

# THE GERMANY I REMEMBER

(II)

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This article continues my personal recollections of life in Germany, begun in the July number of THE DALHOUSIE REVIEW.

The first instalment ended with stories of Giessen.

## I

Occasionally I slipped down to Frankfort for a change. I stayed with Fräulein Wagner in *Escherheimer Landstrasse*, a very<sup>2</sup> clever and cultured woman, a connection of THE WAGNER. At her house I met some of the most interesting people in Frankfort, musicians, *literati*, journalists. The Fräulein was a great friend of old *Pfarrer* Battenberg, and I spent many an amusing evening in his home. But it was not always amusing at the Battenbergs', and it did not take me long to discover that the old man had one obsession. The *Pfarrer* was a portly, bearded gentleman of a past generation. He had retired from the Church, which, I have no doubt, he served as faithfully as he had served the King of Prussia when he marched into France in '70 and was present at the siege and surrender of Paris. His family consisted of his wife, an unobtrusive little woman whose thoughts were bound up with the traditional three "K's" of the old-fashioned German housewife; two sons and a daughter. The elder son was a dreamy youth who was slightly "soft" mentally. He did some sort of market gardening. The younger lad was stiff and arrogant. He had two ambitions in life—to become a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, and to join the diplomatic service after his service in the army. The daughter, who was studying art in Paris, spent her time sprawling on the sofa in the living-room, smoking endless cigarettes, reading French novels, and goading her younger brother to frenzy by her republican ideas. But often it was the *Pfarrer* himself who unwittingly caused violent scenes. For instance, after *Abendessen* (evening meal), when the wine had circulated and his cigar was going comfortably, he might begin the conversation by remarking (casually, it seemed):

"It is a terrible thing that you two young men"—referring to his younger son and myself—"who are seated at my table so happily this evening, must one day fight each other."

"Rot! father," the artist interrupted from the sofa. "War is not inevitable, as you and people of your generation seem to assume. But if it does come, it will come only through the stupidity of people like yourself who are always talking about it, or through the provocative attitude of fools like the—"

"Shut your mouth", shouted the young diplomat. "I forbid you to mention that name."

"Kaiser and his advisers."

"I tell you I forbid you—"

"Quiet *Kinder*. Quiet *Kinder*" the *Herr Pfarrer* admonished. "Remember there is a guest present, and such quarrelling is unseemly. But I say to you all that war will surely come. It is the law of God and of Nature that there must be war. In order to fulfil her high destiny, Germany must go to war—to war with England, which stands in the way of its fulfilment. Two great nations, Germany and England, rivals in trade and for world domination, cannot avoid going to war sooner or later. War is a terrible thing, as I myself know. And the next war will be not merely an affair of two armies fighting, but of the entire nation. Always they are inventing new weapons, and now with our Zeppelins it will be a far more terrible war than the last one."

"Unless you withdraw that insult," the young diplomat continued, returning to the previous question, "I shall have you denounced for *lèse majesté*."

"I tell you the man has no sense of discretion. Look what he said about the work of the sculptor of the Ionic capitals in the new *Kurhaus* in Wiesbaden. He has ruined the man. Why can't he hold his tongue?"

"The Kaiser, I tell you, was right. The fellow who carved those capitals deserved what he got. His work was an insult to German art and German *Kultur*."

"German art! German *Kultur*!" mimicked the artist on the sofa.

"You must excuse the *Kinder Herr Roy*," the *Herr Pfarrer* apologised. "They are still very young—especially the *Bübchen*."

This reference to himself made the "little fellow" grind his teeth and glare furiously at his father who, ignoring the look, continued:

"Anna, as you know, has lived and studied in France, which is perhaps not a good thing in these days of Social Democracy and irreligion."

"She has insulted my Kaiser," the young fellow stormed.

"No, no. She did not think what she was saying," the *Herr Pfarrer* explained.

"She ought never to have been allowed to return to Germany. Let her live with the French, if she prefers them to her own countrymen. Decadents, degenerates, republicans, Social Democrats."

The artist blew a cloud of cigarette smoke. Her hair trailed over her ears; her blouse stuck up above her belt, showing an undervest that was none too clean. Her stockings had holes in the heels.

"They should have dropped you on the head when you were a baby," she shouted back.

"And now that you two *Kinder* have exchanged compliments," the *Herr Pfarrer* continued tranquilly, "let us continue our talk about the war that will so soon be upon us" . . .

Sometimes I took a run over to Marburg to stay with the Sardemanns. Herr Sardemann, senior, was a retired civil servant, and he and his wife were interested in Foreign Missions, and in other Church work. On Sunday evenings his wife and his four sons assembled for family worship. Two of the sons were engaged, and sat, during the reading of the Luther Bible and the singing of the Psalms, holding the hands of their respective *Bräute* (*fiancées*). Everyone, with the exception of the old man and his wife, smoked cigars all the time and sipped red wine. The only thing that interrupted the pleasure of my visits to Marburg was that sooner or later someone would begin to talk about the coming war. It was the same in Worms when I went to stay with the Geils. In carefree hours, on lovely walks on the frozen Rhine, at jolly quaffings of *Liebfrauenmilch*, costume balls and happy little *Kränzchen* (social gatherings), always sooner or later someone was sure to speak of the coming war. In Giessen I used occasionally to attend service in the *Johanniskirche*. Two pastors were attached to the church. One was an old man; the other, young. They were both gentlemen. The old *Pfarrer* liked his glass of beer, and was an able church historian. He had a tremendous respect for the State, for the army, and for the powers that were. He was very discreet in the pulpit, never offended anybody, and was well-liked and highly respected in the community. I suppose he had never committed any great sin in his life; in fact, I question whether he really knew what sin meant. God was for him very obviously a German, a sort of Super Head of the State. That was as far as his

beliefs seemed to go. But he had one fixed belief which he never failed to mention—the inevitability of war. I got to know the younger man well, through his taking lessons in English from me. He was an alert, up-to-date young theologian, an expert in New Testament exegesis, was mildly interested in social and political problems, and hated the Social Democrats. He seemed to think that the chief mission of the Protestant Church in Germany was to fight the Social Democrats, and to fight them was to fight the battle of the State. He was a good citizen like the old *Pfarrer*, and a loyal civil servant. I could never learn from him that he regarded himself as a Christian Knight waging a spiritual warfare. But he had one main preoccupation—and that was why he took lessons in English from me—the coming war with England.

## II

After a few months at the Hasslers, I moved to the<sup>7</sup>Stephanstrasse in order to be near Thomas. My new landlord, Herr Christ, was a black-avised, friendly little man. He was a railway guard. His wife was a gentle and kindly *Hausfrau*. They had three daughters and a son, Ernst. It was a perpetual worry to Frau Christ why Ernst, who was a quiet lad, fond of playing the zither and with a taste for learning foreign languages, should have been born into this world apparently for the express purpose of killing Frenchmen—or Englishmen—if he wasn't killed by them. She used to get on this subject when I visited her and her husband in the kitchen, but whenever she began, her *Mann* growled:

"*Blödsinnig, Quatsch!* (Stuff and nonsense). Wife, you know nothing of such matters. The thing is impossible. The French—perhaps. But the English! Never!"

And, being a good and obedient wife, Frau Christ would say no more about the matter, but put on the coffee pot. While the coffee was getting ready, she cut a plateful of slices of black bread, which she spread with plum-jam skimming. When we were seated at table, she talked of things that were within her compass and scope. Why was it that the Customs had held up my Scotch pudding? I tried to explain what a haggis was. But why was it held up? I told her that it was because some Chicago meat packers had lately been dropping human fingers into their sausages, and the German Customs authorities didn't want to have anything from Chicago getting into Germany. But surely there was a difference between Scotland and Chicago?

Certainly, but the Customs people didn't seem to realise that. Of course they were exceedingly stupid people. Frau Christ had a brother in Oregon. Was Oregon anywhere near Chicago? That was a question which none of the company could answer. But I was afraid that nothing could be done about the haggis. A shame! for no doubt the Customs people would eat the haggis themselves, Chicago or no Chicago. There seemed to be no justice in the world. Fine, that about the Grand Duke having an heir. People said they could never have a child. What did they know? "A young shoot grafted on the Hessian tree," the papers called the child. The Grand Duke was an excellent man. Frau Christ and her *Mann* had often seen him when he came as Chancellor to attend University functions. Kindly too, although they said he was no soldier. Well, everything had its place, and the man perhaps wasn't interested in fighting.

At the mention of that word, Herr Christ looked warningly at her across his coffee cup—And why import all these Prussian police when the Kaiser came to Giessen? They just irritated the people by their bullying ways. *Dreck Preuse* (dirty Prussians) the crowds shouted at them. What were they afraid of? No one in Giessen would dream of hurting *Majestät*. Their own local Hessian police would see to that; they knew all the suspicious characters in the town. And that reminded her, the chemist on the floor beneath had been quarrelling terribly with his mistress. People said that he wanted to get rid of her, and that she wanted to marry him. The thing was becoming a public scandal. No, no, not their living together, but the racket they made. If it came to living together—what about all these Russians on the ground floor? All anarchists, learning to manufacture bombs for the coming revolution. Perhaps that was why the Prussian police had been drafted into the town when the Kaiser was here. And had I heard about Herr Wolkewitz, the Polish student on the floor above? But these Poles drank so! Herr Wolkewitz had been fined for *Leichenbeleidigung* (insulting a corpse). He had been to the *Kneipe* early in the day instead of attending his classes, and on the way home he and some of his friends had met the funeral. They had started to sing "I had a comrade once". And Herr Eigenbrod—a madcap! He had been threatened by another student for defamation, but the case was quashed when he made a public apology and paid forty marks to the poor.

Herr Sardemann too! He had just fought his third duel, with sabres, for calling the members of the *Germanen* corporation

"a set of peasants' sons!" But Herr Sardemann was a *Listler* (left-hander) and had escaped with a mere scratch. The last man he fought had lost half his cheek, and was said to be in bad shape. And Herr Thomas! What a pity the man couldn't stop sneering at German *Kultur* and German cooking. At the Skalitzky they now had to keep a special beer warmer for him, to warm his beer. That is to say, when he deigned to drink it! And Herr "Jossel", that quiet little Jew from Darmstadt, with the quiet eyes, had been slapped in the face by a member of the *Wingolfa* and could not fight, as the Jews were *nicht satisfaktionsfähig* (could not give satisfaction). That was only right too, although it did seem hard on the Jews who were always taking insults and were never able to answer back. But there were far too many Jews in Germany in any case. Let them go back where they came from—wherever *that* was. Soon it would be impossible for a German to get a job. The Jews were always ahead. They certainly had to be kept in their place, these people. And these abominable *Koscher* shops! They were opening one at the corner, just under Herr Professor Eck's apartment. How that man managed to get along with thirteen children! Two wives he had had; he kept them at it!" . . .

Before I returned to Scotland for a vacation in 1907, Giessen University celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of its foundation. It was an occasion for great rejoicing. Many speeches of congratulation were made by many distinguished men. There were representatives from universities all over the world. But at all the receptions, at all the gay garden parties, at all the elaborate banquets, there seemed to me to be a feeling of restlessness, almost of foreboding. As my train steamed out of the railway station early one morning, on the way to Cologne, there came floating across to me in full-throated chorus the stirring strains of *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles* . . .

### III

The following few years were difficult, and fraught with tragedy. Tension between England and Germany grew steadily. The murder at Sarajevo was disturbing; the papers seemed to think that a crisis was at hand. I had arranged to go to Germany again in the summer of 1914. I might have been warned, by what was happening in London, that the situation was grave than it had ever been before. Austrian and German reservists were hurrying back to rejoin their regiments; they all seemed

convinced that there was to be war. On the Hook of Holland boat everyone advised me to go back to England. It was the same on the train in Holland. "Nothing will happen to you, of course," they said, "but it will not be pleasant." Still I was not convinced. I had lived through crises in Germany before, Agadir, for example—and had heard about war so often that it fell on my ears like the cry "Wolf! Wolf!" So, disregarding all warnings, I went on.

I got as far as Heidelberg, where I had intended to stay for a while and do some work with an old colleague, Professor Hoops. I took a room at the *Darmstädter Hof*, and in the evening went to dine with him. The streets were filled with excited people reading the latest bulletins on the news pillars, and the notice boards in front of the hotels. When a waiter told me that nearly all foreigners had left, especially the British, I felt very much alone. I felt more lonely than ever when we sat on the balcony after dinner sipping our coffee, and the Professor said sadly:

"I have always loved England and all that it stands for. And now we are going to fight each other. Yes, it is true," as I made a gesture of protest, "only too true. At any moment England may declare war against us, and you, my young friend, may find yourself in grave danger. I would advise you to leave as soon as possible, and to return to England by way of Switzerland. The frontier there is still open. It is too terribly sad to think of all the young men like yourself, men whom I have taught, who can have no possible reason to hate one another, being sent to war and to death."

On my way back to the hotel, I asked at the station about trains. All they could tell me at the Information Bureau was that the regular service was completely disorganized owing to troop movements, and that it was unlikely there would be a train for ordinary passengers going any distance, for another day at least.

That night I slept uneasily.

Next day I met my friend Wagner, a colleague of mine at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He was on his way to report to his regiment. He was in high spirits, but his *Braut*, who was with him, was silent and depressed. We went to a *café* along the Necker, and discussed the situation over strawberry ices, Wagner having discovered that he could travel by a later train.

"What if England should come into the war?" I asked.

"England will never come into the war," he laughed. "An

Englishman was one of the first to shed his blood for Germany in 1870."

"Things are different now," I answered. "England has definite commitments with France. France is already at war with Germany. Consequently it can only be a matter of a very few hours before we declare war on you too."

"Never!" asserted Wagner. "England will not be such a fool. Her rôle will be that of the 'Laughing Third'. She will set France and Germany by the ears, and look to France to pull her chestnuts out of the fire for her."

"But," I insisted, "if your Government should violate the neutrality of Belgium and attack France through that country, England will be forced to join in the war to save her honour."

"England will join in any war that suits her. She did not intervene in the Bosnia-Herzegovina question; she fought the Boers, and refuses Home Rule to Ireland. This time she knows she has nothing to gain by standing by France and opposing Germany. She will realize that it will be to her advantage to stand aside and let us finish the old quarrel with the French, whose insolence is incredible. We can give England more by defeating France than she could ever hope to gain by going to war on her behalf. And we must settle once and for all this business with the Russians. It is intolerable that we should have this menace to our German *Kultur*. England will also realize that it is to her interest that German *Kultur* be preserved. She could never survive the disgrace of allying herself with a non-European race of barbarians, and with the French."

"I suppose," I interrupted, "we have not time for a second strawberry ice?"

"No," Wagner answered regretfully, speaking for himself and his *Braut*, "but, if you will agree to meet me here at the end of September, when we have finished with the *Herr Franzos*, I shall promise you a bottle of the best *Sekt*. Agreed?"

We went to the station, which was packed with reservists in mufti, and with *Aktiven* (serving soldiers) in blue and grey, wearing their *Pickelhauben* (peaked helmets). A drunkard was capering in front of a group of soldiers; officers in their long cloaks stalked up and down the platform, talking gravely, with clanking swords. No doubt, they already saw themselves in Paris, and were discussing the delayed autumn manoeuvres. They were handsome men, and impressed me at the time with a high seriousness.



When Wagner's train came in, he bade the *Braut* and myself *Auf Wiedersehen*. She wept bitterly, like the other women who were left behind.

"In three weeks we shall be in Paris," Wagner cried gaily from his carriage window, "and I shall meet you in Scotland as usual, in September."

The train moved off, and I turned to console the weeping girl.

"It may still blow over," I said encouragingly. "Wait. You will see that the army will be demobilized in less than a week. It is simply a demonstration. War is inconceivable."

But she was not to be comforted.

"Hermann does not realise what he is saying," she sobbed. "I shall never see him again. And he is so lighthearted. Oh! It is terrible, terrible, this war. We did not want to fight the English and the French. It is the French and the Russians who have forced the war upon us, and England is behind them because she fears German competition and sees now her chance to destroy the German navy. Oh! Why cannot they settle their quarrels in a friendly way? It is the women who know the true horror of war. And your women in England, they, too, will now learn the meaning of war, and Hermann, who is so lighthearted, does not understand. You English do not understand what war means. It will no longer be a sport for the few. Had you realized, you would have forbidden France and Russia to fight, and you would have been the friend of Germany. Now you are her enemy. You are my brother's enemy. You are Hermann's enemy. You are *my* enemy. The responsibility rests upon your country, for your country could have prevented it. But you willed it for our destruction. When it is over, and you see Russia in ruins, and France mutilated and dying for lack of men—when you have gained your objective—then you will realize. But you cannot kill the German spirit. You cannot destroy the German *Kultur*; you cannot ally yourself permanently with a decadent France; you cannot exist without German commerce and German competition, and, one day, when we have recovered, you will come to us, having seen your mistake, and it will be we who will impose the terms of victory and who will emerge victorious from the blood-bath which you have ordered."

I parted from the hysterical girl outside the station, and made my way slowly back to my hotel. People in the *cafés* drank absently. An elderly man in a wicker chair, on the entrance steps of the hotel, set a staring little fellow on his

knee and talked to him gravely of the War of '70; he explained why the Fatherland had taken up arms now. As he talked, the boy listened with wondering eyes . . .

## IV

At that moment a party of Americans, without their guide, invaded the hall noisily and asked the hotel manager for news. A little fat man wearing a flat, soft round hat came across to where I was sitting in the lounge.

"Can you tell me, sir," he asked, "what all this excitement is about, anyway?"

I looked at him for a moment, wondering whether he was in earnest, but the look of distress on the faces of his party, who began to gather round me, speedily convinced me that he was sincere.

"To the best of my knowledge," I replied, with an air of calm which I was far from feeling, "there's a war on".

"For pity's sake!" said someone.

"We've been doing Europe for the past ten days, and just hadn't heard the news," the little man explained. "What about the British?"

"I believe Great Britain may declare war either to-night or to-morrow," I answered.

The little man looked serious.

"Listen!" he said, "you'd better come right along with us Americans. Guess they wouldn't dare interfere with you travelling along with us."

Obviously the little man did not understand the powers of the German *Polizei*.

"I'm afraid I can't come. You see I'm hoping to be able to get back by Belgium. And you?"

"We're going to Mannheim."

At that moment the Cook's man appeared. He was a German.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted, "we have half an hour to do the famous Heidelberg *Schloss*. There is a train leaving for Mannheim in two hours and twenty minutes. And, ladies and gentlemen, I want to assure you that there is absolutely not the least cause for anxiety. You just leave everything to me. I know what I'm doin'".

"Better come along," the little man urged again.

The Cook's man had begun to move down the steps, followed

by his party who looked nervous and upset. I held out my hand to my American friend, who shook it warmly.

"You'll get left behind if you don't go," I said. "And thank you."

The little man shook my hand again and scurried after his party.

As there was nothing I could do for the moment, I lit a cigarette, ordered some coffee, and soon, as the afternoon was warm, fell asleep.

When I woke an hour later, I found an Englishman and his wife seated opposite me. A Frenchwoman was writing letters at the *escritoire*; a waiter was leaning from a window and shouting with a crowd, which was making a tremendous din. The Englishman, bracing himself for a great effort, suddenly spoke:

"Excuse me, but do you think all this is going to come to anything?"

"Hasn't it?"

"I mean—do you think there really is going to be a war?"

"Did you intend to go further?" I countered.

"Oh yes!" the Englishwoman replied. "We are going on to Bayreuth. My husband and I are both intensely fond of music, and we are *so* looking forward to the Festival. Do you think we will find much difficulty travelling?"

"I should advise you to take the first available train back," I said. "Your husband is, like myself, of military age, and might be interned."

"Nonsense!" the Englishman broke in angrily. "They would never dare to touch an Englishman. They would give us thirty-six hours' notice to clear out, if they meant anything. It wouldn't be fair if they didn't. Besides, sir, you are here yourself."

"I assure you that the sole reason that I am here is because I am hoping to catch the train I speak of—if I can."

"You are an alarmist, sir," the musical enthusiast replied, rather huffily, as he got up from his chair. "You need not be unduly alarmed, dear, at what this gentleman says. Besides, the English papers say it will all blow over in a few days."

They bade me good-bye coldly, and went off to find out when the next train left for Bayreuth. No doubt the Englishman thought me a fool. I did not think him a fool. He was merely a typical Englishman of 1914. But I wager he did not get to Bayreuth.