

# **The Story of My Life — Volume 05 eBook**

## **The Story of My Life — Volume 05 by Georg Ebers**

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## CHAPTER XVII

*The gymnasium and the first period of university life.*

It was hard for me to leave Keilhau, but our trip to Rudolstadt, to which my dearest companions accompanied me, was merry enough. With Barop's permission we had a banquet in the peasant tavern there, whose cost was defrayed by the kreutzers which had been paid as fines for offences against table rules. At one of these tables where we larger boys sat, only French was spoken; at another only the purest German; and we had ourselves made the rule that whoever used a word of his native tongue at one, or a foreign one at the other, should be fined a kreutzer.

How merry were these banquets, at which usually several teachers were welcome guests!

One of the greatest advantages of Keilhau was that our whole lives, and even our pleasures, were pure enough not to shun a teacher's eyes. And yet we were true, genuine boys, whose overplus of strength found vent not only in play, but all sorts of foolish tricks.

A smile still hovers around my lips when I think of the frozen snow-man on whose head we put a black cap and then placed in one of the younger teacher's rooms to personate a ghost, and the difficulty we had in transporting the monster, or when I remember our pranks in the dormitory.

I believe I am mentioning these cheerful things here to give myself a brief respite, for the portion of my life which followed is the one I least desire to describe.

Rousseau says that man's education is completed by art, Nature, and circumstances. The first two factors had had their effect upon me, and I was now to learn for the first time to reckon independently with the last; hitherto they had been watched and influenced in my favour by others. This had been done not only by masters of the art of pedagogy, but by their no less powerful co-educators, my companions, among whom there was not a single corrupt, ill-disposed boy. I was now to learn what circumstances I should find in my new relations, and in what way they would prove teachers to me.

I was to be placed at school in Kottbus, at that time still a little manufacturing town in the Mark. My mother did not venture to keep me in Berlin during the critical years now approaching. Kottbus was not far away, and knowing that I was backward in the science that Dr. Boltze, the mathematician, taught, she gave him the preference over the heads of the other boarding-schools in the Mark.

I was not reluctant to undertake the hard work, yet I felt like a colt which is led from the pastures to the stable.



A visit to my grandmother in Dresden, and many pleasures which I was permitted to share with my brothers and sisters, seemed to me like the respite before execution.

My mother accompanied me to my new school, and I can not describe the gloomy impression made by the little manufacturing town on the flat plains of the Mark, which at that time certainly possessed nothing that could charm a boy born in Berlin and educated in a beautiful mountain valley.

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In front of Dr. Boltze's house we found the man to whose care I was to be entrusted. At that time he was probably scarcely forty years old, short in stature and very erect, with a shrewd face whose features indicated an iron sternness of character, an impression heightened by the thick, bushy brows which met above his nose.

He himself said that people in Pomerania believed that men with such eyebrows stood in close relations to Satan. Once, while on his way in a boat from Greifswald to the island of Rugen, the superstitious sailors were on the point of throwing him overboard because they attributed their peril to him as the child of the devil, yet, he added—and he was a thoroughly truthful man—the power which these strange eyebrows gave him over others, and especially over men of humble station, induced them to release him.

But after we had learned what a jovial, indulgent comrade was hidden behind the iron tyrant who gazed so threateningly at us from the black eyes beneath the bushy brows, our timidity vanished, and at last we found it easy enough to induce him to change a resolute “No” into a yielding “Yes.”

His wife, on the contrary, was precisely his opposite, for she wielded the sceptre in the household with absolute sway, though so fragile a creature that it seemed as if a breath would blow her away. No one could have been a more energetic housekeeper. She was as active an assistant to her husband with her pen as with her tongue. Most of my reports are in her writing. Besides this, one pretty, healthy child after another was born, and she allowed herself but a brief time for convalescence. I was the godfather of one of these babies, an honour shared by my school-mate, Von Lobenstein. The baptismal ceremony was performed in the Boltze house. The father and we were each to write a name on a slip of paper and lay it beside the font. We had selected the oddest ones we could think of, and when the pastor picked up the slips he read Gerhard and Habakkuk. Thanks to the care and wisdom of his excellent mother, the boy thrived admirably in spite of his cognomen, and I heard to my great pleasure that he has become an able man.

This boyish prank is characteristic of our relations. If we did not go too far, Frau Boltze always took our part, and understood how to smooth her husband's frowning brow quickly enough. Besides, it was a real pleasure to be on good terms with her, for, as the daughter of a prominent official, she had had an excellent education, and her quick wit did honour to her native city, Berlin.

Had Dr. Boltze performed his office of tutor with more energy, it would have been better for us; but in other respects I can say of him nothing but good.

The inventions he made in mechanics, I have been told by experts, were very important for the times and deserved greater success. Among them was a coach moved by electricity.

My mother and I were cordially welcomed by this couple, on conversing with whom my first feeling of constraint vanished.



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The examination next morning almost placed me higher than I expected, for the head-master who heard me translate at first thought me prepared for the first class; but Pro-Rector Braune, who examined me in Latin grammar, said that I was fitted only for the second.

When I left the examination hall I was introduced by Dr. Boltze to one of my future school-fellows in the person of an elegant young gentleman who had just alighted from a carriage and was patting the necks of the horses which he had driven himself.

I had supposed him to be a lieutenant in civilian's dress, for his dark mustache, small whiskers, and the military cut of his hair, which already began to be somewhat thin, made me add a lustrum to his twenty-one years.

After my new tutor had left us this strange school-fellow entered into conversation with me very graciously, and after telling me many things about the school and its management which seemed incredible, he passed on to the pupils, among whom were some "nice fellows," and mentioned a number of names, principally of noble families whose bearers had come here to obtain the graduation certificate, the key without which so many doors are closed in Prussia.

Then he proceeded to describe marvels which I was afterwards to witness, but which at that time I did not know whether I ought to consider delightful or quite the contrary.

Of course, I kept my doubts to myself and joined in when he laughed; but my heart was heavy. Could I avoid these companions? Yet I had come to be industrious, prepare quickly for the university, and give my mother pleasure.

Poor woman! She had made such careful inquiries before sending me here; and what a dangerous soil for a precocious boy just entering the years of youth was this manufacturing town and an institution so badly managed as the Kottbus School! I had come hither full of beautiful ideals and animated by the best intentions; but the very first day made me suspect how many obstacles I should encounter; though I did not yet imagine the perils which lay in my companion's words. All the young gentlemen who had been drawn hither by the examination were sons of good families, but the part which these pupils, and I with them, played in society, at balls, and in all the amusements of the cultivated circle in the town was so prominent, the views of life and habits which they brought with them so completely contradicted the idea which every sensible person has of a grammar-school boy, that their presence could not fail to injure the school.

Of course, all this could not remain permanently concealed from the higher authorities. The old head-master was suddenly retired, and one of the best educators summoned in his place man who quickly succeeded in making the decaying Kottbus School one of the most excellent in all Prussia. I had the misfortune of being for more than two years a

pupil under the government of the first head-master, and the good luck of spending nearly the same length of time under the charge of his successor.

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My mother was satisfied with the result of the examination, and the next afternoon she drove with me to our relatives at Komptendorf. Frau von Berndt, the youngest daughter of our beloved kinsman, Moritz von Oppenfeld, united to the elegance of a woman reared in a large city the cordiality of the mistress of a country home. Her husband won the entire confidence of every one who met the gaze of his honest blue eyes. He had given up the legal profession to take charge of his somewhat impoverished paternal estate, and soon transformed it into one of the most productive in the whole neighbourhood.

He was pleased that I, a city boy, knew so much about field and forest, so at my very first visit he invited me to repeat it often.

The next morning I took leave of my mother, and my school life began. In many points I was in advance of the other pupils in the second class, in others behind them; but this troubled me very little—school seemed a necessary evil. My real life commenced after its close, and here also my natural cheerfulness ruled my whole nature. The town offered me few attractions, but the country was full of pleasures. Unfortunately, I could not go to Komptendorf as often as I wished, for it was a two hours' walk, and horses and carriages were not always at my disposal. Yet many a Saturday found me there, enjoying the delight of chatting with my kind hostess about home news and other pleasant things, or reading aloud to her.

Even in the second year of my stay at Kottbus I went to every dance given on the estates in the neighbourhood and visited many a delightful home in the town. Then there were long walks—sometimes with Dr. Boltze and my school-mates, sometimes with friends, and often alone.

We frequently took a Sunday walk, which often began on Saturday afternoon, usually with merry companions and in the society of our stern master, who, gayer than the youngest of us, needed our care rather than we his. In this way I visited the beautiful Muskau, and still more frequently the lovely woodlands of the Spree, a richly watered region intersected by numerous arms of the river and countless canals, resting as quietly under dense masses of foliage as a child asleep at noontide beneath the shadow of a tree.

The alders and willows, lindens and oaks, which grow along the banks, are superb; flocks of birds fly twittering and calling from one bush and branch to another; but all human intercourse is carried on, as in Venice, by boats which glide noiselessly to and fro.

Whoever desires a faithful and minute picture of this singular region, which reminded me of many scenes in Holland and many of Hobbema's paintings, should read *The Goddess of Noon*. It contains a number of descriptions whose truth and vividness are matchless.

Every trip into the woodlands of the Spree offered an abundance of beautiful and pleasurable experiences, but I remember with still greater enjoyment my leafy nooks on the river-bank.

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

*The time of effervescence, and my school mates.*

Although the events of my school-days at Kottbus long since blended together in my memory, my life there is divided into two sharply defined portions. The latter commences with Professor Tzschirner's appointment and the reform in the school.

From the first day of the latter's government I can recall what was taught us in the class and how it influenced me, while I have entirely forgotten what occurred during the interim. This seems strange; for, while Langethal's, Middendorf's, and Barop's instruction, which I received when so much younger, remains vividly impressed on my memory, and it is the same with Tzschirner's lessons, the knowledge I acquired between my fifteenth and seventeenth year is effaced as completely as though I had passed a sponge over the slate of my memory. A chasm yawns between these periods of instruction, and I cannot ascribe this circumstance entirely to the amusements which withdrew my thoughts from study; for they continued under Tzschirner's rule, though with some restrictions. I wish I could believe that everything which befel me then had remained entirely without influence on my inner life.

A demon—I can find no other name—urged me to all sorts of follies, many of which I still remember with pleasure, and, thank Heaven, not a single one which a strict teacher—supposing that he had not forgotten how to put himself into the place of a youth—would seriously censure. The effervescing spirits which did not find vent in such pranks obtained expression in a different form.

I had begun to write, and every strong emotion was uttered in verses, which I showed to the companions from whom I could expect sympathy. My school-mates were very unlike. Among the young gentlemen who paid a high price to attend the school not a single one had been really industrious and accomplished anything. But neither did any one of the few lads whose fathers were peasants, or who belonged to the lower ranks, stand at the head of his class. They were very diligent, but success rarely corresponded with the amount of labour employed. The well-educated but by no means wealthy middle class supplied the school with its best material.

The evolution of the human soul is a strange thing. The period during which, in my overflowing mirth, I played all sorts of wild pranks, and at school worked earnestly for one teacher only, often found me toiling late at night for hours with burning head over a profound creation—I called it The Poem of the World—in which I tried to represent the origin of cosmic and human life.

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Many other verses, from a sonnet to the beautiful ears of a pretty cousin to the commencement of the tragedy of Panthea and Abradatus, were written at that time; but I owe The Poem of the World special gratitude, for it kept me from many a folly, and often held me for weeks at my desk during the evening hours which many of my comrades spent in the tavern. Besides, it attracted the new head-master's attention to my poetical tastes, for a number of verses had been left by mistake in an exercise-book. He read them, and asked to see the rest. But I could not fulfil the wish, for they contained many things which could not fail to offend him; so I gave him only a few of the tamest passages, and can still see him smile in his peculiar way as he read them in my presence. He said something about "decided talent," and when preparations for the celebration of the birthday of King Frederick William IV were made he gave me the task of composing an original poem. I gladly accepted it. Writing was a great pleasure, and though my productions at school were far too irregular for me to call them good, I was certainly the best declaimer.

### *The new head of the school.*

Before passing on to other subjects, I must devote a few words to the remodelling of the school and its new head.

At the end of my first term in the first class we learned that we were to have a new teacher, and one who would rule with a rod of iron. Terrible stories of his Draconian severity were in circulation, and his first address gave us reason to fear the worst, for the tall man of forty in the professor's chair was very imposing in his appearance. His smoothly shaven upper lip and brown whiskers, his erect bearing and energetic manner, reminded one of an English parliamentary leader, but his words sounded almost menacing. He said that an entirely new house must be erected. We and the teachers must help him. To the obedient he would be a good friend; but to the refractory, no matter what might be their position, he would—— What followed made many of us nudge one another, and the young men who attended the school merely for the sake of the examination left it in a body. Many a teacher even changed colour.

This reorganizer, Professor Tzschirner, had formerly been principal of the Magdalen Gymnasium at Breslau. In energy and authoritative manner he resembled Barop, but he was also an eminent scholar and a thorough man of the world. The authorities in Berlin made an excellent choice, and we members of the first class soon perceived that he not only meant kindly by us, but that we had obtained in him a teacher far superior to any we had possessed before. He required a great deal, but he was a good friend to every one who did his duty. His kindly intention and inspiring influence made themselves felt in our lives; for he invited to his house the members of the first class whom he desired to influence, and his charming, highly

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educated wife helped him entertain us, so that we preferred an evening there to almost any other amusements. Study began to charm us, and I can only repeat that he seemed to recall Langethal's method and awaken many things which the latter had given me, and which, as it were, had fallen asleep during the interval. He again aroused in my soul the love for the ancients, and his interpretations of Horace or Sophocles were of great service to me in after-years.

Nor did he by any means forget grammar, but in explaining the classics he always laid most stress upon the contents, and every lesson of his was a clever archaeological, aesthetic, and historical lecture. I listened to none more instructive at the university. Philological and linguistic details which were not suited for the senior pupils who were being fitted for other callings than those of the philologist were omitted. But he insisted upon grammatical correctness, and never lost sight of his maxim, "The school should teach its pupils to do thoroughly whatever they do at all."

He urged us especially to think for ourselves, and to express our ideas clearly and attractively, not only in writing but verbally.

It seemed as though a spring breeze had melted the snow from the land, such burgeoning and blossoming appeared throughout the school.

Creative work was done by fits and starts. If the demon seized upon me, I raved about for a time as before, but I did my duty for the principal. I not only honoured but loved him, and censure from his lips would have been unbearable.

The poem which I was to read on the king's birthday has been preserved, and as I glanced over it recently I could not help smiling.

It was to describe the life of Henry the Fowler, and refer to the reigning king, Frederick William IV.

The praise of my hero had come from my heart, so the poem found favour, and in circles so wide that the most prominent man in the neighbourhood, Prince Puckler-Muskau, sent for my verses.

I was perfectly aware that they did not represent my best work, but what father does not find something to admire in his child? So I copied them neatly, and gave them to Billy, the dwarf, the prince's factotum. A short time after, while I was walking with some friends in Branitz Park, the prince summoned me, and greeted me with the exclamation, "You are a poet!"

These four words haunted me a long while; nay, at times they even echo in my memory now. I had heard a hundred anecdotes of this prince, which could not fail to charm a



youth of my disposition. When a young officer of the Garde-du-Corps in Dresden, after having been intentionally omitted from the invitations to a court-ball, he hired all the public conveyances in the city, thus compelling most of the gentlemen and ladies who were invited either to wade through the snow or forego the dance.

When the war of 1813 began he entered the service of "the liberators," as the Russians were then called, and at the head of his regiment challenged the colonel of a French one to a duel, and seriously wounded him.



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It was apparently natural to Prince Puckler to live according to his own pleasure, undisturbed by the opinions of his fellow-men, and this pleasure urged him to pursue a different course in almost every phase of life. I said “apparently,” because, although he scorned the censure of the people, he never lost sight of it. From a child his intense vanity was almost a passion, and unfortunately this constant looking about him, the necessity of being seen, prevented him from properly developing an intellect capable of far higher things; yet there was nothing petty in his character.

His highest merit, however, was the energy with which he understood how to maintain his independence in the most difficult circumstances in which life placed him. To one department of activity, especially, that of gardening, he devoted his whole powers. His parks can vie with the finest pleasure-grounds of all countries.

At the time I first met him he was sixty-nine years old, but looked much younger, except when he sometimes appeared with his hair powdered until it was snow-white. His figure was tall and finely proportioned, and though a sarcastic smile sometimes hovered around his lips, the expression of his face was very kindly. His eyes, which I remember as blue, were somewhat peculiar. When he wished to please, they sparkled with a warm—I might almost say tender-light, which must have made many a young heart throb faster. Yet I think he loved himself too much to give his whole affection to any one.

A great man has always seemed to me the greatest of created things, and though Prince Puckler can scarcely be numbered among the great men of mankind, he was undoubtedly the greatest among those who surrounded him at Branitz. In me, the youth of nineteen, he awakened admiration, interest, and curiosity, and his “You are a poet” sometimes strengthened my courage, sometimes disheartened me. My boyish ambitions in those days had but one purpose, and that was the vocation of a poet.

I was still ignorant that the Muse kisses only those who have won her love by the greatest sufferings. Life as yet seemed a festal hall, and as the bird flies from bough to bough wherever a red berry tempts him, my heart was attracted by every pair of bright eyes which glanced kindly at me. When I entered upon my last term, my Leporello list was long enough, and contained pictures from many different classes. But my hour, too, seemed on the point of striking, for when I went home in my last Christmas vacation I thought myself really in love with the charming daughter of the pleasant widow of a landed proprietor. Nay, though only nineteen, I even considered whether I should not unite her destiny with mine, and formally ask her hand. My father had offered himself to my mother at the same age.

In Kottbus I was treated with the respect due to a man, but at home I was still “the boy,” and the youngest of us three “little ones.” Ludo, as a lieutenant, had a position in society, while I was yet a schoolboy. Amid these surroundings I realized how hasty and premature my intention had been.

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Only four of us came to keep Christmas at home, for Martha now lived in Dresden as the wife of Lieutenant Baron Curt von Brandenstein, the nephew of our Aunt Sophie's husband. Her wedding ceremony in the cathedral was, of course, performed by the court-chaplain Strauss.

My grandmother had died, but my Aunt Sophie still lived in Dresden, and spent her summers in Blasewitz. Her hospitable house always afforded an atmosphere very stimulating to intellectual life, so I spent more time there than in my mother's more quiet residence at Pillnitz.

I had usually passed part of the long—or, as it was called, the “dog-day”—vacation in or near Dresden, but I also took pleasant pedestrian tours in Bohemia, and after my promotion to the senior class, through the Black Forest.

It was a delightful excursion! Yet I can never recall it without a tinge of sadness, for my two companions, a talented young artist named Rothermund, and a law student called Forster, both died young. We had met in a railway carriage between Frankfort and Heidelberg and determined to take the tour together, and never did the Black Forest, with its mountains and valleys, dark forests and green meadows, clear streams and pleasant villages, seem to me more beautiful. But still fairer days were in store after parting from my friends.

I went to Rippoldsau, where a beloved niece of my mother with her charming daughter Betsy expected me. Here in the excellent Gohring hotel I found a delightful party, which only lacked young gentlemen. My arrival added a pair of feet which never tired of dancing, and every evening our elders were obliged to entreat and command in order to put an end to our sport. The mornings were occupied in walks through the superb forests around Rippoldsau, and the afternoons in bowling, playing games, and running races. I speedily lost my susceptible heart to a charming young lady named Leontine, who permitted me to be her Knight, and I fancied myself very unjustly treated when, soon after our separation, I received her betrothal cards.

The Easter and Christmas vacations I usually spent in Berlin with my mother, where I was allowed to attend entertainments given by our friends, at which I met many distinguished persons, among others Alexander von Humboldt.

Of political life in the capital at that time there is nothing agreeable to be said. I was always reminded of the state of affairs immediately after my arrival; for during the first years of my school life at Kottbus no one was permitted to enter the city without a paper proving identity, which was demanded by constables at the exits of railway stations or in the yards of post-houses. Once, when I had nothing to show except my report, I was admitted, it is true, but a policeman was sent with me to my mother's house to ascertain that the boy of seventeen was really the person he assumed to be, and not a criminal dangerous to the state.

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The beautiful aspirations of the Reichstag in Paulskirche were baffled, the constitution of the empire had become a noble historical monument which only a chosen few still remembered. The king, who had had the opportunity to place himself at the head of united Germany, had preferred to suppress the freedom of his native land rather than to promote its unity. Yet we need not lament his refusal. Blood shed together in mutual enthusiasm is a better cement than the decree of any Parliament.

The ruling powers at that time saw in the constitution only a cage whose bars prevented them from dealing a decisive blow, but whatever they could reach through the openings they tore and injured as far as lay in their power. The words “reactionary” and “liberal” had become catch terms which severed families and divided friends.

At Komptendorf, and almost everywhere in the country, there was scarcely any one except Conservatives. Herr von Berndt had driven into the city to the election. Pastor Albin, the clergyman of his village, voted for the Liberal candidate. When the pastor asked the former, who was just getting into his carriage, to take him home, the usually courteous, obliging gentleman, who was driving, exclaimed, “If you don’t vote with me you don’t ride with me,” and, touching the spirited bays, dashed off, leaving the pastor behind.

Dr. Boltze was a “Liberal,” and had to endure many a rebuff because his views were known to the ministry. Our religious instruction might serve as a mirror of the opinions which were pleasing to the minister. It had made the man who imparted it superintendent when comparatively young. The term “mob marriage” for “civil marriage” originated with him, and it ought certainly to be inscribed in the Golden Book above.

He was a fiery zealot, who sought to induce us to share his wrath and scorn when he condemned Bauer, David Strauss, and Lessing.

When discussing the facts of ecclesiastical history, he understood how to rouse us to the utmost, for he was a talented man and a clever speaker, but no word of appeal to the heart, no exhortation to love and peace, ever crossed his lips.

The vacations were the only time which I spent with my mother. I ceased to think of her in everything I did, as was the case in Keilhau. But after I had been with her for a while, the charm of her personality again mastered my soul, her love rekindled mine, and I longed to open my whole heart to her and tell her everything which interested me. She was the only person to whom I read my Poem of the World, as far as it was completed. She listened with joyful astonishment, and praised several passages which she thought beautiful. Then she warned me not to devote too much time to such things at present, but kissed and petted me in a way too charming to describe. During the next few days her eyes rested on me with an expression I had always longed to see. I felt that she regarded me as a man, and she afterwards confessed how great her hopes were at that time, especially as Professor Tzschirner had encouraged her to cherish them.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

*A romance which really happened.*

After returning to Kottbus from the Christmas vacation I plunged headlong into work, and as I exerted all my powers I made rapid progress.

Thus January passed away, and I was so industrious that I often studied until long after midnight. I had not even gone to the theatre, though I had heard that the Von Hoxar Company was unusually good. The leading lady, especially, was described as a miracle of beauty and remarkably talented. This excited my curiosity, and when a school-mate who had made the stage manager's acquaintance told us that he would be glad to have us appear at the next performance of *The Robbers*, I of course promised to be present.

We went through our parts admirably, and no one in the crowded house suspected the identity of the chorus of robbers who sang with so much freshness and vivacity.

I was deeply interested in what was passing on the stage, and, concealed at the wings, I witnessed the greater part of the play.

Rarely has so charming an Amalie adorned the boards as the eighteen-year-old actress, who, an actor's child, had already been several years on the stage.

The consequence of this visit to the theatre was that, instead of studying historical dates, as I had intended, I took out *Panthea* and *Abradatus*, and on that night and every succeeding one, as soon as I had finished my work for the manager, I added new five-foot iambs to the tragedy, whose material I drew from Xenophon.

Whenever the company played I went to the theatre, where I saw the charming Clara in comedy parts, and found that all the praises I had heard of her fell short of the truth. Yet I did not seek her acquaintance. The examination was close at hand, and it scarcely entered my mind to approach the actress. But the Fates had undertaken to act as mediators and make me the hero of a romance which ended so speedily, and in a manner which, though disagreeable, was so far from tragical, that if I desired to weave the story of my own life into a novel I should be ashamed to use the extensive apparatus employed by Destiny.

Rather more than a week had passed since the last performance of *The Robbers*, when one day, late in the afternoon, the streets were filled with uproar. A fire had broken out, and as soon as Professor Braune's lesson was over I joined the human flood. The boiler in the Kubisch cloth factory had burst, a part of the huge building near it was in flames, and a large portion of the walls had fallen.

When, with several school-mates, I reached the scene of the disaster, the fire had already been mastered, but many hands were striving to remove the rubbish and save the workmen buried underneath. I eagerly lent my aid.

Meanwhile it had grown dark, and we were obliged to work by the light of lanterns. Several men, fortunately all living, had been brought out, and we thought that the task of rescue was completed, when the rumour spread that some girls employed in one of the lower rooms were still missing.

## Page 12

It was necessary to enter, but the smoke and dust which filled the air seemed to preclude this, and, besides, a high wall above the cleared space in the building threatened to fall. An architect who had directed with great skill the removal of the debris was standing close beside me and gave orders to tear down the wall, whose fall would cost more lives.

Just at that moment I distinctly heard an inexpressibly mournful cry of pain. A narrow shouldered, sickly-looking man, who spite of his very plain clothing, seemed to belong to the better classes, heard it too, and the word "Horrible!" in tones of the warmest sympathy escaped his lips. Then he bent over the black smoking space, and I did the same.

The cry was repeated still louder than before, my neighbour and I looked at each other, and I heard him whisper, "Shall we?"

In an instant I had flung off my coat, put my handkerchief over my mouth, and let myself down into the smoking pit, where I pressed forward through a stifling mixture of lime and particles of sand.

The groans and cries of the wounded guided me and my companion, who had instantly followed, and at last two female figures appeared amid the smoke and dust on which the lanterns, held above, cast flickering rays of light.

One was lying prostrate, the other, kneeling, leaned against the wall. We seized the first one, and staggered towards the spot where the lanterns glimmered, and loud shouts greeted us.

Our example had induced others to leap down too.

As soon as we were released from our burden we returned for the second victim. My companion now carried a lantern. The woman was no longer kneeling, but lay face downward several paces nearer to the narrow passage choked with stones and lime dust which separated her from us. She had fainted while trying to follow. I seized her feet, and we staggered on, but ere we could leave the passage which led into the larger room I heard a loud rattling and thundering above, and the next instant something struck my head and everything reeled around me. Yet I did not drop the blue yarn stockings, but tottered on with them into the large open space, where I fell on my knees.

Still I must have retained my consciousness, for loud shouts and cries reached my ears. Then came a moment with which few in life can compare —the one when I again inhaled draughts of the pure air of heaven.

I now felt that my hair was stained with blood, which had flowed from a wound in my head, but I had no time to think of it, for people crowded around me saying all sorts of

pleasant things. The architect, Winzer, was most cordial of all. His words, "I approve of such foolhardiness, Herr Ebers," echoed in my ears long afterwards.

A beam had fallen on my head, but my thick hair had broken the force of the blow, and the wound in a few days began to heal.

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My companion in peril was at my side, and as my blood-stained face looked as if my injuries were serious he invited me to his house, which was close by the scene of the accident. On the way we introduced ourselves to each other. His name was Hering, and he was the prompter at the theatre. When the doctor who had been sent to me had finished his task of sewing up the wound and left us, an elderly woman entered, whose rank in life was somewhat difficult to determine. She wore gay flowers in her bonnet, and a cloak made of silk and velvet, but her yellow face was scarcely that of a "lady." She came to get a part for her daughter; it was one of the prompter's duties to copy the parts for the various actors.

But who was this daughter?

Fraulein Clara, the fair Amalie of The Robbers, the lovely leading lady of the theatre.

My daughter has an autograph of Andersen containing the words, "Life is the fairest fairy tale."

Ay, our lives are often like fairy tales.

The Scheherezade "Fate" had found the bridge to lead the student to the actress, and the means employed were of no less magnitude than a conflagration, the rescue of a life, and a wound, as well as the somewhat improbable combined action of a student and a prompter. True, more simple methods would scarcely have brought the youth with the examination in his head and a pretty girl in his heart to seek the acquaintanceship of the fair actress.

Fate urged me swiftly on; for Clara's mother was an enthusiastic woman, who in her youth had herself been an ornament of the stage, and I can still hear her exclamation, "My dear young sir, every German girl ought to kiss that wound!"

I can see her indignantly forbid the prompter to tie his gay handkerchief over the injury and draw a clean one from her own velvet bag to bind my forehead. Boltze and my school-mates greeted me very warmly. Director Tzschirner said something very similar to Herr Winzer's remark.

And so matters would have remained, and in a few weeks, after passing the examination, I should have returned to my happy mother, had not a perverse Fate willed otherwise.

This time a bit of linen was the instrument used to lead me into the path allotted, for when the wound healed and the handkerchief which Clara's mother had tied round it came back from the wash, I was uncertain whether to return it in person or send it by a messenger with a few words of thanks. I determined on the latter course; but when, that same evening, I saw Clara looking so pretty as the youthful Richelieu, I cast aside



my first resolve, and the next day at dusk went to call on the mother of the charming actress. I should scarcely have ventured to do so in broad daylight, for Herr Ebeling, our zealous religious instructor, lived directly opposite.

The danger, however, merely gave the venture an added zest and, ere I was aware of it I was standing in the large and pretty sitting-room occupied by the mother and daughter.

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It was a disappointment not to meet the latter, yet I felt a certain sense of relief. Fate intended to let me escape the storm uninjured, for my heart had been by no means calm since I mounted the narrow stairs leading to the apartments of the fair actress. But just as I was taking leave the pavement echoed with the noise of hoofs and the rattle of wheels. Prince Puckler's coupe stopped in front of the house and the young girl descended the steps.

She entered the room laughing merrily, but when she saw me she became graver, and looked at her mother in surprise.

A brief explanation, the cry, "Oh, you are the man who was hurt!" and then the proof that the room did not owe its neat appearance to her, for her cloak flew one way, her hat another, and her gloves a third. After this disrobing she stood before me in the costume of the youthful Richelieu, so bewitchingly charming, so gay and bright, that I could not restrain my delight.

She had come from old Prince Puckler, who, as he never visited the theatre in the city, wished to see her in the costume whose beauty had been so much praised. The vigorous, gay old gentleman had charmed her, and she declared that she liked him far better than any of the young men. But as she knew little of his former life and works, I told her of his foolish pranks and chivalrous deeds.

It seemed as if her presence increased my powers of description, and when I at last took leave she exclaimed: "You'll come again, won't you? After one has finished one's part, it's the best time to talk."

Did I wait to be asked a second time? Oh, no! Even had I not been the "foolhardy Ebers," I should have accepted her invitation. The very next evening I was in the pleasant sitting-room, and whenever I could slip away after supper I went to the girl, whom I loved more and more ardently. Sometimes I repeated poems of my own, sometimes she recited and acted passages from her best parts, amid continual jesting and laughter. My visits seemed like so many delightful festivals, and Clara's mother took care that they were not so long as to weary her treasure. She often fell asleep while we were reading and talking, but usually she sent me away before midnight with "There's another day coming to-morrow." Long before my first visit to the young actress I had arranged a way of getting into the house at any time, and Dr. Boltze had no suspicion of my expeditions, since on my return I strove the more zealously to fulfil all my school duties.

This sounds scarcely credible, yet it is strictly true, for from a child up to the present time I have always succeeded, spite of interruptions of every kind, in devoting myself to the occupation in which I was engaged. Loud noises in an adjoining room, or even tolerably severe physical pain, will not prevent my working on as soon as the subject so

masters me as to throw the external world and my own body into the background. Only when the suffering becomes very intense, the whole being must of necessity yield to it.

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During the hours of the night which followed these evening visits I often succeeded in working earnestly for two or three hours in preparation for the examination. During my recitations, however, weariness asserted itself, and even more strongly the new feeling which had obtained complete mastery over me. Here I could not shake off the delightful memories of these evenings because I did not strive to battle with them.

I am not without talent for drawing, and even at that time it was an easy matter to reproduce anything which had caught my eye, not only distinctly, but sometimes attractively and with a certain degree of fidelity to nature. So my note-book was filled with figures which amazed me when I saw them afterwards, for my excited imagination had filled page after page with a perfect Witch's Sabbath of compositions, in which the oddest scrolls and throngs of genii blended with flowers, buds, and all sorts of emblems of love twined around initial letters or the picture of the person who had captured my heart at a time so inopportune.

I owe the suggestion of some verses which were written at that time to the memory of a dream. I was on the back of a swan, which bore me through the air, and on another swan flying at my side sat Clara. Our hands were clasped. It was delightful until I bent to kiss her; then the swan I rode melted into mist, and I plunged headlong down, falling, falling, until I woke.

I had this dream on the Friday before the beginning of the week in which the first examination was to take place; and it is worthy of mention, for it was fulfilled.

True, I needed no prophetic vision to inform me that this time of happiness was drawing to a close. I had long known that the company was to remove from Kottbus to Guben, but I hoped that the separation would be followed by a speedy meeting.

It was certainly fortunate that she was going, yet the parting was hard to bear; for the evening hours I had spent with her in innocent mirth and the interchange of all that was best in our hearts and minds were filled with exquisite enjoyment. The fact that our intercourse was in a certain sense forbidden fruit merely doubled its charm.

How cautiously I had glided along in the shadows of the houses, how anxiously I had watched the light in the minister's study opposite, when I went home!

True, he would have seen nothing wrong or even unseemly, save perhaps the kiss which Clara gave me the last time she lighted me down stairs, yet that would have been enough to shut me out of the examination. Ah! yes, it was fortunate that she was going.

March had come, the sun shone brightly, the air was as warm as in May, and I had carried the mother and daughter some violets which I had gathered myself. Suddenly I thought how delightful it would be to drive with Clara in an open carriage through the spring beauty of the country. The next day was Sunday. If I went with them and spent

the night in Guben I could reach home in time the next day. I need only tell Dr. Boltze I was going to Komptendorf, and order the carriage, to transform the dear girl's departure into a holiday.

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Again Fate interfered with the course of this story; for on my way to school that sunny Saturday morning I met Clara's mother, and at sight of her the wish merged into a resolve. I followed her into the shop she entered and explained my plan. She thought it would be delightful, and promised to wait for me at a certain place outside of the city.

The plan was carried out. I found them at the appointed spot, my darling as fresh as a rose. If love and joy had any substantial weight, the horses would have found it a hard matter to drag the vehicle swiftly on.

But at the first toll-house, while the toll-keeper was changing some money, I experienced the envy of the gods which hitherto I had known only in Schiller's ballad. A pedestrian passed—the teacher whom I had offended by playing all sorts of pranks during his French lesson. Not one of the others disliked me.

He spoke to me, but I pretended not to understand, hastily took the change from the toll-keeper, and, raising my hat, shouted, "Drive on!"

This highly virtuous gentleman scorned the young actress, and as, on account of my companions, he had not returned my greeting, Clara flashed into comical wrath, which stifled in its germ my thought of leaving the carriage and going on foot to Komptendorf, where Dr. Boltze believed me to be.

Clara rewarded my courageous persistence by special gaiety, and when we had reached Guben, taken supper with some other members of the company, and spent the evening in merriment, danger and all the ills which the future might bring were forgotten.

The next morning I breakfasted with Clara and her mother, and in bidding them good-bye added "Till we meet again," for the way to Berlin was through Guben, where the railroad began.

The carriage which had brought us there took me back to Kottbus. Several members of the company entered it and went part of the way, returning on foot. When they left me twilight was gathering, but the happiness I had just enjoyed shone radiantly around me, and I lived over for the second time all the delights I had experienced.

But the nearer I approached Kottbus the more frequently arose the fear that the French teacher might make our meeting the cause of an accusation. He had already complained of me for very trivial delinquencies and would hardly let this pass. And yet he might.

Was it a crime to drive with a young girl of stainless reputation under her mother's oversight? No. I had done nothing wrong, except to say that I was going to Komptendorf—and that offence concerned only Dr. Boltze, to whom I had made the false statement.

At last I fell asleep, until the wheels rattled on the pavement of the city streets. Was my dream concerning the swan to be fulfilled?

I entered the house early. Dr. Boltze was waiting for me, and his wife's troubled face betrayed what had happened even more plainly than her husband's frown.

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The French teacher had instantly informed my tutor where and with whom he had met me, and urged him to ascertain whether I had really gone to Komptendorf. Then he went to Clara's former residence, questioned the landlady and her servant, and finally interrogated the livery-stable keeper.

The mass of evidence thus gathered proved that I had paid the actress numerous visits, and always at dusk. My dream seemed fulfilled, but after I had told Dr. Boltze and his wife the whole truth a quiet talk followed. The former did not give up the cause as lost, though he did not spare reproaches, while his wife's wrath was directed against the informer rather than the offence committed by her favourite.

After a restless night I went to Professor Tzschirner and told him everything, without palliation or concealment. He censured my frivolity and lack of consideration for my position in life, but every word, every feature of his expressive face showed that he grieved for what had happened, and would have gladly punished it leniently. In after years he told me so. Promising to make every effort to save me from exclusion from the examination in the conference which he was to call at the close of the afternoon session, he dismissed me—and he kept his word.

I know this, for I succeeded in hearing the discussion. The porter of the gymnasium was the father of the boy whom my friend Lebenstein and I kept to clean our boots, *etc.* He was a conscientious, incorruptible man, but the peculiar circumstances of the case led him to yield to my entreaties and admit me to a room next to the one where the conference was held. I am grateful to him still, for it is due to this kindness that I can think without resentment of those whose severity robbed me of six months of my life.

This conference taught me how warm a friend I possessed in Professor Tzschirner, and showed that Professor Braune was kindly disposed. I remember how my heart overflowed with gratitude when Professor Tzschirner sketched my character, extolled my rescue of life at the Kubisch factory, and eloquently urged them to remember their own youth and judge what had happened impartially. I should have belied my nature had I not availed myself of the chain of circumstances which brought me into association with the actress to make the acquaintance of so charming a creature.

To my joyful surprise Herr Ebeling agreed with him, and spoke so pleasantly of me and of Clara, concerning whom he had inquired, that I began to hope he was on my side.

Unfortunately, the end of his speech destroyed all the prospects held out in the beginning.

Space forbids further description of the discussion. The majority, spite of the passionate hostility of the informer, voted not to expel me, but to exclude me from the examination this time, and advise me to leave the school. If, however, I preferred to remain, I should be permitted to do so.



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At the close of the session I was standing in the square in front of the school when Professor Tzschirner approached, and I asked his permission to leave school that very day. A smile of satisfaction flitted over his manly, intellectual face, and he granted my request at once.

So my Kottbus school-days ended, and, unfortunately, in a way unlike what I had hoped. When I said farewell to Professor Tzschirner and his wife I could not restrain my tears. His eyes, too, were dim, and he repeated to me what I had already heard him say in the conference, and wrote the same thing to my mother in a letter explaining my departure from the school. The report which he sent with it contains not a single word to indicate a compulsory withdrawal or the advice to leave it.

When I had stopped at Guben and said goodbye to Clara my dream was literally fulfilled. Our delightful intercourse had come to a sudden end. Fortunately, I was the only sufferer, for to my great joy I heard a few months after that she had made a successful debut at the Dresden court theatre.

I was, of course, less joyfully received in Berlin than usual, but the letters from Professor Tzschirner and Frau Boltze put what had occurred in the right light to my mother—nay, when she saw how I grieved over my separation from the young girl whose charms still filled my heart and mind, her displeasure was transformed into compassion. She also saw how difficult it was for me to meet the friends and guardian who had expected me to return as a graduate, and drew her darling, whom for the first time she called her “poor boy,” still closer to her heart.

Then we consulted about the future, and it was decided that I should graduate from the gymnasium of beautiful Quedlinburg. Professor Schmidt’s house was warmly recommended, and was chosen for my home.

I set out for my new abode full of the best resolutions. But at Magdeburg I saw in a show window a particularly tasteful bonnet trimmed with lilies of the valley and moss-rose buds. The sight brought Clara’s face framed in it vividly before my eyes, and drew me into the shop. It was a Paris pattern-hat and very expensive, but I spent the larger part of my pocket-money in purchasing it and ordered it to be sent to the girl whose image still filled my whole soul. Hitherto I had given her nothing except a small locket and a great many flowers.

## CHAPTER XX.

### AT THE QUEDLINBURG GYMNASIUM

The atmosphere of Quedlinburg was far different from that of the Mark factory town of Kottbus. How fresh, how healthful, how stimulating to industry and out-door exercise it was!

Everything in the senior class was just as it should be.

In Kottbus the pupils addressed each other formally. There were at the utmost, I think, not more than half a dozen with whom I was on terms of intimacy. In Quedlinburg a beautiful relation of comradeship united all the members of the school. During study hours we were serious, but in the intervals we were merry enough.

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Its head, Professor Richter, the learned editor of the fragments of Sappho, did not equal Tzschirner in keenness of intellect and bewitching powers of description, yet we gladly followed the worthy man's interpretations.

Many a leisure day and hour we spent in the beautiful Hartz Mountains. But, best of all, was my home in Quedlinburg, the house of my tutor, Professor Adalbert Schmidt, an admirable man of forty, who seemed extremely gentle and yielding, but when necessary could be very peremptory, and allowed those under his charge to make no trespass on his authority.

His wife was a model of amiable, almost timid womanliness. Her sister-in-law, the widow of a magistrate, Frau Pauline Schmidt, shared the care of the pupils and the beautiful, large garden; while her pretty, bright young sons and daughters increased the charm of the intercourse.

How pleasant were the evenings we spent in the family circle! We read, talked, played, and Frau Pauline Schmidt was a ready listener when ever I felt disposed to communicate to any one what I had written.

Among my school friends were some who listened to my writings and showed me their own essays. My favorite was Carl Hey, grandson of Wilhelm Hey, who understood child nature so well, and wrote the pretty verses accompanying the illustrations in the *Speckter Fables*, named for the artist, a book still popular with little German boys and girls. I was also warmly attached to the enthusiastic Hubotter, who, under the name of "Otter," afterwards became the ornament of many of the larger German theatres. Lindenbein, Brosin, the talented Gosrau, and the no less gifted Schwalbe, were also dear friends.

At first I had felt much older than my companions, and I really had seen more of life; but I soon perceived that they were splendid, lovable fellows. My wounded heart speedily healed, and the better my physical and mental condition became the more my demon stirred within me. It was no merit of mine if I was not dubbed "the foolhardy Ebers" here also. The summer in Quedlinburg was a delightful season of mingled work and pleasure. An Easter journey through the Hartz with some gay companions, which included an ascent of the Brocken—already once climbed from Keilhau—is among my most delightful memories.

Like the Thuringian Mountains, the Hartz are also wreathed with a garland of legends and historical memories. Some of its fairest blossoms are in the immediate vicinity of Quedlinburg. These and the delight in nature with which I here renewed my old bond tempted more than one of us to write, and very different poems, deeper and with more true feeling, than those produced in Kottbus. A poetic atmosphere from the Hercynian woods and the monuments of ancient days surrounded our lives. It was delightful to dream under the rustling beeches of the neighbouring forest; and in the church with its

ancient graves and the crypt of St. Wiperti Cloister, the oldest specimen of Christian art in that region, we were filled with reverence for the days of old.

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The life of the great Henry, which I had celebrated in verse at Kottbus, became a reality to me here; and what a powerful influence a visit to the ancient cloister exerted on our young souls! The nearest relatives of mighty sovereigns had dwelt as abbesses within its walls. But two generations ago Anna Amalie, the hapless sister of Frederick the Great, died while holding this office.

A strange and lasting impression was wrought upon me by a corpse and a picture in this convent. Both were in a subterranean chamber which possessed the property of preserving animal bodies from corruption. In this room was the body of Countess Aurora von Konigsmark, famed as the most beautiful woman of her time. After a youth spent in splendour she had retired to the cloister as superior, and there she now lay unveiled, rigid, and yellow, although every feature had retained the form it had in death. Beside the body hung her portrait, taken at the time when a smile on her lips, a glance from her eyes, was enough to fire the heart of the coldest man.

A terrible antithesis!

Here the portrait of the blooming, beautiful husk of a soul exulting in haughty arrogance; yonder that husk itself, transformed by the hand of death into a rigid, colourless caricature, a mummy without embalming.

Art, too, had a place in Quedlinburg. I still remember with pleasure Steuerwald's beautiful winter landscapes, into which he so cleverly introduced the mediaeval ruins of the Hartz region.

Thus, Quedlinburg was well suited to arouse poetic feelings in young hearts, steep the soul with love for the beautiful, time-honoured region, and yet fill it with the desire to make distant lands its own. Every one knows that this was Klopstock's birthplace; but the greatest geographer of all ages, Karl Ritter, whose mighty mind grasped the whole universe as if it were the precincts of his home, also first saw the light of the world here.

Gutsmuths, the founder of the gymnastic system, Bosse, the present Minister of Public Worship and Instruction, and Julius Wolff, are children of Quedlinburg and pupils of its gymnasium.

The long vacation came between the written and verbal examinations, and as I had learned privately that my work had been sufficiently satisfactory, my mother gave me permission to go to the Black Forest, to which pleasant memories attracted me. But my friend Hey had seen nothing of the world, so I chose a goal more easily attained, and took him with me to the Rhine. I went home by the way of Gottingen, and what I saw there of the Saxonia corps filled me with such enthusiasm that I resolved to wear the blue, white, and blue ribbon.

The oral was also successfully examination passed, and I returned to my mother, who received me at Hosterwitz with open arms. The resolve to devote myself to the study of law and to commence in Gottingen was formed, and received her approval.

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For what reason I preferred the legal profession it would be hard to say. Neither mental bias nor interest gained by any searching examination of the science to which I wished to devote myself, turned the scale. I actually gave less thought to my profession and my whole mental and external life than I should have bestowed upon the choice of a residence.

In the ideal school, as I imagine it, the pupils of the senior class should be briefly made acquainted with what each one of the principal professions offers and requires from its members. The principal of the institution should also aid by his counsel the choice of the young men with whose talents and tastes long intercourse had rendered him familiar.

[It should never contain more than seventy pupils. Barop, when I met him after I attained my maturity, named sixty as the largest number which permitted the teacher to know and treat individually the boys confided to his care. He would never receive more at Keilhau.]

Of course I imagine this man not only a teacher but an educator, familiar not alone with the school exercises, but with the mental and physical characteristics of those who are to graduate from the university.

Had not the heads of the Keilhau Institute lost their pupils so young, they would undoubtedly have succeeded in guiding the majority to the right profession.

### ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Coach moved by electricity  
Do thoroughly whatever they do at all  
I approve of such foolhardiness  
Life is the fairest fairy tale (Anderson)  
Loved himself too much to give his whole affection to any one  
Scorned the censure of the people, he never lost sight of it  
What father does not find something to admire in his child

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