUE, DELIVERED AT

## A BANQUET OF THE ANGLO-AMERICAN CLUB OF STUDENTS BY THE

## AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

Gentlemen: Since I arrived, a month ago, in this

old wonderland, this vast garden of Germany, my English

tongue has so often proved a useless piece of baggage

to me, and so troublesome to carry around, in a country

where they haven't the checking system for luggage, that I

finally set to work, and learned the German language.

Also! Es freut mich dass dies so ist, denn es muss,

in ein haupts:achlich degree, h:oflich sein, dass man

auf ein occasion like this, sein Rede in die Sprache des

Landes worin he boards, aussprechen soll. Daf:ur habe ich,

aus reinische Verlegenheit--no, Vergangenheit--no, I

mean Hoflichkeit--aus reinishe Hoflichkeit habe ich

resolved to tackle this business in the German language,

um Gottes willen! Also! Sie mu"ssen so freundlich sein,

und verzeih mich die interlarding von ein oder zwei

Englischer Worte, hie und da, denn ich finde dass die

deutsche is not a very copious language, and so when

you've really got anything to say, you've got to draw

on a language that can stand the strain.

Wenn haber man kann nicht meinem Rede Verstehen, so werde

ich ihm sp:ater dasselbe :ubersetz, wenn er solche Dienst

verlangen wollen haben werden sollen sein h:atte. (I don't

know what wollen haben werden sollen sein ha"tte means,

but I notice they always put it at the end of a German

sentence--merely for general literary gorgeousness,

I suppose.)

This is a great and justly honored day--a day which is

worthy of the veneration in which it is held by the true

patriots of all climes and nationalities--a day which

offers a fruitful theme for thought and speech; und meinem

Freunde--no, meinEN FreundEN--meinES FreundES--well,

take your choice, they're all the same price; I don't

know which one is right--also! ich habe gehabt haben

worden gewesen sein, as Goethe says in his Paradise

Lost--ich--ich--that is to say--ich--but let us change cars.

Also! Die Anblich so viele Grossbrittanischer und Amerikanischer

hier zusammengetroffen in Bruderliche concord, ist zwar

a welcome and inspiriting spectacle. And what has moved you

to it? Can the terse German tongue rise to the expression of

this impulse? Is it Freundschaftsbezeigungenstadtverordneten-

versammlungenfamilieneigenth:umlichkeiten? Nein,

o nein! This is a crisp and noble word, but it fails

to pierce the marrow of the impulse which has gathered

this friendly meeting and produced diese Anblick--eine

Anblich welche ist gut zu sehen--gut fu"r die Augen

in a foreign land and a far country--eine Anblick solche

als in die gew:ohnliche Heidelberger phrase nennt man ein

"scho"nes Aussicht!" Ja, freilich natu"rlich wahrscheinlich

ebensowohl! Also! Die Aussicht auf dem K:onigsstuhl

mehr gr:osser ist, aber geistlische sprechend nicht so

scho"n, lob' Gott! Because sie sind hier zusammengetroffen,

in Bruderlichem concord, ein grossen Tag zu feirn,

whose high benefits were not for one land and one locality,

but have conferred a measure of good upon all lands

that know liberty today, and love it. Hundert Jahre

voru"ber, waren die Engla"nder und die Amerikaner Feinde;

aber heut sind sie herzlichen Freunde, Gott sei Dank!

May this good-fellowship endure; may these banners here

blended in amity so remain; may they never any more wave

over opposing hosts, or be stained with blood which

was kindred, is kindred, and always will be kindred,

until a line drawn upon a map shall be able to say:

"THIS bars the ancestral blood from flowing in the veins

of the descendant!"

***Gorilla***

***Publishing***