

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
Eufemia von Adlersfeld-Ballestrem (1854-1941)

Dr. Dorothea Schlözer

(From: *Der Brautschmuck der Ahnfrau und andere Novellen*. [The Bridal Jewellery of the Ancestress.] Leipzig: Reclam, 1913. First appeared in *Aus tiefem Borne* [From a Deep Fount], 1883.)

The erudite Professor Schlözer of Göttingen stood with his hands folded behind his back, clasping his long tobacco-pipe and an old book bound in pig-leather, and looked with curiosity into a prettily painted cradle in which a newborn baby lay. This important event took place on August 10th, 1770, and the Professor shook his learned head very forcefully as he stood in this manner before the cradle.

“Hmm!” he uttered for what might have been the tenth time, “Hmm... so a *feminum*! I would actually have preferred a son – hmm – well, it’ll just have to do! A son could have followed in my footsteps, a daughter – well, one must see what can be done! I had really imagined a *masculinum*.”

The Professor threw one more look at the baby with the large brown eyes in the cradle and then returned to his study. Within five minutes, he had forgotten, over his pig-leather tome, that he had a daughter and not a son.

It is a curious fact that the majority of learned gentlemen suffer from the malady of absent-mindedness. The reason for this can no doubt be

found in the thoughts of those gentlemen being at all times engrossed in the object of their study, and as a consequence they are and remain strangers in the realm of the mundane – it is natural, if one has no interest in something, that one also has no memory for it. Professor Schlözer did not constitute an exception to the species of absent-minded scholars.

When he went to university on the day after that memorable August 10th of the year 1770, to lead his listeners into the Kingdom of Knowledge, the entire cheerful academic youth received him with a thundering, “Congratulations, Professor!”

The learned gentleman cast a thoughtful look at the students and thought about what event they could possibly be congratulating him on; he at least had completely forgotten the “why.”

“Thank you, thank you, gentlemen!” he said, “but today is not my birthday, as far as I can remember!”

“We congratulate you on the arrival of a Miss Schlözer!” the chorus thundered anew.

Professor Schlözer shook his head. “Miss Schlözer?” he repeated. “Now, I think I ought to know about that – hmm...”

“We congratulate the Professor on the birth of his daughter,” the auditorium cried in the most cheerful tone.

The poor Professor began to feel positively uneasy. Did these young people wish to make a fool of him?

“Daughter – daughter – my daughter?” he said uncertainly. But all of a sudden it clicked, he remembered, and his kind face began to beam.

“Thank you, thank you, gentlemen! Now I know what you mean –

the *femininum*, at home in the cradle. – Yes, that is right, I have a daughter. I shall teach her – she will become a Doctor – Quite right, I remember!”

The students laughed and exchanged glances. Was their professor completely off his rocker, wanting to make his daughter a Doctor? And yet he seemed to be in deadly earnest. For a long time afterwards, the students made merry at Professor Schlözer’s having completely forgotten that he had a daughter.

And even at the christening! The father scarcely knew if he was coming or going, and he often had to ponder in all seriousness why everyone was actually sitting here, sharing the excellent repast and drinking good Rhine or Hungarian wine with it. The little thing in the cradle was given the name Dorothea – no sooner had she received the name than the godparents were calling her Dora.

Among the guests at the christening, who were divided into proper friends and so-called ‘Feast Gaffers,’ there was also the somewhat older friend of the Professor’s youth, the rich merchant Rodde from Lübeck. He tucked into the good wines and was very soon a little half-seas-over: with iron single-mindedness, he drank continually to the health of the Schlözer family and of his god-daughter Dorothea in particular.

“Brother!” he said, slapping the Professor on the shoulder in his tipsy mood, “Brother, I have a son at home, a splendid boy of twelve – it will work out just right when they are older. Let us promise our children to each other today, so they will become a couple one day. Schlözer and Rodde – Rodde and Schlözer – they sound very well together.”

“That may be,” the Professor gravely replied, “it could be done,

provided that my daughter becomes an ordinary woman. But I want to wait and see first; if she possesses more than a hen's brain, she shall become a scholar and attain at least a doctor's degree!"

"Nonsense, brother!" the merchant cried with some warmth, "what good would your scholarly stuff do a girl! Certainly, she shall not stay a goose, but no woman has yet become a doctor."

"Then my daughter shall be the first.¹ My wife may teach her domestic economy, I shall take care of the rest!"

"Well, fair enough," laughed the merchant. "Doctor or not, Dora Schlözer will be Mrs. Rodde one day! Shake on it, brother!"

The Professor placed his hand in that of his friend and nodded; he may well have thought it was better not to tread on the toes of one who, being fuddled, could easily flare up.

So Dora Schlözer's christening went off in the happiest way. There was much consuming, much laughter, much disputing, and on the following morning many a learned colleague of the Professor was sorely troubled with a headache.

But in the Professor's house, everything ran its earlier course. The baptized child, celebrated in many fine odes, was able to grow and thrive, the Professor's wife taking care of this in the most assiduous manner, while the Professor only made the occasional inquiry if his daughter's mind was not educable yet. The little thing was soon toddling around in her father's study, laughing loudly while merrily playing children's games, and it

¹ Dorothea Christiane Erxleben (1715-1762) became the first in 1754.

was odd that the stern gentleman, who usually could not bear any noise at all, let Dora potter about among his books to her heart's content and yet was never disturbed by her in his work!

But her studies began on the day after her fourth birthday, and from the way in which she understood and learned how to read, write and count through play, the Professor drew the hope that she would also acquire other, higher things in her maturer years. Now there was certainly many a hard struggle with the Professor's wife; although a highly educated woman herself, she absolutely did not want Schlözer to cram his daughter's head full of useless scholarly stuff. But this time, the Professor remained master of the field, however skilfully Mrs. Schlözer knew how to use her tongue. "You don't understand, wife!" he retorted, "women should not be maids, but free *feminina*, as they appear so finely in classical antiquity. I want to educate our daughter as if she were our son, she shall be properly taught so she will not suffocate in the slough of everyday life, and she will have matter to occupy her mind when she is older. Let us make an agreement, Sophie! I shall teach her so that she completes the grammar-school syllabus, while you may initiate her into the art of cooking and show her how one darns and knits stockings, quite appropriate and useful occupations."

"Well," said the Professor's wife, "Dora does not need to practise such very common work, for we are comfortably off, and in the future she'll marry the son of Godfather Rodde anyway and will have everything in abundance."

The Professor blew a mighty puff from his pipe and shook his head,

making the neatly dressed queue fly back and forth like a pendulum.

“You females have nothing but thoughts of marriage,” he grumbled, “and you mothers would like to bestow your daughters in marriage when they are mere babes-in-arms. One must not reckon without one’s host.”

“But at the christening feast, you gave Godfather Rodde your hand, didn’t –“

“Yes, because Godfather Rodde was a little fuddled up top – one must not contradict such people.”

And the Professor got his way. –

Certainly, he found in Dora a pupil of rare intelligence; she had a penchant and a passion for learning, and it was easy to teach her. At the age of ten, the Professor’s little daughter spoke fluent Latin, French, Italian and English; she also read Homer quite delightfully, not to mention the other branches of knowledge, such as physics, mathematics, history, geography, etc.

At the same time, she learned all that was necessary for the running of a household from her mother, and was, on top of everything, such a charming figure that everyone liked “delightful Dora.” Alongside all this, she possessed the cleverness never to boast about her knowledge before her playmates or to sputter out scraps of learning; she was a child among children and an eager, inquiring student, striving for new knowledge, in the classroom.

When she was twelve years old, Professor Schlözer travelled with his Dora to Rome, partly to allow her a rest so she might recover her strength, but also partly to present a new field of learning to her there, in all

the poetical magic of nature and treasures of art; and also, no doubt, to let her partake of the society of highly educated, learned men.

Oh, how she shouted out in delight when she saw the wonders of the Eternal City, of which she had only dreamed up to then, and which she had never dared hope to behold in reality. And now she stood in the middle of these wonders with marvelling eyes, pounding heart, and yearning soul – where should she begin to look? Oh, how gladly she would have taken everything in all at once! It was good that Professor Schlözer had many friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in Rome who became knowledgeable guides for him, for otherwise the learned gentleman, together with his daughter, would have got lost in this labyrinth of churches, antique edifices, museums, palaces, and galleries.

When people heard about Schlözer's arrival, they said, "Aha, the peculiar professor from Göttingen with the child prodigy –" and smiled and shrugged their shoulders.

But when Schlözer introduced Dora to the distinguished circle of scholars, painters, and sculptors, all hearts flew towards the delightful girl with the clever, charming little face, the girl who won all the world with her amiable modesty. And when the masters of knowledge examined her, then the smile died away, and everyone came to hold the twelve-year-old child in tremendous respect, she who left no question unanswered and was so sure in all the branches of her knowledge. In no time at all, Dora Schlözer began to cause a sensation; people pressed around the charming girl and gazed at her in wonder. Artists of the first rank rushed to embellish her family album, poets and scholars inscribed their names therein; indeed, the

famous sculptor Trippel² requested to be allowed to model a bust of her as a special privilege. It adorns the library of Göttingen to this day and shows Dora in the full, blooming charm of her fresh youth.

All of her friends in Rome were reluctant to see her depart, for not only did people admire her unprecedented erudition, they also loved her graceful, modest girliness.

Oh, how much there was to tell her mother, who had remained in Göttingen and cordially grumbled about her scholarly daughter, but in her heart of hearts was proud of her! Father Schlözer beamed at his Dora's triumph and became ever more absent-minded in regard to other things.

"Now it's enough!" Mama Schlözer said to him one day. "Now you have crammed enough scholarly matter into Dora's head, people marvel at her, and you have what you wanted."

The Professor shook his head, which was now covered with a carefully dressed wig with a long queue and mighty side-curls, and drew his white-flowered dressing gown tightly around his tall, gaunt form with a rather malicious smile.

"Wife, you don't understand!" he said, "and I would be a fool were I now to pluck the half-ripe apple from the tree."

"But Heavens, what more is she to learn?"

"A great deal," he replied mysteriously.

"Indeed? And what is to become of her in the end?"

"A *doctor philosophiae*."

² Alexander Trippel (1744-93), a Swiss sculptor known for busts of Goethe.

The Professor's wife shook her head with its snow-white mob-cap and said with a sigh that her husband was stricken with an *idée fixe*, for since the days of the First Mother, Eve, no Christian girl had ever been a Doctor. Secretly, she hoped that young Rodde would come from Lübeck in a few years' time to fetch his bride.

Two years later, the old merchant Rodde really did come to Göttingen with his son, just when Papa Schlözer was about to set out on a journey to the Harz Mountains with his Dora. The young man saw the blooming, charming girl, but he did not fall in love with her, to the sorrow of the Professor's wife and the fierce fury of his father.

Dora herself approached her godfather's son completely free from inhibition, for the planned wedding was unknown to her; but there soon burgeoned in her young heart, softly and unconsciously, a quiet love for the stately and honourable young man. It sprouted as secretly and unnoticed by her as violets in the green grass.

"It's enough to make you tear your hair out!" With these words, old Rodde rushed into Schlözer's study, his eyes rolling, gasping for breath.

"I wouldn't advise you that," the Professor replied, "since you've only a little left! But tell me what has got you so up in arms."

"Oh, I'll tell you! The matter is simply this: On the christening day, we promised my Carl and your Dora to each other in marriage, did we not? Well! I've done my part to keep this fact well and truly alive in the boy's memory – and in spite of everything, he has the impertinence to fall for a girl from Lübeck. – Between you and me, she is pretty and rich and from a good family, but it's Dora I want for my daughter-in-law! I had trouble and

toil bringing Carl here! – Stap my vitals! I, the old fellow, almost fell in love with this blooming rose, and the boy, Carl, stays as cool as a tree-frog at the sight of her! How could anyone not hit the roof? I constantly worked away at the boy and pestered him, he should at least pay court a little to your daughter – yes, what do you suppose the boy drivels out? He would not dream of arousing feelings in so beautiful and splendid a girl which he might and could not requite, as his heart and his hand were no longer free. Such nonsense – I –”

“Listen, dear friend!” the Professor interrupted the stream of words, “I like your son better and better, for he is, from what you have just said about him, a man of honour! Let him marry his girl from Lübeck and do not force a girl on him whom he does not like.”

Mr. Rodde tried, to be sure, to make a host of further objections, but the Professor repelled and rebuked him so firmly that in the end he promised, with a heavy heart, to accommodate himself to the Lübeckian daughter-in-law.

“There, now you are being reasonable!” the Professor cried, delighted, “and we can be glad that everything will be settled so peacefully! I am going with Dora to the Harz now – she is to go down the mine in Clausthal and learn the science of mining, which she is already very passionate about.”

Mr. Rodde smiled in spite of himself. “You’re a foolish eccentric, Professor!” he said. “In the end, we’ll even hear that you want to teach your daughter how to dive! What use is the science of mining to a girl?”

“What use is it to her?” the Professor began his explanation, smiling subtly. “None at all for the future, dear friend, but while she is learning it, she is occupied, and occupation is the best protection for a girl of sixteen against the temptations of the Devil.”

No sooner said than done! Schlözer took his Dora to Clausthal, and there she pursued the science of mining as eagerly as if it were a matter of earning her daily bread thereby. Perhaps she also wished for the depths of the earth and its treasures to drive the image of young Rodde from her mind – who knows?

In the following year, Professor Schlözer’s most ardent wish came true. At the time of the University of Göttingen’s Jubilee, that is to say in the year 1787, Dorothea Schlözer came up for examination before the Forum of the Sublime Sciences. At home, the mother trembled for the daughter, and even the Professor could not suppress a faint and peculiar feeling, like frost and heat at the same time.

But the examinee stood calm, with clear eyes and softly blushing cheeks, dressed in a plain white garment, in the assembly hall of the university, before all the learned gentlemen in their ceremonial robes of office, and before all the curious sons of the Muses who had come to see the Professor’s little daughter “fail” utterly and yet found her to be “deuced” pretty; and compared her quite rightly to a Briar-Rose in splendid bloom, for Dora bloomed like such a flower, simple, humble, and lovely.

And now the examination began. For three hours, Dorothea was rigorously and tiringly tested in the Latin language; but she returned an answer to every question, calm and considered, without evincing any

weariness. And then the Doctorate of Philosophy was ceremonially conferred on Dorothea Schlözer, and a thundering cheer from many hundreds of youthful throats saluted her.

“Three cheers for Miss Doctor Schlözer!” it rang out, “three cheers! Thrice three cheers for Doctor Dora!”

She smiled her gratitude to the roaring swarm in her charming way, and expressed in the Greek language, improvising easily and skilfully, what an honour it was for her to celebrate this day of honour in the city of her birth, in the place where the Muses were cultivated. Papa Schlözer had to keep wiping his spectacles on this day because they clouded up so, and he could not speak a word for sheer emotion; he could only press his Dora’s hand, and call her, in a faltering voice with a curiously grotesque obeisance, “Miss Doctor!”

And then, upon his offering her his arm for the walk home, the whole swarm of students joined them and escorted the new Doctor home with thundering cheers, which made the Professor’s wife think there was a riot; and in her first shock she dropped a large bowl of milk which instantly coloured the entire corridor white. Certainly, the joy of seeing her daughter thus honoured and distinguished helped her get over this loss; and when, that same evening, the heads of the various student societies appeared and presented Miss Doctor Schlözer with a splendid goblet of crystal and silver in the most ceremonial manner, then Mama Schlözer remembered a recipe of her late father for delicious punch, and soon glasses were clinking to the new Doctor’s health.

Henceforth, Dora Schlözer was a celebrity, and everyone was

amazed at her natural, cheerful character and her modesty, which she had kept in spite of everything. She was much celebrated in words and images; indeed, there even appeared an English pamphlet in her honour with the title, "An account of Miss Dr. Dorothee Schlözer." Many suitors also appeared, wishing to pluck the beautiful flower for themselves, but Dora shook her head and said that marriage could wait.

The Schlözers had heard nothing from the Roddes for several years, having only learned that Carl Rodde had got married. And so time passed until the year 1792.

It was a glorious spring day, the flowers were blooming and the birds were singing, and Dora Schlözer was walking up and down between the fragrant flowerbeds of her little garden, tying up a stalk here, removing a weed or a caterpillar there. All of a sudden, a deep voice sounded in her ear: "A very good day to you, Miss Doctor."

She started, and a deep red coloured her cheeks – she knew this voice, which she had last heard six years before; and looking up, she beheld Carl Rodde, grown older, admittedly, but looking all the more manly. He now had the title of Senator.

She could not utter a word; silently she held out her hand to him – finally she found her tongue: "Welcome, Senator! How have you been?"

"My father died three years ago," he said, "and I buried my wife one year ago, and – and today I step before you, Dora, to tell you that I have not been able to forget you since I saw you six years ago; at that time, I suppressed my love for you because another, for whom my heart had taken fire like straw, had my promise; but today, when I am free, I ask you

with all my heart if you will be my dearly beloved wife? – The Professor sent me to you in the garden – Dorothea, Dora, what will your answer be?”

She lifted her tear-filled eyes up to him.

“Ask the suitors for my hand why I rejected them – ask my heart, and it will answer you that it could not forget Carl Rodde and stayed true to him - -”

“Dora, is it possible?” he cried. “You will be my wife for ever and ever?”

And then she said a quiet, very quiet, “Yes,” in the middle of verdant, blossoming May, amidst the scent of blooms, and the birds in the branches warbled their Hallelujah!

Thus did it come about that Miss Doctor Schlözer eventually became Mrs. Senator Rodde after all, as Papa Schlözer and his fuddled friend had decided long before on that memorable Christening Day.³

³ They married in 1792 and were joined by the French writer and philosopher Charles de Villers (1765-1815) in 1797.