

**Graves, A.K. (1914) *The Secrets of the German War Office* - Contemporary Review
GERMAN "SPY"; Are Dr. A.K. Graves's Revelations Genuine? - *New York Times*,
December 13, 1914, Review of Books**

GERMAN "SPY"

Are Dr. A. K. Graves's Revelations Genuine?

The writer of the letter reviewing Dr. Armgaard Karl Graves's "The Secrets of the German War Office" is a distinguished professor of history, whose writings are well known throughout the United States. At his request his name has been withheld from the following letter.

New York Times Review of Books:

ARE "The Secrets of the German War Office," by Dr. Armgaard Karl Graves, genuine revelations, or are they dangerous fiction and a hoax? The author claims to have served the War Office as a spy for ten years, and to have been a central figure in some of the most important political events of those years. His book is having a lively sale, as part of the important literature of the war. Collier's Weekly published the material serially before the war and treated it as authentic. But is it?

The author hints that he belongs to an eminent family and is bearing an assumed name. He says he was educated at a school for cadets, and later was graduated from a celebrated gymnasium and from one of the classic universities of Europe.

Why, then, does he write English in faultless and slick journalistic style, with never a trace that he ever thought or wrote in German? Why, on the other hand, does he always stumble when he ventures into German? He consistently misspells familiar German names—Schwereln for Schwerin, Weringrode for Wernigerode, Königgrätzerstrasse for Königgrätzerstrasse. Every German schoolboy knows the battle of Königgrätz as the most celebrated victory of the Prussians over the Austrians in 1866. Would an educated American write of the battle of Gettysburg? Dr. Graves speaks of the Grosser Generalstab instead of the Gross-Generalsstab, and of the Zweite Garde Dragoner instead of the Zweite Garde Dragoner. Additional mistakes could readily be collected.

The eighth chapter tells of an amazing secret conference of eminent diplomats of England, Austria, and Germany, held to isolate France. Dr. Graves was charged by the German War Office with the sole responsibility of protecting the secrecy and safety of the conference. It met in a shooting lodge in the mountains. But the trusted protector of the conference does not know in what mountain range it was. On Page 131 he says it was the Schwarzwald; on the next page he says it was the Taunus. The Schwarzwald, or Black Forest, runs north and south

along the Rhine south of Heidelberg. The Taunus runs east and west along the Rhine north of Wiesbaden and Heidelberg. We have heard of an English novelist mixing up the Catskills and Adirondacks because both are in New York. The name of the shooting lodge was Ehrenkrug. The author had probably forgotten that he had utilized that name for a vacation resort near Berlin (P. 76).

Dr. Graves occasionally refers to documentary evidence, but every reference is bluff, a literary trick to give an air of trustworthiness to his story. For instance, the Kaiser employed Dr. Graves to checkmate his own war party at Agadir, and paid him \$2,500 personally, "which the stubs of the royal check book will show." The Kaiser will, no doubt, be charmed to show his personal check book to any inquiring soul.

The author says he took his university degree in both philosophy and medicine in six semesters. (P. 4.) He did admirably. If we are not mistaken, the ordinary minimum for a student of medicine in Germany is eight semesters. But why does Dr. Graves talk like an outsider about German university life? German students do not "take their degrees" at the end of their university work; they "pass their Government examination." (Staatsexamen.) Degrees are usually taken some years later on the basis of scientific work.

A man who has mixed for ten years in such important affairs ought to betray his knowledge and experience on every page. In this book there is only one chapter, the one on "The German War Machine," which has any weight. The rest is flimsy stuff, which any man with a smattering of recent history and with an imagination trained by reading Sherlock Holmes might write. Mr. Graves may have been a secret service employe, and yet every story in this book may be fiction.

We might charitably assume that the misspellings and misquotations are due to bad proofreading. But the author has furnished documentary evidence against himself. He has inserted two fac similes to convince the public, and he has trapped himself with both. The frontispiece is a fac simile of his secret service card. But the seal on the card is a rubbing from a German 50-cent piece of 1912, in which the words "Zwei Mark" were left un-rubbed and the words "Geheim-Dienst" written in. The other fac simile (P. 134) shows the memorandum given him by Count von Wedel, the chief of the War Office, and enumerating the statesmen who were to meet at the secret conference in the Schwarzwald. (Or was it the Taunus?) They were Viscount Haldane, Winston Spencer Churchill, Herr von Kiderlen-Wächter, Gen. von Heeringen, Admiral von Tirpitz, and Moritz Ritter von Auffenberg. The name of the eminent Foreign Minister of the German Empire, Herr von Kiderlen-Wächter, is spelled "Kiderlen Wächter" throughout the

book. Let the proofreader bear the guilt for that. But how did the chief of the German War Office come to make the very same blunder? Would a first-class official at Washington call our eminent Americans Roosevelt or Briant? Has German Kultur broken down on spelling, too, or has Dr. Graves successfully hoaxed American readers?

The German Embassy at Washington thinks it is the latter. In a letter of Nov. 19, it says:

In reply to your favor of the 11th instant relating to Dr. A. K. Graves I beg to say that Mr. Graves has apparently served in the German Army, where he may have gained some knowledge of German institutions. Whether he has really been in the secret service or not, is doubtful. His book is, of course, pure fiction. Amongst the many proofs for that I beg to cite a few:

1—The frontispiece of his book, which is claimed to be a fac simile of an official document, bears the mention of "Imperial and Royal Service." Any one having some knowledge of the Constitution of the German Empire will realize the utter impossibility of such a mention in an official document.

2—The seal printed there is simply a print of a two-mark piece, where the inscription "Zwei Mark" has been superseded by the words "Geheim-Dienst."

The description which the author gives of the former Minister of War, General von Heeringen, is sufficient proof that he never saw that gentleman.

For the study of contemporary history Mr. Graves's book offers no more value than a Nick Carter novel. Very truly yours,

FOR THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR,
HAGBOLDT,
Councillor of the Embassy.

When Collier's Weekly published these stories before the war they were legitimate fiction. Today this is a dangerous book. England and France are in acute dread of the German spy system. No one knows how many persons have been shot as spies since the outbreak of the war. Germans, who have had their homes and their business in England for years, have been placed in concentration camps to make spying impossible. Germany and Austria have recently retaliated by collecting British residents in similar camps. Dr. Graves's book doubtless intensifies the fear of a mysterious, pervasive, and omniscient spy system, and may help to snuff out the life and liberty of innocent persons. We cannot afford to be fooled nowadays for the profit of an author.

Other posts of possible interest:

[Blyth, J. \(1909\) The Swoop of the Vulture - Contemporary Review](#)

[Blyth, J. \(1912\) The Peril of Pine's Place - Contemporary Review](#)

[Shiel, M.P. \(1898\) The Yellow Danger - Contemporary Review](#)