

A GERMAN CHAMPION OF AMERICAN SPEECH

A BONE of contention was recently thrown before an English audience by a high German authority. Prof. Alois Brandl, cited as "the most distinguished authority on English literature and language in Germany," declared that the English of Americans was not only improving, but was already as good as that of our English cousins. Can it be that Professor Brandl already discerns results of the labors of the Society for the Improvement of Spoken English, organized among us last year? Or were we unnecessarily taken to task by our foreign visitors, with the results that we immediately began setting our house in order? Professor Brandl has just been visiting London, where he was made an honorary member of the Royal Society of Literature. In a London dispatch to the *New York Times* we read this account of his deliverances on "the question of our speech":

"Mr. Brandl has been comparing English as it is spoken by Englishmen and English as it is spoken by Americans, and has come to the conclusion that the former is not a whit purer than the latter. He is very severe on the cockney accent, and declares that the English of the ordinary educated American is quite on an equality with that of the ordinary educated Englishman, basing this opinion on a systematic observation during twenty years of continual contact with American students at German universities, and on further observations made when he visited America as the representative of academic Germany at the recent Benjamin Franklin centenary celebration.

"The professor states that when in America he not only studied the English spoken by American students at the various universities and colleges, but also listened to speeches delivered by thirty-five Americans coming from all parts of the United States. Of these thirty-five orators, he says, the American whose English was most un-English was Andrew Carnegie—and he is a Scotsman.

"Dr. Brandl believes that the American twang is rapidly dying out and that it will, in time, become a thing of the past owing to the advance of education. The average American, he says, is being educated into a consciousness of his accent and is beginning to criticize and eradicate it.

"The Prussian Ministry of Education recently consulted Dr. Brandl regarding the advisability of arranging an exchange of teachers between Germany and the United States, the plan being for German teachers to go to America to teach German while American teachers would come to Germany to teach English. Some advisers of the Ministry of Education feared to recommend the importation of American teachers on the ground that they might teach English with a bad accent; but Dr. Brandl sent in an official report declaring that the English taught by the average

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American tutor would be quite as good as the English taught by the average English teacher. In consequence his recommendation for an exchange of teachers between Germany and America will be carried out without further delay."

Strangely enough, an Englishman, Prof. W. W. Skeat, of the chair of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, agrees with the German savant. A dispatch two days later to the same paper represents him as saying :

It is perfectly true that many Americans speak English with an excellent pronunciation, but it is to be remembered that in America training in English is carried on with much greater strictness and to a far greater extent than in England.

"For example, it generally is considered in our great public schools that Latin and Greek are of primary importance, and no particular attention is paid to instruction in English nor to elocution. In America, on the contrary, as I lately was assured by the president of one of the principal American universities, the teaching of English takes absolutely the first place ; every other study is held to be of subsidiary importance.

"Moreover, the study of phonetics is taken very seriously both in Germany and America, and students are expected to understand the pronunciation of Chaucer and King Alfred. In England the study of phonetics is almost unknown except to a few students, who receive small encouragement. The consequence is that the ordinary Englishman is entirely ignorant of the history of his own language, and has no idea why words are spelled as they are."

Professor Skeat said he saw no objection to the employment of Americans to teach English in Germany, because, as he put it, "Americans give attention to the subject and understand what they are talking about." James Gow, head master of the Westminster School, London, takes a different view. "He bases his qualification to judge in the matter," says a London dispatch to the *New York Sun*, "on his acquaintance with several American teachers who have visited the Westminster School." Further :

"He objects to Professor Brandl comparing educated American adults with English children in the elementary schools, and cites Americans residing in England as admitting that the English grammar and pronunciation are more accurate and more graceful than the American.

"He also contends that American education is far behind the standard of this country."