

Ethé introduction

Subjects	Professors
German, French, and Italian	H. Ethé, Ph.D. (Leipzig)
Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, & Sanskrit*	H. Ethé, Ph.D. (Leipzig)

* Dr. Ethé will be happy to read with Students in other Oriental Languages.
(The Calendar of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1886-7)

In his 'Impressions of Aberystwyth, 1887–1901' in Iwan Morgan's *College by the Sea* (1928), Dr Charles Herford wrote that Ethé was 'probably, till the close of the century at least, the one man of European reputation who held a chair at any of the Welsh Colleges.' But Herford also wrote that Ethé was 'the one strikingly abnormal personality of the college' and that 'he was not the man to conceal his opinion of other people's eccentricities. On the contrary his neighbourhood was often announced by the Homeric laughter they excited in him. Forty years of Aberystwyth did little to make him less alien to his milieu. Few boulders in such a period ever gathered so little moss. The finer traits of Welsh character, as of Welsh scenery, escaped him, and he fled from both every long vacation to a little inn beside the Rhine at Oberwesel, "the only place in the world for a wise man"'.

The historian R.T. Jenkins (although a student at Aberystwyth between 1898 and 1901, was no friend of the College, and confessed in his autobiography, *Edrych yn Ôl* (Looking Back, 1968), that he only chose Aberystwyth over Bangor 'because the scholarships were better, that's all!') also remembers the eccentric academic. He thought that Ethé was 'one of the greatest scholars that he had ever seen' and that when he lectured, his 'thundering voice would roll across the high ceilings, making a noise as if a tray full of china dishes had fallen to the floor.' But he remembered Ethé's scornful judgement on the college library whenever he heard anyone praising it: '*Library!* – zis is *nod* a Library! – zis is a gollegshion of boogs!' (p104).

'Yes there was something stupendous about him – I know of no better word – ' wrote Jenkins, 'something unbelievable, as one of the remains of prehistoric animals; he was in the lineage of the giant German scholars of the second half of the eighteenth century.' (p113).

‘He would spend many hours a day over his books. But he was far from being a pale, anaemic, bookworm. He was a great walker; an extreme smoker – a thick cigar constantly between his lips; a great drinker; a great eater; thunderous laugher. Scornful of all vegetarians and abstainers – “Miss W, she iz a ve-ge-tar-i-an! She iz like Nebuchadnezzar, she lives on *grass*, Ho-Ho-Ho!”’ (p113)

‘And he would drink like an ox – but if he drank hard liquor by the bucketful, not a hair of his head (not that he had much) would be out of place. My wife tells me that she often saw Ethé and his (first) wife sitting in the open window of their house, each with an enormous pewter pot of beer in front of them, in godly *Aberystwyth*, where etiquette insisted that you at all times enter the tavern through the back door! – the old man would pay for this insult on the home of the [Methodist] *Confession of Faith*.’ (p114)

And it is the story of that payment that is told in **Professor Carl Hermann Ethé (1844-1917): also a victim of the First World War**.

We are very grateful to Christopher T. Husbands for permitting us to reproduce here the Hermann Ethé section from his much larger study *German-/Austrian-origin Professors of German in British universities during the First World War: the lessons of four case studies*, which can be seen in full here:

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49797/1/Husbands_German_Austrian_origin_2013.pdf.

45 letters from Aberystwyth University Registry [concerning the treatment of Professor Hermann Ethé](#) have been included in the JISC funded [The Welsh Experience of the First World War](#), 1914-1918 project. The file includes correspondence from the Registrar, J. H. Davies; the Principal, Thomas Francis Roberts; Professor Ethé himself, and various other members of the College.