

ADA KLETT BISTER

1897 - 1965

Ada Klett Bister, Professor Emeritus of German, died on November 21, 1965 after a long and lingering illness, less than five months after the sudden death of her beloved husband, Andreas. To the Vassar community the departure of the Bisters for their native Germany in 1960 signified in many respects the end of an era. For twelve years their apartment in Kendrick was a place of warm and generous hospitality, beautiful music, discussions on literature and art with books of every description, wild-life at the windowsill, and an ever sympathetic ear for students and colleagues alike. One sensed in their company the fullness and excitement of life and, what the German calls "Gemütlichkeit" which is such a rare thing today. To both Ada and Andreas Bister we pay tribute, for indeed during the years of their marriage they were one in spirit and one in the hearts of their friends.

Mrs. Bister came to the United States from Berlin in 1923. She received her M.A. from the University of Nebraska in 1928 and her Ph.D from the University of Wisconsin in 1936. In 1937 she came to Vassar on a one year appointment as an Exchange Assistant Professor of German from Scripps College. She then returned a year later to begin a long and fruitful career as a member of the Department and as Chairman for her last two years before failing health required her early retirement in 1960. These are but the bare facts of her academic training and professional status. Behind these facts sparkles Ada Bister's ever ready smile, her boundless enthusiasm for her work, her delightful, slightly roguish sense of humor, and her unparalleled valor and good spirits in the face of years of constant pain from which she could find no relief. She was able to forget and rise above her infirmities because of her varied interests and her deep sense that every moment is important and should be savored fully. Those of us who visited the Bisters in Germany found that she still had in her last months this undaunted spirit even though her health was completely deteriorating. Her letters too were filled with comments about books just read, the pleasures of visits from friends and relatives and the enjoyment of her lovely home and garden in Eutin, Holstein near the Danish border. To have known Ada Bister is to have

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known a vital and courageous woman.

Teaching was Mrs. Bister's first love. Colleagues and students can attest to her tireless, joyous pursuit of this, her profession. She was never too busy to help a beginner whom most others would have sent to a tutor and never too preoccupied with her own projects that she would not share her knowledge and insight with an advanced student seeking

inspiration or guidance. We will always remember Mrs. Bister for her delight in talking and those of us who knew her were well aware that behind what often seemed to be chit chat rolling from her nimble tongue was a genuine concern for ideas and causes. Her teaching was by no means limited to the classroom. In her office, in the German Club meetings and in her apartment she gave of herself and eagerly received stimulation from the young. For years she directed the German Christmas Play in the Chapel, having compiled it herself from several German medieval nativity plays. Students who took part in it under her direction gained a new sense of the real meaning of Christmas.

Though her interest in German literature and culture was varied, she was first and foremost a passionate Goethe scholar. Out of her dissertation came her major publication, an annotated bibliography of Goethe's Faust, Part II, published in 1939 under the title DER STREIT UM FAUST II SEIT 1900 with the aid of Vassar's Salmon Fund. In a newspaper article of August, 1949 upon the occasion of Goethe's bicentennial, Mrs. Bister mentioned the influence the poet had had on Albert Schweitzer who had gone to Aspen, Colorado as one of the guest speakers for the event, and there she quoted Goethe, saying that Schweitzer might well have had these lines in mind whenever he explained what Goethe had meant to him. We give them here, believing that they not only express the philosophy of life of Goethe and Schweitzer, whom Mrs. Bister admired so much, but also her own:

God in the hidden law, that fools call chance,
God in the star, the flower, the moondrawn wave,
God in the snake, the bird, and the wild beast,
God in the long ascension from the dark,
God in the body and the soul of man,
God uttering life, and God receiving death.

Ruth Hofrichter

Elizabeth Zorb

Mary Hillis

Mary B. Corcoran