

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
Heinrich Hansjakob (1837-1916)

- 1. Valentine the Nailmaker** (p. 1)
- 2. The Idiot Painter** (p. 46)
3. Theodore the Soapboiler (p. 93)

Valentine the Nailmaker

(From *Wilde Kirschen* [Wild Cherries] 1888 and the augmented edition in *Valentin der Nägler*, No. 2 in the *Wiesbadener Volksbücher* series, 1913)

With its technical inventions, our modern age has removed a great deal of poetry from the world. The steam-engine with its railways has swept thousands of students with their “holiday-satchels” off the country roads and pursued the poetic stage-coaches with their postilions and post-horns into exile in the highest mountains.

But machines have also nailed up the quiet poetry of the nailsmith. What a poetic quiet life that was, being a nailsmith in the narrow street of a small country-town thirty and more years ago! The dark workshop, the hearth kept burning by the Pomeranian in the wheel, the red-hot iron bar in the hand of the “merry nailsmith” who hammered together all sorts of nails, from tacks for the shoemaker to the coffin nails for his fellow men. The nailsmith had a much easier trade than the blacksmith. The latter must think, measure, and test while working. The nailmaker made his wares from the template in his anvil block and was free to think of all sorts of things at the same time, not only of springtime and love, but also of politics and the tavern.

The nailmakers and their journeymen were therefore at all times more frivolous and thirstier, but also cleverer and merrier, than their colleagues of the heavy anvil.

In my boyhood years, four nailmakers made nails for town and country. Each one of the four Masters was an original in his own way.

The one living closest to me, opposite my grandmother's house, was Buss the Master Nailer, a full brother of the famous Court Counsellor Dr. Buss. Of all my neighbours, he was the one I was most at loggerheads with, because he caught my pigeons whenever he could. When he was busy in his workshop, "treading" his bellows himself, he would stick his gaunt head with its deep-set eyes and sharply arched nose out of the window every now and then to look at his pigeons and their guests. If he noticed some of the latter, he would abandon his iron and fire, creep to his pigeon loft and begin to whistle and lure until the stranger pigeons were in his enclosure. Mine were the nearest and therefore the most endangered.

When he had caught a couple of my birds, enmity broke out between us. I never let him pass our house without crying to him: "Buss, you just make your nails and leave off catchin' pidgins!" He just smiled every time, his long teeth flashing, and walked away without saying a word. I cursed for some time, and then I was taken in by him again, i.e. I concluded peace whenever he called to me and told me the latest stories from the local pigeon lofts: That "Boschesepp" had bought "noble culvers" or "Nägilespiz" had "bin tanned"¹ by Maier the Tailor because he had taken

¹ Been thrashed.

two of his “Redroofs”,² or that the beams in the pigeon loft had been smeared with anise-oil and the pigeons which were newly bought had to be thrown into the loft in the “three highest names”³ if they were to stay there.

This was music to my ears. I paid attention, more intently than a battle-commander to the reports of his adjutants, and being a “gormless dupe” at all times, I forgave Master Valentine, who at that very moment had the firm intention of stealing my pigeons from me again, all his sins against my property.

In this, I fared as he himself had fared back in his boyhood years. The father of the Court Counsellor and the nailmaker was a Master Tailor in the neighbouring Free Imperial City of Zell, but he had come to be the “Chief Burgomaster” of that place. Now when the Chief Burgomaster was at a wedding or a ball with his better half, he would bring some “goodies” home for his boys in the evening, as was the custom all over Kinzig Valley.

How I longed, in my childhood days, for mother to return home – she who, as a rule, visited peasants’ weddings for the sake of customers! – Every time, she would bring back some roasted calves’ feet in her apron, and that was the greatest carnal delight for me. On those evenings, I would not have swapped my portion of calf’s foot for a kingdom, and if I ever had honeyed words for my sisters, it was in those calf’s-foot hours when I scrounged at least a part of their portion off them.

² Rare pigeons with red wings.

³ The Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost – had to be invoked.

Things were similar in the sartorial Chief Burgomaster's house in Zell forty years earlier. Valentine and Joseph, the later Court Counsellor and Professor, were impatiently waiting in bed for their parents to return. At last they came, and the portions were shared out. But then the future professor of German jurisprudence began: "Valentine, let's keep the goodies an' lay them unner the pellow, then we'll still hae something the morn." Brother Valentine, who, as a nailmaker *in spe*, had a head filled with sawdust, believed him, laid, like Joseph, his "goodies" under the "pellow," and fell asleep, while the other stayed awake. No sooner was Valentine in the Realm of Dreams than Joseph began to eat, and, once he had finished his portion, he took Valentine's share out from under the "pellow" and ate it up also. In the morning – general astonishment, and Jacob and Esau were at daggers drawn because each accused the other of having done him out of his "goodies." The future lawyer eventually found reasons enough to trick Valentine into believing that third parties – cats, mice, the maid – were guilty, until he was satisfied; only to lose his cakes again in the same way the next time. As Joseph did to Valentine with the "goodies," so did Valentine later do to me, credulous and good-natured "Baker-Phil"⁴ with the pigeons.

But Joseph, who often told me all these things himself as an old man, had inherited this slyness from his grandfather, old "Joe the Tailor" of Zell. Here is just one example of how sly this tailor-ancestor was.

It's a cold winter morning. The hoarfrost hangs like sugar on the fir-

⁴ Hansjakob's father, Philipp, was a baker.

trees in Harmersbach Valley which Sepp the Tailor is walking up. On the Sunday before, the servant of “Farmer Hermes,” to whose house he is going, to visit his customer, had taken his “tailor’s utensils” with him. The master carried only his yard-wand as a standard of his trade under his blue cape. But the “air and scent” are icily cold; he freezes deep inside his tailor’s soul. Only one consolation remains to him on the cold walk up the valley: Farmer Hermes has good cherry brandy and Farmer Hermes, of all the Master Tailor’s customers in the little town and in the valley, makes the best “Dummis,”⁵ our tailor’s absolute favourite food. “Guid mornin’, tailor,” Hermesbauer says as the master walks into the large parlour, “A seen ye comin’ up the valley and brocht ye a Cherry Brandy till the wife has makkit the soup.” His first hope had been realised. And soon there came the stately bowl full of steaming milk soup, made especially for Sepp the Tailor. Master Yarn knew from long experience that the “Dummis” would not fail to appear at lunchtime, but one thought occupied him all morning after he had begun his work – how he could, on this occasion, when a particularly strong desire stirred inside him, attain to the largest possible portion of “Dummis.”

He would share the merry meal with Farmer Hermes. For that was the custom, into my childhood years, that a shoemaker or tailor who entered their customer’s house in the country was served especially well. After “the folks,” as the farmer in Kinzig Valley still calls his servants today, had eaten, the table was covered anew for the farmer and the master.

⁵ Pastry made of flour and eggs, cut up into small pieces in the pan.

Depending on the kind of farmer's wife and the quality of the farm, there was a more or less lavish "banquet." Farmer Hermes's wife was of the best kind and Hermes Farm one of the finest in all Harmersbach.

More than one "pinch" from the snuff-tin, which no tailor will ever be without, found its way up Sepp the Tailor's nose that winter's morning as he pensively sewed in the parlour, while the farmer threshed out his summer crop in the barn with his farmhands, the sound ringing down into the valley. The farmer's wife span with her maids, sitting on the stove bench, and was surprised at the master being so quiet today. Usually he would tell the latest news from the town and keep the "womenfolk"⁶ right royally entertained.

The good woman did not suspect that the tailor had been brooding all morning over a life-or-death on Farmer Hermes. And when the farmer's wife left her distaff after ten o'clock and went into the kitchen with the words, "Weel, Maister, a'll awa' noo and see tae⁷ the Dummis," the tailor's plan was made. At eleven o'clock "the folks" turned up to eat, servants and maids, and when these went away half-an-hour later, the table was set for the master and the farmer. Soup, bacon and sauerkraut formed the "Entrées," but my tailor paid very little attention to this. Now the farmer's wife served a dish full of "Dummis," garnished with dried pears, and now the grandfather of a Court Counsellor and my nailmaker-neighbour launched into his plan: "Hermesbauer," he broke his silence, "Ah kent yer

⁶ "Weiber": in the Kinzig Valley, refers to all the women in the house.

⁷ "Well, Master, I'll go now and see to."

faither weel, Ah makkit mony⁸ a smock and pair o' Sunday troosers o' calf's leather. A guid man, he wes, it's a shame he had tae lie in his carebed mony a year. Ye wur still young in those days, Farmer Hermes, but ye wur a richt help for yer ma. Ah weel remember ye gaeing through the toon tae this and that doctor. What was the illness yer faither had, and which doctors did ye gae tae?" Farmer Hermes, who, like most people, was only too happy to talk about his late father, laid his fork down to one side and began to speak. The cunning tailor had counted on this. He knew that a farmer, when he is going to talk about something near to his heart, cannot eat at the same time. The farmer spoke, and the tailor ate. The more the former span out his tale, describing the various doctors, cures and salves and their success, the deeper the tailor's fork sank into the "Dummis" and the emptier the dish became. This finally made Farmer Hermes aware of the tailor's prank; he concluded his tale and decided he would now, for his part, catch the Dummis-eater in his own snare. "But noo, Tailor," the farmer finished his narrative, "noo ye tell me what illness yer faither deed o'!" But the tailor, not stopping eating for a second, said straight out: "Weel, Farmer Hermes, there's hee-haw tae tell, ma faither deed upon a suddenty frae a shock, and in just ten meenits he wis hale, then he wis deid."⁹ So saying, he calmly ate the remaining "Dummis" with the farmer. The latter, however, was vexed that the tailor had taken him in, and when his wife cleared the dish away, he remarked: "Wife, mak twa

⁸ "I knew your father well, I made many a smock"

⁹ "Well, Farmer Hermes, there's nothing at all to tell, my father died all of a sudden from a stroke, and in just ten minutes he was healthy, then he was dead."

dishes fu' o' Dummis the morn, ane for me and ane for the tailor, then ilka o' us cin eat and speak as muckle as he likes!"¹⁰

Thus did Sepp the Tailor do Farmer Hermes out of his "Dummis," his grandson Joseph do his brother Valentine out of his "goodies," and the brother Valentine, *vulgo* Nailmaker Buss, do "Baker-Phil" out of his pigeons.

Incidentally, old Farmer Hermes, the story of whose illness cost his son a meal of Dummis, died like a hero. Hermes Farm lies on a small hill and looks down into the quiet valley as far as the pilgrimage church at Zell. The farmer had walked thither on many a Saturday in days of health "for the sake of the Mother of God," and when he became ill and iller, he sent his children down to the chapel so they would pray for a happy hour of death. The Chaplain of Zell often brought him the holy viaticum. And so Farmer Hermes did not fear dying.

It was a hot summer's day when the Scythe-bearer knocked at Hermes Farm to fetch the farmer away to his wife, who had lain in the churchyard at Zell many years since. The children, all grown up, were standing around their father's deathbed. Down in the valley, servants and maids were working to bring in the wheat harvest. From over the Kinzig River a storm was moving into the valley. Already thunder was rumbling in the distance.

"The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes,"

¹⁰ "Wife, make two dishes full of Dummis tomorrow, one for me and one for the tailor, then each of us can eat and speak as much as he wants!"

says Shakepeare,¹¹ and a German farm-owner is a prince also. At least he still was so in old Farmer Hermes's day. While he was dying, he heard the voice of the approaching storm and knew that the harvest was lying down at the foot of the hill. "Ah cin dee alane," the old man told his children, "ye help the fowk doon ablow bin stooks an' see tae yer breid for winter-time. Ah dinnae need ony more,¹² Ah'll wait for winter doon in the God's-acre." Behind the ancient chest in the dying man's chamber there stood an old, long flintlock, which had always simply been called "The Grumbler" in the house. The dying man's great-grandfather had fired the Grumbler down into the valley for New Year and the Church Fair. Dying Farmer Hermes wanted to use it to announce his death. "Lay the Grumbler," he continued, "on the windae-sole, tie a tow tae the lock an' gie me the tow in ma haun. An' noo gae doon and bin stooks an' yer faither will wait for Deeth, an' when he comes, Ah'll pu at the Grumbler."¹³ When ye hear the Grumbler doon in the valley, then kneel doon an' pray an Oor Father and a 'Lord gie him eternal rest' – for then yer faither will be deid. And noo God preserve ye! Bide guid, as yer faither and mither were. But hie thee, the thunner's rummling agen!"¹⁴

Old Farmer Hermes always had his way, his will being hard as iron. But today, his last will was like diamond. His children, always accustomed

¹¹ *Julius Caesar*, Act 2 Scene 2.

¹² "A cin dee alane ... ye help the people down below bind sheaves and see to your bread for winter-time. I don't need any more."

¹³ "on the window-sill, tie a string to the lock and give me the string in my hand. And now go down and bind sheaves and your father will wait for Death, and when he comes, I'll pull at the Grumbler."

¹⁴ Stay good, as your father and mother were. But go quickly, the thunder's rumbling again!"

to obey him, obeyed here also. Weeping, they walked down the hill, and in tears they bound their sheaves. From time to time, they looked up from their work with tearful eyes to Hermes Farm, to check they had not overheard the Grumbler because of the thunder. The last sheaf had just been bound and loaded when lightning and a peal of thunder passed over the valley. A sudden silence followed the flashing and rumbling in the heavens – then a shot was fired down from the farm, the Grumbler was signalling their father's death. The children kneeled down beside the harvest cart and prayed an Our Father and 'Lord give him eternal rest' and 'Let the light eternal light his way.' Then they brought their sheaves up into the parental home. Their father was dead when they entered his room. The harvest was brought home, and so was their father. –

That is how great people die, and great people are not found only on the thrones of Princes, on battlefields, at lecterns – they are also to be found in quiet valleys, on lonely farmsteads. Among the people, this sea of mankind, they live, the children of Adam, of every description. –

The grandson of the Dummis-Tailor of Zell, Valentine the Nailmaker, did have one way of placating me after he had lured my pigeons away from me. He kept canaries, and a canary was the supreme flower of the feathered world in my eyes, but unobtainable for me in those days; for it cost one a Crown Dollar. But at that time a Crown Dollar was a concept of money no smaller to me than a billion would be today. Even my father never attained to a canary; he allowed himself at most a siskin, which a Swabian bird-dealer who passed through every year had supplied him with for six kreutzer. I still remember very clearly that sunny September day

when the news came through to us boys that there was an escaped canary in Mill Street. All morning we drove the bird from tree to tree, from roof to roof, as if it were a matter of life and death, until I succeeded in getting hold of it near the brick kiln by the mill-chapel. The first victor in the Olympic Games could not possibly have been happier than I was. But in the afternoon came Joseph Hinterskirch, who functioned as an actuary and so, although a man of Haslach, was held in whopping great respect by us boys, and he requisitioned the bird as his property. I would rather have seen a wolf than this Joseph, who incidentally soothed my grief by giving me an old hen for our young cock. But what did that avail me, for the yellow bird was everything to me, its song did not matter in the least. Why, I heard the birds singing in the fields and in the forest every day.

So when Nailmaker Buss called to me that he had young canaries or eggs, and he wanted to show them to me, then I joyfully ran into his low parlour and forgot all loss of pigeons. Valentine had another balsam to heal me from my youthful fury. Once in a while, a small child of his would die, and he regularly made me the crucifer,¹⁵ a dignity which brought in six kreutzer and was therefore much desired by us boys. But it also made us feel proud because you wore an “amice” over your upper body and so were dressed up fit for a parade. The nailmaker paid me down to the last farthing, but I was so naïve that I never thought about him recouping his money twofold and threefold with the first pair of pigeons he whistled away from me.

¹⁵ The person carrying a cross at the head of a procession.

One time, he took from me a pair of red-rumped swallows, rare birds at that time. Our apprentice, Sepp, had brought them for me from his hometown, Shappach, on the Sunday evening. I had gone high up the valley to meet Sepp because I knew what he was going to bring. Up at the edge of the forest, where the Kinzig drifts away past primitive woodland, I met Sepp. "Got pigeons?" was my cry from afar. "Aye, ah hae,' an' cakes an' a' from ma mither." And from the stick he carried over his shoulder, he took down two small ticken bags, and the pigeons were in one of them, the cakes in the other. I walked on cloud nine, carrying the bag of pigeons, towards the little town with Sepp, and I would have spent all that night in the pigeon-loft if father had allowed it. When the pigeons paraded around on our roof for the first time, Valentine the Nailmaker saw them, and two days later, when I was at school, he took them. A neighbour, Furst the cartwright, who lived opposite him, had observed him catching them and immediately told me what had happened. He was in love with our maid, plump Luitgard, and I gave her his regards, told him what she was doing and where she was. This made him my friend; but I had not the faintest idea of the deep psychological basis of friendship. At the time, I believed only in *one* love, in love of pigeons, of field and wood.

The friend in love knew what to do. "When the damned nailmaker," he said in the purest High German, "goes into his field, we'll fetch the pigeons back!"

Valentine had his field, where he spent the greatest part of the day, far away in a forest vale at the back of the Stricker district. His wife and children, insofar as the latter were able to walk and work, accompanied

him. But in a room on the upper floor, an old, old woman sat constantly at the window; I was afraid of her, as I was of all old women I did not know. She was the mother of the Court Counsellor and the nailmaker. Until the Revolution of '48, she had been with her Court Counsellor son in Freiburg. When he was forced to flee with his family from the revolutionaries, our Valentine took their mother in and kept her until she died.

And before the house of my pigeon-marten, there was a second female as guard, the nailmaker's sister-in-law, Nanne Buhrer, minding the little children. There are not as many original types in the female sex as in the male one. Women are by nature more disposed not to show themselves as they are. There is too much coyness and hypocrisy in play. But Nanne Buhrer was an original, even though her past life had faded her considerably. Once an original beauty, she had gone to Paris via Strasbourg, which is situated not far from our little town. In that Babel on the Seine, she lost everything, even a part of her mind. The world-city then spat her out again, and she came back to the Kinzig poor and deranged. The spital for the poor and the sick took her in, and during the day she took care of her brother-in-law Valentine's children. She was a tall, stately person, who always very elegantly held her drill-skirt somewhat raised with her right hand, as if she were wearing a dress with a train. Her favourite saying was, "My favourite colour is pink and my ball-gown is purple." The young girls mockingly cried these words to her in the street.

It was music to Nanne's ears, who then stopped and told the girls about the lovely balls and clothes in Paris. Her concluding words were invariably, "Children, be good, good, and never go to Paris, to Paris!" She

spoke German just as hastily as properly. She often had her bad hours, and then she gave no echo to "pink and purple." But if someone then called "Miss Nanette" to her, she would give a bright smile, nod, and walk on.

She had been a friend of my mother's schooldays and youth. She visited her very often and asked for a tonic. "Cecile, give me a little glass again!" was her frequent salutation. And then she went on to complain about the rough people in the spital, and what she had to suffer from the malice of youth. She lived in a perpetual feud with Sepp Gottleut, a fellow-sufferer in the spital, where they both represented intelligence and education. Sepp Gottleut wanted to be the top dog among the "Spitalers" because he had read a great deal and, in particular, knew the Hussite Wars by heart. But he had never gone beyond the precincts of our little town. Miss Nanette, on the other hand, had received her education in the big world, and though she possessed little definite knowledge, she had elegant manners. And as the latter count for more with most people, not only with spital patients, than scholarliness, then Nanne Buhrer had more followers than Sepp Gottleut the Hussite. He now sought to disparage his rival through all kinds of more or less crude Parisian allusions. Then a row broke out all over the spital. The battlecry was, "For Nanne," "For Sepp Gottleut."

I well remember when I was in grandmother's garden, near the spital, the noise and the storming, which grandmother explained to me every time with the words, "That'll be Sepp Gottleut and Nanne Buhrer going at each other again."

Nanne most commonly called Sepp Gottleut the “Eternal Patient” because he had been in the old almshouse¹⁶ down near the churchyard and then brought over into the new spital. Hence his name. But Sepp claimed this was his inborn right, because his forefathers had held the rectorship in the almshouse since time immemorial. When the Hussites under Black Prokop rode to the Council of Basle,¹⁷ they took the road, Sepp Gottleut declared with rock-hard certainty, through Kinzig Valley and over the Elzacher Eck. They had stopped at the first house in Haslach; it was the almshouse. Nobody else being there, the master of the house’s “Katie” had acted as the riders’ guide as far as the Haidburg. But that evening a rider had come back and stayed with Katie for the rest of his life. He was descended from that man. Hence his love for the Hussites and his researches into their history.

Sepp Gottleut and Nanne Buhrer were both the laughing-stocks of young and old. I could never, however vivacious and malicious I was as a boy, join in the mockery of them. They both seemed to be to be remarkable persons, whom I enjoyed listening to, especially Sepp Gottleut. In front of the spital was the large rhizome of an apple-tree, and Sepp Gottleut sat on it while we boys sat around him. I listened with all my soul when he spoke about Zizka and his Taborites¹⁸ and about the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren¹⁹ and their victories.

¹⁶ “Gottleuthaus” – a place where people were cared for “um Gottes willen” (for the love of God), hence an almshouse.

¹⁷ Prokop the Great (or the Bald) (c.1380-1434). The Council of Basle lasted from 1431 to 1449.

¹⁸ Jan Zizka (c. 1360-1424), leader of the Taborites, the radical Hussites.

¹⁹ A Protestant denomination founded in 1457.

And I always took his side and assured him that I believed him when, at the end of his tale, the other boys cried: "Sepp Gottleut, it's all a lie," which deeply hurt him every time.

I regret now that I was not able to take a closer look into the souls of a Sepp Gottleut and a Nanne Buhrer. Sepp died when I was still a stupid boy-student who cared about anything rather than psychological studies of spital patients. I saw Nanne for the last time when my mother died. On that gloomy December day in 1867, one of the saddest in my life, I stood crying in the hallway of my parental home when they brought mother down the stairs in her coffin. Suddenly I heard a stranger sob to one side of me: "Oh, she was so good with me!" It was Nanne Buhrer. But I could have applied her words a thousand times more truly to myself and I now cried out loud.

I would probably have completely forgotten the poor spitaler if her brother-in-law Valentine had not called her image to my mind.

To carry out the attack on the nailmaker's pigeon-loft, it was necessary to get Nanne out of the house. Furst, who knew how to handle women, found a way. "Miss Nanette," he said in a sweet tone, "could you perhaps be so kind as to fetch me two cigars from Gotterbarm?" If you spoke in a friendly way to Nanne, you had her heart immediately. She readily complied and pushed off up the "back alley" with the children. Now the cartwright and I rushed into the house. Furst positioned himself on the second floor before the door of the old Chief Burgomaster of Zell's wife, and I rushed a flight of stairs higher up to the pigeon-loft. I did indeed find my red-rumped swallows there in a separate cage. I pounced on my property like a young marten and went down the stairs with it, where Furst

had been faithfully guarding the old woman I feared. She had sat unsuspecting in her room all this time.

A king who has regained his lost realm could not be happier than I was then. The matter was less attractive to my brave accomplice and the admirer of our Luitgarde. In every village and in every little town, there are people who like nothing so much as to set others at loggerheads. Goethe rightly says:

Whether you're living in village or city,
Don't ever think to be shown any pity.²⁰

Valentine's neighbour up from him, "Raving Schlosser," belonged to these people. He may have been zealous for the "Religion of Christ," but whenever he had the chance to egg two people on against each other, or to lie in ambush for a peasant, he was there. And so that evening, he told Valentine about our trespass as a silent observer. Valentine's guilty conscience left *me* in peace, but he attacked Furst with vehement words that same evening. After a short introduction, each of them tried to prove that the other was a "scoundrel." Raving Schlosser stood in his hallway, like a faun, listening with glee. I seconded my friend and helper down from the skylight in the roof of my parents' house, beside the pigeon-loft, and barked death-defyingly at tall Valentine. He beat a retreat and disappeared, showing the cartwright his fist all the while, into his dwelling.

We made our peace long ago, and since I began doing research for

²⁰ "Lebst im Volke, sei gewohnt, / Keiner je des andern schont" (If you live among people, be accustomed to the fact / That nobody ever spares the other). From Goethe's *Zahme Xenien* ('Tame Xenions'), 1827.

“Wild Cherries,” he has told me how he became a nailmaker and came to Haslach.

His father the tailor, though he was Chief Burgomaster, had not become a rich man. Nevertheless, he decided that his two talented sons, the older Joseph and the younger Nepomuk, should study. But it was determined that Valentine, being the feeble thinker and, by age, in the middle of these two, was to become a tradesman. Joseph was already at Göttingen University when the time came for Valentine to decide what he wanted to become. The choice was in his hands. Next to the parental house, a nailmaker hammered his nails, and the boys had been in his workshop looking on very many times. So Valentine took a fancy to become a nailmaker. His mother clapped her hands over her head. “Even a tailor rather than a nailmaker,” she said, “why, that’s the most wretched trade of all!” But Valentine simply wanted to hammer rather than tailor, and the Master Nailer promising him six kreutzer a week for his wages, and his father having to send all the money he had left over to Göttingen, Valentine’s wish came true. “And so,” he told me, “I became a nailmaker and martyr, while my brother Joseph became a Court Counsellor and an apostle!”

The younger brother, Nepomuk, studied medicine, but was too frivolous to make it to the exam, and he enlisted in Strasbourg as a second regimental physician going to Algiers. He was involved in all the battles and sieges there, as well as journeys to Palestine, and he stood – this was what impressed Valentine the most – on Mt. Sinai. He died as a physician in a French regiment while still quite young.

When Valentine had finished his apprenticeship, at the age of seventeen, he went on his journeyman's travels. He came to Baden-Baden, where he found work. Here he saved up a hundred florins, a tremendous achievement for a nailmaker's journeyman with a weekly wage of one florin. He was also the "most handsome nailmaker's journeyman" in Baden, freely came in and went out of the house of every master of his guild, and was "known in every place where beautiful master's daughters lived." When he came home to "live it up," the people of Zell stared, for Valentine was not only a handsome journeyman but a proud one as well. He wore stirrup trousers, a top-hat and a cane-stick with a silver knob; in those days, this last was the greatest adornment of a journeyman when he came home from foreign lands.

Our Valentine wanted to spend the time from "living it up" to "enlisting" not far from his hometown, and so he came as a journeyman to old Franz the Nailmaker in Haslach.

When a journeyman from other parts comes to Haslach, he must be first-class, not in trade, but in "fidelity," when the sons of burghers of the same guild make friendship with him. In Kinzig at that time, the nailmakers belonged to the so-called Allied Guild, which contained the hatmakers, the nailmakers, potters, coppersmiths, and tinsmiths. Our Valentine must have fitted in with the perpetually merry people of Haslach, for the two sons of the potter "behind the church", Sepp and Fidel, very soon admitted him to their friendship. We know Sepp from my "Memories of Youth"²¹ as the

²¹ *Aus meiner Jugendzeit* (1879).

trumpet-blower in the church-choir and as the priest's safeguard during the revolution in the town. When Valentine entered the guild, Fidel had just returned from abroad – and with a cow, no less.

He had worked for a poor devil of a potter in Gernsbach for several years, who could rarely pay his journeyman's wages. The master went bankrupt, and Fidel, to obtain his due, came to an agreement with him to quickly take the cow in the byre as payment and then depart. He buckled his knapsack on his back, took his walking-stick in one hand and the cow-rope in the other and set out up the country, arriving in the town one fine evening. It was surely very rare for a travelling journeyman to come from abroad with a cow, hence the great jubilation among the people of Haslach, who then played the part of Fidel in the Shrovetide Carnival. At the time when I became aware of Fidel, he was already an elderly man who struck me because of his small figure and the circumstance of his always having both hands in his trouser pockets in the street. In those days he generally walked around the Haslach area with the name "The Morning Star." He owed this poetic nickname to his strong predilection for walks in fields and meadows before sunrise. He declared that there was nothing healthier than morning dew; he took it from the leaves before "the sun got up" and washed his eyes with it. Wicked tongues remarked that the Morning Star had his eye not only on the dew from the sky on his rambles, but also on the fruits of the field, and he brought many a sack filled with apples and pears home with him.

Now Sepp the Potter, Fidel, Valentine and Sepp the Hatmaker, which last-named never had a care in the world save on Monday evening,

when the money was all gone – then he sighed: “Life is beautiful, but costly” – formed a camaraderie that was as merry as it was strong, and which meant more to Valentine than anything else. On Sunday, they went bowling and drank beer at “Sweet” Lang’s, who had just come from Lyons and opened his business. He lived down by the Klosterbach River and had established a summer-cellar in the Stricker Forest, in among the spruce trees. The sound rang out through mountain and forest and vale when the journeymen of Haslach sang or played ninepins. And when the sun over the forest had gone down, they moved up to “Sour” Lang’s in Mill Street to continue drinking and caterwauling.

These two beer-brewers had their nicknames not from beer but from their physiognomies. Matthias Lang in Mill Street always had a fierce and deeply serious expression, so he was called “Sour” Lang. Joseph, his cousin by the Klosterbach, was the opposite; he always had a friendly and cheerful smile, which led the people of Haslach to christen him “Sweet” Lang.

Remarkably enough, the John Barleycorn they produced was the inverse of the nicknames of the two brewers. Sweet Lang had in the main sour beer, and Sour Lang had as a rule sweet beer. For Matthias, as a rule, did not make his tipples until a few days before Sunday, and if he forgot to do this, often not until Saturday afternoon. As a result, it was unfermented, boiled malt, and therefore sweet.

The Sour Master made no attempt at all to conceal this from his guests, indeed, he was proud of it and said with self-satisfaction as he served the glasses: “Yesterday, still malt; today, already beer.” He had a

fondness for speaking the Bavarian dialect, to remind people that he had studied in the Number One land for beer.

It is one of my earliest boyhood memories, my father taking me out into the countryside one summer's morning, to the Spitfields or into the clay-pits where the day-labourers were working, and then stopping in at "Sour" Lang's with me on the way home. Matthias's wife was a cousin of father and always looked sharp to put something to fill a little hole before me. Add to that a few sips from the sweet brew, and that meant much more to me at that time than the most splendid dinner today.

My father had a penchant for sarcastic remarks, and when the sombre alehouse-keeper with his little eyes and the strong black eyebrows above set down his thick, dull liquid with the words, "Philip, yesterday, still malt; today, already beer" – then my father might say, "Matthias, you're one for the ages – your beer can be eaten or drunk!"

Yet people at that time were just as merry and content with this would-be beer as they are today with the chemical malt preparations. And I find it to be the strongest proof of the irrepressibility of Haslach humour that the people of Haslach are merry at all times, whether their beer be good or bad.

The days at Sweet and at Sour Lang's and his friendship with Morning Star and his companions, made the stay in Haslach exceedingly pleasant for our Valentine. Now, old Franz the Nailmaker had a rosy-cheeked granddaughter who ran his household, but Valentine had his eyes on her far less than "Liz" and Franz the Nailmaker had theirs on the handsome and diligent journeyman. They were unhappy to see him leave

when the time came for his military service, and he too departed with a heavy heart, but only from Morning Star and his satellites.

A few weeks later, Valentine was wearing an artilleryman's uniform in Gottsau near Karlsruhe. Being a soldier at the end of the Twenties was no risky undertaking. But Master Valentine was proud of it in later life all the same. I very clearly remember his discharge as an artilleryman who had given faithful service hanging up in his living-room, and I often looked reverently up at the board on which a soldier was painted beside a cannon. What annoyed him most was anyone doubting that the handsome soldier was his image in former days. One day, he was the town's Master of the Forests by this time, when he was writing under his "discharge" in his green coat, lean and gaunt, and I, impertinent boy that I was, asked if he had been the soldier, and would not believe him when he said, "Aye," he cried, "Ask your father, ye scallywag, he wis in uniform wi' me up the valley, he as Grenadier, I as Gunnar. Since then, thair's nivver bin twa sic braw lookin' sodgers on furlough."²² An' that's ma portrait!"

After a military service without reproach and without deeds, Valentine wandered into foreign parts again, and it was to Freiburg he went, where his brother Joseph was already a celebrated university professor. The apostle provided his Martyr-Brother with a place in a nail-forge, and while Joseph lectured, Valentine hammered. On Sundays he could visit the professor and he received a coffee, a delicacy in those days.

But our Valentine longed for Haslach, where he was much merrier

²² "there has never been two so handsome soldiers on furlough."

with sweet or sour beer than he was in Freiburg with the professor and coffee. Just when he was on the point of moving back there, his father wrote to him that his old trade-master, being childless and advanced in years, wanted to make over his house and nail-forge, together with his field and two cows, to Valentine for a cheap price. The lucky man joyfully hurried to Harmersbach Valley, and the old master's estate was offered him for a song.

While the father conducts the negotiation for the son and settles the points, the latter walks to the merry little town on the Kinzig on a Sunday afternoon. It is just so delightful to be with the potters and hatmakers again, and Morning Star and the other companions exhort our Valentine to set up shop in Haslach. Franz the Nailer and Liz, visited by Valentine and informed by him that he was going to establish himself in Zell, likewise besiege him to take what they are offering. Liz and the nail forge, the common-land field in Stricker Forest as well as a goat, are laid at his feet. The only reason he looks more closely at rosy-cheeked Liz and the old house today is because they promise him the opportunity of staying among the merry folk of Haslach for ever.

Liz and Franz the Nailer do not let go of him, they accompany him to Zell, and now Hercules-Valentine stands at a crossroads. On the one side, the house of his trade-master's neighbour beckons to him with two cows in the stable, on the other, Liz, a goat and an old nail forge, but the latter in unforgettable "Hasle" and the former in boring Zell. His father is for the latter, the professor, on being consulted, likewise, but the Martyr wants at least a merry nailsmithy-life and is for Franz the Nailer's firm in "Hasle."

With a heavy heart, the Chief Burgomaster decides to go to Haslach with Valentine for an “inspection.” But it turns out badly. The good sun looks straight down through all of Franz the Nailer’s house into the cellar; everywhere are the traces of a poor nailer. The Head of the Imperial City takes his Valentine by the arm and drags the resisting son away, out of the tumble-down hut. Franz the Nailer and his Liz are in despair and make every possible protestation in front of the house. In the end, they beg and beseech the burgomaster to go with them to neighbour Kaltenbach: he could best straighten everything out.

Xavier Kaltenbach, my grandfather on the maternal side, was regarded at that time as the wisest man in the town and was well known to Valentine’s father. Yet it was not so long since the now wealthy merchant had come to Zell as a hawker and peddler with his heavy box on his back and obtained a permit from the burgomaster’s office to peddle in the mountains and valleys of the Imperial Territory. Old Buss considered the man to be an authority, and a few minutes later the two parties contending for Valentine surround him in his shop. Before Kaltenbach stands the Chief Burgomaster with his martyr, and to his right and left are Franz the Nailer and Liz. While the Mayor of Zell complains about Franz the Nailer’s poverty, Liz tugs at Kaltenbach’s long, blue coat and looks imploringly up at the judge who will decide her future, and he thoughtfully takes one pinch after another from his large snuff-box.

When the plaint was finished, he spoke as advocate for his neighbours. “Franz the Nailer,” he began, “is the most industrious neighbour I know; he toils and moils, in his old age, for all he’s worth. He

lost his wife and children young and has had much domestic ill-luck. So his household went to rack and ruin through no fault of his. Liz is a girl as good as they come, nobody would be unhappy with her. Therefore just give your son to my neighbour's house, and whenever you need anything, I'll be there to help with word and deed." These last words were the decisive factor for the Chief Burgomaster of Zell. He gave his consent, and a few weeks later Valentine was the head of a house and a Master Nailer in merry Haslach; he had Liz, the hole-riddled house, the goat, the field in Stricker Forest, but also the not inconsiderable debts of old Franz the Nailer.

Master Valentine fared as almost everyone does who establishes a household. You build yourself a merry, bright future with all your hopes and wishes, and most of the time the very opposite happens. No sooner was the wedding over than my grandfather died, he who had offered to be a helper in need, and Valentine was alone with his debts. In a short time, he became a martyr in the true sense of the word. Whereas his colleagues, Morning Star and Sepp the Hatmaker, stayed bachelors and merry, the poor nailer became ever more serious and quiet. He worked day and night. In the summer season, he dug over his field in Stricker Forest during the daytime, and at night he began to make nails with no other light than the one given by his hearth.

I still clearly remember how the sound of his hammering came over to us baker's boys, to me and to Peter, when we were at work during the night. And when we closed the shop in the bakery at midnight, we saw the head of hammering Valenitne in the glow of the nail-forge fire. I liked this

curious chiaroscuro at midnight; my soul must have sensed at that time that this was poetry, and I liked looking at the martyr, around whose head the fire of his hearth spread a halo. Peter, in whose breast no poetic sentiments stirred, would often cry impatiently to me: "Harry, c'way,²³ let's gae ta bed. Wir better aff than Buss the Nailer!"

Valentine personally brought to market all that he had nailed together in the nights of a week. Then the peasant-cobblers and the carpenters came to the little town from mountain and vale, to supply their needs from the nailers who offered their competing goods for sale at the Town Hall, a hundred large nails for six kreutzer, smaller ones for a batzen.²⁴ These slight proceeds were to feed Valentine's family, which grew more numerous every year, and pay the interest on his debts. It was impossible, and with every year he became a greater martyr. If the apostle in Freiburg had not sent some small change every now and then, Valentine would not even have been able to go for a pint on a Sunday in "merry Haslach."

But he never lost his sense of humour. This much he had learnt in Haslach, where nobody, as of yet, has ever known despair. In between the toils of the day, he crept into his pigeon-loft at midday and, in the evening, whistled to other people's pigeons, and caught them. Such a capture, and he forgot all of his martyrdom for a day. Or on Sunday afternoons, when he lacked money for the inn, he sat before the cage of his canaries and made his ornithological observations.

²³ Come away; Come.

²⁴ Four kreutzer.

But Master Valentine showed himself in his full greatness when he paraded on Sundays, in the clothes which the Court Counsellor of Freiburg sent him each time they ceased to be worthy of the salon or the college. At those times the poor nailer proudly drew attention to his Court Counsellor's garb as a part payment for the fatherly fortune which the Court Counsellor had needed for his studies and the loss of which had made a nailer of Valentine.

Though the martyr was not as talented as his brothers, he was still much cleverer and, in particular, much more dexterous with a pen than many a man of Haslach. Compared with the intellectual lights of his friend Morning Star, he was a veritable sun. Thus it came about that the Senate of Haslach conferred on him the office of Woodward over the many and lovely woodlands of the community, these amounting to half a district forest.

The office was a difficult one: in it, one of his predecessors had almost lost his life. This happened as follows. Not only Rome, but my hometown on the Kinzig had its struggles between plebeians and patricians. The ideas of the French Revolution had penetrated to the "rear vassals" of the small town, and as early as 1805 these had successfully ensured that the common-fields and -meadows were divided in equal shares among them and the full citizens. Twenty years later, it was all about the woods. Up to then, only the full citizens had possessed a right to wood from the town's woodlands; now, the suburbanites and the rear vassals also demanded the same right, to two cords and 150 faggots every year.

This caused an uproar. The patricians saw their last privilege under threat. The leader of the opposition was Kaiser the Weaver, whom I knew well, a sincere, stately man, with large blue eyes and a hawk's nose. He smoked a short Cologne-Pipe in the street all the time. More eloquent and intelligent than all of his fellow plebeians, he gathered them around him to form a private confederacy, to which he gave the handsome name: "The general weal."

A patrician, in whose house he had a lodging and his loom, gave him notice to leave the dwelling when the fight began. What does the people's tribune and the spokesman of "The general weal" do? He takes his wife and child to the Town Hall and pitches his tent and holds popular assemblies in its airy stone halls, until the authorities offer him a home in the almshouse. But even here he incites a rebellion against the patricians; he makes all of the poor people into social democrats. A patrician of the second rank, "Fidel the Baker," takes his stand under Kaiser's flag and supports his rant against the town government: "They at the Town Hall are sheer scoundrels, who need an upright man placed in the Council to tell them his opinion straight from the hip. This man, Fidel the Baker, is the person best suited for this." The plebeians elect him, and no sooner is Fidel the Baker in the Council than his opposition to them falls silent. And when the people interpellate him: why has he not kept his promise? – he says, "Guid fowk, Ah'd nivver hae thocht as lang as ah lived that a'thing went on wi' sic honesty at the Toon Ha'." The number of "Fidel the Bakers" in similar circumstances is legion to this day.

However, "The general weal" did not drop his cause. Kaiser now

transfers the agitation to the women, who are easy to win over. They also want to burn wood which costs nothing in the kitchen and the stove, like the wives of full citizens do. In spring 1826, the Town Council promises to allow the plebeians to participate in this right and appoints Fidel the Baker as temporary Woodward. The plebeians suspect a kind of coup d'état behind this appointment and are doubly on their guard. Spring arrives in the land; much wood has been felled during the winter, the blows of axes having resounded down from the primitive forest to the town on many a winter's day. The day for the lots to be drawn for all "those entitled to wood" was proclaimed.

Now, up to the present day, wood is distributed at the Town Hall every year, the same for every citizen in terms of quantity, but differing in quality. It is mostly women and boys who go to the draw. It was no small honourable office for me when father ordered me, as a boy, to draw the lot and then pick up the wood in the forest straight afterwards.

On that first draw-day of the year 1826, the plebeians sent mostly their wives; the men had fought and won the victory, the women were to fetch the trophies. Before Fidel the Baker began the lot-drawing, he announced the decision of the Town Council that, for the first year, the rear vassals would not have a lot for wood but would only receive 150 faggots of brushwood. Now the poor Woodward was done for. The women flew at the treacherous patrician like hyenas and gave him a battering, beating him down to the ground. Had it not been for the intervention of men of his patrician rank, he would not have escaped alive from the hands of the wood-furies. Then the Senate stepped in. The ringleaders, Sawyer's wife

and the wife of “Wild Neumaier,” a carter, were to be arrested and taken into the “Idiot House” by the policeman. For the Chief of the Executive Power at that time, old Miehle the tailor, that was no small matter. Sawyer’s wife, a giantess, whom I often saw at my grandmother’s as a boy, threw the poor policeman-tailor out the door. He succeeded in arresting the wife of “Wild Neumaier” and putting her behind lock and bar. Her husband was away, but when he returned home with his horse and cart from Offenburg that afternoon, he was told that his wife had been locked up by Miehle the tailor because of the battle at the Town Hall.

If a knight in the Middle Ages had been informed on his return home that somebody had abducted the Lady of his castle, he could not have started out to avenge the disgrace in greater haste than Wild Neumaier did. In those days, Haslach had a militia squadron. Neumaier was one of them. Buckling on his cavalry sabre, saddling a horse, and galloping into town with drawn sword, were the work of only a few minutes.

Arrived at the Idiot House, he bursts open the wretched wooden door with his sword, lifts his dearest onto his horse, like a knight of old in the age of courtly love, and proudly trots down the main street, his naked sword still in his right hand, towards his ruined castle in the suburbs, where he sets down his wife.

But the knight has not yet avenged himself on the man who assailed the honour of his house,²⁵ on Miehle the tailor. He rides at full pelt into town once more and searches for the servant of the Holy Brotherhood.

²⁵ “Hausehre,” meaning his wife.

Enraged Roland gallops up to Miehle's home, to the Town Hall, to all the taverns. He does not find him. He is about to ride back home – there, on the border between town and suburb, not far from the Angel Inn, he sees the tailor in the distance, already informed and frightened, hurrying towards his dwelling. The tailor hears the hoofbeats, sees Wild Neumaier swinging his sabre and riding for him, and he sprints behind the Angel Inn in search of a shelter. Another second, and the dragoon will have him. Quick thinking is of the essence. Only one single opening offers itself to the man in mortal fear – the goose-coop of the Angel Inn. Into this he slips with his uniform and sabre. Hardly has he drawn his feet in after him than a blow lands on the goose-palace. Yet the poor tailor's fear, and the energy with which he squeezed himself into the goose-coop, disarm the horseman's fury. But so long as his wife had to stay in the "Idiot House," just so long must the policeman stay in the goose-coop. High on horse, Wild Neumaier keeps faithful watch, and to leave the tailor in no doubt as to his presence, he cuts a chip out of his wooden hiding-place every now and then. Eventually, old and young gather around this peculiar tableau. When the evening bell has ceased to sound, the plebeian rides away; merciful folk pull the half-dead officer of the public safety out of his chest and compassionately escort him home.

That was the worthy conclusion of the long struggle between the patricians and the plebeians. The latter were victorious in all their demands. From that time on, there was peace until the year of '48.

But these achievements could not help the tribune of the people, the ingenious weaver, Kaiser, the great speaker for the field- and forest-hungry

people, out of his weaver's misery. What good does cheap wood do when you have nothing to boil? Pope once said:

“Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.”²⁶

That was also true of the leader of the plebeians in Kinzig. The dark night of the soul surrounded him. One morning, he sought his death in the mill-canal, at the same spot where, several years before, old Breithaupt, his sister, who first gave me Till Eulenspiegel to read once upon a time, entered the deathly water. It was at the same spot, up from the town mill, that the bodies were found. I saw both of them lying dead in the green grass by the bank.

Dark points in the history of the human soul. –

At the time when our Valentine was the Woodward, things were more peaceful than in the days of “Fidel the Baker.” The forest wardens did, indeed, still have fights on many a night on the heights of the ancient forest with the peasants of the upper Barental Valley, who readily crept into the town woodlands by night to fetch a roebuck or a log. But Valentine, as a soldier who had served in peacetime, kept his distance from these fights. He walked in the beautiful mountain forests only in daytime, and I can still picture him today, leaving his house, in his coat which had turned from green to yellow, and holding a staff, for his forest inspection.

His “Martyrdom” was not alleviated by the new office. Such small “corvées” ruin their man as a rule. My father often said, when a citizen had

²⁶ The quote is actually from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).

to put on a coat on a working-day, then all was lost. Valentine did maintain himself at his previous level, and once he had played Head Forester during the day, he hammered his nails until midnight. And even during the day, he still had time enough to lure my pigeons from me.

Another preferment which he held in those days contributed just as little to pave a path to prosperity for him. He was “Master of the Chest” of the allied guilds. The “Chest” of the old guilds could well be named their Ark of the Covenant, in a way. In it were kept the passports of the travelling journeymen, the papers of the guild, and the coffers. Whenever an apprentice was admitted, or qualified, or a master was made, a contribution of one florin, or several, had to be offered to the chest. An apprentice, that is to say, his father, paid four florins as an admission-tax; the honourable masters drank three of them away at once, and the fourth went into the chest. When an apprentice qualified, the agents involved, the Master of the Guild, the Master of the Chest, the Junior Master²⁷ and their two advisers from the guild had to address a banquet.

The merry murmuring at this feast still sounds in my ears when I recall how we boys, at that time, would look in at the windows of the Raven Inn, where almost all the guilds had their lodging, and envy the lucky ones.

Every now and then, a good drink and a proper repast sweetened the existence of Valentine, Master of the Chest, so that he now suffered it in silence, he now bore it with good humour. Far more silent even than Valentine was his good wife, Liz. Untiringly active, blessed with a bevy of

²⁷ The Master most recently admitted.

children, she stood with dignity at the side of the poor nailmaker, who never left his smithy before midnight. She has long since gone home to eternal rest from the unrest of this earthly vale of tears. But Valentine, who gave us the frame for the pictures of life above, he is still alive today, an octogenarian.

In that parlour, at the same window, where Valentine's ages-old mother sat in my childhood days, he sits now on his own on dull winter days. His hearth, which lit up his face on so many nights, went out long ago. His son, Wilhelm, a younger schoolfriend of mine, has made a white baker's room out of the black nail-smithy, and he has become, a truly tremendous achievement for a small baker in Haslach, a rich man. The blessing which the martyr and his wife earned has passed to the son. As for Valentine's other children, some are in eternity with their mother, some in America. Initially they sent many a dollar-note over the sea to their father. Years ago, they became as cold as Americans, and the dollars do not come now. But that does not dampen the old martyr's spirits.

In the hot summer last year, I met him by my parents' house, holding a rake as a support in the one hand, and a watering-can in the other to water the plants in his son's garden. I invited him to a glass of wine; he drank the juice of the vine and I related the memories he evoked of my wonderful childhood days. "Heinrich," he said at parting, armed by the "milk of the old,"²⁸ "Ah've bin a martyr a' ma life, but ah've reached auld age. Ah'm still blithe in the world, an' ah'm thinking ah'm no gaun tae

²⁸ "Vinum lac senum est" (Wine is the milk of the old) – an ancient Latin proverb.

dee!”²⁹ Smiling, he slowly wandered off, out to the gardens at Klosterbach.

Many years have passed since then. The spring of this year, 1888, brought me back home. On a Sunday afternoon, at the end of April, I walked, alone and lonely, to the Stricker Forest. Mountain and valley laughed and blossomed to meet the springtime. Children came out of the forest with primroses in their hands. The people of Haslach call these “dim angels” still today, these first, light-yellow forest-children of spring. I thought of the time when I too carried them out of the forest with the same happy, cheerful, innocent child’s face, full of the joys of life, which came towards me today in my successors in the children’s heaven that is Haslach.

Melancholy and, at the same time, joyful memories of home came back to me. I had met young representatives of my long-past childhood days here at the edge of the wood, but a yet more vivid memory lay in store for me. When I had walked further up and had come into the deep, quiet side valley at the back of Stricker Forest, Valentine the nailmaker was there in his favourite field, which he had cultivated for nearly sixty years, in Sunday dress, the main decoration of which was a coat which his brother the Court Counsellor had worn when alive. It gave him joy to meet me there so unexpectedly, but he did not suspect that a far greater joy filled my soul to find him again, whom I had seen here as a man so often in my boyhood days, on this classical ground more than forty years later, at the moment when I had just laid down my pen after writing “Valentine the

²⁹ “I’m still happy in the world, and I could imagine I’m not going to die!”

Nailsmith." I say on classical ground, for a few steps away from his favourite field lay my father's field, where I had passed so many a day in sweet work and even sweeter dreams in the forest. Because it was a long way off from the little town, the midday meal was brought over; and dining with servants and maids and day-labourers up in the forest or down by the small, still pond, that was a real treat for me such as no luncheon in the world can offer me today. How often did Valentine rest and eat beside us with his family by the small spring which feeds the pond from the forest!

So I took joy in old memories. And beside the joy, that quiet admonisher, called melancholy, moved into me again. Nature all around me was the same as formerly. The cherry-trees still stood in Valentine's field and the beech-trees of my long, long-dead friend, "Jock the Runner" were still on the mountain. The cuckoo still cried, as it had forty years before, into the spring evening, and there were still boys sitting down by the pond beating willow branches and making shawms from them – only Valentine and I had changed, he had become eighty-five and I had passed half a century.

His cherry-trees had brought him here on this Sunday; he wanted to see if they were sprouting well and promised him a harvest. I told him he had "come into a book" of mine and I had introduced his "martyrdom" to the world. At these words, he laughed from a joyful heart and said he would rather have that than a gravestone.

I walked on a few steps, when I was cut to the soul. Up on my father's field was a large fir-tree, which I had sat under as a boy. I had carved my name in its bark. Every time I came here, I had looked for the

H.H. 1850 and greeted the fir-tree as an old and dear friend. Today it lay felled at my feet. The woodcutters must have wrought their work of destruction here a few days before; corpses of firs lay all around, with a dead queen before them, the fir of my youth. A tear rose to my eye, I turned around and said to myself: "Everything changes, even fir-trees die." Over yonder, Valentine tottered towards the budding trees, the winter of life in spring.³⁰

Four years have passed again since our encounter "at the back of Stricker Forest." Again it is spring, and again the cherry-trees are blossoming. Valentine and I are sitting together in my holiday-room in "The Snowballs" in the quiet, sunny valley, to the south of Hasle, on a cool day in May of the year 1892.

The old man has come up to visit me. It occurred to him that he had forgotten to tell me the abovementioned story of Lovely Sophie before Martin's Gate at Freiburg, and she "must be in the book an' all," he says, so people will know that Valentine was popular with the "better lasses" of his youthful days and is proud still today of "that acquaintance."

Only yesterday he was in his wood on the Ried. He has been coming to this wood since 1833, every day in spring and summer for the last twenty years, a mountain-hike of four hours. Now he wants to look at his fir-trees for a few more years; then a raft will be made of them so the "wood" will be transported down the Kinzig and sold in Strasbourg. And

³⁰ This is where "Valentine the Nailmaker" ends in the 1888 version of "Wilde Kirschen." The text from this point on is translated from the 1913 Wiesbadener Volksbüch.

with the money, the martyr intends to live as an apostle for “a few years” more.

I ordered two quarts of wine for him and gave him some more money for further fortifying pints. Merry with wine, he left. When something else occurs to him, he will come again.

I look down from my window at him as he leaves the house. In a loud voice, he says to himself while walking away: “After a’, it’s a braw place tae be, this warld.”³¹

I, the pessimist, quickly shut my window and felt ashamed at this optimism of an eighty-six-year-old.

Very shortly afterwards, as I was walking towards the village graveyard and turned off into the little valley of “Ullerst,” still occupied with Valentine’s cheerful philosophy of life, an old woman came up behind me. She greeted me with the usual greeting: “Praise be tae Jesus Christ, Faither.” From her costume, I recognised her at once to be from another valley towards the west, and I asked if she had some business to see to over here. “Aye,” she answered, “Ah’ve bin at the God’s-acre an’ veesited puir Xaveri.”

And then she told me the following about dead Xaveri:

Xaveri was a good, diligent boy, the son of a farmer up on the Breitebene.³² He served as a farm-labourer for his father’s neighbour, for Farmer Schmalzen, and beside him Rosine served as maid, the narrator’s

³¹ “After all, it’s a nice place to be, this world.”

³² A plateau near Haslach.

niece, a “bonny, eident, strang³³ lass.” Her home is over there, over the mountain, not far from the Breitebene.

Rosine and Xaveri are “sweet on each other” but “they cannae mak it tae mairriage.” Nowhere, neither on this side nor the other side of the Hessenberg is there a farm or an “opportunity”³⁴ for sale. In hopeless love, Xaveri and Rosine look down from Schmalzen Farm over hill and dale.

Then Rosine’s brother dies over on the Hessenberg and in him dies the future owner of her father’s farm. Now Rosine becomes a farmer back in her home, and she and Xaveri become man and wife.

After many years, Rosine gives Xaveri triplets, but with this birth she loses “all her heart’s blood” and “goes out like a light without oil.” At the eleventh hour, the priest of Schweighusen is sent for, but he has not walked half the way up Gaisberg when Rosine dies.

She, the narrator, hurries to meet the priest so he will turn round and not make the long walk in vain.

Xaveri is “sore afflicted” but he must think of marrying again for the sake of his three children. Half a year later, he goes over the mountain to his home. Down there in the valley, by the trout-rich Salmersbach stream, a poor weaver lives at Helgenwasen, he has a daughter Caroline, a “braw auld lass” who has earned “a few hundred marks” by this time.

She becomes Xaveri’s wife and moves with him over to the Hessenberg. But after a few weeks, “when we war hoeing the tatties on the

³³ Pretty, hardworking, strong.

³⁴ In Kinzig Valley, a term used to describe an estate big enough to feed a family and so provide the “opportunity” for marriage.

mountain,” the farmer becomes “gyte,”³⁵ begins to sigh and to groan, and he sighs and groans day and night into the winter.

Two days before “Lady’s Day before Christmas,”³⁶ Xaveri asks for the priest of Schweighusen. He wants to make a childlike confession and also receive extreme unction.

The priest comes, and the fairmer “does a’ it’s richt tae dae when deeing.” But on the eve of Lady’s Day, when the “others” are sitting at their evening meal in the parlour, and Xaveri is lying in bed in the master bedroom, he quietly gets up and jumps over the wooden balcony at the back of the house and away.

Those in the parlour hear the noise of his leap and mark at once that the farmer has gone.

The moon is shining brightly, it is a clear, cold advent night. The “wummin” run in terror to the neighbours and report that Xaveri has gone; there is no doubt he intends to do himself harm. The “gadgies” of all the farms around are alarmed and the dogs let loose, and the troop rushes along the Hessenberg, over the Hallen to the Gummi and to the Kohlwald [*Charcoal Forest*]. There are calls and shouts and barks, and the moon “lights,” but nowhere is there a trace of Xaveri.

At midnight, the farmers and their hands came home from the vain expedition.

With the first light of dawn, old Kury, Rosine’s father, sets off, out into Kinzig Valley and over this into Harmesbach – to Farmer Hattich on

³⁵ Insane, demented.

³⁶ The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th.

the Billersberg. He is a shaman of the first rank, and Kury wants to ask him where Xaveri is to be found.

Farmer Hattich, when asked, strides into his chamber, looks into his “mountain-mirror,” and conveys the words of the oracle to the Hessenberger, short and sharp: “Xaveri is over the mountain, towards his home, but no longer living.”

Now, let anyone try to tell me that the shamans in Kinzig Valley know nothing! It was as Farmer Hattich had prophesied.

At the same time as old Kury left the Hessenberg, on the other side of it, Farmer Heize on the Breitebene wanted to let his “mill-pond” flow so it would drive his wheel for grinding. That is when he finds dead Xaveri, his neighbour’s son, in the pond.

“But Xaveri,” said my narratress, “kent the watter weel, he often pleyed by the pond as a bairn, an’ for the pond’s sake he went rinnin’ that nicht and socht his deeth.”

What sombre, melancholy poetry in this seeking out the pond, to die in that place where the happy boy once played!

The dead man was not carried over the mountain into his hut but brought into his parental home and buried in his home churchyard, which I saw the old woman coming out of that morning.

Dead Xaveri’s farm is auctioned off, relatives not far from the churchyard take the children, and Caroline, the second wife, becomes a maid as before.

All this happened last winter. And now that spring has arrived, the old woman has come over the mountain, for she has long had a “yearning”

to visit Xaveri at the God's-acre and see after the children. She asks me "to include him and Rosi too in my prayer."

"Xaveri," she added, "is in a guid place onyways. He wis guid, liked tae pray wi' the buik and wi' his mooth, and his heid ganging sae apley,³⁷ he couldnae help that. Ah trow he's wi' Rosi agen noo, an' things are better for the twa o' them than they war afore."

She cried while speaking these words, wiped her old eyes dry with her red handkerchief, and said: "Faither, ah'd fain be wi' them an' aw; for it wad mak a stane greet, what we hae tae thole in this haur warld."³⁸

I could have kissed the old woman's brown, calloused hand, so greatly had she delighted and edified me with her naïve, moving tale.

We had stopped walking a long time since and were standing on the road. And when I, completely fascinated by the narratress all this while, raised my eyes, we were before the stone cross which Farmer Witte had put up in Ullerst not far from his farm.

I comforted the woman by referring to the Crucified One, and her wet eyes flashed like sunlight over dewdrops.

Before I parted from her, I wanted to know her name. And now the "Eternal Feminine" showed itself in the old creature. "Ah'd rather no say ma name, it's nae bonnie yin."³⁹ Nae wumman on a' the Hessenberg is

³⁷ His going so soft in the head.

³⁸ "Father, I'd be glad to be with them too; for it would move a stone to tears, what we have to endure in this here world."

³⁹ "I don't like to say my name, it's no pretty one."

ca'd it. Ah'm ca'd Uschi, an' fowk jist say⁴⁰ Kury-Franze-Uschi." So I had a single lady before me, and I doubly understood her little vanity. But when I said to her that Uschi was a very pretty name, her brown old face shone like sparkling malmsey.

The May sun had lit us up to then, but with a cool light. Then suddenly a snowstorm broke out over our heads. Uschi opened her enormous blue brolly, and I was driven homewards.

We shook hands warmly. She walked up the valley to her Xaveri's children, and I went down the valley, lost in thought.

The old soul had delighted me. I wondered: Who is right, Valentine, who just parted from me, happy as a child, uttering the maxim, "After a', it's a braw place tae be, this warld," or Uschi from Hessenberg, who sighed with teary eyes, "it wad mak a stane greet, what we hae tae thole in this haur warld"?

I think the heavens settled the question. After cold sunlight, they strewed cold snowflakes on Nature's blossoms and fields.

And that is what they do in a man's life. —

One and a half years later, there was a festival in Freiburg. The old artillerymen of Baden came together.

Knowing that Valentine was certain to be the eldest, I had made him promise, long before the festival, to join in and be my guest.

October 1893 saw his day of greatest honour. As the oldest Baden artilleryman, he was led, crowned with a wreath in a garlanded car,

⁴⁰ "I'm called Ushi, and people just say"

accompanied by horsemen, at the head of the long procession all through the town. Everywhere people greeted him with joy. For the newspapers had announced that “Valentine, the Nailmaker” was coming to the festival as the eldest participant.

In the evening he said to me, beaming with joy and honour, “What wad the auld Freiburgers say, an’ ma Sophie, if they cud hae seen the nailmaker’s apprentice o’ yon days being honoured in Freiburg an’ led in triumph throch the toun? Wha’d hae thocht it!”

“That’s ne’er happened tae a nailmaker afore,” he concluded, “an ne’er will happen tae anither yin.” –

And when he came home from the Freiburg Festival Day, the people of Hasle received him with music and gun salutes, so great was their delight at the honour paid to Valentine in Freiburg.

When he took leave of me, he said, “This hes bin owermuch honour for a puir nailmaker, ah winnae survive this lang.”

Winter came and went. It became spring of the following year, 1894. With the first warm days, the old man began his daily ramble to the Ried, which he had suspended now and then in the previous winter.

Thirsty, he came back to the little town one hot April day. In “The Ox” he drinks two quarts of wine. But they do not fully quench his thirst, so he adds the same amount of beer in “The Cannon.” That does not go down well. He must lie down in bed and die, however loath he be to leave life.

When the news of his death came to me, I was a sick man myself, weary of life, or I would have helped to bury him, the Martyr of Hasle.

But on the day when they buried him, a breeze fluttered his fir-trees

on the Ried, like a song of lament for Valentine, the nailmaker, who loved his forest like a father loves his children.

The Idiot Painter

(From *Wilde Kirschen* [Wild Cherries] 1888)

I have already mentioned, in the memoirs of my “Youth-” and “Student-Days,” a man whom I feared as a boy and regarded with reverence and astonishment as a student. In my boyhood, he would sometimes stand on the Gutleut Bridge over the River Klosterbach for half the day and look, silent and still, now into the water as it rushed away, now over to the forested mountains beyond the River Kinzig. We boys would timidly hurry past him and quietly whisper to each other: “The eejit peantair!”

He was a wonderfully handsome man, this idiot painter. On a tall, slim, graceful figure there sat the head of an Albrecht Dürer, and from between the dark, long hair of his head and his beard there looked out a pair of large blue eyes, which were just as intelligent as they were gloomy. His whole appearance was noble.

As an elder high school pupil, I tried to approach him at times, on those occasions when he was in the market-square, or standing on the bridge, or drinking a glass of beer at a lonely table in the Bierkrämer Pub. If he was in a good mood, then one would receive some few words from him; now and then, he would rapidly sketch a portrait on a piece of paper on request, but most of the time, when people spoke to him, he would laugh to himself, a hollow and sinister laugh, and hurry away.

A chance occurrence had made it possible for me to look more closely into the life of this man who departed this earth as a poor idiot, misjudged in his lifetime, and almost forgotten and unknown today.⁴¹

We have devoted a chapter especially to the Sandhas family, so richly endowed with intellect. The coppersmith Lorenz Sandhas had a brother who was a blacksmith. This blacksmith's daughter Margarethe, or, as the people of Haslach say, "Gretle," was the most beautiful girl in the town and possessed not a little of her family's intellect.

The wanderlust of her five cousins was in her also, and although girls from Haslach rarely went into foreign parts in past times, she did not stay at home. "Gretle" insisted on seeing the world and departing from the parental home, which still stands opposite mine today.

At that time, Haslach and the upper Kinzig Valley were still under the rule of the Prince of Furstenberg, and every child of the land, as at all times and among every people, longed first and foremost to see the Capital. And so Gretle too came first to the sources of the Danube and into the small capital of the former Principality of Furstenberg.

My grandfather's brother, Josef, was Professor and Court Chaplain in Donaueschingen at that time and resided with his sister Helene. The two

⁴¹ [Hansjakob's Note]: A Mr. Allegeyer, born the son of an official in Haslach, had known the unhappy artist more closely and, partly from his own experience, partly from the accounts of his cousin, the old headteacher Blum, put a short depiction in verse of the Idiot Painter down on paper more than thirty years ago. His brother possessed the manuscript and sent it to me. The author, currently living in Munich, readily gave his consent for use to be made of his production in my "Wild Cherries." This and my own inquiries enable me to portray a thoroughly tragic human life in the following pages and to save from oblivion a high-minded man who, misjudged and mistreated in his hometown for many years, lived and died as the "Eejit peantair."

of them took care of her and she came to Court Councillor Z. Here she often saw the bachelor bailiff of the neighbouring town of H., and after a few years he brought it about that Gretle moved into his house and became his cook.

Let us skip the two years which she spent in the bailiff's house. A free poetic pen could describe them; I am neither free nor a poet.

It was a cold, raw winter's day in the year 1801. Wanly shone the sun over the hills of the Black Forest between Donaueschingen and Triberg. The fir-trees rustled, shaken by an icy wind, when a young woman with a baby in her arms came walking down the lonely path in the snow. The sun had just set when she hurried out the lower gate of the town of Billingen in fearful haste.

She did not think of the winter, not of the night, not of the burden she bore. Restlessly she hurried on, indifferent to the fate she would meet out in the cold night. It is still a long way down into the Kinzig Valley; whether she arrived early or late, there was always time for her disgrace.

So she dashed off into the cold evening, into the cold night. She did not feel the baby freezing stiff in her arms and her own strength becoming ever more and more exhausted. On the iciest height of that region, on the Sommerau, she finally sank down on the road. Mother and child soon fell asleep. Then Heaven brought a labourer from a neighbouring farmstead, on his way home from Peterzell, to the two figures embraced by death. He took them up and laboriously dragged them through storm and snow to the nearest farm.

Here they were both called back into warm life, and sympathy

ensured that they were provided with every care. But no word was to be got out of the mother about From where? and Why? She sat in silence before her baby, and the farmer's wife learned only this much, namely that she wanted to go down into the valley, to her home; and everyone in the house which had saved her felt this much, namely that an infinite amount of woe and sorrow lay upon the young mother.

On the afternoon of the second day, she moved on; she did not give thanks for being brought back to this life, she placed a silver coin on the table, took her baby, and walked all the way up the hill and then down into the valley. The moon was rising over the old ruins of the dynasts of Husen, down by the River Kinzig, by the time she reached the derelict village of the same name.

But here she left the open highroad; for she was approaching her hometown and did not want to meet anyone who had known her in better days. She crossed the bridge near Husen onto the right bank of the river, where narrow paths led her unseen down to the Kinzig Bridge near Haslach.

When she arrived at this bridge, under which the icy water rushed, a terrible struggle began in the unfortunate mother between love and fear, between disgrace and crime. A few more steps, and she would be standing before her parental home, which she was to enter dishonoured, from which her staid father might immediately chase her and her baby out. Would it not be better to bury the baby or herself and the baby in the water and let all earthly misery be swallowed by the waves?

She leaned against the parapet, a terrible struggle raging in her

soul. Her baby in her arms, she stared into the moonlit water. The rushing of the water and her inner struggle had closed her ears to the steps of a man who had come up the river from the village of Schnellingen, on his way home to the little town at a late hour.

It was the old “Fat Butcher” of Haslach, who was returning from the countryside and had drunk his last pint in The Flower at Schnellingen. From a distance, he saw a figure leaning against the bridge in the moonlight, and the nearer he came, the more mysterious it seemed to him.

He came up to her as close as the width of the bridge. Now he saw the baby also, recognised the blacksmith’s beautiful Margarethe, and instantly guessed what was about to happen here. Carefully taking her by the arm, he said: “Gretle, how have you come here, and what are you planning to do?” In vain did she try to tear herself away from the strong man, who had already taken possession of the baby also; covering her face, she gave a dull groan.

He was usually a hard and mocking man, the Fat Butcher, but the girl’s sorrow cut him to the quick. And when a man who is usually hard is moved by something, then he really is moved. And so the fat man took the girl home with him first, reconciled the old blacksmith to his daughter’s misfortune on the following morning, and then took Gretle with her baby into her parental home. That is how the future “Idiot painter” came into the world and into his grandfather’s smithy.

In the first days after her return home, Gretle’s father walked with her to the rectory. At that time, the worthy priest Schumacher lived there, about whom my father told me, even fifty years after his death, that he had

been the friend and adviser of the entire little town.

The blacksmith first asked for “holy baptism,” and Gretle sobbed with shame, but the priest, following some serious words, opened her heart through sympathy and comfort. As she had confessed everything at home to her father, so now did she to him also, that she had fallen because of a promise of marriage, but later been deceived and lied to.

Outraged at the behaviour of the Furstenbergian official, Priest Schumacher reported the incident in its entirety to the Princely government, energetically spoke up for poor Gretle, and brought about at least the payment of a sum of money to her and her child which would protect her from destitution after her father’s death.

The old blacksmith died shortly afterwards and left little, like most people of Haslach; his son, the young blacksmith, the same with whom I spent many an hour forty years later and whom I often helped to hammer his iron, took over the forge and the house. Although his three sisters, among whom Gretle was the youngest, had the right of occupancy in *one* room in the house, it was too small for four people, so they reached an agreement with their brother and moved into a small cottage in Graben Street by the town moat.

The life of three single females without a fortune in the countryside is a very monotonous and miserable one. Our three sisters earned their bread through casual work, in summer, working in the field, in winter, spinning and knitting. It must have been truly dreary in winter-time, when the sun barely reached the small windows in their dark cottage, where I, as a boy, was later to spend many a delightful hour.

In my days, old “Sot-Brucker” lived on the lower floor there. His son Karl was my schoolfriend and his wife a midwife. Father and mother were away most of the time, the old man at the “boozing-trade,” the mother on her work-related duties, and we boys were alone in the apartment, where we turned everything upside-down. And when the old man came home, he was as a rule a little tipsy and did not see the mess we had made, but praised us for “looking after the home like good boys” and ordered us to just stick to it until Mother came back. Then he went out again to go full seas over, happy that he had met us alone and not his wife, who would have kept him at home.

A flight of stairs higher up, there was the apartment of my friend, the third member of our alliance, Peter the Woodcutter’s Rudolf, whom I have mentioned in the memoirs of my youth- and student-days. His mother, an old widow, and her even older sister lived together there, two grumpy womenfolk I never saw give a smile, and whom we often caused vexation with the row we made in the floor below.

Yet we were intermittently at peace with the two Fates, who sat at their spinning-wheels in summer and in winter. If the weather was really too gloomy outside and the energetic midwife was at home on the lower floor, and if my guardian spirit led me straight to my abovenamed friend, then we would sometimes sit quietly around the two morose old women, but not without an ulterior motive.

Towards three o’clock the sister would drag herself into the kitchen and brew a kind of coffee generally called ‘Schnizbrühe” in those days; we would also receive some of it in an earthenware bowl. That was a drink of

the gods for our undemanding boys' throats. But no sooner had we drunk it than we took our leave of the dear solitude in the small room where only the whirring of the spinning-wheels could be heard.

But that helped both parties. The two spinsters preferred to sit alone, and sometimes Rudolf's mother would say to her sister: "Gae an' mek' the Schnizbrüh, sae oo'll get the gadgies oot oor hoose!" –

In this little house, Gretle had lived with her sisters and her son Karl a generation earlier. Time heals all wounds, and so, in spite of her loneliness, Gretle was able to bear her sorrow more easily and find peace of soul once again over the grave of her earthly hopes.

Only every now and then did the old wound open. When Karl, who had become a handsome, black-haired boy, got into an argument with his friends and they mockingly cried to him, "Ye're anely Gretle's Karl an' ye dinnae hae a faither!" – and the poor boy hurried home and complained in tears to his mother, then her heart almost broke for bitter sorrow. She comforted him with the words, "Your father is up in Heaven and loves you as much as He does those who mock you."

People are despicable in so many things. They readily accept wealth conjoined to disgrace and meanness, but poverty is forgiven nothing. It is reproached with disgrace and infamy at every opportunity. Thus, for example, poor children born out of wedlock are often, especially in the countryside, treated and judged in the severest way, and yet they are as innocent of both these blemishes as their mockers and contemners.

Indeed, there were, and there are still today, priests who believe themselves to be doing honour to God and his moral law when they

announce from the pulpit, even years after the fact, that this man or that woman who want to get married were born out of wedlock.

They think this will act as a deterrent for future mothers of illegitimate children, but they forget that while they are applying a method of contraception that is actually ridiculous, an absolutely innocent human being is deeply offended and cut to the heart.

In my boyhood years, we had some friends among us who had “singles” as mothers. But everywhere, in school and in the street, whether it were the teacher thrashing them or an upright citizen, those poor boys received as a rule, with the defect of their birth as pretext, double the number of blows every time.

Thus I had a schoolfriend by the name of Othmar, who lived in the cloister with his mother, “Nanne-Turner,” a washerwoman. A carter beat him so badly that he had to walk with a stick for the rest of his life. Wicked boys would sometimes take the poor lad’s stick away from him, and then he fell over at the first step he tried to take. I always felt sorry for Othmar; I gave him many pieces of bread, and then, when he leant against a house corner, having a firm foothold, he became bright and cheerful and sang his favourite song:

“Napoleon’s no haughty feller

Now that he’s a matchstick-seller.”

Nobody cared two hoots about Othmar being beaten like that, nor did anybody think about compensation for permanent bodily injury. In this respect, too little happened in earlier days in favour of the individual concerned, and too much happens in our age which is infected with

sentimental humanitarianism. Now nobody may give a wicked boy a well-deserved clip round the ears without running the risk of being sued at law. That is why brutality, which is never eradicated by humanity, is increasing year by year.

Gretle's Karl was given similar treatment to the "single ones" in my days, and it was that which tore open the unfortunate mother's old wound from time to time. Karl especially received many blows for giving expression to his artistic genius everywhere and at every opportunity. If he had found a little piece of chalk or, as all of us boys liked to do, had knocked a piece of "red chalk" out of a sandstone in front of a bricklayer's house or near a new building, then he just began to draw. He drew a pig on a front-door here, a cow or a crow or an owl on a shutter there – and everywhere, his innocent artistic drive was taken to be malice and insinuation. Curses and blows rained down on the poor boy. Only Blum, the old headteacher, showed him leniency in amongst the prevailing complaints and recognised the future painter.

Science was at home in the Sandhas family, so why should there not be an artist inside this half-blood Sandhas? For his mother had a brother who had made a name for himself as an artist and lived as Court Painter in the Hessian Capital of Darmstadt.

Every now and then, this man came back to his hometown by the Kinzig, satisfied himself as to the talent of his poor, persecuted nephew, and, when he "was out the school," took him to Darmstadt with him.

Karl was not reluctant to leave his hometown, where he had had few good friends and suffered much sorrow in his young life, not

suspecting that he was to suffer yet more in his mature years.

Only one citizen, apart from the teacher, took care of Gretle's Karl. "Candle-Runner," so called because his name was Runner and he cast candles, accepted him as a pupil free of charge, like his schoolfriend Christian, for flute lessons.

Karl became a virtuoso on this instrument, and his playing would illuminate and comfort the dark night of his soul at times later in his life.

Playing the flute was very widespread in the little town back in my day. On workday evenings and Sunday mornings, a flute-dilettante could be heard shrilling out his exercises in his quiet little chamber in every street and every alley.

How he fared in Darmstadt, where he trained to be a painter under the watchful eyes of his uncle, is something about which I have been unable to gain any knowledge. But I do know that he returned to his hometown several years later to visit his mother, and he painted her portrait as the first test of his skill. Then he wanted to go, a strikingly handsome man now, to Vienna, whither all the Sandhases gravitated and where a son of the abovementioned Court Painter later became Professor of Jurisprudence at the University. He reached as far as Munich. Here, art had just begun to take on new life under Ludwig I.⁴² Gretle's Karl remained here and forgot the journey to Vienna.

Three happy years passed for the young artist in the new Athens on the Isar. But the titans who had begun to found a home for art in Munich

⁴² Ludwig I (1786-1868), King of Bavaria from 1825 to 1848.

had all come from Italy. Like every artistic soul, the painter Sandhas longed to go thither.

One day, he disappeared from the circle of his friends. Nobody knew whither; everyone suspected that he had journeyed over the Alps. And it was so. The first news reached his mother from Venice, and a Munich artist who had left the city on the Isar after him met him on the strand at Naples. Sandhas, a walker with few equals, had wandered through all of Italy, roamed through all its mountains from the Apennines to Vesuvius, and pursued his studies in every important city.

Many years had passed again when, at the Gulf of Naples, he was seized with homesickness for the fir-dark forests by the Kinzig. In his boyhood, beside his mother, only Nature had given him unclouded joy; she alone stayed true to him when all others had deserted him.

So he headed homewards, walking unweariedly. It was September of the year 1830. The autumn sun stood over the little house in Graben Street and kissed the flowers at Gretle's window as she sat alone in her little parlour. Death had collected her sisters. Then Karl, as a man of consummate beauty, with bronzed skin and a full beard, walked down the narrow road from the Upper Town-gate to his mother's cottage. Her eyes had known him at once in spite of the change in him, and she hurried down to meet him, full of heartfelt joy, under the doorway.

Handsome Karl, who had returned home from Italy, caused astonishment in the entire town, not only at his mother's. He also gave my grandfather, Baker-Peter, greetings from his brother, Noodle-Toni, who did in the Eternal City what he had learnt in his father's bakery: he made

noodles, a good business even in the land of macaroni. Karl had visited him in Rome and benefitted greatly from his favours.

For a while afterwards, Gretle's parlour was visited throughout the day by the young and old of Haslach, to whom Karl showed the studies he had put to paper in Italy while providing the corresponding explanation.

All the better class of townsmen and townswomen now wanted to have their portrait painted by Karl, and there was work aplenty. He executed every one of these portraits in watercolours, and he did so quite superbly. Thus he painted, in those days, from my family alone: My maternal grandparents, my parents as a young wedded couple, and the brother of my paternal grandfather, the priest, who at that time was passing his twilight years in retirement in his parental home. All these pictures are in my possession today, and they very often remind me not only of the originals but also of the unfortunate artist who created the portraits.

Soon the fame of the portrait-painter from "Hasle" spread through the entire valley, and he was summoned everywhere; and there still exists today, from Offenburg to Wolfach, a great many old family portraits with the monogram, "Karl Sandhas."

But the young artist did not forget studies of Nature in field and wood. Now he sat up at the Red Cross, under a fir-tree, and drew the countryside at his feet; now he stood on the Kinzig Bridge and sketched a little picture of riverbank life; now he tarried in the garden of the Capuchin monastery to sketch one or the other of the friars at work.

The monastery had been abolished long since, only a few monks were living there until they would die out, and already townspeople were

cultivating a part of the large garden. And so one morning in summertime the painter met a girl who was drawing water from the River Klosterbach to water her flowers. He had never seen her before. She was the daughter of a Furstenbergian “hunter,” as foresters were called in that poetic age when they had more work to do in the forest than could be done with a pen.

A prince’s treasurer and a hunter resided at Haslach in those days, the Prince of Furstenberg owning woods and fields around there in abundance.

The young painter had often encountered the old hunter when roaming around in the forest, the artist’s favourite walk. But his daughter was first pointed out to him by old Brother Othmar, whom I knew also, in the monastery garden. The hunter’s “Mina” had no idea that the painter who sat silent and still on the monastery wall with his sketchbook was taking her likeness, and even less idea that the longer he looked at her, the more restless he became in his heart.

His fame as an artist had at length won him the favour of the Town Council as well. Usually, no prophet is recognised in his hometown, even less is an artist, and yet the Fathers of the little town commissioned from him a picture for the Mother of God Altar in the parish church.

The people of Haslach were a pious race in olden days, and consequently greater devotees of the Mother of God. In my boyhood I saw the principal townsmen walking to church in procession with the Shield of the Confraternity of the Rosary. That was why Gretle’s Karl was to glorify the Mother of God with his brush.

All the Great Masters of the Middle Ages took their Madonna from

their land and their people; they were very often female figures who were close to their hearts. And the young painter by the Kinzig acted likewise. He could not conceive of a noble and more modest female than “Hunter’s Mina,” who stood before him like a saint, and with whom he had never, lost in admiration, dared to speak.

And so, on his picture, ‘The Assumption of the Virgin,’ he painted “Mina” as the main figure, and among the apostles, who watched the ascending Queen of Heaven, he painted himself. He had Titian’s ‘Assumption of the Virgin’ in mind. The painting was then displayed in the council chamber so the senators could be the first to survey it critically.

But no sooner had Soderer, the old town clerk, to whom the picture was brought before the opening of the session, and who called the tune in the council, fixed his gaze on the painting over his large glasses, than he spotted Gretle’s Karl among the apostles. The Madonna had not attracted his attention, because he did not know any of the young girls. But this was quite enough for him – that Sandhas, an illegitimate young man, had put himself among the apostles. If he had copied him, the old and dignified Chief of General Staff of the Town Council, that would have been a different matter, but as it was, the painter’s head spoiled the whole picture for him.

While he sat over the painting with wrathful eyes, murmuring his indignation to himself, the oldest town councillor, Fidel the Baker, came into the room. Before the town clerk had time to show him the suspicious apostle, he clapped his hands over his head and cried, “Why, the Maither o’ God is Hunter’s Mina!” As a baker, he knew all the girls, as they came in

and out of his bakery every day, and so he knew the Madonna on the picture by Sandhas.

Meanwhile, the other town councillors had turned up, together with the mayor, and with each man the indignation increased, which was easy to understand. In the afternoon, the painter's sacrilegious deed spread like wildfire all through the town. The Council sent for the man himself next morning and, full of indignation, redhibited⁴³ his picture. Outraged at the misunderstanding which his painter's licence had met with among the Fathers of his hometown, he provoked them with the words: "If that's how you judge my Assumption of the Virgin, then I'll paint a Nativity and take the subjects for the ox and the donkey from the Town Council."

With these words he walked out of the Council Chamber, leaving the councillors doubly indignant in his wake. Fidel the Baker proposed that the picture be burnt and Gretle's Karl be sued for slander before the Chief Bailiff. Against this there rose, a second Gamaliel for wisdom, the old bookbinder Hinterskirch. This man, whom I saw when I was a boy walking erect, slowly and solemnly, to the council meetings, had migrated to Haslach from Wurttemberg and possessed all the shrewdness of a bona fide Swabian. "If we," he said to his outraged colleagues, "adopt Fidel the Baker's proposal, our lot will be disgrace and derision. If we burn the picture, Sandhas will sue us, and we'll be disgraced; while if we sue him for his spiteful joke, it will become generally known, and we'll be derided and disgraced."

⁴³ To redhibit is to cancel a sale and return a product on the discovery of a hidden defect.

They all saw the wisdom of this, even Fidel the Baker, and as a result of an additional proposal made by the bookbinder, the Town Hall porter set the picture before the door of the house in which the painter lived with his mother.

It was summertime and warm, dry weather, and so the angry artist let the picture stand where the council's henchman had put it down for several days. Thus everyone in the town had the opportunity to look at Hunter's Mina as the Mother of God and Karl as an apostle, and to make snide comments about it. – Everybody inveighed against the shameless painter of course, only the grown-up girls secretly envied beautiful Mina her high role.

She had much to suffer. Wherever she showed her face, it was said: "Here comes the painted Mother of God." But the news that the painter, whom she had seen in the monastery garden so often, had glorified her in this way, aroused the suspicion in her heart as to why this might have happened.

There came, as there tends to come, the old story of human hearts, which is eternally renewed with its joy and its woe. They met under the big lime-tree before the garden-gate of the Capuchin Monastery and swore love and fidelity in the old traditional way. And the old Brother, Othmar, did not disturb them, however often they stood under the lime and poured out their sorrows to each other. The branches of the lime-tree whispered with them, and the brook beside them carried their whispers away as it softly murmured.

They had much sorrow to pour out, for the old hunter would not hear

of his daughter marrying a painter, who was a wastrel to boot and roamed around in the forests. Mina now had to endure mockery from everyone not only on account of the painting of the Madonna but also on account of the “peantair,” about whom they now began to say, “He’s just a half-crazed fellow, like all the Sandhases.”

It is known that popular opinion places painters, actors, musicians and rogues on one and the same ranking list. Why? Because the three first-named mostly include characters who, having frittered away their lives, have to seek their bread among the lower levels of society; and then, in the nature of things, they sink down, in many cases, and end up with all the characteristics of a rogue.

At their finest, the art of painting, drama and music are amongst the greatest achievements of human talent. But one can in a certain sense say here also, “Corrupti optimi pessima”⁴⁴: the more ideally an art or a profession is conceived, the deeper the fall the more one departs from the ideal. And as there are nowhere more amateurs and bunglers than in the field of the abovementioned ideal arts, it is mostly depraved people whom we meet here. They are nothing but poor individuals, more or less reduced in their circumstances, who paint, make music, and act among the people. Those arts are consequently considered by the people to be not only unprofitable but also contemptible. The people do not know the great and true artists nor their achievements, and they value painting, drama and music only according to their own ideas and experience, and so that

⁴⁴ “The corruption of the best is the worst of all.”

unfavourable judgement arises.

We cannot therefore blame the old “hunter” for losing his temper at his daughter wanting to take up with a “destitute, half-crazed painter.” In vain did she point out that “Karle” was no rogue, earned a lot of money, and nobody could say a bad word about him. One day, when the young artist met the old man in the ancient forest by the sacred spring, he threatened him with his gun if he did not leave Mina, who would not ever be allowed to marry a painter and a wastrel. The poor artist hurried down the forest without a word of reply. When he was treated roughly, he did not answer at all or he answered satirically. But he had no intention of being scornful when face-to-face with the father of his beloved.

That evening, under the monastery lime-tree, Mina learned what had happened in the forest. For her part, she told him that soon she would not feel safe at home any longer. Whenever her father came home from his evening pint at the Cross, he was furious, for he had to put up with being “ragged” by the company every time because of the mad painter, whose stupidity the painting of the Madonna had clearly demonstrated. He intended to ship her to America if the rogue stayed in the “toon” much longer and did not end the acquaintance.

The next day, the painter had disappeared.

He had gone over the mountains to prevent Mina’s journey over the ocean. Freiburg was to be his place of residence, from where he promised to be at the monastery lime-tree on the evening of every second Saturday at the eighth hour.

His fame as a portrait painter procured him work and money enough

in the old Zähringer City.⁴⁵ The pathologist Professor Baumgärtner,⁴⁶ famous at that time, was surprised at the precise execution of his pictures and made him a collaborator on his book, “The Physiognomy of Illnesses.” Sandhas drew the features of individual patients in the hospital, and the Professor detected the various sicknesses which revealed themselves in their facial expressions.

He received two crown dollars for every head.

On the appointed days, he went on foot with swift paces over the mountains to the lime-tree at the monastery. It takes nine hours from Freiburg to Haslach, which the painter covered in barely five hours each time. For one thing, he soon came to know all the paths, even the loneliest ones, which could shorten the way, and for another, he was a walker who would have held his own as a sprinter. Sandhas was well into his forties when I became aware of him, and even at that time we boys watched him with amazement when he strode towards the forest from the town and hurried uphill. I have never seen a man striding along so quickly and easily, elegantly swinging his large rustic walking stick in the air.

He met Mina at the lime-tree, spoke as his heart and the circumstances prompted, called upon his mother in the darkness of the night for a “God Bless,” and before the cockerel of the castle-farmer by the old Heidburg Pass on the heights of Elz Valley had given his first crow,

⁴⁵ The House of Zähringen founded 12 cities in the Southern Black Forest and in North Switzerland between the 11th and the 13th centuries, all of which were built on the same plan.

⁴⁶ Karl Heinrich Baumgärtner (1798-1886), author of *Kranken-Physiognomik* (1st ed. 1838).

Sandhas flitted past the castle courtyard, and before the watchman on the cathedral tower in Freiburg had rung in the day, he walked in by the lower city-gate.

Always he bore more sorrow than joy over the mountains when he walked back in the quiet of the night. Mina had much to tell him about her torments in her parental home. No sooner was “the ragged painter,” as the old hunter used to say, gone from the town than a suitor came who was to the old man’s liking. He was employed as a bookkeeper at the Furstenbergian hammer mill over in Haslach, and he had his daily bread, free accommodation, wood and lighting, with the prospect of becoming the manager of one of the many princely forges in the Black Forest one day.

That was the man for the old hunter, but not for his daughter. Every time she heard the great hammer send its dull boom down the valley, it was as a blow to her heart. And this heart had already had to endure so much from an inexorable father and the mocking townspeople. It was no surprise when, one day, febrile heat threw the girl, so long derided and tormented, into a sickbed in her lonely chamber.

In the meantime, Karl had earned many crown dollars in Freiburg from paintings and drawings, which he accumulated through thrift. He sought relaxation mostly in Nature, in the glorious forested mountains around Freiburg, and his flute was his constant companion. Sitting alone in the forest, playing the flute, and blowing his sorrow into it, was his joy in the even more dismal days which came later.

The week on the last day of which they were to come together again under the lime-tree, came to an end once again. The painter set out earlier

than usual. Although he was taking all of his crown dollars – and there were not a few – to give to Mina, for her to show the treasure to her father and prove to him that Sandhas was no rogue – in spite of this, his spirits could not rise on this day. A feeling of anxiety crept over him while he hurried up the Elz Valley.

At the “Corner,” old Rößler’s, he drank a pint towards evening. This tavern stands secluded on the mountain road, and formerly the carters and travellers on foot would not fail to take a rest here after completing their ascent, whether it was from the Elz Valley or the Kinzig Valley. As he was walking onwards, the sound of the great bell of Haslach came, up from the valley, muffled and quiet to his ear. He grew yet more anxious. The ringing struck him as so uncanny. And yet a poetical ringing of bells, such as seldom occurs in the world, resounded at this “Corner” once every year. On this topmost height between the Elz and Kinzig valleys, the herders of all the region round about assemble every Whit Monday for the “Bell Festival.”

From the first day of May to St. Gall’s Day,⁴⁷ these boys sit lonely and forlorn by their herds in ravines and high valleys and on mountain heights. Every one of their animals has a bell, and the herder knows where this or that animal is from the tone of the bell. His favourite animal wears the bell which has the clearest and most melodious sound, and every herder strives to receive one of these. But “ears” vary as much as “tastes,” and so every herder has a fondness for a different sound. That is why they

⁴⁷ October 16, the Feast Day of the Irish monk St. Gall (c.550-c.645).

come down from the mountains and up from the valleys once a year to exchange bells.

One boy has bought a bell at the Martinmas Market; down in the town, between the narrow streets, it sounded very well to him, and now, on the pure, airy height, he can barely hear it when the animal is only a few steps away from him. Another one was brought a bell from the last Lenten Market by the farmer, and the first time he goes out with the cattle, the herder notices that it's "wrang." The Bell Festival takes place so everyone can receive a bell which corresponds with his mood and his own Theory of Harmony. There follows a ringing and tinkling the whole afternoon. The bells are tested both in close earshot and at a distance until everyone has the right sound for him.

Herdgirls come as well. Many peasants have no boys but "strang lasses" in abundance, who therefore have to keep watch. Or the boy watches the cattle and a girl the goats and sheep. But the "lass" also wants to hang a bell on the billy-goat or the ram, and so the girls appear at the exchange and enter into the business, albeit not with such earnest or such variety.

Towards evening, everyone goes to Rößler's. The exchange took place on the open heath. Then they have a drink, and they also have a little dance without permission from the authorities. It would be a crying shame if bureaucrats were to stick their oar into so poetic a festival.

With the coming of night, the herders set out for home, up hill and down dale. As soon as he is alone, the herder gives his new bell another test, and a thorough one, and a wonderful sound of ringing and tinkling can

be heard passing into the mountains in the evening. And the ringing goes past many a farm where everyone has already gone to bed, and those inside, who wake up at hearing the ringing, say to one another: "The herders are going home from the Bell Festival." –

It is the only free afternoon which the herder has all through the summer, and a great many storms with thunder pass over him and his herd up until autumn and Martinmas Market, where he has another day off for the annual fair. And the herder and the servant-boy, the farmhand and the maid in the mountains of Kinzig Valley, make it a condition of their entering service – freedom at the Bell Festival and at the Martinmas Market!

Modest, happy people! –

The more the distant sound of the bell made the young painter's heart sink, as he descended from the heights to the valley on this day, the more he quickened his steps. Once he had arrived down in the valley, he turned off the road and took the path leading to Bächlewald Forest. There he encountered Matte the Miller from Hofstetten, who had his mill near the edge of the forest, and its mill-brook bore him away from it at winter-time some fifteen years later, bringing him to Haslach as a corpse. As a boy, I saw Matte the Miller lying in the River Klosterbach, not far from the place where the painter's and Mina's lime-tree stood. The miller knew Karl well. For had he not often sat in the forest above the mill and drawn, or passed the mill on his way from and to Freiburg? Usually taciturn, on this occasion Sandhas felt the urge to confront Matte the Miller and ask where he had come from. He had been in the town to fetch bolting-cloth for his mill-machine. "Did the death-knell not toll just now?" asked the painter. "Aye,

indeed," the miller replied. "I was just sitting with a pint in the Black Horse when it tolled. Right after that, the landlord's boy came home and told us they were tolling for Hunter's Mina, she'd died of nervous fever."

When an oak is struck by a thunderbolt, it cannot be so deeply shaken to the very core as the tall, strong man who stood before Matte the Miller in Bächlewald Forest was struck by this news.

It was not malice, but that naivety of the uneducated person which sometimes has a diabolical ring, when the miller added with his red, good-natured face: "You must have known her, Sandhas, for I've heard tell many a time that you painted her in a picture." "Yes, I knew her," the soul-stricken man dryly remarked, and he took his farewell of the bearer of bad tidings. Then he sat down under the nearest fir-tree and cried so hard that the whole forest could have taken pity, and he cried until it was night. Then he walked slowly towards the town, as if drunk with pain, and approached the hunter's little house on Upper Graben Street. There was light in the chamber on the second floor where Mina had lived. The light trembled through in between the potted plants which stood before her window, and this being open, the words of the women neighbours who were telling the rosary before the corpse sounded out into the street: "Lord, give her eternal rest, and the light everlasting shine upon her!"

And down below stood the poor painter, and he bowed his head, and the prayer-words rained down upon him like arrows on a bound man. He would have liked to join in the prayers up there, he would have liked to kneel down to see the dead woman once more. But he did not want to disturb her rest by appearing before her father, who would probably

receive him as the murderer of his child.

Directly behind him rose up the old church-tower of the town, from which so many dying-knells had pealed down. It forms a dark corner with several old houses. Karl stood in this in silent woe for a long time after he had withdrawn from the immediate proximity of the house of death.

Out of the small alley which led down from Fidel Berg's house to Upper Graben Street and to the hunter's house, there came two women in the darkness of the night to go to say the rosary for dead Mina. The painter clearly heard one of them remark to the other, "Nobody else is to blame for the lass's death but that crazy Sandhas. The Mother of God has avenged herself because he painted her on the altarpiece."

Now poor Karl knew the popular opinion in the town, and to all the particular pain the death had caused him there was added the unutterable pain of being regarded as the author of Mina's death.

It became night in his mind also. He staggered out to the Kinzig Bridge. At the place where his mother had once stood with her baby in the cold winter night, the man now stood who had grown up from that baby, and he surely bore such bitter woe as his mother had borne in that dark night. But he did not feel the burden of the sorrow as she had, because the first shadows of mental derangement had fallen on him this evening.

He did something which could be labelled a wretched invention of mine if it were not typical of a madman. He took his crown dollars out of his pockets and threw them, one after the other, into the river. With every cast, the bitter cry broke out from his soul: "Dead – farewell!"

And when he was poor, as poor as on that night when his mother

carried him over the bridge, he returned home to her, to bring new sorrow to his mother's heart.

On the next morning, Tall Sepp's Agathe came, a friend of Gretle. She had sat up with Mina on the last night of her life, and when leaving this mortal coil the girl had asked her to go to Gretle and give her last regards to Karl. At this news he livened up out of his gloomy brooding for a moment; Mina still thinking of him was the only ray of light entering his dark soul.

On the second day, they bore the girl whom Death had fetched so soon down to her final rest. Up at the Red Cross, under the fir-trees of the primitive forest, there stood, as if petrified with woe, the poor painter. He saw the funeral procession pass down the white road which leads from the Lower Gate to the God's acre. They bore all the joy of his life, all his hopes, down with them into the grave. When the procession had disappeared under the bridge by the River Klosterbach, Karl disappeared also, into the forest.

The forest, always a favourite preserve for the boy, became from this time on the place in which the unhappy man buried his sorrow.

It was the mother who suffered most with the son, unhappy Gretle. When he roamed around in the forest for days on end, she always imagined the worst and was happy in the midst of her unhappiness when he returned, late at night, unseen by human eyes, to the little house for several hours. She still carried a hope in her breast, that of leading the son to his father and thereby winning the former back to life.

He himself had for a long time been demanding from his mother an

explanation of his dark origin, which he only guessed at through the mocking insinuations of other people. Shame had always tied the mother's tongue. But now she thought she would save her son if she could divert his thoughts, and she told him what we have long known. He heard his mother's account without saying a word. Her burning tears fell on his heart, and he readily acceded to her request to present himself before his father. She thought the latter would be glad and happily acknowledge and accept the handsome young man as his son.

He put in a portfolio his studies from Italy, his best sketches from mountain and vale, and then that watercolour portrait of his mother which he had painted years before. So he went up the valley towards Swabia where the former bailiff of H. lived in comfortable retirement in the Capital.

Karl's soul was embittered and remained so; even when his mother told him about the origin of his life, this did not change. Her tears had moved him, her heartache had aroused his deepest sympathy. But he now knew just what his mother had suffered. Hate and contempt for his – father had entered his heart. He wanted to avenge his mother on him, because, after what he had heard, he expected nothing more from him. With Mina's death he had given up on life, and in his mood at the time he had nothing left to lose.

While he passed over the hills of the Black Forest into the Neckar Valley, he made his plan. The glorious fir-forests in the upper Kinzig Valley, the charming panorama from the watershed at Kniebis⁴⁸ left him cold. He

⁴⁸ A mountain pass between the Rhine Basin and the Danube Basin.

thought only of his revenge.

He had already heard from his mother that the bailiff of H. had been a great lover of the art of painting and possessed many old works of art. It was her opinion that the son had inherited his artistic talent from his father. On this fondness of the old man, Sandhas built his plan. He knew a colleague from his Munich days in Stuttgart. This man was the object of his first visit. Everything worked out splendidly. The Swabian was an acquaintance of the old art-loving bureaucrat and announced at his home the artist "Karl," who had returned from Italy with studies, as he would surely be interested in seeing the paintings of a talented friend from Baden.

The old man received the painter "Karl" in the friendliest manner; all the more was he struck by the seriousness of the handsome young man. "You bring with you studies from Naples and Rome" – remarked the bailiff. "Yes," the painter dryly replied, "yet the best study I bring you is from Kinzig Valley." Disconcerted by these strange words, the old man evaded the steady gaze of the man who was beginning to make him feel uncomfortable.

"Let us sit down," said the Idiot Painter, "and I'll show you my studies, one after the other." The old man fought down a secret anxiety, and Karl handed to him, sheet by sheet, paintings from Milan to Palermo. Every sheet received a word of admiring criticism. "You have achieved great things in your field," the viewer said towards the end.

"I have always honestly striven to reach the topmost heights," replied the painter, "but my situation would be better if others had done

their duty.”

With these words he held in his trembling hand the last sheet – the portrait of his mother. “Do you perhaps know this woman? It is true that fate and time have graven furrows in the once beautiful face with hard hands, but anyone who knew her in the past will still recognise her. When she was blooming in the charm of her youth, she believed the false words of a hypocrite. She fell, and the villain pitilessly plunged the fallen woman into misery.” He had stood up to his full height with these words – the Idiot Painter, and he now concluded: “The man who betrayed her was you, and before you stands the disgraced son.”

Scornful laughter rang through the room. The old sinner had regained his composure. “A histrionic’s trick!” he cried. “But it was well played, so take a little money as a reward!”

This scorn from his father made the son, who had acted with such courage, falter. Speechless, he hurried away. But the shadows in his soul became ever gloomier.

Only to his mother did he tell what had occurred in Stuttgart. She told it to her brother, the blacksmith, on the next day – and then she sank into silent lunacy, from which she was never to awaken. She barely knew her son outside the occasional moment.

So death delivered her. In the spring of 1831 they buried Gretle.

Once again he stood at the Red Cross, when they bore his mother down to Mina. He was not able to follow the coffin. The people now considered him to be completely mad, and until the end of his life, they generally called him just the “Idiot Painter” or the “Idiot Sandhas.” Even

while his mother lay dead in the little parlour, he was given notice to move out. Nobody wanted to have the proud, scornful, crazy man in the house, he who looked down on the people in the town with mute contempt, or, when he was provoked to speak, paid the other back with scorn. But nobody was able to read inside him to judge him differently.

In those days, the almshouse still stood down beside the churchyard, and that was where everyone went who was healthy but had nowhere to live. This would have been allocated him as well if he had applied for it. He had not given any more thought to moving forward, to being active in the world since that night when he had stood before the house of dead Mina. From then on, his mind began to break, and joy in life and every urge to create had died inside him.

It was spring in the land, showing its wonders in mountain and vale and woodland – when the poor painter stood up in the forest while they buried his mother down below. In that same hour he resolved to remain in the forest and make a home for himself, the homeless man, far away from humanity with its unutterable misery and woe.

Whoever walks or drives up Kinzig Valley today will see something shining out through the dark fir-trees, down from the heights of the primitive forest directly above the town. And when he asks what it is, every child will be able to tell him: “It’s Sandhas’s hut.” The child knows nothing more. But if he asks older people, they will tell him: “Up thair an eejit peantair uised tae bide, an’ noo the fowk o’ Haslach gae up thair for the

braw sicht.”⁴⁹

The old hut has long since succumbed to the tooth of time, but every now and then the *jeunesse dorée* of Haslach built a new one, and they covered the most recent one in sheet metal to make it stronger against wind and weather. And so the hut flashes down from the forest, deep into the valley, when the sun shines.

On fine spring mornings and on warm summer days, the better class of young people of Haslach sit up there and sing, drink, and are merry looking out into God’s wonderful Nature which stretches out before their eyes. Nobody now thinks of the time when an unhappy, highly talented man spent days and nights in solitude there and found peace, after the world and people had cast him aside.

On the day when they buried the unfortunate mother, Sandhas sought this spot, and it must have taken him long days of searching to find it. He may have clambered over many a rock, have threaded his way through many a thicket, until he found a place that hid him from people and opened all of Nature before him at the same time. And he found it in the most agreeable way. With high rocks towering above, with a dark fir-thicket all around, this spot seemed to offer the certainty of not being disturbed by people here. Where the forest thinned a little, there appeared a prospect as beautiful as can be, looking down into Kinzig Valley and into the district of Ortenau as far as the Rhine and to Strasbourg Cathedral on the right, and, on the left, over the foothills of the Black Forest from the ruins of

⁴⁹ “An idiot painter once lived up there, and now the people of Haslach go up there for the beautiful view.”

Geroldseck Castle up to the Nillkopf.⁵⁰

With unutterable toil, he made himself a path, barely a foot wide, which ran under the rocks, built a hut in a natural arch of the stone, with a bed of moss inside, and fetched the most necessary items among his possessions up there under cover of darkness and became a hermit.

I have seen this first hut. When we boys were fetching wood or gathering beechnuts in the primitive forest in late autumn, we sometimes came onto the ridge above the hut. A peculiar shudder ran through our bodies when one of the older boys, who knew the way, suggested that we climb down into "Sandhas's hut." For most of us, the thought of setting foot in the mysterious cave was a hair-raising one, and the dread that the "Idiot Painter," whom we feared, could be down there or could surprise us, was even more so. In the rocks above, one of the boldest boys now lay down and spied if he could hear or see any sign of Sandhas. If the spy brought reassuring news, we would creep down the rocks and enter the cave quietly and respectfully.

I remember only his moss-bed and a wall cabinet in which an axe, a saw, his flute, and several books lay about in disorder. We crept back out of the stone cave with such awe if we had been in the Kyffhäuser⁵¹ or in the Venusberg,⁵² happy to have been inside without being caught by the painter. On occasion he came across us in the forest as we were heading

⁵⁰ A mountain ridge in the Black Forest, now beautified with wind turbines.

⁵¹ A range of hills in Thuringia, where legend has the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1122-1190) sitting in sleep, ready to awaken and restore Germany to its greatness.

⁵² In mythology, the mountain residence of the goddess Venus, where Tannhäuser is held captive in Wagner's opera (1845).

homewards. He came up from the “Sacred Spring,” where he had drunk water. We followed the man with timid eyes as he hurried up towards his hut with the fleetness of a deer.

In the town, Karl had disappeared since the day of his mother’s funeral. Nobody knew whither. Only that “Herresepp,” whose hut stood deep in the primitive forest, or a nocturnal wanderer who came down the valley, claimed to have heard flute-playing up in the forest at night. Later, at the weekly market, some farmer or other from the Bärenbach and Adlersbach valleys would tell how Sandhas had been to their farm and asked for bread and milk.

Necessity drove him to these isolated mountain-farms. He asked for bread and milk, and in return he drew the farmer, his wife or his children on a piece of paper. At parting, he received a piece of bacon as well and the invitation to come again as often as he wanted.

It happened more rarely that he came down the forest during the night, passed unseen through the town and painted portraits in Lower Kinzig Valley, in Gengenbach or Offenburg. There he cheerfully sat among old acquaintances with a beer and smoked his Cologne Pipe or played the flute. But no sooner had he earned a few coppers to live on again than he would disappear and hurry back to his mountain hut.

And thus the first spring in the forest passed by and the first summer glided away. Autumn moved on with cold gales. The birds in the forest were silent.⁵³ In the tower down in the town, ravens minded the

⁵³ A reference to Goethe’s 1780 poem “Wandrer’s Nachtlied II” (Traveller’s Night-Song II), “Über allen Gipfeln / Ist Ruh”.

storks' nest, and the magnificent beech forest above the hut had lost its leaves. That did not matter to the man in the hut. Game lives in the forest, be the weather stormy or mild. There is wood in abundance all around, and the fire burns merrily up to the granite ceiling of the hermitage.

So he lay on his mossy bed one evening, reading his favourite book, Homer, which he possessed in German translation, by the light of the firesticks.⁵⁴ He was reading about Odysseus the Endurer until sleep seized him before he had smothered the fire in his hut. Outside, the gale whipped the rain and blew so hard that the fir-trees groaned, and it blew through a chink in the door onto the fire. The moss of the bed caught sparks, and soon the sleeper's bed was burning brightly. The smoke and the heat woke him up, he could only just flee up the rocks while the fire consumed everything wooden in his hut.

It was not yet nine o'clock in the evening. The fire was noticed down below in the town. "There's a fire in the ancient woodland," rang through the streets, and soon there was a crowd on the way to the forest. "It has to have been," remarked Hans the glazier as they ascended, "the Idiot Painter. He wanted to set the forest on fire." And the others presently expressed their concurrence. In the meantime the fire had burned down; in spite of the gale, the raw weather prevented the fire from spreading, the sparks flying over to the fir-trees with no effect. When all the woodwork in the hut was destroyed, the fire stopped, and suddenly the fire-extinguishers were standing in the deepest darkness of the forest.

⁵⁴ [Hansjakob's note:] I repeat that I am not inventing anything, but relating everything according to the reports of credible contemporaries.

They returned home but were filled with wrath at the painter, whose nest had to be sought on the following morning. A snowstorm passed over the valley at that time, and it was no fun to search in the forest. They did, indeed, have schnaps and bacon with them, the men who set out on that day on the instructions of the High Council, with the Master of the Forest, Fidel the Baker, at their head, to catch the arsonist – but when the provisions had been polished off down by the “Sacred Spring,” halfway up the mountain, the spirits of The Faithful also sank, and Fidel the Baker gave the order to go back. But all the more irefully did they threaten the Idiot Painter.

At crack of dawn on the third day, Herresepp saw Sandhas, behind his house, hurrying towards the forest. The poor man, suspecting what awaited him, had roamed around in the forest in frost and tempest during that night and the following day. He had seen the troop encamp at the “Sacred Spring” and their threats had reached his ears.

Benumbed and drenched, he sought a dry nest and crept on the second night into the barn of the little house which stood on a hill-slope hard by the forest. When its owner, Herresepp, went to feed his goats in the morning, the painter fled his night’s lodgings.

Now the usually ponderous Herresepp hurried down into Mill Street and called up the local militia against the arsonist. A new contingent lined up: Kaiser the Weaver, Vinegar-Marti, Crooked Stricker, Cow-Marti, Herresepp, et al. Snow lay over field and wood, and so the fugitive’s trail was easy to find. They followed the tracks of his footsteps and so came up close to the burnt-down hut. The men of Haslach, armed with cudgels, old

sabres and rifles, surrounded the rocks.

As a red deer, harried by hounds, before he is caught by them and torn to pieces, turns around from time to time and gores one or the other of the bloodthirsty pack, so did the painter suddenly rush out at his pursuers from behind a rock. Vinegar-Mart and Crooked Stricker, whom he struck first, flew down the cliff, and only the thick undergrowth saved them from falling into the depths. "But many hounds soon catch the hare" – and so, in the end, the strong and stately man was overpowered and taken down into the valley bound with ropes.

They had hunted down an unfortunate man, an innocent man, in whom hard blows from Fate had already awoken a predisposition to mental night, and, through their rough handling, blown the spark to a blazing fire. When they arrived down in the town with him, they had a madman on their hands. And all the people now thought they had really done the right thing by catching so dangerous a man. They put him in a straitjacket and left him in the "Fools' House" until morning, when Othmar, the old carter, loaded him onto his cart and transported him to Illenau, accompanied by the night-watchman, Hafte-Alise, twelve leagues down the valley.

Here he received more humane treatment. With loving, sympathetic nursing he recovered from his madness after two years. And so his eyes became moist before he left, for he had been happy in this house. He would have liked to remain there for the rest of his life, but the community would not allow this, for he could be kept in the almshouse in his hometown for less money. His madness had given way to a quiet

melancholy.

He had no choice but to return home to the people who had never understood him but always misjudged and, at the last, maltreated him. The warden of the almshouse came and fetched him. At the Town Hall, he was notified that he must never again, on pain of incarceration, spend the night in the forest, and he must behave well in the almshouse, where he was living at the charge of the parish.

With that sovereign contempt which was peculiar to him to the end of his life, he listened to this welcome from Soderer, the old council clerk, and repaired to the almshouse. He accepted his fate with a broken heart. But throughout the day, his time belonged to the forest. He rebuilt his old hut, played the flute, and read Homer. This last was given him by the Chief Magistrate, Dilger, after his copy had burnt with the first hut.

But the seclusion made his affliction ever worse; he became ever more unsociable and reserved. At the end of the 40s, when he entered my boy's memory, he had already reached this stage.

He was not seen often. When the weather was bad, he lay in the almshouse, on the bed in his wretched room, and brooded the whole day long. My friend, Black-Baker's Rudolf,⁵⁵ was well-liked by him; he was allowed to enter his cave, and he took me along on occasion. We had to sing him a song. He liked most of all to hear the old children's song:

Adam's gone into his patch,⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The Baker's guild was divided into Black Bakers and White Bakers. Black Bakers were allowed to make only black bread and half-white penny loaves.

⁵⁶ "Adam ist in Garte g'ange [Adam ist in den Garten gegangen]."

How many birds did Adam catch?

One, two, three,

You are free.

But he gave such a hollow and uncanny laugh at this that I never really felt comfortable singing. Then he gave us small drawings or little pictures painted in watercolour.

He especially liked to stand at the cross-street by the Town Hall or on the Almsbridge over the River Klosterbach, with no words, no sound, no movement. He could tarry there for hours before suddenly storming away towards the forest.

The Idiot Painter lived on a constant war-footing with the world of great people and with the greatest part of the world of little ones. For the great, like the little people, men, women and boys, have believed since time immemorial that a fool and an imbecile are outlaws.⁵⁷

I was one of the worst boys in the town, but I never could mock Sandhas and I would not suffer others to either insofar as I was able to prevent it. A mixture of fear of, and respect for, the man always held me back.

Otherwise, pretty much everyone looked to needle him. From his estate, I managed to get hold of some pages he had written in the last years of his life. My cousin Kaspar Bosche, a collector of antiquities from way back, had kept them for almost 30 years. They are “loose leaves,” written as the momentary impulse of life suggested them to the unhappy

⁵⁷ And therefore, being outside the protection of the law, fair game.

man. He calls one of them “Almshouse Chronicle,” in which he complains about the food and his treatment in the almshouse.

At that time, the Master of the Almshouse was Kirnberger the glazier, who had run out of glass and therefore accepted the wretched position of “Almshouse Warden.” He received eight to ten kreutzer⁵⁸ for the board of an almshouse inmate and yet wanted to make a profit from this. So one can imagine that the soup was pretty thin. Sandhas writes as follows: “I often have nothing with my midday charity-soup but a little plateful of cabbage. In the evening, nothing but soup and a roll. Sometimes I do not receive a bite of meat to eat in five days, or at most a little bit of sinew or a couple of spoonfuls of corned meat or a little bit of bacon rind.” Another time: “For a few days I have been receiving somewhat more to eat, more soup, and somewhat more meat and vegetables.” Or: “I want wine too. I have received barely four glasses⁵⁹ of wine to drink in eight years. I have nothing but the charity fare and not a single kreutzer.”

The female paupers in the almshouse also made his life a misery. They lent a hand in the kitchen and served the food to the others, to everyone in his room. But with Sandhas they as a rule laid it before his door, dampened his bread, and chased him out of the kitchen when he came and complained or asked for oil for his lamp. Why? “Because I do not court them, I despise them or sometimes draw their stupid faces on the wall.” His main female enemy was Nanne Buhrer, whom I have described

⁵⁸ There were 60 kreutzer to a Gulden (florin) before 1857. One kreutzer was roughly equivalent to half a penny.

⁵⁹ “Schoppen,” which can be half a pint or a pint, of wine or beer.

before.⁶⁰

This woman was not quite right in the mind herself and suffered from megalomania. When she crossed the street, she had a habit, as previously mentioned, of carrying her skirt most elegantly in both hands, as if it were trimmed with the finest lace which must not come into contact with the earth. Sandhas had caricatured her in this favourite position of hers and thereby incurred her enmity.

What hurt him most was big and small boys so often ruining his hut in the forest. They wrecked or soiled his favourite place only to pain the poor man and give him some new trouble and labour.

The bailiffs Dilger, Jüngling, and Laroche, who bore the sceptre one after the other, were now for him, now against him, and alternately received his applause or provoked his anger. They encouraged him to work, to paint. He replies once in the beforementioned pages: "they always want me to paint and work. But the gentlemen and the townspeople pay nothing, and he who pays nothing gets nothing. People think I should paint their portrait for a tankard of beer."

They refused him a passport because of his "mental condition," and that was his main complaint against the bailiffs: "I want to go to Rome again. In Rome, there is macaroni, figs, a glass of Semada and good tobacco, but they give me a starvation diet and no passport."

Because he was on bad terms with the bailiffs, the gendarmes persecuted him as well. They sometimes chased him out of the taverns,

⁶⁰ In "Valentine the Nailmaker."

where someone or other had bought him a glass of beer. He complains bitterly about this with good reason. One of the worst among them, E., a rough and brutal man, later ended his career in the House of Correction.

It also sorely grieved the unfortunate man when old friends from the artistic world tried to visit him and were prevented from so doing. He writes thus: "They told me the painter Dürr from Freiburg was here yesterday and stayed at the Cross. He wanted to visit me, but they told him I was mentally deranged and very dangerous. He apparently complained about not being permitted to see me. Another proof of what good friends I have here."

It is also evident from the beforementioned pages that he was close to the famous artistic hero Peter Cornelius and the orientalist at the University of Freiburg, Hug,⁶¹ Dean of the Cathedral.

In the time from which these pages date, at the beginning of the fifties, he was visited by the Mr. Allgeyer who was referred to above. This gentleman wrote the following to me from Munich in 1886 about this visit and the "Idiot Painter":

"I was on a visit to my relatives in Haslach. Sandhas had been in the almshouse for many years by then. I had resolved to call on him, come what may, which was of course taken to be a curious quirk. I found him stretched out on his bed, his only occupation by that time, in broad daylight. I introduced myself as the son of my father, in whose house he had been no stranger. He needed some time at first to master his

⁶¹ Cornelius (1783-1867) was a painter of the Nazarene movement; Johann Leonhard Hug (1765-1847) was a Catholic theologian and Biblical scholar.

confusion and come to terms with the idea that somebody had come to visit him with no other intention than one of friendly sympathy.

“Sandhas, for all that he had degenerated, was still a remarkable figure. Out from his handsome head, framed with long, greying hair, there shone a pair of intelligent dark eyes. Every movement of his was full of supple strength and natural grace; the tone of his voice was a sonorous, pleasant chest note. But the cell in which he lived, and everything that surrounded him, or rather did not surround him, gave little cheer. Nowhere was there the slightest sign of an artistic activity, even one of the past, or of any other intellectual need; no books, no sheets of paper. My heart became heavy and sore, and I therefore invited him to accompany me out into the fresh air and take me up, if it still existed, to his former forest-hut.

“This invitation seemed to move his spirits in the most agreeable manner, and he complied with my request with manifest pleasure. It was a glorious day in the heart of spring, and under the influence of the fresh outdoors and words of friendly encouragement, which he had assuredly long been without, the inwardly broken man gradually thawed out somewhat and indulged in various memories. However, as all of them might have been, under the pressure of the present, of a not very pleasant kind for him, and I thought it best to refrain from tiresome questions, and furthermore, interviewing was not yet so common and developed in those days as it is at present, the selection of conversation was not as considerable as one would wish looking back. I was concerned above all else with the impression of his person, and regarding this, I still have the clear memory today of an infinitely lonely but thoroughly noble artistic

nature, which, a picture and exemplar of genuine modern tragedy, wrapped itself in complete silence for protection from the tiresome, for at bottom almost always apathetic, intrusiveness of society, as you know and correctly sense of him from the memories of your own childhood. I found this out myself at the end, when we entered a beer-garden for physical refreshment after walking for several hours, where the poor, lost man countered the tactless words of the guests present with an utterly unshakeable silence.

“It is possible that there was a shortcoming in the character of the man which predestined him to ruin. The question about the degree to which he was himself to blame is one I would not like to raise, even less attempt to answer. First and foremost, one will have to say and assume that it was, aside from the narrow circumstances in which he was placed, the generally wretched conditions of the age in which, as an artist, he went under. That he was this, and was so in an eminent sense, is beyond doubt for me; for from his works, insofar as I became acquainted with them and they are still present in my memory, there speaks an immediacy of natural feeling that was little in step with the age in which he lived, and which would surely, in different circumstances, have brought the best out of him. I am an opponent of the heartless phrase that genius always makes its own way; it is as false as the opposite would be. Every plant needs suitable ground and the right amount of sunshine to be able to thrive: how much more then art (and with it, the artist) as the finest blossom of culture. We know only this much of those who have, as the saying goes, made their way in the world, i.e. good fortune and merit united in their cases to help

the individual advance.

“I know nothing about the whereabouts of Sandhas’s artistic effects; and they would probably not suffice to furnish proof to *the world* that more than a talent perished with him. His misfortune perhaps makes the initiated inclined to rate his talent more highly than it actually merited, because so strange a fate in the midst of modern life gives rise to the suspicion of an uncommon predisposition. However, the right to regard things in so personal a light can be denied nobody, even if such a view achieves nothing further than to justly offset and transfigure a martyrdom, the extent of which was always undeserved, in the remembrance of posterity.”

It was in the Easter holidays of the year 1857 when I saw Sandhas for what was, as far as I remember, the last time. He sat in the Bierkrämer pub alone, as always, at a table away from the other guests. He did this because he wanted to escape their insulting remarks.

I and three former schoolfriends asked him nicely to draw us for several glasses of beer. He was in a good mood just then and fulfilled our wish. Without leaving his seat, he sketched striking likenesses of the four young beer-louts in a few minutes. I possess these portraits to this day.

Wrapped in rags, he still had at that time a wonderfully handsome man’s head with large, scintillating eyes. But he did not speak a word to us. When the drawing was finished, he saved the pints which we had bought him for later and rushed out the door, as if he regretted having drawn the four characters.

In the death register of the parish of Haslach, my old dean, Kurz, made the entry: “On the 12th of April 1859 died Carl Sandhas, painter, 58

years old.” That was the obituary of a genius who had the misfortune to “go wrong.”

Heine once wrote that Germany is not made to accommodate geniuses and this earth is only “the Calvary on which they are crucified” for people of genius because they are not understood.⁶²

We can in part allow this opinion for the Idiot Painter also. To be a genius is very dangerous. Genius is simply not disposed to be humble or obedient, and then, as Lichtenberg very aptly observes, an intelligent man is a more detestable creature to many people than is the most avowed rogue.⁶³ Geniuses offend and repel through their intellectual superiority.

A genius therefore very easily goes astray, particularly in that field where humility and obedience are demanded first and foremost, in the field of faith. Such geniuses in the Catholic Church as Pascal and Lamennais⁶⁴ come to mind.

The wilder the age, the more disordered the conditions in which a genius lives, the sooner will he make his way. That is why geniuses came to the fore in masses during the French Revolution.

In ordinary daily life, many a genius, because the world is not made for him, can go to pot and starve to death, and only a few break through,

⁶² “und dann gehören große Genies nicht ihrem partikulären Geburtslande, kaum gehören sie dieser Erde, der Schädelstätte ihres Leidens” [“and then great geniuses do not belong to the country in particular where they are born, they hardly belong to this earth, the Calvary of their sufferings”] – from *Lutetia* Chapter LI (17th September, 1842).

⁶³ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-99): “Gewissen Menschen [To certain people] ist ein Mann von Kopf ein fatales Geschöpf, als der deklariereste Schurke.” This aphorism appeared in his *Sudelbücher* (“Scrapbooks”), published 1800-1806.

⁶⁴ Félicité de la Mennais (1782-1854), a Catholic priest and philosopher who eventually left the Church.

with great effort. Schiller was in many respects more brilliant, more original than Goethe, yet how did the man struggle for his daily bread to the end of his life!

So I am for “mediocrity.” The world belongs to mediocre individuals. They ensure that it does not go out of joint, that every morning the butchers and bakers can open their stalls in peace and feed the hungry, that offices and counting-houses begin their daily work at 8 o’clock sharp and finish at 6 o’clock, and that the German citizen can sing his favourite song, “Friend, I am contented”⁶⁵ in peace.

That is why mediocre people being at the top in most positions is such a beneficial arrangement. This way, nothing is rushed, and everything peacefully runs its course. Geniuses and highly talented people would only cause confusion and agitation here, there, and everywhere with their “follies.” “Aurea mediocritas!” cried the practical Romans.⁶⁶ Yes, it is golden, mediocrity! It brings bread and offices and dignities and it leads to popularity notwithstanding. “Only stupid people,” remarks Schopenhauer, “are universally liked.”

Our Sandhas could, without doubt, rightfully say with King Lear: “I am a man more sinned against than sinning.”⁶⁷ On top of that came the inherited tendency to insanity. We saw it break out in his cousin Wendel and in his own mother. This illness may have come from the trait of genius

⁶⁵ “Freund, ich bin zufrieden,” a folksong with words by Johann Heinech Wilhelm Witschel (1769-1847) before 1800, put to music by Carl August Fischer (1828-1892).

⁶⁶ The poet Horace (65-8 B.C.) in particular, in Ode 2.10, extolled the virtues of the Golden Mean.

⁶⁷ Act 3, Scene 2.

which ran throughout the family; for, Pope observes:

“Great Wits are sure to Madness near alli’d,
And thin Partitions do their Bounds divide.”⁶⁸

His effects, a great many drawings and manuscripts, were auctioned off for a pittance and scattered. Later, when art resonated with me, I was able to collect some of the former.

The most pain was occasioned the unhappy man by his fellow citizens of Haslach. For that reason, I am glad that a person of Haslach has appeared to rescue the “Idiot Painter” from oblivion and set up a small memorial for him here. Ex ossibus ultor!⁶⁹ – From the flesh and blood of his Haslach there grew up for him an “avenger” and biographer.

⁶⁸ A quote from Dryden which appeared with the same misattribution in “Valentine the Nailmaker” (See Note 26, p. 33).

⁶⁹ Dido, in Virgil’s *Aeneid* Book IV, l.625: “Let someone rise up from my bones [and avenge me],” as she curses the Trojans before taking her own life.