

ELIZABETH VON ARNIM

CHRISTINE

Elizabeth von Arnim

Christine

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Elizabeth Von Arnim

Christine

My daughter Christine, who wrote me these letters, died at a hospital in Stuttgart on the morning of August 8th, 1914, of acute double pneumonia. I have kept the letters private for nearly three years, because, apart from the love in them that made them sacred things in days when we each still hoarded what we had of good, they seemed to me, who did not know the Germans and thought of them, as most people in England for a long while thought, without any bitterness and with a great inclination to explain away and excuse, too extreme and sweeping in their judgments. Now, as the years have passed, and each has been more full of actions on Germany's part difficult to explain except in one way and impossible to excuse, I feel that these letters, giving a picture of the state of mind of the German public immediately before the War, and written by some one who went there enthusiastically ready to like everything and everybody, may have a certain value in helping to put together a small corner of the great picture of Germany which it will be necessary to keep clear and naked before us in the future if the world is to be saved.

I am publishing the letters just as they came to me, leaving out nothing. We no longer in these days belong to small circles, to limited little groups. We have been stripped of our secrecies and of our private hoards. We live in a great relationship. We share our griefs; and anything there is of love and happiness, any smallest expression of it, should be shared too. This is why I am leaving out nothing in the letters.

The war killed Christine, just as surely as if she had been a soldier in the trenches. I will not write of her great gift, which was extraordinary. That too has been lost to the world, broken and thrown away by the war.

I never saw her again. I had a telegram saying she was dead. I tried to go to Stuttgart, but was turned back at the frontier. The two last letters, the ones from Halle and from Wurzburg, reached me after I knew that she was dead.

ALICE CHOLMONDELEY,
London, May, 1917.

Publishers' Note

The Publishers have considered it best to alter some of the personal names in the following pages.

Christine

Lutzowstrasse 49, Berlin, Thursday, May 28th, 1914

My blessed little mother,

Here I am safe, and before I unpack or do a thing I'm writing you a little line of love. I sent a telegram at the station, so that you'll know at once that nobody has eaten me on the way, as you seemed rather to fear. It is wonderful to be here, quite on my own, as if I were a young man starting his career. I feel quite solemn, it's such a great new adventure, Kloster can't see me till Saturday, but the moment I've had a bath and tidied up I shall get out my fiddle and see if I've forgotten how to play it between London and Berlin. If only I can be sure you aren't going to be too lonely! Beloved mother, it will only be a year, or even less if I work fearfully hard and really get on, and once it is over a year is nothing. Oh, I know you'll write and tell me you don't mind a bit and rather like it, but you see your Chris hasn't lived with you all her life for nothing; she knows you very well now,—at least, as much of your dear sacred self that you will show her. Of course I know you're going to be brave and all that, but one can be very unhappy while one is being brave, and besides, one isn't brave unless one is suffering. The worst of it is that we're so poor, or you could have come with me and we'd have taken a house and set up housekeeping together for my year of study. Well, we won't be poor for ever, little mother. I'm going to be your son, and husband, and everything else that loves and is devoted, and I'm going to earn both our livings for us, and take care of you forever. You've taken care of me till now, and now it's my turn. You don't suppose I'm a great hulking person of twenty two, and five foot ten high, and with this lucky facility in fiddling, for nothing? It's a good thing it is summer now, or soon will be, and you can work away in your garden, for I know that is where you are happiest; and by the time it's winter you'll be used to my not being there, and besides there'll be the spring to look forward to, and in the spring I come home, finished. Then I'll start playing and making money, and we'll have the little house we've dreamed of in London, as well as our cottage, and we'll be happy ever after. And after all, it is really a beautiful arrangement that we only have each other in the world, because so we each get the other's concentrated love. Else it would be spread out thin over a dozen husbands and brothers and people. But for all that I do wish dear Dad were still alive and with you.

This pension is the top fiat of a four-storied house, and there isn't a lift, so I arrived breathless, besides being greatly battered and all crooked after my night sitting up in the train; and Frau Berg came and opened the door herself when I rang, and when she saw me she threw up two immense hands and exclaimed, "*Herr Gott!*"

"*Nicht wahr?*" I said, agreeing with her, for I knew I must be looking too awful.

She then said, while I stood holding on to my violin-case and umbrella and coat and a paper bag of ginger biscuits I had been solacing myself with in the watches of the night, that she hadn't known when exactly to expect me, so she had decided not to expect me at all, for she had observed that the things you do not expect come to you, and the things you do expect do not; besides, she was a busy woman, and busy women waste no time expecting anything in any case; and then she said, "Come in."

"*Seien Sie willkommen, mein Fraulein,*" she continued, with a sort of stern cordiality, when I was over the threshold, holding out both her hands in massive greeting; and as both mine were full she caught hold of what she could, and it was the bag of biscuits, and it burst.

"*Herr Gott!*" cried Frau Berg again, as they rattled away over the wooden floor of the passage, "*Herr Gott, die schonen Kakes!*" And she started after them; so I put down my things on a chair and started after them too, and would you believe it the biscuits came out of the corners positively cleaner than when they went in. The floor cleaned the biscuits instead of, as would have happened in London, the biscuits cleaning the floor, so you can be quite happy about its being a clean place.

It is a good thing I learned German in my youth, for even if it is so rusty at present that I can only say things like *Nicht wahr*, I can understand everything, and I'm sure I'll get along very nicely for at least a week on the few words that somehow have stuck in my memory. I've discovered they are:

Nicht wahr, Wundervoll, Natürlich, Herrlich, Ich gratuliere, and Doch.

And the only one with the faintest approach to contentiousness, or acidity, or any of the qualities that don't endear the stranger to the indigenous, is *doch*.

My bedroom looks very clean, and is roomy and comfortable, and I shall be able to work very happily in it, I'm sure. I can't tell you how much excited I am at getting here and going to study under the great Kloster! You darling one, you beloved mother, stinting yourself, scraping your own life bare, so as to give me this chance. *Won't* I work. And *work*. And *work*. And in a year—no, we won't call it a year, we'll say in a few months—I shall come back to you for good, carrying my sheaves with me. Oh, I hope there will be sheaves,—big ones, beautiful ones, to lay at your blessed feet! Now I'll run down and post this. I saw a letter-box a few yards down the street. And then I'll have a bath and go to bed for a few hours, I think. It is still only nine o'clock in the morning, so I have hours and hours of today before me, and can practise this afternoon and write to you again this evening. So good-bye for a few hours, my precious mother.

Your happy Chris.

May 28th. Evening

It's very funny here, but quite comfortable. You needn't give a thought to my comforts, mother darling. There's a lot to eat, and if I'm not in clover I'm certainly in feathers,—you should see the immense sackful of them in a dark red sateen bag on my bed! As you have been in Germany trying to get poor Dad well in all those *Kurorten*, you'll understand how queer my bedroom looks, like a very solemn and gloomy drawingroom into which it has suddenly occurred to somebody to put a bed. It is a tall room: tall of ceiling, which is painted at the corners with blue clouds and pink cherubim—unmistakable Germans—and tall of door, of which there are three, and tall of window, of which there are two. The windows have long dark curtains of rep or something woolly, and long coffee-coloured lace curtains as well; and there's a big green majolica stove in one corner; and there's a dark brown wall-paper with gilt flowers on it; and an elaborate chandelier hanging from a coloured plaster rosette in the middle of the ceiling, all twisty and gilt, but it doesn't light,—Wanda, the maid of all work, brings me a petroleum lamp with a green glass shade to it when it gets dusk. I've got a very short bed with a dark red sateen quilt on to which my sheet is buttoned all round, a pillow propped up so high on a wedge stuck under the mattress that I shall sleep sitting up almost straight, and then as a crowning glory the sack of feathers, which will do beautifully for holding me down when I'm having a nightmare. In a corner, with an even greater air of being an afterthought than the bed, there's a very tiny washstand, and pinned on the wall behind it over the part of the wallpaper I might splash on Sunday mornings when I'm supposed really to wash, is a strip of grey linen with a motto worked on it in blue wool:

Eigener Heerd
Ist Goldes Werth

which is a rhyme if you take it in the proper spirit, and isn't if you don't. But I love the sentiment, don't you? It seems peculiarly sound when one is in a room like this in a strange country. And what I'm here for and am going to work for *is* an *eigener Heerd*, with you and me one each side of it warming our happy toes on our very own fender. Oh, won't it be too lovely, mother darling, to be together again in our very own home! Able to shut ourselves in, shut our front door in the face of the world, and just say to the world, "There now."

There's a little looking-glass on a nail up above the *eigener Heerd* motto, so high that if it hadn't found its match in me I'd only be able to see my eyebrows in it. As it is, I do see as far as my chin. What goes on below that I shall never know while I continue to dwell in the Lutzowstrasse. Outside, a very long way down, for the house has high rooms right through and I'm at the top, trams pass almost constantly along the street, clanging their bells. They sound much more aggressive than other trams I have heard, or else it is because my ears are tired tonight. There are double windows, though, which will shut out the noise while I'm practising—and also shut it in. I mean to practise eight hours every day if Kloster will let me,—twelve if needs be, so I've made up my mind only to write to you on Sundays; for if I don't make a stern rule like that I shall be writing to you every day, and then what would happen to the eight hours? I'm going to start them tomorrow, and try and get as ready as I can for the great man on Saturday. I'm fearfully nervous and afraid, for so much depends on it, and in spite of knowing that somehow from somewhere I've got a kind of gift for fiddling. Heaven knows where that little bit of luck came from, seeing that up to now, though you're such a perfect listener, you haven't developed any particular talent for playing anything, have you mother darling; and poor Dad positively preferred to be in a room where music wasn't. Do you remember how he used to say he couldn't think which end of a violin the noises came out of, and whichever it was he wished they

wouldn't? But what a mercy, what a real mercy and solution of our difficulties, that I've got this one thing that perhaps I shall be able to do really well, I do thank God on my knees for this.

There are four other boarders here,—three Germans and one Swede, and the Swede and two of the Germans are women; and five outside people come in for the midday dinner every day, all Germans, and four of them are men. They have what they call *Abonnementskarten* for their dinners, so much a month. Frau Berg keeps an Open Midday Table—it is written up on a board on the street railing—and charges 1 mark 25 pfennigs a dinner if a month's worth of them is taken, and 1 mark 50 pfennigs if they're taken singly. So everybody takes the month's worth, and it is going to be rather fun, I think. Today I was solemnly presented to the diners, first collectively by Frau Berg as *Unser junge englische Gast*, Mees—no, I can't write what she made of Cholmondeley, but some day I'll pronounce it for you; and really it is hard on her that her one English guest, who might so easily have been Evans, or Dobbs, or something easy, should have a name that looks a yard long and sounds an inch short—and then each of them to me singly by name. They all made the most beautiful stiff bows. Some of them are students, I gathered; some, I imagine, are staying here because they have no homes,—wash-ups on the shores of life; some are clerks who come in for dinner from their offices near by; and one, the oldest of the men and the most deferred to, is a lawyer called Doctor something. I suppose my being a stranger made them silent, for they were all very silent and stiff, but they'll get used to me quite soon I expect, for didn't you once rebuke me because everybody gets used to me much too soon? Being the newest arrival I sat right at the end of the table in the darkness near the door, and looking along it towards the light it was really impressive, the concentration, the earnestness, the thoroughness, the skill, with which the two rows of guests dealt with things like gravy on their plates,—elusive, mobile things that are not caught without a struggle. Why, if I can manage to apply myself to fiddling with half that skill and patience I shall be back home again in six months!

I'm so sleepy, I must leave off and go to bed. I did sleep this morning, but only for an hour or two; I was too much excited, I think, at having really got here to be able to sleep. Now my eyes are shutting, but I do hate leaving off, for I'm not going to write again till Sunday, and that is two whole days further ahead, and you know my precious mother it's the only time I shall feel near you, when I'm talking to you in letters. But I simply can't keep my eyes open any longer, so goodnight and good-bye my own blessed one, till Sunday. All my heart's love to you.

Your Chris.

We have supper at eight, and tonight it was cold herrings and fried potatoes and tea. Do you think after a supper like that I shall be able to dream of anybody like you?

Sunday, May 31st, 1914

Precious mother,

I've been dying to write you at least six times a day since I posted my letter to you the day before yesterday, but rules are rules, aren't they, especially if one makes them oneself, because then the poor little things are so very helpless, and have to be protected. I couldn't have looked myself in the face if I'd started off by breaking my own rule, but I've been thinking of you and loving you all the time—oh, so much!

Well, I'm *very* happy. I'll say that first, so as to relieve your darling mind. I've seen Kloster, and played to him, and he was fearfully kind and encouraging. He said very much what Ysaye said in London, and Joachim when I was little and played my first piece to him standing on the dining-room table in Eccleston Square and staring fascinated, while I played, at the hairs of his beard, because I'd never been as close as that to a beard before. So I've been walking on clouds with my chin well in the air, as who wouldn't? Kloster is a little round, red, bald man, the baldest man I've ever seen; quite bald, with hardly any eyebrows, and clean-shaven as well. He's the funniest little thing till you join him to a violin, and then—! A year with him ought to do wonders for me. He says so too; and when I had finished playing—it was the G minor Bach—you know,—the one with the fugue beginning:

[Transcriber's note: A Lilypond rendition of the music fragment can be found at the end of this e-text.]

he solemnly shook hands with me and said—what do you think he said?—"My Fraulein, when you came in I thought, 'Behold yet one more well-washed, nice-looking, foolish, rich, nothing-at-all English Mees, who is going to waste my time and her money with lessons.' I now perceive that I have to do with an artist. My Fraulein *ich gratuliere*." And he made me the funniest little solemn bow. I thought I'd die of pride.

I don't know why he thought me rich, seeing how ancient all my clothes are, and especially my blue jersey, which is what I put on because I can play so comfortably in it; except that, as I've already noticed, people here seem persuaded that everybody English is rich,—anyhow that they have more money than is good for them. So I told him of our regrettable financial situation, and said if he didn't mind looking at my jersey it would convey to him without further words how very necessary it is that I should make some money. And I told him I had a mother in just such another jersey, only it is a black one, and therefore somebody had to give her a new one before next winter, and there wasn't anybody to do it except me.

He made me another little bow—he talks English, so I could say a lot of things—and he said, "My Fraulein, you need be in no anxiety. Your Frau Mamma will have her jersey. Those fingers of yours are full of that which turns instantly into gold."

So now. What do you think of that, my precious one? He says I've got to turn to and work like a slave, practise with a *sozusagen verteufelte Unermudlichkeit*, as he put it, and if I rightly develop what he calls my unusual gift,—(I'm telling you exactly, and you know darling mother it isn't silly vainness makes me repeat these things,—I'm past being vain; I'm just bewildered with gratitude that I should happen to be able to fiddle)—at the end of a year, he declares, I shall be playing all over Europe and earning enough to make both you and me never have to think of money again. Which will be a very blessed state to get to.

You can picture the frame of mind in which I walked down his stairs and along the Potsdamerstrasse home. I felt I could defy everybody now. Perhaps that remark will seem odd to you, but having given you such glorious news and told you how happy I am, I'll not conceal from you that I've been feeling a little forlorn at Frau Berg's. Lonely. Left out. Darkly suspecting that they don't like me.

You see, Kloster hadn't been able to have me go to him till yesterday, which was Saturday, and not then till the afternoon, so that I had had all Friday and most of Saturday to be at a loose end in, except for practising, and though I had got here prepared to find everybody very charming and kind it was somehow gradually conveyed to me, though for ages I thought it must be imagination, that Frau Berg and the other boarders and the *Mittagsgaste* dislike me. Well, I would have accepted it with a depressed resignation as the natural result of being unlikeable, and have tried by being pleasanter and pleasanter—wouldn't it have been a dreadful sight to see me screwing myself up more and more tightly to an awful pleasantness—to induce them to like me, but the people in the streets don't seem to like me either. They're not friendly. In fact they're rude. And the people in the streets can't really personally dislike me, because they don't know me, so I can't imagine why they're so horrid.

Of course one's ideal when one is in the streets is to be invisible, not to be noticed at all. That's the best thing. And the next best is to be behaved to kindly, with the patient politeness of the London policemen, or indeed of anybody one asks one's way of in England or Italy or France. The Berlin man as he passes mutters the word *Englanderin* as though it were a curse, or says into one's ear—they seem fond of saying or rather hissing this, and seem to think it both crushing and funny,—"*Ros bif*," and the women stare at one all over and also say to each other *Englanderin*.

You never told me Germans were rude; or is it only in Berlin that they are, I wonder. After my first expedition exploring through the Thiergarten and down Unter den Linden to the museums last Friday between my practisings, I preferred getting lost to asking anybody my way. And as for the policemen, to whom I naturally turned when I wanted help, having been used to turning to policemen ever since I can remember for comfort and guidance, they simply never answered me at all. They just stood and stared with a sort of mocking. And of course they understood, for I got my question all ready beforehand. I longed to hit them,—I who don't ever want to hit anybody, I whom you've so often reprimanded for being too friendly. But the meekest lamb, a lamb dripping with milk and honey, would turn into a lion if its polite approaches were met with such wanton rudeness. I was so indignantly certain that these people, any of them, policemen or policed, would have answered the same question with the most extravagant politeness if I had been an officer, or with an officer. They grovel if an officer comes along; and a woman with an officer might walk on them if she wanted to. They were rude simply because I was alone and a woman. And that being so, though I spoke with the tongue of angels, as St. Paul saith, and as I as a matter of fact did, if what that means is immense mellifluousness, it would avail me nothing.

So when I was out, and being made so curiously to feel conspicuous and disliked, the knowledge that the only alternative was to go back to the muffled unfriendliness at Frau Berg's did make me feel a little forlorn. I can tell you now, because of the joy I've had since. I don't mind any more. I'm raised up and blessed now. Indeed I feel I've got much more by a long way than my share of good things, and with what Kloster said hugged secretly to my heart I'm placed outside the ordinary toiling-moiling that life means for most women who have got to wring a living out of it without having anything special to wring with. It's the sheerest, wonderfulest, most radiant luck that I've got this. Won't I just work. Won't this funny frowning bedroom of mine become a temple of happiness. I'm going to play Bach to it till it turns beautiful.

I don't know why I always think of Bach first when I write about music. I think of him first as naturally when I think of music as I think of Wordsworth first when I think of poetry. I know neither of them is the greatest, though Bach is the equal of the greatest, but they are the ones I love best. What a world it is, my sweetest little mother! It is so full of beauty. And then there's the hard work that makes everything taste so good. You have to have the hard work; I've found that out. I do think it's a splendid world,—full of glory created in the past and lighting us up while we create still greater glory. One has only got to shut out the parts of the present one doesn't like, to see this all clear and feel so happy. I shut myself up in this bedroom, this ugly dingy bedroom with its silly heavy trappings, and get out my violin, and instantly it becomes a place of light, a place full of sound,—

shivering with light and sound, the light and sound of the beautiful gracious things great men felt and thought long ago. Who cares then about Frau Berg's boarders not speaking to one, and the Berlin streets and policemen being unkind? Actually I forget the long miles and hours I am away from you, the endless long miles and hours that reach from me here to you there, and am happy, oh happy,—so happy that I could cry out for joy. And so I would, I daresay, if it wouldn't spoil the music.

There's Wanda coming to tell me dinner is ready. She just bumps the soup-tureen against my door as she carries it down the passage to the diningroom, and calls out briefly, "*Essen.*"

I'll finish this tonight.

Bedtime.

I just want to say goodnight, and tell you, in case you shouldn't have noticed it, how much your daughter loves you. I mayn't practise on Sundays, because of the *Hausruhe*, Frau Berg says, and so I have time to think; and I'm astonished, mother darling, at the emptiness of life without you. It is as though most of me had somehow got torn off, and I have to manage as best I can with a fragment. What a good thing I feel it so much, for so I shall work all the harder to shorten the time. Hard work is the bridge across which I'll get back to you. You see, you're the one human being I've got in the world who loves me, the only one who is really, deeply, interested in me, who minds if I am hurt and is pleased if I am happy. That's a watery word,—pleased; I should have said exults. It is so wonderful, your happiness in my being happy,—so touching. I'm all melted with love and gratitude when I think of it, and of the dear way you let me do this, come away here and realize my dream of studying with Kloster, when you knew it meant for you such a long row of dreary months alone. Forgive me if I sound sentimental. I know you will, so I needn't bother to ask. That's what I so love about you,—you always understand, you never mind. I can talk to you; and however idiotic I am, and whatever sort of a fool,—blind, unkind, ridiculous, obstinate or wilful—take your choice, little sweet mother, you'll remember occasions that were fitted by each of these—you look at me with those shrewd sweet eyes that always somehow have a laugh in them, and say some little thing that shows you are brushing aside all the ugly froth of nonsense, and are intelligently and with perfect detachment searching for the reason. And having found the reason you understand and forgive; for of course there always *is* a reason when ordinary people, not born fiends, are disagreeable. I'm sure that's why we've been so happy together,—because you've never taken anything I've done or said that was foolish or unkind personally. You've always known it was just so much irrelevant rubbish, just an excrescence, a passing sickness; never, never your real Chris who loves you.

Good-bye, my own blessed mother. It's long past bedtime. Tomorrow I'm to have my first regular lesson with Kloster. And tomorrow I ought to get a letter from you. You will take care of yourself, won't you? You wouldn't like me to be anxious all this way off, would you? Anxious, and not sure?

Your Chris.

Berlin, Tuesday, June 2nd, 1914

Darling mother, I've just got your two letters, two lovely long ones at once, and I simply can't wait till next Sunday to tell you how I rejoiced over them, so I'm going to squander 20 pfennigs just on that. I'm not breaking my rule and writing on a day that isn't Sunday, because I'm not really writing. This isn't a letter, it's a kiss. How glad I am you're so well and getting on so comfortably. And I'm well and happy too, because I'm so busy,—you can't think how busy. I'm working harder than I've ever done in my life, and Kloster is pleased with me. So now that I've had letters from you there seems very little left in the world to want, and I go about on the tips of my toes. Good-bye my beloved one, till Sunday.

Chris.

Oh, I must just tell you that at my lesson yesterday I played the Ernst F sharp minor concerto,—the virtuoso, firework thing, you know, with Kloster putting in bits of the orchestra part on the piano every now and then because he wanted to see what I could do in the way of gymnastics. He laughed when I had finished, and patted my shoulder, and said, "Very good acrobatics. Now we will do no more of them. We will apply ourselves to real music." And he said I was to play him what I could of the Bach Chaconne.

I was so happy, little mother. Kloster leading me about among the wonders of Bach, was like being taken by the hand by some great angel and led through heaven.

Berlin, Sunday, June 7th, 1914

On Sunday mornings, darling mother, directly I wake I remember it is my day for being with you. I can hardly be patient with breakfast, and the time it takes to get done with those thick cups of coffee that are so thick that, however deftly I drink, drops always trickle down what would be my beard if I had one. And I choke over the rolls, and I spill things in my hurry to run away and talk to you. I got another letter from you yesterday, and Hilda Seeberg, a girl boarding here and studying painting, said when she met me in the passage after I had been reading it in my room, "You have had a letter from your *Frau Mutter*, nicht?" So you see your letters shine in my face.

Don't be afraid I won't take enough exercise. I go for an immense walk directly after dinner every day, a real quick hot one through the Thiergarten. The weather is fine, and Berlin I suppose is at its best, but I don't think it looks very nice after London. There's no mystery about it, no atmosphere; it just blares away at you. It has everything in it that a city ought to have,—public buildings, statues, fountains, parks, broad streets; and it is about as comforting and lovable as the latest thing in workhouses. It looks disinfected; it has just that kind of rather awful cleanness.

At dinner they talk of its beauty and its perfections till I nearly go to sleep. You know how oddly sleepy one gets when one isn't interested. They've left off being silent now, and have gone to the other extreme, and from not talking to me at all have jumped to talking to me all together. They tell me over and over again that I'm in the most beautiful city in the world. You never knew such eagerness and persistence as these German boarders have when it comes to praising what is theirs, and also when it comes to criticizing what isn't theirs. They're so funny and personal. They say, for instance, London is too hideous for words, and then they look at me defiantly, as though they had been insulting some personal defect of mine and meant to brazen it out. They point out the horrors of the slums to me as though the slums were on my face. They tell me pityingly what they look like, what terrible blots and deformities they are, and how I—they say England, but no one could dream from their manner that it wasn't me—can never hope to be regarded as fit for self-respecting European society while these spots and sore places are not purged away.

The other day they assured me that England as a nation is really unfit for any decent other nation to know politically, but they added, with stiff bows in my direction, that sometimes the individual inhabitant of that low-minded and materialistic country is not without amiability, especially if he or she is by some miracle without the lofty, high-nosed manner that as a rule so regrettably characterizes the unfortunate people. "*Sie sind so hochnasig*," the bank clerk who sits opposite me had shouted out, pointing an accusing finger at me; and for a moment I was so startled that I thought something disastrous had happened to my nose, and my anxious hand flew up to it. Then they laughed; and it was after that that they made the speech conceding individual amiability here and there.

I sit neatly in my chair while this sort of talk goes on—and it goes on at every meal now that they have got over the preliminary stage of icy coldness towards me—and I try to be sprightly, and bandy my six German words about whenever they seem appropriate. Imagine your poor Chris trying to be sprightly with eleven Germans—no, ten Germans, for the eleventh is a Swede and doesn't say anything. And the ten Germans, including Frau Berg, all fix their eyes reproachfully on me while as one man they tell me how awful my country is. Do people in London boarding houses tell the German boarders how awful Germany is, I wonder? I don't believe they do. And I wish they would leave me alone about the Boer war. I've tried to explain my extreme youth at the time it was going on, but they still appear to hold me directly responsible for it. The fingers that have been pointed at me down that table on account of the Boer war! They raise them at me, and shake them, and tell me of the terrible things the English did, and when I ask them how they know, they say it was in the newspapers; and when I ask them what newspapers, they say theirs; and when I ask them how they know it was true,

they say they know because it was in the newspapers. So there we are, stuck. I take to English when the worst comes to the worst, and they flounder in after me.

It is the funniest thing, their hostility to England, and the queer, reluctant, and yet passionate admiration that goes With it. It is like some girl who can't get a man she admires very much to notice her. He stays indifferent, while she gets more exasperated the more indifferent he stays; exasperated with the bitterness of thwarted love. One day at dinner, when they had all been thumping away at me, this flashed across me as the explanation, and I exclaimed in English, "Why, you're in love with us!"

Twenty round eyes stared at me, sombrely at first, not understanding, and then with horror slowly growing in them.

"In love with you? In love with England?" cried Frau Berg, the carving knife suspended in the air while she stared at me. "*Nein, aber so was!*" And she let down her heavy fists, knife and all, with a thud on the table.

I thought I had best stand up to them, having started off so recklessly, and tried to lash myself into bravery by remembering how full I was of the blood of all the Cholmondeleys, let alone those relations of yours alleged to have fought alongside the Black Prince; so though I wished there were several of me rather than only one, I said with courage and obstinacy, "Passionately."

You can't think how seriously they took it. They all talked at once, very loud. They were all extremely angry. I wished I had kept quiet, for I couldn't elaborate my idea in my limping German, and it was quite difficult to go on smiling and behaving as though they were all not being rude, for I don't think they mean to be rude, and I was afraid, if I showed a trace of thinking they were that they might notice they were, and then they would have felt so uncomfortable, and the situation would have become, as they say, *peinlich*.

Four of the Daily Dinner Guests are men, and one of the boarders is a man; and these five men and Frau Berg were the vociferous ones. They exclaimed things like "*Nein, so was!*" and, "*Diese englische Hochmut!*" and single words like *unerhort*; and then one of them called Herr Doctor Krummlaut, who is a lawyer and a widower and much esteemed by the rest, detached himself from them and made me a carefully patient speech, in which he said how sorry they all were to see so young and gifted a lady,—(he bowed, and I bowed)—oh yes, he said, raising his hand as though to ward off any modest objections I might be going to make, only I wasn't going to make any, he had heard that I was undoubtedly gifted, and not only gifted but also, he would not be deterred from saying, and he felt sure his colleagues at the table would not be deterred from saying either if they were in his place, a lady of personal attractions,—(he bowed and I bowed,)—how sorry they all were to see a young Fraulein with these advantages, filled at the same time with opinions and views that were not only highly unsuitable to her sex but were also, in any sex, so terribly wrong. Every lady, he said, should have some knowledge of history, and sufficient acquaintance with the three kinds of politics,—*Politik*, *Weltpolitik*, and *Realpolitik*, to enable her to avoid wrong and frivolous conclusions such as the one the young Fraulein had just informed them she had reached, and to listen intelligently to her husband or son when they discuss these matters. He said a great deal more, about a woman knowing these things just enough but not too well, for her intelligence must not be strained because of her supreme function of being the cradle of the race; and the cradle part of her, I gather, isn't so useful if she is allowed to develop the other part of her beyond what is necessary for making an agreeable listener.

It was no use even trying to explain what I had meant about Germany really being in love with England, because I hadn't got words enough; but that is exactly the impression I've received from my brief experiences of one corner of its life. In this small corner of it, anyhow, it behaves exactly like a woman who is so unlucky as to love somebody who doesn't care about her. She naturally, I imagine,—for I can only guess at these enslavements,—is very much humiliated and angry, and all the more because the loved and hated one— isn't it possible to love and hate at the same time, little mother? I

can imagine it quite well—is so indifferent as to whether she loves or hates. And whichever she does, he is polite,—“Always gentleman,” as the Germans say. Which is, naturally, maddening.

Evening.

Do you know I wrote to you the whole morning? I wrote and wrote, with no idea how time was passing, and was astonished and indignant, for I haven't half told you all I want to, when I was called to dinner. It seemed like shutting a door on you and leaving you outside without any dinner, to go away and have it without you.

If it weren't for its being my day with you I don't know what I'd do with Sundays. I would hate them. I'm not allowed to play on Sundays, because practising is forbidden on that day, and, as Frau Berg said, how is she to know if I am practising or playing? Besides, it would disturb the others, which of course is true, for they all rest on Sundays, getting up late, sleeping after dinner, and not going out till they have had coffee about five. Today, when I hoped they had all gone out, I had such a longing to play a little that I muted my strings and played to myself in a whisper what I could remember of a very beautiful thing of Ravel's that Kloster showed me the other day,—the most haunting, exquisite thing; and I hummed the weird harmonies as I went along, because they are what is so particularly wonderful about it. Well, it really was a whisper, and I had to bend my head right over the violin to hear it at all whenever a tram passed, yet in five minutes Frau Berg appeared, unbuttoned and heated from her *Mittagsruhe*, and requested me to have some consideration for others as well as for the day.

I was very much ashamed of myself, besides feeling as though I were fifteen and caught at school doing something wicked. I didn't mind not having consideration for the day, because I think Ravel being played on it can't do Sunday anything but good, but I did mind having disturbed the other people in the flat. I could only say I was sorry, and wouldn't do it again,—just like an apologetic schoolgirl. But what do you think I wanted to do, little mother? Run to Frau Berg, and put my arms round her neck, and tell her I was lonely and wanting you, and would she mind just pretending she was fond of me for a moment? She did look so comfortable and fat and kind, standing there filling up the doorway, and she wasn't near enough for me to see her eyes, and it is her eyes that make one not want to run to her.

But of course I didn't run. I knew too well that she wouldn't understand. And indeed I don't know why I should have felt such a longing to run into somebody's arms. Perhaps it was because writing to you brings you so near to me that I realize how far away you are. During the week I work, and while I work I forget; and there's the excitement of my lessons, and the joy of hearing Kloster appreciate and encourage. But on Sundays the day is all you, and then I feel what months can mean when they have to be lived through each in turn and day by day before one gets back to the person one loves. Why are you so dear, my darling mother? If you were an ordinary mother I'd be so much more placid. I wouldn't mind not being with an ordinary mother. When I look at other people's mothers I think I'd rather like not being with them. But having known what it is to live in love and understanding with you, it wants a great deal of persistent courage, the sort that goes on steadily with no intervals, to make one able to do without it.

Now please don't think I am fretting, will you, because I'm not. It's only that I love you. We're such *friends*. You always understand, you are never shocked. I can say whatever comes into my head to you. It is as good as saying one's prayers. One never stops in those to wonder whether one is shocking God, and that is what one loves God for,—because we suppose he always understands, and therefore forgives; and how much more—is this very wicked?—one loves one's mother who understands, because, you see, there she is, and one can kiss her as well. There's a great virtue in kissing, I think; an amazing comfort in just *touching* the person one loves. Goodnight, most blessed little mother, and good-bye for a week. Your Chris.

Perhaps I might write a little note—not a letter, just a little note,—on Wednesdays? What do you think? It would be nothing more, really, than a postcard, except that it would be in an envelope.

Berlin, Sunday, June 14th, 1914

Well, I didn't write on Wednesday, I resisted. (Good morning, darling mother.) I knew quite well it wouldn't be a postcard, or anything even remotely related to the postcard family. It would be a letter. A long letter. And presently I'd be writing every day, and staying all soft; living in the past, instead of getting on with my business, which is the future. That is what I've got to do at this moment: not think too much of you and home, but turn my face away from both those sweet, desirable things so that I may get back to them quicker. It's true we haven't got a home, if a home is a house and furniture; but home to your Chris is where you are. Just simply anywhere and everywhere you are. It's very convenient, isn't it, to have it so much concentrated and so movable. Portable, I might say, seeing how little you are and how big I am.

But you know, darling mother, it makes it easier for me to harden and look ahead with my chin in the air rather than over my shoulder back at you when I see, as I do see all day long, the extreme sentimentality of the Germans. It is very surprising. They're the oddest mixture of what really is a brutal hardness, the kind of hardness that springs from real fundamental differences from ours in their attitude towards life, and a squashiness that leaves one with one's mouth open. They can't bear to let a single thing that has happened to them ever, however many years ago, drop away into oblivion and die decently in its own dust. They hold on to it, and dig it out that day year and that day every year, for years apparently,—I expect for all their lives. When they leave off really feeling about it—which of course they do, for how can one go on feeling about a thing forever?—they start pretending that they feel. Conceive going through life clogged like that, all one's pores choked with the dust of old yesterdays. I picture the Germans trailing through life more and more heavily as they grow old, hauling an increasing number of anniversaries along with them, rolling them up as they go, dragging at each remove a lengthening chain, as your dear Goldsmith says,—and if he didn't, or it wasn't, you'll rebuke me and tell me who did and what it was, for you know I've no books here, except those two that are married as securely on one's tongue as Tennyson and Browning, or Arnold Bennet and his, I imagine reluctant, bride, H. G. Wells,—I mean Shakespeare and the Bible.

I went into Hilda Seeberg's room the other day to ask her for some pins, and found her sitting in front of a photograph of her father, a cross-looking old man with a twirly moustache and a bald head; and she had put a wreath of white roses round the frame and tied it with a black bow, and there were two candles lit in front of it, and Hilda had put on a black dress, and was just sitting there gazing at it with her hands in her lap. I begged her pardon, and was going away again quickly, but she called me back.

"I celebrate," she said.

"Oh," said I politely, but without an idea what she meant.

"It is my Papa's birthday today," she said, pointing to the photograph.

"Is it?" I said, surprised, for I thought I remembered she had told me he was dead. "But didn't you say—"

"Yes. Certainly I told you Papa was dead since five years."

"Then why—?"

"But *liebes Fraulein*, he still continues to have birthdays," she said, staring at me in real surprise, while I stared back at her in at least equally real surprise.

"Every year," she said, "the day comes round on which Papa was born. Shall he, then, merely because he is with God, not have it celebrated? And what would people think if I did not? They would think I had no heart."

After that I began to hope there would be a cake, for they have lovely birthday cakes here, and it is the custom to give a slice of them to every one who comes near you. So I looked round the room out of the corners of my eyes, discreetly, lest I should seem to be as greedy as I was, and I lifted my

nose a little and waved it cautiously about, but I neither saw nor smelt a cake. Frau Berg had a birthday three days ago, and there was a heavenly cake at it, a great flat thing with cream in it, that one loved so that first one wanted to eat it and then to sit on it and see all the cream squash out at the sides; but evidently the cake is the one thing you don't have for your birthday after you are dead. I don't want to laugh, darling mother, and I know well enough what it is to lose one's beloved Dad, but you see Hilda had shown me her family photographs only the other day, for we are making friends in a sort of flabby, hesitating way, and when she got to the one of her father she said with perfect frankness that she hadn't liked him, and that it had been an immense relief when he died. "He prevented my doing anything," she said, frowning at the photograph, "except that which increased his comforts."

I asked Kloster about anniversaries when I went for my lesson on Friday. He is a very human little man, full of sympathy,—the sort of comprehending sympathy that laughs and understands together, yet his genius seems to detach him from other Germans, for he criticizes them with a dispassionate thoroughness that is surprising. The remarks he makes about the Kaiser, for instance, whom he irreverently alludes to as S. M.—(short and rude for *Seine Majestat*)—simply make me shiver in this country of *lese majeste*. In England, where we can say what we like, I have never heard anybody say anything disrespectful about the King. Here, where you go to prison if you laugh even at officials, even at a policeman, at anything whatever in buttons, for that is the punishable offence of *Beamtenbeleidigung*—haven't they got heavenly words—Kloster and people I have come across in his rooms say what they like; and what they like is very rude indeed about that sacred man the Kaiser, who doesn't appear to be at all popular. But then Kloster belongs to the intelligents, and his friends are all people of intelligence, and that sort of person doesn't care very much, I think, for absolute monarchs. Kloster says they're anachronisms, that the world is too old for them, too grown-up for pretences and decorations. And when I went for my lesson on Friday I found his front door wreathed with evergreens and paper flowers,—pretences and decorations crawling even round Kloster—and I went in very reluctantly, not knowing what sort of a memorial celebration I was going to tumble into. But it was only that his wife—I didn't know he had a wife, he seemed altogether so happily unmarried—was coming home. She had been away for three weeks; not nearly long enough, you and I and others of our self-depreciatory and self-critical country would think, to deserve an evergreen garland round our door on coming back. He laughed when I told him I had been afraid to come in lest I should disturb retrospective obsequies.

"We are still so near, my dear Mees Chrees," he said, shrugging a fat shoulder—he asked me what I was called at home, and I said you called me Chris, and he said he would, with my permission, also call me Chrees, but with Mees in front of it to show that though he desired to be friendly he also wished to remain respectful—"we are still so near as a nation to the child and to the savage. To the clever child, and the powerful savage. We like simple and gross emotions and plenty of them; obvious tastes in our food and our pleasures, and a great deal of it; fat in our food, and fat in our women. And, like the child, when we mourn we mourn to excess, and enjoy ourselves in that excess; and, like the savage, we are afraid, and therefore hedge ourselves about with observances, celebrations, cannon, kings. In no other country is there more than one king. In ours we find three and an emperor necessary. The savage who fears all things does not fear more than we Germans. We fear other nations, we fear other people, we fear public opinion to an extent incredible, and tremble before the opinion of our servants and tradespeople; we fear our own manners and therefore are obliged to preserve the idiotic practice of duelling, in which as often as not the man whose honour is being satisfied is the one who is killed; we fear all those above us, of whom there are invariably a great many; we fear all officials, and our country drips with officials. The only person we do not fear is God."

"But—" I began, remembering their motto, bestowed on them by Bismarck,

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted. "It is not, however, true. The contrary is the truth. We Germans fear not God, but everything else in the world. It is only fear that makes us polite, fear of the duel; for, like the child and the savage, we have not had time to acquire the habit of good manners, the

habit which makes manners inevitable and invariable, and it is not natural to us to be polite. We are polite only by the force of fear. Consequently—for all men must have their relaxations—whenever we meet the weak, the beneath us, the momentarily helpless, we are brutal. It is an immense relief to be for a moment natural. Every German welcomes even the smallest opportunity."

You would be greatly interested in Kloster, I'm certain. He sits there, his fiddle on his fat little knees, his bow punctuating his sentences with quivers and raps, his shiny bald head reflecting the light from the window behind him, and his eyes coming very much out of his face, which is excessively red. He looks like an amiable prawn; not in the least like a person with an active and destructive mind, not in the least like a great musician. He has the very opposite of the bushy eyebrows and overhanging forehead and deep set eyes and lots of hair you're supposed to have if you've got much music in you. He came over to me the other day after I had finished playing, and stretched up—he's a good bit smaller than I am—and carefully drew his finger along my eyebrows, each in turn. I couldn't think what he was doing.

"My finger is clean, Mees Chrees," he said, seeing me draw back. "I have just wiped it, Be not, therefore, afraid. But you have the real Beethoven brow—the very shape—and I must touch it. I regret if it incommodes you, but I must touch it. I have seen no such resemblance to the brow of the Master. You might be his child."

I needn't tell you, darling mother, that I went back to the boarders and the midday guests not minding them much. If I only could talk German properly I would have loved to have leant across the table to Herr Mannfried, an unwholesome looking young man who comes in to dinner every day from a bank in the Potsdamerstrasse, and is very full of that hatred which is really passion for England, and has pale hair and a mouth exactly like two scarlet slugs—I'm sorry to be so horrid, but it *is* like two scarlet slugs—and said,—"Have you noticed that I have a *Beethovenkopf*? What do you think of me, an *Englanderin*, having such a thing? One of your own great men says so, so it must be true."

We are studying the Bach Chaconne now. He is showing me a different reading of it, his idea. He is going to play it at the Philharmonie here next week. I wish you could hear him. He was intending to go to London this season and play with a special orchestra of picked players, but has changed his mind. I asked him why, and he shrugged his shoulder and said his agent, who arranges these things, seemed to think he had better not. I asked him why again—you know my persistency—for I can't conceive why it should be better not for London to have such a joy and for him to give it, but he only shrugged his shoulder again, and said he always did what his agent told him to do. "My agent knows his business, my dear Mees Chrees," he said. "I put my affairs in his hands, and having done so I obey him. It saves trouble. Obedience is a comfortable thing."

"Then why—" I began, remembering the things he says about kings and masters and persons in authority; but he picked up his violin and began to play a bit. "See," he said, "this is how—"

And when he plays I can only stand and listen. It is like a spell. One stands there, and forgets. . . .
Evening.

I've been reading your last darling letter again, so full of love, so full of thought for me, out in a corner of the Thiergarten this afternoon, and I see that while I'm eagerly writing and writing to you, page after page of the things I want to tell you, I forget to tell you the things you want to know. I believe I never answer *any* of your questions! It's because I'm so all right, so comfortable as far as my body goes, that I don't remember to say so. I have heaps to eat, and it is very satisfying food, being German, and will make me grow sideways quite soon, I should think, for Frau Berg fills us up daily with dumplings, and I'm certain they must end by somehow showing; and I haven't had a single cold since I've been here, so I'm outgrowing them at last; and I'm not sitting up late reading,—I couldn't if I tried, for Wanda, the general servant, who is general also in her person rather than particular—aren't I being funny—comes at ten o'clock each night on her way to bed and takes away my lamp.

"Rules," said Frau Berg briefly, when I asked if it wasn't a little early to leave me in the dark. "And you are not left in the dark. Have I not provided a candle and matches for the chance infirmities of the night?"

But the candle is cheap and dim, so I don't sit up trying to read by that. I preserve it wholly for the infirmities.

I've been in the Thiergarten most of the afternoon, sitting in a green corner I found where there is some grass and daisies down by a pond and away from a path, and accordingly away from the Sunday crowds. I watched the birds, and read the Winter's Tale, and picked some daisies, and felt very happy. The daisies are in a saucer before me at this moment. Everything smelt so good,—so warm, and sweet, and young, with the leaves on the oaks still little and delicate. Life is an admirable arrangement, isn't it, little mother. It is so clever of it to have a June in every year and a morning in every day, let alone things like birds, and Shakespeare, and one's work. You've sometimes told me, when I was being particularly happy, that there were even greater happiness ahead for me,—when I have a lover, you said; when I have a husband; when I have a child. I suppose you know, my wise, beloved mother; but the delight of work, of doing the work well that one is best fitted for, will be very hard to beat. It is an exultation, a rapture, that manifest progress to better and better results through one's own effort. After all, being obliged on Sundays to do nothing isn't so bad, because then I have time to think, to step back a little and look at life.

See what a quiet afternoon sunning myself among daisies has done for me. A week ago I was measuring the months to be got through before being with you again, in dismay. Now I feel as if I were very happily climbing up a pleasant hill, just steep enough to make me glad I can climb well, and all the way is beautiful and safe, and on the top there is you. To get to the top will be perfect joy, but the getting there is very wonderful too. You'll judge, from all this that I've had a happy week, that work is going well, and that I'm hopeful and confident. I mustn't be too confident, I know, but confidence is a great thing to work on. I've never done anything good on days of dejection.

Goodnight, dear mother. I feel so close to you tonight, just as if you were here in the room with me, and I had only to put out my finger and touch Love. I don't believe there's much in this body business. It is only spirit that matters really; and nothing can stop your spirit and mine being together.

Your Chris.

Still, a body is a great comfort when it comes to wanting to kiss one's darling mother.

Berlin, Sunday, June 21st, 1914

My precious mother,

The weeks fly by, full of work and *Weltpolitik*. They talk of nothing here at meals but this *Weltpolitik*. I've just been having a dose of it at breakfast. To say that the boarders are interested in it is to speak feebly: they blaze with interest, they explode with it, they scorch and sizzle. And they are so pugnacious! Not to each other, for contrary to the attitude at Kloster's they are knit together by the toughest band of uncritical and obedient admiration for everything German, but they are pugnacious to the Swede girl and myself. Especially to myself. There is a holy calm about the Swede girl that nothing can disturb. She has an enviable gift for getting on with her meals and saying nothing. I wish I had it. Directly I have learned a new German word I want to say it. I accumulate German words every day, of course, and there's something in my nature and something in the way I'm talked at and to at Frau Berg's table that makes me want to say all the words I've got as quickly as possible. And as I can't string them into sentences my conversation consists of single words, which produce a very odd effect, quite unintended, of detached explosions. When I've come to the end of them I take to English, and the boarders plunge in after me, and swim or drown in it according to their several ability.

It's queer, the atmosphere here,—in this house, in the streets, wherever one goes. They all seem to be in a condition of tension—of intense, tightly-strung waiting, very like that breathless expectancy in the last act of "Tristan" when Isolde's ship is sighted and all the violins hang high up on to a shrill, intolerably eager note. There's a sort of fever. And the big words! I thought Germans were stolid, quiet people. But how they talk! And always in capital letters. They talk in tremendous capitals about what they call the *deutsche Standpunkt*; and the *deutsche Standpunkt* is the most wonderful thing you ever came across. Butter wouldn't melt in its mouth. It is too great and good, almost, they give one to understand, for a world so far behind in high qualities to appreciate. No other people has anything approaching it. As far as I can make out, stripped of its decorations its main idea is that what Germans do is right and what other people do is wrong. Even when it is exactly the same thing. And also, that wrong becomes right directly it has anything to do with Germans. Not with *a* German. The individual German can and does commit every sort of wrong, just as other individuals do in other countries, and he gets punished for them with tremendous harshness; Kloster says with unfairness. But directly he is in the plural and becomes *Wir Deutschen*, as they are forever saying, his crimes become virtues. As a body he purifies, he has a purging quality. Today they were saying at breakfast that if a crime is big enough, if it is on a grand scale, it leaves off being a crime, for then it is a success, and success is always virtue,—that is, I gather, if it is a German success; if it is a French one it is an outrage. You mustn't rob a widow, for instance, they said, because that is stupid; the result is small and you may be found out and be cut by your friends. But you may rob a great many widows and it will be a successful business deal. No one will say anything, because you have been clever and successful.

I know this view is not altogether unknown in other countries, but they don't hold it deliberately as a whole nation. Among other things that Hilda Seeberg's father did which roused her unforgiveness was just this,—to rob too few widows, come to grief over it, and go bankrupt for very little. She told me about it in an outburst of dark confidence. Just talking of it made her eyes black with anger. It was so terrible, she said, to smash for a small amount,—such an overwhelming shame for the Seeberg family, whose poverty thus became apparent and unhideable. If one smashes, she said, one does it for millions, otherwise one doesn't smash. There is something so chic about millions, she said, that whether you make them or whether you lose them you are equally well thought-of and renowned.

"But it is better to—well, disappoint few widows than many," I suggested, picking my words.

"For less than a million marks," she said, eyeing me sternly, "it is a disgrace to fail."

They're funny, aren't they. I'm greatly interested. They remind me more and more of what Kloster says they are, clever children. They have the unmoral quality of children. I listen—they treat

me as if I were the audience, and they address themselves in a bunch to my corner—and I put in one of my words now and then, generally with an unfortunate effect, for they talk even louder after that, and then presently the men get up and put their heels together and make a stiff inclusive bow and disappear, and Frau Berg folds up her napkin and brushes the crumbs out of her creases and says, "Ja, ja," with a sigh, as a sort of final benediction on the departed conversation, and then rises slowly and locks up the sugar, and then treads heavily away down the passage and has a brief skirmish in the kitchen with Wanda, who daily tries to pretend there hadn't been any pudding left over, and then treads heavily back again to her bedroom, and shuts herself in till four o'clock for her *Mittagsruhe*; and the other boarders drift away one by one, and I run out for a walk to get unstiffened after having practised all the morning, and as I walk I think over what they've been saying, and try to see things from their angle, and simply can't.

On Tuesdays and Fridays I have my lesson, and tell Kloster about them. He says they're entirely typical of the great bulk of the nation. "*Wir Deutschen*," he says, and laughs, "are the easiest people in the world to govern, because we are obedient and inflammable. We have that obedience of mind so convenient to Authority, and we are inflammable because we are greedy. Any prospect held out to us of getting something belonging to some one else sets us instantly alight. Dangle some one else's sausage before our eyes, and we will go anywhere after it. Wonderful material for S. M." And he adds a few irreverences.

Last Wednesday was his concert at the Philharmonie. He played like an angel. It was so strange, the fat, red, more than commonplace-looking little bald man, with his quite expressionless face, his wilfully stupid face—for I believe he does it on purpose, that blankness, that bulgy look of one who never thinks and only eats—and then the heavenly music. It was as strange and arresting as that other mixture, that startling one of the men who sell flowers in the London streets and the flowers they sell. What does it look like, those poor ragged men shuffling along the kerb, and in their arms, rubbing against their dirty shoulders, great baskets of beauty, baskets heaped up with charming aristocrats, gracious and delicate purities of shape and colour and scent. The strangest effect of all is when they happen, round about Easter, to be selling only lilies, and the unearthly purity of the lilies shines on the passersby from close to the seller's terrible face. Christ must often have looked like that, when he sat close up to Pharisees.

But although Kloster's music was certainly as beautiful as the lilies, he himself wasn't like those tragic sellers. It was only that he was so very ordinary,—a little man compact, apparently, of grossness, and the music he was making was so divine. It was that marvellous French and Russian stuff. I must play it to you, and play it to you, till you love it. It's like nothing there has ever been. It is of an exquisite youth,—untouched, fearless, quite heedless of tradition, going its own way straight through and over difficulties and prohibitions that for centuries have been supposed final. People like Wagner and Strauss and the rest seem so much sticky and insanitary mud next to these exquisite young ones, and so very old; and not old and wonderful like the great men, Beethoven and Bach and Mozart, but uglily old like a noisy old lady in a yellow wig.

The audience applauded, but wasn't quite sure. Such a master as Kloster, and one of their own flesh and blood, is always applauded, but I think the irregularity, the utter carelessness of the music, its apparently accidental beauty, was difficult for them. Germans have to have beauty explained to them and accounted for,—stamped first by an official, authorized, before they can be comfortable with it. I sat in a corner and cried, it was so lovely. I couldn't help it. I hid away and pulled my hat over my face and tried not to, for there was a German in eyeglasses near me, who, perceiving I wanted to hide, instantly spent his time staring at me to find out why. The music held all things in it that I have known or guessed, all the beauty, the wonder, of life and death and love. I *recognised* it. I almost called out, "Yes—of course—I know that too."

Afterwards I would have liked best to go home and to sleep with the sound of it still in my heart, but Kloster sent round a note saying I was to come to supper and meet some people who would be

useful for me to know. One of his pupils, who brought the note, had been ordered to pilot me safely to the house, it being late, and as we walked and Kloster drove in somebody's car he was there already when we arrived, busy opening beer bottles and looking much more appropriate than he had done an hour earlier. I can't tell you how kindly he greeted me, and with what charming little elucidatory comments he presented me to his wife and the other guests. He actually seemed proud of me. Think how I must have glowed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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