

The Story of My Life — Volume 01 eBook

The Story of My Life — Volume 01 by Georg Ebers

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BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I.

Glancing backward.

Though I was born in Berlin, it was also in the country. True, it was fifty-five years ago; for my birthday was March 1, 1837, and at that time the house—[No. 4 Thiergartenstrasse]—where I slept and played during the first years of my childhood possessed, besides a field and a meadow, an orchard and dense shrubbery, even a hill and a pond. Three big horses, the property of the owner of our residence, stood in the stable, and the lowing of a cow, usually an unfamiliar sound to Berlin children, blended with my earliest recollections.

The Thiergartenstrasse—along which in those days on sunny mornings, a throng of people on foot, on horseback, and in carriages constantly moved to and fro—ran past the front of these spacious grounds, whose rear was bounded by a piece of water then called the “Schafgraben,” and which, spite of the duckweed that covered it with a dark-green network of leafage, was used for boating in light skiffs.

Now a strongly built wall of masonry lines the banks of this ditch, which has been transformed into a deep canal bordered by the handsome houses of the Konigin Augustastrasse, and along which pass countless heavily laden barges called by the Berliners “Zillen.”

The land where I played in my childhood has long been occupied by the Matthaikirche, the pretty street which bears the same name, and a portion of Konigin Augustastrasse, but the house which we occupied and its larger neighbour are still surrounded by a fine garden.

This was an Eden for city children, and my mother had chosen it because she beheld it in imagination flowing with the true Garden of Paradise rivers of health and freedom for her little ones.

My father died on the 14th of February, 1837, and on the 1st of March of the same year I was born, a fortnight after the death of the man in whom my mother was bereft of both husband and lover. So I am what is termed a “posthumous” child. This is certainly a sorrowful fate; but though there were many hours, especially in the later years of my life, in which I longed for a father, it often seemed to me a noble destiny and one worthy of the deepest gratitude to have been appointed, from the first moment of my existence, to one of the happiest tasks, that of consolation and cheer.



It was to soothe a mother's heartbreak that I came in the saddest hours of her life, and, though my locks are now grey, I have not forgotten the joyful moments in which that dear mother hugged her fatherless little one, and among other pet names called him her "comfort child."

She told me also that posthumous children were always Fortune's favorites, and in her wise, loving way strove to make me early familiar with the thought that God always held in his special keeping those children whose fathers he had taken before their birth. This confidence accompanied me through all my after life.

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As I have said, it was long before I became aware that I lacked anything, especially any blessing so great as a father's faithful love and care; and when life showed to me also a stern face and imposed heavy burdens, my courage was strengthened by my happy confidence that I was one of Fortune's favorites, as others are buoyed up by their firm faith in their "star."

When the time at last came that I longed to express the emotions of my soul in verse, I embodied my mother's prediction in the lines:

The child who first beholds the light of day
After his father's eyes are closed for aye,
Fortune will guard from every threatening ill,
For God himself a father's place will fill.

People often told me that as the youngest, the nestling, I was my mother's "spoiled child"; but if anything spoiled me it certainly was not that. No child ever yet received too many tokens of love from a sensible mother; and, thank Heaven, the word applied to mine. Fate had summoned her to be both father and mother to me and my four brothers and sisters—one little brother, her second child, had died in infancy—and she proved equal to the task. Everything good which was and is ours we owe to her, and her influence over us all, and especially over me, who was afterward permitted to live longest in close relations with her, was so great and so decisive, that strangers would only half understand these stories of my childhood unless I gave a fuller description of her.

These details are intended particularly for my children, my brothers and sisters, and the dear ones connected with our family by ties of blood and friendship, but I see no reason for not making them also accessible to wider circles. There has been no lack of requests from friends that I should write them, and many of those who listen willingly when I tell romances will doubtless also be glad to learn something concerning the life of the fabulist, who, however, in these records intends to silence imagination and adhere rigidly to the motto of his later life, "To be truthful in love."

My mother's likeness as a young woman accompanies these pages, and must spare me the task of describing her appearance. It was copied from the life-size portrait completed for the young husband by Schadow just prior to his appointment as head of the Dusseldorf Academy of Art, and now in the possession of my brother, Dr. Martin Ebers of Berlin. Unfortunately, our copy lacks the colouring; and the dress of the original, which shows the whole figure, confirms the experience of the error committed in faithfully reproducing the fashion of the day in portraits intended for future generations. It never fully satisfied me; for it very inadequately reproduces what was especially precious to us in our mother and lent her so great a charm—her feminine grace, and the tenderness of heart so winningly expressed in her soft blue eyes.



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No one could help pronouncing her beautiful; but to me she was at once the fairest and the best of women, and if I make the suffering Stephanus in *Homo Sum* say, "For every child his own mother is the best mother," mine certainly was to me. My heart rejoiced when I perceived that every one shared this appreciation. At the time of my birth she was thirty-five, and, as I have heard from many old acquaintances, in the full glow of her beauty.

My father had been one of the Berlin gentlemen to whose spirit of self-sacrifice and taste for art the Konigstadt Theater owed its prosperity, and was thus brought into intimate relations with Carl von Holtei, who worked for its stage both as dramatist and actor. When, as a young professor, I told the grey-haired author in my mother's name something which could not fail to afford him pleasure, I received the most eager assent to my query whether he still remembered her. "How I thank your admirable mother for inducing you to write!" ran the letter. "Only I must enter a protest against your first lines, suggesting that I might have forgotten her. I forget the beautiful, gentle, clever, steadfast woman who (to quote Shakespeare's words) 'came adorned hither like sweet May,' and, stricken by the hardest blows so soon after her entrance into her new life, gloriously endured every trial of fate to become the fairest bride, the noblest wife, most admirable widow, and most faithful mother! No, my young unknown friend, I have far too much with which to reproach myself, have brought from the conflicts of a changeful life a lacerated heart, but I have never reached the point where that heart ceased to cherish Fanny Ebers among the most sacred memories of my chequered career. How often her loved image appears before me when, in lonely twilight hours, I recall the past!"

Yes, Fate early afforded my mother an opportunity to test her character. The city where shortly before my birth she became a widow was not her native place. My father had met her in Holland, when he was scarcely more than a beardless youth. The letter informing his relatives that he had determined not to give up the girl his heart had chosen was not regarded seriously in Berlin; but when the lover, with rare pertinacity, clung to his resolve, they began to feel anxious. The eldest son of one of the richest families in the city, a youth of nineteen, wished to bind himself for life—and to a foreigner—a total stranger.

My mother often told us that her father, too, refused to listen to the young suitor, and how, during that time of conflict, while she was with her family at Scheveningen, a travelling carriage drawn by four horses stopped one day before her parents' unpretending house. From this coach descended the future mother-in-law. She had come to see the paragon of whom her son had written so enthusiastically, and to learn whether it would be possible to yield to the youth's urgent desire to establish a household



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of his own. And she did find it possible; for the girl's rare beauty and grace speedily won the heart of the anxious woman who had really come to separate the lovers. True, they were required to wait a few years to test the sincerity of their affection. But it withstood the proof, and the young man, who had been sent to Bordeaux to acquire in a commercial house the ability to manage his father's banking business, did not hesitate an instant when his beautiful fiancée caught the smallpox and wrote that her smooth face would probably be disfigured by the malignant disease, but answered that what he loved was not only her beauty but the purity and goodness of her tender heart.

This had been a severe test, and it was to be rewarded: not the smallest scar remained to recall the illness. When my father at last made my mother his wife, the burgomaster of her native city told him that he gave to his keeping the pearl of Rotterdam. Post-horses took the young couple in the most magnificent weather to the distant Prussian capital. It must have been a delightful journey, but when the horses were changed in Potsdam the bride and groom received news that the latter's father was dead.

So my parents entered a house of mourning. My mother at that time had only the slight mastery of German acquired during hours of industrious study for her future husband's sake. She did not possess in all Berlin a single friend or relative of her own family, yet she soon felt at home in the capital. She loved my father. Heaven gave her children, and her rare beauty, her winning charm, and the receptivity of her mind quickly opened all hearts to her in circles even wider than her husband's large family connection. The latter included many households whose guests numbered every one whose achievements in science or art, or possession of large wealth, had rendered them prominent in Berlin, and the "beautiful Hollander," as my mother was then called, became one of the most courted women in society.

Holtei had made her acquaintance at this time, and it was a delight to hear her speak of those gay, brilliant days. How often Baron von Humboldt, Rauch, or Schleiermacher had escorted her to dinner! Hegel had kept a blackened coin won from her at whist. Whenever he sat down to play cards with her he liked to draw it out, and, showing it to his partner, say, "My thaler, fair lady."

My mother, admired and petted, had thoroughly enjoyed the happy period of my father's lifetime, entertaining as a hospitable hostess or visiting friends, and she gladly recalled it. But this brilliant life, filled to overflowing with all sorts of amusements, had been interrupted just before my birth.

The beloved husband had died, and the great wealth of our family, though enough remained for comfortable maintenance, had been much diminished.



Such changes of outward circumstances are termed reverses of fortune, and the phrase is fitting, for by them life gains a new form. Yet real happiness is more frequently increased than lessened, if only they do not entail anxiety concerning daily bread. My mother's position was far removed from this point; but she possessed qualities which would have undoubtedly enabled her, even in far more modest circumstances, to retain her cheerfulness and fight her way bravely with her children through life.



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The widow resolved that her sons should make their way by their own industry, like her brothers, who had almost all become able officials in the Dutch colonial service. Besides, the change in her circumstances brought her into closer relations with persons with whom by inclination and choice she became even more intimately associated than with the members of my father's family—I mean the clique of scholars and government officials amid whose circle her children grew up, and whom I shall mention later.

Our relatives, however, even after my father's death, showed the same regard for my mother—who on her side was sincerely attached to many of them—and urged her to accept the hospitality of their homes. I, too, when a child, still more in later years, owe to the Beer family many a happy hour. My father's cousin, Moritz von Oppenfeld, whose wife was an Ebers, was also warmly attached to us. He lived in a house which he owned on the Pariser Platz, now occupied by the French embassy, and in whose spacious apartments and elsewhere his kind heart and tender love prepared countless pleasures for our young lives.

CHAPTER II.

MY EARLIEST CHILDHOOD

My father died in Leipzigerstrasse, where, two weeks after, I was born. It is reported that I was an unusually sturdy, merry little fellow. One of my father's relatives, Frau Mosson, said that I actually laughed on the third day of my life, and several other proofs of my precocious cheerfulness were related by this lady.

So I must believe that—less wise than Lessing's son, who looked at life and thought it would be more prudent to turn his back upon it—I greeted with a laugh the existence which, amid beautiful days of sunshine, was to bring me so many hours of suffering.

Spring was close at hand; the house in noisy Leipzigerstrasse was distasteful to my mother, her soul longed for rest, and at that time she formed the resolutions according to which she afterward strove to train her boys to be able men. Her first object was to obtain pure air for the little children, and room for the larger ones to exercise. So she looked for a residence outside the gate, and succeeded in renting for a term of years No. 4 Thiergartenstrasse, which I have already mentioned.

The owner, Frau Kommissionsrath Reichert, had also lost her husband a short time before, and had determined to let the house, which stood near her own, stand empty rather than rent it to a large family of children.

Alone herself, she shrank from the noise of growing boys and girls. But she had a warm, kind heart, and—she told me this herself—the sight of the beautiful young mother in her deep mourning made her quickly forget her prejudice. “If she had brought ten

bawlers instead of five,” she remarked, “I would not have refused the house to that angel face.”

We all cherish a kindly memory of the vigorous, alert woman, with her round, bright countenance and laughing eyes. She soon became very intimate with my mother, and my second sister, Paula, was her special favorite, on whom she lavished every indulgence. Her horses were the first ones on which I was lifted, and she often took us with her in the carriage or sent us to ride in it.



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I still remember distinctly some parts of our garden, especially the shady avenue leading from our balcony on the ground floor to the Schafgraben, the pond, the beautiful flower-beds in front of Frau Reichert's stately house, and the field of potatoes where I—the gardener was the huntsman—saw my first partridge shot. This was probably on the very spot where for many years the notes of the organ have pealed through the Matthaikirche, and the Word of God has been expounded to a congregation whose residences stand on the playground of my childhood.

The house which sheltered us was only two stories high, but pretty and spacious. We needed abundant room, for, besides my mother, the five children, and the female servants, accommodation was required for the governess, and a man who held a position midway between porter and butler and deserved the title of factotum if any one ever did. His name was Kurschner; he was a big-boned, square-built fellow about thirty years old, who always wore in his buttonhole the little ribbon of the order he had gained as a soldier at the siege of Antwerp, and who had been taken into the house by our mother for our protection, for in winter our home, surrounded by its spacious grounds, was very lonely.

As for us five children, first came my oldest sister Martha—now, alas! dead—the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Baron Curt von Brandenstein, and my brother Martin, who were seven and five years older than I.

They were, of course, treated differently from us younger ones.

Paula was my senior by three years; Ludwig, or Ludo—he was called by his nickname all his life—by a year and a half.

Paula, a fresh, pretty, bright, daring child, was often the leader in our games and undertakings. Ludo, who afterward became a soldier and as a Prussian officer did good service in the war, was a gentle boy, somewhat delicate in health—the broad-shouldered man shows no trace of it—and the best of playfellows. We were always together, and were frequently mistaken for twins. We shared everything, and on my birthday, gifts were bestowed on him too; on his, upon me.

Each had forgotten the first person singular of the personal pronoun, and not until comparatively late in life did I learn to use “I” and “me” in the place of “we” and “us.”

The sequence of events in this quiet country home has, of course, vanished from my mind, and perhaps many which I mention here occurred in Lennestrasse, where we moved later, but the memories of the time we spent in the Thiergarten overlooked by our second home—are among the brightest of my life. How often the lofty trees and dense shrubbery of our own grounds and the beautiful Berlin Thiergarten rise before my mental vision, when my thoughts turn backward and I see merry children playing among them, and hear their joyous laughter!

Fairytales and fact.

What happened in the holy of holies, my mother's chamber, has remained, down to the smallest details, permanently engraved upon my soul.



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A mother's heart is like the sun—no matter how much light it diffuses, its warmth and brilliancy never lessen; and though so lavish a flood of tenderness was poured forth on me, the other children were no losers. But I was the youngest, the comforter, the nestling; and never was the fact of so much benefit to me as at that time.

My parents' bed stood in the green room with the bright carpet. It had been brought from Holland, and was far larger and wider than bedsteads of the present day. My mother had kept it. A quilted silk coverlet was spread over it, which felt exquisitely soft, and beneath which one could rest delightfully. When the time for rising came, my mother called me. I climbed joyfully into her warm bed, and she drew her darling into her arms, played all sorts of pranks with him, and never did I listen to more beautiful fairy tales than at those hours. They became instinct with life to me, and have always remained so; for my mother gave them the form of dramas, in which I was permitted to be an actor.

The best one of all was Little Red Riding Hood. I played the little girl who goes into the wood, and she was the wolf. When the wicked beast had disguised itself in the grandmother's cap I not only asked the regulation questions: "Grandmother, what makes you have such big eyes? Grandmother, why is your skin so rough?" *etc.*, but invented new ones to defer the grand final effect, which followed the words, "Grandmother, why do you have such big, sharp teeth?" and the answer, "So that I can eat you," whereupon the wolf sprang on me and devoured me—with kisses.

Another time I was Snow-White and she the wicked step-mother, and also the hunter, the dwarf, and the handsome prince who married her.

How real this merry sport made the distress of persecuted innocence, the terrors and charm of the forest, the joys and splendours of the fairy realm! If the flowers in the garden had raised their voices in song, if the birds on the boughs had called and spoken to me—nay, if a tree had changed into a beautiful fairy, or the toad in the damp path of our shaded avenue into a witch—it would have seemed only natural.

It is a singular thing that actual events which happened in those early days have largely vanished from my memory; but the fairy tales I heard and secretly experienced became firmly impressed on my mind. Education and life provided for my familiarity with reality in all its harshness and angles, its strains and hurts; but who in later years could have flung wide the gates of the kingdom where everything is beautiful and good, and where ugliness is as surely doomed to destruction as evil to punishment? Even poesy in our times turns from the Castalian fount whose crystal-clear water becomes an unclean pool and, though reluctantly, obeys the impulse to make its abode in the dust of reality. Therefore I plead with voice and pen in behalf of fairy tales; therefore I tell them to my children and grandchildren, and have even written a volume of them myself.



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How perverse and unjust it is to banish the fairy tale from the life of the child, because devotion to its charm might prove detrimental to the grown person! Has not the former the same claim to consideration as the latter?

Every child is entitled to expect a different treatment and judgment, and to receive what is his due undiminished. Therefore it is unjust to injure and rob the child for the benefit of the man. Are we even sure that the boy is destined to attain the second and third stages—youth and manhood?

True, there are some apostles of caution who deny themselves every joy of existence while in their prime, in order, when their locks are grey, to possess wealth which frequently benefits only their heirs.

All sensible mothers will doubtless, like ours, take care that their children do not believe the stories which they tell them to be true. I do not remember any time when, if my mind had been called upon to decide, I should have thought that anything I invented myself had really happened; but I know that we were often unable to distinguish whether the plausible tale related by some one else belonged to the realm of fact or fiction. On such occasions we appealed to my mother, and her answer instantly set all doubts at rest; for we thought she could never be mistaken, and knew that she always told the truth.

As to the stories invented by myself, I fared like other imaginative children. I could imagine the most marvellous things about every member of the household, and while telling them—but only during that time—I often fancied that they were true; yet the moment I was asked whether these things had actually occurred, it seemed as if I woke from a dream. I at once separated what I had imagined from what I had actually experienced, and it would never have occurred to me to persist against my better knowledge. So the vividly awakened power of imagination led neither me, my brothers and sisters, nor my children and grandchildren into falsehood.

In after years I abhorred it, not only because my mother would rather have permitted any other offence to pass unpunished, but because I had an opportunity of perceiving its ugliness very early in life. When only seven or eight years old I heard a boy—I still remember his name—tell his mother a shameless lie about some prank in which I had shared. I did not interrupt him to vindicate the truth, but I shrank in horror with the feeling of having witnessed a crime.

If Ludo and I, even in the most critical situations, adhered to the truth more rigidly than other boys, we “little ones” owe it especially to our sister Paula, who was always a fanatic in its cause, and even now endures many an annoyance because she scorns the trivial “necessary fibs” deemed allowable by society.



True, the interesting question of how far necessary fibs are justifiable among children, is yet to be considered; but what did we know of such necessity in our sports in the Thiergarten? From what could a lie have saved us except a blow from a beloved mother's little hand, which, it is true, when any special misdeed was punished by a box on the ear, could inflict a tolerable amount of pain by means of the rings which adorned it.



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There is a tradition that once when she had slapped Paula's pretty face, the odd child rubbed her cheek and said, with the droll calmness that rarely deserted her, "When you want to strike me again, mother, please take off your rings first."

The governess—the cemetery.

During the time we lived in the Thiergarten my mother's hand scarcely ever touched my face except in a caress. Every memory of her is bright and beautiful. I distinctly remember how merrily she jested and played with us, and from my earliest recollections her beloved face always greets me cheerily. Yet she had moved to the Thiergarten with a heart oppressed by the deepest sorrow.

I know from the woman who accompanied her there as the governess of the two eldest children, and became a faithful friend, how deeply she needed consolation, how completely her feelings harmonized with the widow's weeds she wore, and in which she is said to have been so beautiful.

The name of this rare woman was Bernhardine Kron. A native of Mecklenburg, she united to rich and wide culture the sterling character, warmth of feeling, and fidelity of this sturdy and sympathetic branch of the German nation. She soon became deeply attached to the young widow, to whose children she was to devote her best powers, and, in after years, her eyes often grew dim when she spoke of the time during which she shared our mother's grief and helped her in her work of education.

Both liked to recall in later days the quiet evenings when, after the rest of the household had retired, they read alone or discussed what stirred their hearts. Each gave the other what she could. The German governess went through our classic authors with her employer, and my mother read to her the works of Racine and Corneille, and urged her to speak French and English with her; for, like many natives of Holland, her mastery of both languages was as thorough as if she had grown up in Paris or London. The necessity of studying and sharing her own rich intellectual possessions continued to be a marked trait in my mother's character until late in life, and how much cause for gratitude we all have for the share she gave us of her own knowledge and experience!

Fraulein Kron always deeply appreciated the intellectual development she owed to her employer, while the latter never forgot the comfort and support bestowed by the faithful governess in the most sorrowful days of her life. When I first became conscious of my surroundings, these days were over; but in saying that my first recollections of my mother were bright and cheerful, I forgot the hours devoted to my father's memory. She rarely brought them to our notice; a certain chaste reserve, even later in life, prevented her showing her deepest grief to others. She always strove to cope with her sorest trials alone. Her sunny nature shrank from diffusing shadow and darkness around her.



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On the 14th of February, the anniversary of my father's death, wherever she might be, she always withdrew from the members of the household, and even her own children. A second occasion of sharing her sorrowful emotion was repeated several times every summer. This was the visit to the cemetery, which she rarely made alone.

The visits impressed us all strongly, and the one I first remember could not have occurred later than my fifth year, for I distinctly recollect that Frau Rapp's horses took us to the churchyard. My father was buried in the Dreifaltigkeitskirchhof,—[Trinity churchyard]—just outside the Halle Gate. I found it so little changed when I entered it again, two years ago, that I could walk without a guide directly to the Ebers family vault. But what a transformation had taken place in the way!

When we visited it with my mother, which was always in carriages, for it was a long distance from our home, we drove quickly through the city, the gate, and as far as the spot where I found the stately pile of the brick Kreuzkirche; then we turned to the right, and if we had come in cabs we children got out, it was so hard for the horses to drag the vehicles over the sandy road which led to the cemetery.

During this walk we gathered blue cornflowers and scarlet poppies from the fields, bluebells, daisies, ranunculus, and snapdragon from the narrow border of turf along the roadside, and tied them into bouquets for the graves. My mother moved silently with us between the rows of grassy mounds, tombstones, and crosses, while we carried the pots of flowers and wreaths, which, to afford every one the pleasure of helping, she had distributed among us at the gravedigger's house, just back of the cemetery.

Our family burial place—my mother's stone cross now stands there beside my father's—was one of those bounded in the rear by the church yard wall; a marble slab set in the masonry bears the owner's name. It is large enough for us all, and lies at the right of the path between Count Kalckreuth's and the stately mausoleum which contains the earthly remains of Moritz von Oppenfeld—who was by far the dearest of our father's relatives—and his family.

My mother led the way into the small enclosure, which was surrounded by an iron railing, and prayed or thought silently of the beloved dead who rested there.

Is there any way for us Protestants, when love for the dead longs to find expression in action, except to adorn with flowers the places which contain their earthly remains? Their bright hues and a child's beaming face are the only cheerful things which a mourner whose wounds are still bleeding freshly beside a coffin can endure to see, and I might compare flowers to the sound of bells. Both are in place and welcome in the supreme moments of life.



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Therefore my mother, besides a heart full of love, always brought to my father's grave children and flowers. When she had satisfied the needs of her own soul, she turned to us, and with cheerful composure directed the decoration of the mound. Then she spoke of our father, and if any of us had recently incurred punishment—one instance of this kind is indelibly impressed on my memory—she passed her arms around the child, and in whispered words, which no one else could hear, entreated the son or daughter not to grieve her so again, but to remember the dead. Such an admonition on this spot could not fail to produce its effect, and brought forgiveness with it.

On our return our hands and hearts were free again, and we were at liberty to use our tongues. During these visits my interest in Schleiermacher was awakened, for his grave—he died in 1834, three years before I was born—lay near our lot, and we often stopped before the stone erected by his friends, grateful pupils, and admirers. It was adorned with his likeness in marble; and my mother, who had frequently met him, pausing in front of it, told us about the keen-sighted theologian, philosopher, and pulpit orator, whose teachings, as I was to learn later, had exerted the most powerful influence upon my principal instructors at Keilhau. She also knew his best enigmas; and the following one, whose terse brevity is unsurpassed:

“Parted I am sacred,
United abominable”—

she had heard him propound himself. The answer, “Mein eid” (my oath), and “Meineid” (perjury), every one knows.

Nothing was further from my mother's intention than to make these visits to the cemetery special memorial days; on the contrary, they were inter-woven into our lives, not set at regular intervals or on certain dates, but when her heart prompted and the weather was favourable for out-of-door excursions. Therefore they became associated in our minds with happy and sacred memories.

CHAPTER III.

ON FESTAL DAYS

The celebration of a memorial day by outward forms was one of my mother's customs; for, spite of her sincerity of feeling, she favoured external ceremonies, and tried when we were very young to awaken a sense of their meaning in our minds.

On all festal occasions we children were freshly dressed from top to toe, and all of us, including the servants, had cakes at breakfast, and the older ones wine at dinner.

On the birthdays these cakes were surrounded by as many candles as we numbered years, and provision was always made for a dainty arrangement of gifts. While we were



young, my mother distinguished the “birthday child” —probably in accordance with some custom of her native country—by a silk scarf. She liked to celebrate her own birthday, too, and ever since I can remember—it was on the 25th of July—we had a picnic at that time.



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We knew that it was a pleasure to her to see us at her table on that day, and, up to the last years of her life, all whose vocations permitted met at her house on the anniversary.

She went to church on Sunday, and on Good Friday she insisted that my sisters as well as her self should wear black, not only during the service, but throughout the rest of the day.

Few children enjoyed a more beautiful Christmas than ours, for under the tree adorned with special love each found the desire of his or her heart gratified, while behind the family gift-table there always stood another, on which several poorer people whom I might call "clients" of the household, discovered presents which suited their needs. Among them, up to the time I went as a boy of eleven to Keilhau, I never failed to see my oldest sister's nurse with her worthy husband, the shoemaker Grossman, and their well-behaved children. She gladly permitted us to share in the distribution of the alms liberally bestowed on the needy. The seeming paradox, "No one ever grew poor by giving," I first heard from her lips, and she more than once found an opportunity to repeat it.

We, however, never valued her gifts of money so highly as the trouble and inconveniences she cheerfully encountered to aid or add to the happiness of others by means of the numerous relations formed in her social life and the influence gained mainly by her own gracious nature. Many who are now occupying influential positions owe their first start or have had the path smoothed for them by her kindness.

As in many Berlin families, the Christmas Man came to us—an old man disguised by a big beard and provided with a bag filled with nuts and bonbons and sometimes trifling gifts. He addressed us in a feigned voice, saying that the Christ Child had sent him, but the dainties he had were intended only for the good children who could recite some thing for him. Of course, provision for doing this had been made. Everybody pressed forward, but the Christmas Man kept order, and only when each had repeated a little verse did he open the bag and distribute its contents among us.

Usually the Christmas Man brought a companion, who followed him in the guise of Knecht Ruprecht with his own bag of presents, and mingled with his jests threats against naughty children.

The carp served on Christmas eve in every Berlin family, after the distribution of gifts, and which were never absent from my mother's table, I have always had on my own in Jena, Leipsic, and Munich, or wherever the evening of December 24th might find us. On the whole, we remain faithful to the Christmas customs of my own home, which vary little from those of the Germans in Riga, where my wife's family belong; nay, it is so hard for me to relinquish such childish habits, that, when unable to procure a Christmas tree for the two "Eves" I spent on the Nile, I decked a young palm and fastened candles on it.



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My mother's permission that Knecht Ruprecht should visit us was contrary to her principle never to allow us to be frightened by images of horror. Nay, if she heard that the servants threatened us with the Black Man and other hobgoblins of Berlin nursery tales, she was always very angry. The arguments by which my wife induced me to banish the Christmas Man and Knecht Ruprecht seem still more cogent, now that I think I understand the hearts of children. It is certainly far more beautiful and just as easy-if we desire to utilize Christmas gifts for educational purposes—to stimulate children to goodness by telling them of the pleasure it will give the little Christ Child, rather than by filling them with dread of Knecht Ruprecht.

True, my mother did not fail to endeavor to inspire us with love for the Christ Child and the Saviour, and to draw us near to him. She saw in him, above all else, the embodiment of love, and loved him because her loving heart understood his. In after years my own investigation and thought brought me to the same conviction which she had reached through the relation of her feminine nature to the person and teachings of her Saviour. I perceived that the world as Jesus Christ found it owes him nothing grander, more beautiful, loftier, or more pregnant with importance than that he widened the circle of love which embraced only the individual, the family, the city, or, at the utmost, the country of which a person was a citizen, till it included all mankind, and this human love, of which my mother's life gave us practical proof, is the banner under which all the genuine progress of mankind in later years has been made.

Nineteen centuries have passed since the one that gave us Him who died on the cross, and how far we are still from a perfect realization of this noblest of all the emotions of the heart and spirit! And yet, on the day when this human love has full sway, the social problems which now disturb so many minds and will permit the brains of our best citizens to take no rest, will be solved.

Other obligations to my mother, and A summary of the new and great events which befell the Germans during my life.

I omit saying more of my mother's religious feelings and relations to God, because I know that it would be contrary to her wishes to inform strangers of the glimpse she afterward afforded me of the inmost depths of her soul.

That, like every other mother, she clasped our little hands in prayer is a matter of course. I could not fall asleep until she had done this and given me my good-night kiss. How often I have dreamed of her when, before going to some entertainment, she came in full evening dress to hear me repeat my little prayer and bid us good-bye!

But she also provided most carefully for the outward life; nay, perhaps she laid a little too much stress upon our manners in greeting strangers, at table, and elsewhere.



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Among these forms I might number the fluent use of the French language, which my mother early bestowed upon us as if its acquisition was mere sport-bestowed; for, unhappily, I know of no German grammar school where pupils can learn to speak French with facility; and how many never-to-be-forgotten memories of travel, what great benefits during my period of study in Paris I owe to this capacity! We obtained it by the help of *bonnes*, who found it easier to speak French to us because our mother always did the same in their presence.

My mother considered it of the first importance to make us familiar with French at a very early age, because, when she reached Berlin with a scanty knowledge of German, her mastery of French secured numerous pleasant things. She often told us how highly French was valued in the capital, and we must believe that the language possesses an imperishable charm for Germans when we remember that this was the case so shortly after the glorious uprising against the terrible despotism of France. True, French, in addition to its melody and ambiguity, possesses more subtle turns and apt phrases than most other languages; and even the most German of Germans, our Bismarck, must recognize the fitness of its phrases, because he likes to avail himself of them. He has a perfect knowledge of French, and I have noticed that, whenever he mingles it with German, the former has some sentence which enables him to communicate in better and briefer language whatever he may desire to express. What German form of speech, for instance, can convey the idea of fulness which will permit no addition so well as the French popular saying, "Full as an egg," which pleased me in its native land, and which first greeted me in Germany as an expression used by the great chancellor?

My mother's solicitude concerning good manners and perfection in speaking French, which so easily renders children mere dolls, fortunately could not deprive us of our natural freshness and freedom from constraint. But if any peril to the character does lurk in being unduly mindful of external forms, we three brothers were destined to spend a large portion of our boyhood amid surroundings which, as it were, led us back to Nature. Besides, even in Berlin we were not forbidden to play like genuine boys. We had no lack of playmates of both sexes, and with them we certainly talked and shouted no French, but sturdy Berlin German.

In winter, too, we were permitted to enjoy ourselves out of doors, and few boys made handsomer snow-men than those our worthy Kurschner—always with the order in his buttonhole—helped us build in Thiergartenstrasse.

In the house we were obliged to behave courteously, and when I recall the appearance of things there I become vividly aware that no series of years witnessed more decisive changes in every department of life in Germany than those of my boyhood. The furnishing of the rooms differed little from that of the present day, except that the chairs and tables were somewhat more angular and the cushions less comfortable. Instead of the little knobs of the electric bells, a so-called "bell-rope," about the width of one's hand, provided with a brass or metal handle, hung beside the doors.



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The first introduction of gas into the city was made by an English company about ten years before my birth; but how many oil lamps I still saw burning, and in my school days the manufacturing city of Kottbus, which at that time contained about ten thousand inhabitants, was lighted by them! In my childhood gas was not used in the houses and theatres of Berlin, and kerosene had not found its way to Germany. The rooms were lighted by oil lamps and candles, while the servants burned tallow-dips. The latter were also used in our nursery, and during the years which I spent at school in Keilhau all our studying was done by them.

Matches were not known. I still remember the tinder box in the kitchen, the steel, the flint, and the threads dipped in sulphur. The sparks made by striking fell on the tinder and caught it on fire here and there. Soon after the long, rough lucifer matches appeared, which were dipped into a little bottle filled, I believe, with asbestos wet with sulphuric acid.

We never saw the gardener light his pipe except with flint, steel, and tinder. The gun he used had a firelock, and when he had put first powder, then a wad, then shot, and lastly another wad into the barrel, he was obliged to shake some powder into the pan, which was lighted by the sparks from the flint striking the steel, if the rain did not make it too damp.

For writing we used exclusively goose-quills, for though steel pens were invented soon after I was born, they were probably very imperfect; and, moreover, had to combat a violent prejudice, for at the first school we attended we were strictly forbidden to use them. So the penknife played an important part on every writing-desk, and it was impossible to imagine a good penman who did not possess skill in the art of shaping the quills.

What has been accomplished between 1837 and the present date in the way of means of communication I need not recapitulate. I only know how long a time was required for a letter from my mother's brothers—one was a resident of Java and the other lived as "Opperhoofd" in Japan—to reach Berlin, and how often an opportunity was used, generally through the courtesy of the Netherland embassy, for sending letters or little gifts to Holland. A letter forwarded by express was the swiftest way of receiving or giving news; but there was the signal telegraph, whose arms we often saw moving up and down, but exclusively in the service of the Government. When, a few years ago, my mother was ill in Holland, a reply to a telegram marked "urgent" was received in Leipsic in eighteen minutes. What would our grandparents have said to such a miracle?

We were soon to learn by experience the number of days required to reach my mother's home from Berlin, for there was then no railroad to Holland.

The remarkable changes wrought during my lifetime in the political affairs of Germany I can merely indicate here. I was born in despotic Prussia, which was united to Austria

and the German states and small countries by a loosely formed league. As guardians of this wretched unity the various courts sent diplomats to Frankfort, who interrupted their careless mode of life only to sharpen distrust of other courts or suppress some democratic movement.



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The Prussian nation first obtained in 1848 the liberties which had been secured at an earlier date by the other German states, and nothing gives me more cause for gratitude than the boon of being permitted to see the realization and fulfilment of the dream of so many former generations, and my dismembered native land united into one grand, beautiful whole. I deem it a great happiness to have been a contemporary of Emperor William I, Bismarck, and Von Moltke, witnessed their great deeds as a man of mature years, and shared the enthusiasm they evoked and which enabled these men to make our German Fatherland the powerful, united empire it is to-day.

The journey to Holland closes the first part of my childhood. I look back upon it as a beautiful, unshadowed dream out of doors or in a pleasant house where everybody loved me. But I could not single out the years, months, or days of this retrospect. It is only a smooth stream which bears us easily along. There is no series of events, only disconnected images—a faithful dog, a picture on the wall, above all the love and caresses of the mother lavished specially on me as the youngest, and the most blissful of all sounds in the life of a German child, the ringing of the little bell announcing that the Christmas tree is ready.

Only in after days, when the world of fairyland and legend is left behind, does the child have any idea of consecutive events and human destinies. The stories told by mother and grandmother about Snow-White, the Sleeping Beauty, the giants and the dwarfs, Cinderella, the stable at Bethlehem where the Christ-Child lay in the manger beside the oxen and asses, the angels who appeared to the shepherds singing “Glory to God in the Highest,” the three kings and the star which led them to the Christ-Child, are firmly impressed on his memory. I don’t know how young I was when I saw the first picture of the kings in their purple robes kneeling before the babe in its mother’s lap, but its forms and hues were indelibly stamped upon my mental vision, and I never forgot its meaning. True, I had no special thoughts concerning it; nay, I scarcely wondered to see kings in the dust before a child, and now, when I hear the summons of the purest and noblest of Beings, “Suffer little children to come unto me,” and understand the sacred simplicity of a child’s heart, it no longer awakens surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

The journey to Holland to attend the golden wedding.

The rattle of wheels and the blast of the postilion’s horn closed the first period of my childhood. When I was four years old we went to my mother’s home to attend my grandparents’ golden wedding. If I wished to describe the journey in its regular order I should be forced to depend upon the statements of others. So little of all which grown people deem worth seeing and noting in Belgium, Holland, and



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on the Rhine has remained in my memory, that I cannot help smiling when I hear people say that they intend to take children travelling for their amusement and instruction. In our case we were put in the carriage because my mother would not leave us behind, and wanted to give our grandparents pleasure by our presence. She was right, but in spite of my inborn love of travel the month we spent on the journey seemed a period of very uncomfortable restlessness. A child realizes only a single detail of beauty—a flower, a radiant star, a human face. Any individual recollection of the journey to Holland, aside from what has been told me, is getting into the travelling carriage, a little green leather Bajazzo dressed in red and white given to me by a relative, and the box of candies bestowed to take on the trip by a friend of my mother.

Of our reception in the Belgian capital at the house of Adolphe Jones, the husband of my aunt Henriette, a sister of my mother, I retain many recollections.

Our pleasant host was a painter of animals, whom I afterward saw sharing his friend Verboeckhoven's studio, and whose flocks of sheep were very highly praised. At that time his studio was in his own house, and it seems as if I could still hear the call in my aunt's shrill voice, repeated countless times a day, "Adolphe!" and the answer, following promptly in the deepest bass tones, "Henriette!" This singular freak, which greatly amused us, was due, as I learned afterward, to my aunt's jealousy, which almost bordered on insanity.

In later years I learned to know him as a jovial artist, who in the days of his youth very possibly might have given the strait-laced lady cause for anxiety. Even when his locks were white he was ready for any pleasure; but he devoted himself earnestly to art, and I am under obligation to him for being the means of my mother's possessing the friendship of the animal painter, Verboeckhoven, and that greatest of more modern Belgian artists, Louis Gallait and his family, in whose society and home I have passed many delightful hours.

In recalling our arrival at the Jones house I first see the merry, smiling face—somewhat faunlike in its expression—of my six-foot uncle, and the plump figure of his wonderfully good and when undisturbed by jealousy—no less cheery wife. There was something specially winning and lovable about her, and I have heard that this lady, my mother's oldest sister, possessed in her youth the same dazzling beauty. At the famous ball in Brussels this so captivated the Duke of Wellington that he offered her his arm to escort her back to her seat. My mother also remembered the Napoleonic days, and I thought she had been specially favoured in seeing this great man when he entered Rotterdam, and also Goethe.



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I remember my grandfather as a stately old gentleman. He, as well as the other members of the family, called me Georg Krullebol, which means curly-head, to distinguish me from a cousin called Georg von Gent. I also remember that when, on the morning of December 5th, St. Nicholas day, we children took our shoes to put on, we found them, to our delight, stuffed with gifts; and lastly that on Christmas Eve the tree which had been prepared for us in a room on the ground floor attracted such a crowd of curious spectators in front of the Jones house that we were obliged to close the shutters. Of my grandparents' day of honor I remember nothing except a large room filled with people, and the minutes during which I repeated my little verse. I can still see myself in a short pink skirt, with a wreath of roses on my fair curls, wings on my shoulders, a quiver on my back, and a bow in my hand, standing before the mirror very much pleased with my appearance. Our governess had composed little Cupid's speech, my mother had drilled me thoroughly in it, so I do not remember a moment of anxiety and embarrassment, but merely that it afforded me the purest, deepest pleasure to be permitted to do something.

I must have behaved with the utmost ease before the spectators, many of whom I knew, for I can still hear the loud applause which greeted me, and see myself passed from one to another till I fled from the kisses and pet names of grandparents, aunts, and cousins to my mother's lap. Of the bride and groom of this golden wedding I remember only that my grandfather wore short trousers called 'escarpins' and stockings reaching to the knee. My grandmother, spite of her sixty-six years—she married before she was seventeen—was said to look remarkably pretty. Later I often saw the heavy white silk dress strewn with tiny bouquets which she wore as a bride and again remodelled at her silver wedding; for after her death it was left to my mother. Modern wedding gowns are not treasured so long. I have often wondered why I recollect my grandfather so distinctly and my grandmother so dimly. I have a clear idea of her personal appearance, but this I believe I owe much more to her portrait which hung in my mother's room beside her husband's, and is now one of my own most cherished possessions. Bradley, one of the best English portrait painters, executed it, and all connoisseurs pronounce it a masterpiece.

This festival lives in my memory like the fresh spring morning of a day whose noon is darkened by clouds, and which ends in a heavy thunderstorm.

Black clouds had gathered over the house adorned with garlands and flowers, echoing for days with the gay conversations, jests, and congratulations of the relatives united after long separation and the mirth of children and grandchildren. Not a loud word was permitted to be uttered. We felt that something terrible was impending, and people called it grandfather's illness. Never had I seen my mother's sunny face so anxious and sad. She rarely came to us, and when she did for a short time her thoughts were far away, for she was nursing her father.



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Then the day which had been dreaded came. Wherever we looked the women were weeping and the eyes of the men were reddened by tears. My mother, pale and sorrowful, told us that our dear grandfather was dead.

Children cannot understand the terrible solemnity of death. This is a gift bestowed by their guardian angels, that no gloomy shadows may darken the sunny brightness of their souls.

I saw only that cheerful faces were changed to sad ones, that the figures about us moved silently in sable robes and scarcely noticed us. On the tables in the nursery, where our holiday garments were made, black clothes were being cut for us also, and I remember having my mourning dress fitted. I was pleased because it was a new one. I tried to manufacture a suit for my Berlin Jack-in-the-box from the scraps that fell from the dressmaker's table. Nothing amuses a child so much as to imitate what older people are doing. We were forbidden to laugh, but after a few days our mother no longer checked our mirth. Of our stay at Scheveningen I recollect nothing except that the paths in the little garden of the house we occupied were strewn with shells. We dug a big hole in the sand on the downs, but I retained no remembrance of the sea and its majesty, and when I beheld it in later years it seemed as if I were greeting for the first time the eternal Thalassa which was to become so dear and familiar to me.

My grandmother, I learned, passed away scarcely a year after the death of her faithful companion, at the home of her son, a lawyer in The Hague.

Two incidents of the journey back are vividly impressed on my mind. We went by steamer up the Rhine, and stopped at Ehrenbreitstein to visit old Frau Mendelssohn, our guardian's mother, at her estate of Horchheim. The carriage had been sent for us, and on the drive the spirited horses ran away and would have dashed into the Rhine had not my brother Martin, at that time eleven years old, who was sitting on the box by the coachman, saved us.

The other incident is of a less serious nature. I had seen many a salmon in the kitchen, and resolved to fish for one from the steamer; so I tied a bit of candy to a string and dropped it from the deck. The fish were so wanting in taste as to disdain the sweet bait, but my early awakened love of sport kept me patiently a long time in the same spot, which was undoubtedly more agreeable to my mother than the bait was to the salmon. As, protected by the guards, and probably watched by the governess and my brothers and sisters, I devoted myself to this amusement, my mother went down into the cabin to rest. Suddenly there was a loud uproar on the ship. People shouted and screamed, everybody rushed on deck and looked into the river. Whether I, too, heard the fall and saw the life-boat manned I don't remember; but I recollect all the more clearly my mother's rushing frantically from the cabin and clasping me tenderly to her heart as her rescued child. So the drama ended happily, but there had been a terrible scene.



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Among the steamer's passengers was a crazy Englishman who was being taken, under the charge of a keeper, to an insane asylum. While my mother was asleep the lunatic succeeded in eluding this man's vigilance and plunged into the river. Of course, there was a tumult on board, and my mother heard cries of "Fallen into the river!"

"Save!" "He'll drown!" Maternal anxiety instantly applied them to the child-angler, and she darted up the cabin stairs. I need not describe the state of mind in which she reached the deck, and her emotion when she found her nestling in his place, still holding the line in his hand.

As the luckless son of Albion was rescued unharmed, we could look back upon the incident gaily, but neither of us forgot this anxiety—the first I was to cause my mother.

I have forgotten everything else that happened on our way home; but when I think of this first journey, a long one for so young a child, and the many little trips—usually to Dresden, where my grandmother Ebers lived—which I was permitted to take, I wonder whether they inspired the love of travel which moved me so strongly later, or whether it was an inborn instinct. If a popular superstition is correct, I was predestined to journey. No less a personage than Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten system, called my attention to it; for when I met him for the first time in the Institute at Keilhau, he seized my curly hair, bent my head back, gazed at me with his kind yet penetrating eyes, and said: "You will wander far through the world, my boy; your teeth are wide apart."

CHAPTER V.

Lennestrasse.—Lenne.—Early impressions.

Lennestrasse is the scene of the period of my life which began with my return from Holland. If, coming from the Brandenburg Gate, you follow the Thiergarten and pass the superb statue of Goethe, you will reach a corner formed by two blocks of houses. The one on the left, opposite to the city wall, now called Koniggratz, was then known as Schulgartenstrasse. The other, on the right, whose windows overlooked the Thiergarten, bore the name in my childhood of Lennestrasse, which it owed to Lenne, the park superintendent, a man of great talent, but who lives in my memory only as a particularly jovial old gentleman. He occupied No. 1, and was one of my mother's friends. Next to Prince Packler, he may certainly be regarded as one of the most inventive and tasteful landscape gardeners of his time. He transformed the gardens of Sans-Souci and the Pfaueninsel at Potsdam, and laid out the magnificent park on Babelsberg for Emperor William I, when he was only "Prince of Prussia." The magnificent Zoological Garden in Berlin is also his work; but he prided himself most on rendering the Thiergarten a "lung" for the people, and, spite of many obstacles, materially enlarging it. Every moment of the tireless man's time was claimed, and



besides King Frederick William IV, who himself uttered many a tolerably good joke, found much pleasure in the society of the gay, clever Rhinelander, whom he often summoned to dine with him at Potsdam. Lenne undoubtedly appreciated this honour, yet I remember the doleful tone in which he sometimes greeted my mother with, "Called to court again!"



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Like every one who loves Nature and flowers, he was fond of children. We called him "Uncle Lenne," and often walked down our street hand in hand with him.

It is well known that the part of the city on the other side of the Potsdam Gate was called the "Geheimerath-Quarter." Our street, it is true, lay nearer to the Brandenburg Gate, yet it really belonged to that section; for there was not a single house without at least one Geheimerath (Privy Councillor).

Yet this superabundance of men in "secret" positions lent no touch of mystery to our cheerful street, shaded by the green of the forest. Franker, gayer, sometimes noisier children than its residents could not be found in Berlin. I was only a little fellow when we lived there, and merely tolerated in the "big boys'" sports, but it was a festival when, with Ludo, I could carry their provisions for them or even help them make fireworks. The old Rechnungsath, who lived in the house owned by Geheimerath Crede, the father of my Leipsic colleague, was their instructor in this art, which was to prove disastrous to my oldest brother and bright Paul Seiffart; for—may they pardon me the treachery— they took one of the fireworks to school, where—I hope accidentally—it went off. At first this caused much amusement, but strict judgment followed, and led to my mother's resolution to send her oldest son away from home to some educational institution.

The well-known teacher, Adolph Diesterweg, whose acquaintance she had made at the house of a friend, recommended Keilhau, and so our little band was deprived of the leader to whom Ludo and I had looked up with a certain degree of reverence on account of his superior strength, his bold spirit of enterprise, and his kindly condescension to us younger ones.

After his departure the house was much quieter, but we did not forget him; his letters from Keilhau were read aloud to us, and his descriptions of the merry school days, the pedestrian tours, and sleigh-rides awakened an ardent longing in Ludo and myself to follow him.

Yet it was so delightful with my mother, the sun around which our little lives revolved! I had no thought, performed no act, without wondering what would be her opinion of it; and this intimate relation, though in an altered form, continued until her death. In looking backward I may regard it as a law of my whole development that my conduct was regulated according to the more or less close mental and outward connection in which I stood with her. The storm and stress period, during which my effervescent youthful spirits led me into all sorts of follies, was the only time in my life in which this close connection threatened to be loosened. Yet Fate provided that it should soon be welded more firmly than ever. When she died, a beloved wife stood by my side, but she was part of myself; and in my mother Fate seemed to have robbed me of the supreme arbitrator, the high court of justice, which alone could judge my acts.

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In Lennestrasse it was still she who waked me, prepared us to go to school, took us to walk, and—how could I ever forget it?—gathered us around her “when the lamps were lighted,” to read aloud or tell us some story. But nobody was allowed to be perfectly idle. While my sisters sewed, I sketched; and, as Ludo found no pleasure in that, she sometimes had him cut figures out; sometimes—an odd fancy—execute a masterpiece of crocheting, which usually shared the fate of Penelope’s web.

We listened with glowing cheeks to Robinson Crusoe and the Arabian Nights, Gulliver’s Travels and Don Quixote, both arranged for children, the pretty, stories of Nieritz and others, descriptions of Nature and travel, and Grimm’s fairy tales.

On other winter evenings my mother—this will surprise many in the case of so sensible a woman—took us to the theatre. Two of our relatives, Frau Amalie Beer and our beloved Moritz von Oppenfeld, subscribed for boxes in the opera-house, and when they did not use them, which often happened, sent us the key.

So as a boy I heard most of the operas produced at that time, and I saw the ballets, of which Frederick William IV was especially fond, and which Taglioni understood how to arrange so admirably.

Of course, to us children the comic “Robert and Bertram,” by Ludwig Schneider, and similar plays, were far more delightful than the grand operas; yet even now I wonder that Don Giovanni’s scene with the statue and the conspiracy in the Huguenots stirred me, when a boy of nine or ten, so deeply, and that, though possessing barely the average amount of musical talent, Orpheus’s yearning cry, “Eurydice!” rang in my ears so long.

That these frequently repeated pleasures were harmful to us children I willingly admit. And yet—when in after years I was told that I succeeded admirably in describing large bodies of men seized by some strong excitement, and that my novels did not lack dramatic movement or their scenes vividness, and, where it was requisite, splendour—I perhaps owe this to the superb pictures, interwoven with thrilling bursts of melody, which impressed themselves upon my soul when a child.

Fortunately, the outdoor life at Keilhau counteracted the perils which might have arisen from attending theatrical performances too young. What I beheld there, in field and forest, enabled me in after life, when I desired a background for my stories, not to paint stage scenes, but take Nature herself for a model.

I must also record another influence which had its share in my creative toil—my early intercourse with artists and the opportunity of seeing their work.

The statement has been made often enough, but I should like to repeat it here from my own experience, that the most numerous and best impulses which urge the author to



artistic development come from his childhood. This law, which results from observing the life and works of the greatest writers, has shown itself very distinctly in a minor one like myself.



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There was certainly no lack of varied stimulus during this early period of my existence; but when I look back upon it, I become vividly aware of the serious perils which threaten not only the external but the internal development of the children who grow up in large cities.

Careful watching can guard them from the transgressions to which there are many temptations, but not from the strong and varying impressions which life is constantly forcing upon them. They are thrust too early from the paradise of childhood into the arena of life. There are many things to be seen which enrich the imagination, but where could the young heart find the calmness it needs? The sighing of the wind sweeping over the cornfields and stirring the tree-tops in the forest, the singing of the birds in the boughs, the chirping of the cricket, the vesper-bells summoning the world to rest, all the voices which, in the country, invite to meditation and finally to the formation of a world of one's own, are silenced by the noise of the capital. So it happens that the latter produces active, practical men, and, under favorable circumstances, great scholars, but few artists and poets. If, nevertheless, the capitals are the centers where the poets, artists, sculptors, and architects of the country gather, there is a good reason for it. But I can make no further digression. The sapling requires different soil and care from the tree. I am grateful to my mother for removing us in time from the unrest of Berlin life.

First studies.—My sisters and their friends.

My mother told me I was never really taught to read. Ludo, who was a year and a half older, was instructed in the art. I sat by playing, and one day took up Speckter's Fables and read a few words. Trial was then made of my capability, and, finding that I only needed practice to be able to read things I did not know already by heart, my brother and I were thenceforth taught together.

At first the governess had charge of us, afterward we were sent to a little school kept by Herr Liebe in the neighbouring Schulgarten (now Koniggratz) Strasse. It was attended almost entirely by children belonging to the circle of our acquaintances, and the master was a pleasant little man of middle age, who let us do more digging in his garden and playing or singing than actual study.

His only child, a pretty little girl named Clara, was taught with us, and I believe I have Herr Liebe to thank for learning to write. In summer he took us on long walks, frequently to the country seat of Herr Korte, who stood high in the estimation of farmers.

From such excursions, which were followed by others made with the son and tutor of a family among our circle of friends, we always brought our mother great bunches of flowers, and often beautiful stories, too; for the tutor, Candidate Woltmann, was an excellent story-teller, and I early felt a desire to share with those whom I loved whatever charmed me.



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It was from this man, who was as fond of the beautiful as he was of children, that I first heard the names of the Greek heroes; and I remember that, after returning from one of these walks, I begged my mother to give us Schwab's Tales of Classic Antiquity, which was owned by one of our companions. We received it on Ludo's birthday, in September, and how we listened when it was read to us—how often we ourselves devoured its delightful contents!

I think the story of the Trojan War made a deeper impression upon me than even the Arabian Nights. Homer's heroes seemed like giant oaks, which far overtopped the little trees of the human wood. They towered like glorious snow mountains above the little hills with which my childish imagination was already filled; and how often we played the Trojan War, and aspired to the honor of acting Hector, Achilles, or Ajax!

Of Herr Liebe, our teacher, I remember only three things. On his daughter's birthday he treated us to cake and wine, and we had to sing a festal song composed by himself, the refrain of which changed every year:

“Clara, with her fair hair thick,
Clara, with her eyes like heaven,
Can no more be called a chick,
For to-day she's really seven.”

I remember, too, how when she was eight years old we had to transpose the words a little to make the measure right. Karl von Holtei had a more difficult task when, after the death of the Emperor Francis (Kaiser Franz), he had to fit the name of his successor, Ferdinand, into the beautiful “Gotterhalte Franz den Kaiser,” but he got cleverly out of the affair by making it “Gott erhalte Ferdinandum.”—[God save the Emperor Francis.]

My second recollection is, that we assisted Herr Liebe, who was a churchwarden and had the honour of taking up the collection, to sort the money, and how it delighted us to hear him scold—with good reason, too—when we found among the silver and copper pieces—as, alas! we almost always did—counters and buttons from various articles of clothing.

In the third place, I must accuse Herr Liebe of having paid very little attention to our behaviour out of school. Had he kept his eyes open, we might have been spared many a bruise and our garments many a rent; for, as often as we could manage it, instead of going directly home from the Schulgartenstrasse, we passed through the Potsdam Gate to the square beyond. There lurked the enemy, and we sought them out. The enemy were the pupils of a humbler grade of school who called us Privy Councillor's youngsters, which most of us were; and we called them, in return, ‘Knoten,’ which in its original meaning was anything but an insult, coming as it does by a natural philological process from “Genote,” the older form of “Genosse” or comrade.

But to accuse us of arrogance on this account would be doing us wrong. Children don't fight regularly with those whom they despise. Our "Knoten" was only a smart answer to their "Geheimrathsjoren." If they had called us boobies we should probably have called them blockheads, or something of that sort.

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This troop, which was not over-well-dressed even before the beginning of the conflict, was led by some boys whose father kept a so-called flower cellar—that is, a basement shop for plants, wreaths, *etc.*—at the head of Leipzigerstrasse. They often sought us out, but when they did not we enticed them from their cellar by a particular sort of call, and as soon as they appeared we all slipped into some courtyard, where a battle speedily raged, in which our school knapsacks served as weapons of offence and defence. When I got into a passion I was as wild as a fighting cock, and even quiet Ludo could deal hard blows; and I can say the same of most of the “Geheimrathsjoren” and “Knoten.” It was not often that any decided success attended the fight, for the janitor or some inhabitant of the house usually interfered and brought it all to an untimely end. I remember still how a fat woman, probably a cook, seized me by the collar and pushed me out into the street, crying: “Fie! fie! such young gentlemen ought to be ashamed of themselves.”

Hegel, however, whose influence at that time was still great in the learned circles of Berlin, had called shame “anger against what is natural,” and we liked what was natural. So the battles with the “Knoten” were continued until the Berlin revolution called forth more serious struggles, and our mother sent us away to Keilhau.

Our sisters went to school also, a school kept by Fraulein Sollmann in the Dorotheenstrasse. And yet we had a tutor, I do not really know why. Whether our mother had heard of the fights, and recognized the impossibility of following us about everywhere, or whether the candidate was to teach us the rudiments of Latin after we went to the Schmidt school in the Leipziger Platz, at the beginning of my tenth year, I neglected to inquire.

The Easter holidays always brought Brother Martin home. Then he told us about Keilhau, and we longed to accompany him there; and yet we had so many good schoolmates and friends at home, such spacious playgrounds and beautiful toys! I recall with especial pleasure the army of tin soldiers with which we fought battles, and the brass cannon that mowed down their ranks. We could build castles and cathedrals with our blocks, and cooking was a pleasure, too, when our sisters allowed us to act as scullions and waiters in white aprons and caps.

Martha, the eldest, was already a grown young lady, but so sweet and kind that we never feared a rebuff from her; and her friends, too, liked us little ones.

Martha’s contemporaries formed a peculiarly charming circle. There was the beautiful Emma Baeyer, the daughter of General Baeyer, who afterward conducted the measuring of the meridian for central Europe; pretty, lively Anna Bisting; and Gretchen Bugler, a handsome, merry girl, who afterward married Paul Heyse and died young; Clara and Agnes Mitscherlich, the daughters of the celebrated chemist, the younger

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of whom was especially dear to my childish heart. Gustel Grimm, too, the daughter of Wilhelm Grimm, was often at our house. The queen of my heart, however, was the sister of our playmate, Max Geppert, and at this time the most intimate friend of my sister Paula. The two took dancing lessons together, and there was no greater joy than when the lesson was at our house, for then the young ladies occasionally did us the favour of dancing with us, to Herr Guichard's tiny violin.

Warm as was my love for the beautiful Annchen, my adored one came near getting a cold from it, for, rogue that I was, I hid her overshoes during the lesson on one rainy Saturday evening, that I might have the pleasure of taking them to her the next morning.

She looked at that time like the woman with whom I celebrated my silver wedding two years ago, and certainly belonged to the same feminine genre, which I value and place as high above all others as Simonides von Amorgos preferred the beelike woman to every other of her sex: I mean the kind whose womanliness and gentle charm touch the heart before one ever thinks of intellect or beauty.

Our mother smiled at these affairs, and her daughters, as girls, gave her no great trouble in guarding their not too impressionable hearts.

There was only one boy for whom Paula showed a preference, and that was pretty blond Paul, our Martin's friend, comrade, and contemporary, the son of our neighbour, the Privy-Councillor Seiffart; and we lived a good deal together, for his mother and ours were bosom friends, and our house was as open to him as his to us.

Paul was born on the same November day as my sister, though several years earlier, and their common birthday was celebrated, while we were little, by a puppet-show at the neighbour's, conducted by some master in the business, on a pretty little stage in the great hall at the Seiffarts' residence.

I have never forgotten those performances, and laugh now when I think of the knight who shouted to his servant Kasperle, "Fear my thread!" (Zwirn), when what he intended to say was, "Fear my anger!" (Zorn). Or of that same Kasperle, when he gave his wife a tremendous drubbing with a stake, and then inquired, "Want another ounce of unburned wood-ashes, my darling?"

Paula was very fond of these farces. She was, however, from a child rather a singular young creature, who did not by any means enjoy all the amusements of her age. When grown, it was often with difficulty that our mother persuaded her to attend a ball, while Martha's eyes sparkled joyously when there was a dance in prospect; and yet the tall and slender Paula looked extremely pretty in a ball dress.



Gay and active, indeed bold as a boy sometimes, so that she would lead in taking the rather dangerous leap from a balcony of our high ground floor into the garden, clever, and full of droll fancies, she dwelt much in her own thoughts. Several volumes of her journal came to me after our mother's death, and it is odd enough to find the thirteen-year-old girl confessing that she likes no worldly pleasures, and yet, being a very truthful child, she was only expressing a perfectly sincere feeling.

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It was touching to read in the same confessions: “I was in a dreamy mood, and they said I must be longing for something—Paul, no doubt. I did not dispute it, for I really was longing for some one, though it was not a boy, but our dead father.” And Paula was only three years old when he left us!

No one would have thought, who saw her delight when there were fireworks in the Seiffarts’ garden, or when in our own, with her curls and her gown flying, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes flashing, she played with all her heart at “catch” or “robber and princess,” or, all animation and interest, conducted a performance of our puppet-show, that she would sometimes shun all noisy pleasure, that she longed with enthusiastic piety for the Sunday churchgoing, and could plunge into meditation on subjects that usually lie far from childish thoughts and feelings.

Yet who would fancy her thoughtless when she wrote in her journal: “Fie, Paula! You have taken no trouble. Mother had a right to expect a better report. However, to be happy, one must forget what cannot be altered.”

In reality, she was not in the least “featherheaded.” Her life proved that, and it is apparent, too, in the words I found on another page of her journal, at thirteen: “Mother and Martha are at the Drakes; I will learn my hymn, and then read in the Bible about the sufferings of Jesus. Oh, what anguish that must have been! And I? What do I do that is good, in making others happy or consoling their trouble? This must be different, Paula! I will begin a new life. Mother always says we are happy when we deny self in order to do good. Ah, if we always could! But I will try; for He did, though He might have escaped, for our sins and to make us happy.”

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

Full as an egg
I plead with voice and pen in behalf of fairy tales
Nobody was allowed to be perfectly idle
The carp served on Christmas eve in every Berlin family
To be happy, one must forget what cannot be altered
Unjust to injure and rob the child for the benefit of the man

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