

Berlin, was famous, and, in the eyes of many, even notorious. (Without this structure, it is impossible to imagine Jewish life in the diaspora countries and especially in America. It allows many who would otherwise have turned their backs on Judaism, to remain true to their community of faith, because it extends the 'either/or' of orthodoxy with other possibilities of practicing religion.)"

Goldmann describes the "symbiosis," the process by which the Jewish minority integrated itself intellectually into its surrounding society. "Names such as Heine, Rilke, and Kafka in literature, Haber and Ehrlich in science and medicine, Rathenau in politics, Bleichröder and Warburg in finances, Schönberg, Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, Irika Morini in music, are testimony to it."

Today, Goldmann notes, Germany has become a country of immigrants, whether it wants or not. Jews in Germany also have their opportunities to build and shape the country, and the changes will probably bring about something which differs from the time prior to 1933.

Goldmann says that it is important that Jews and non-Jews alike be taught the history of German Jewry, not only because of the richness of the history itself, but also because people have spoken about, read about, and been taught about dead Jews in the last several decades, where little is said or written or taught about the *lives* of Jews in Germany prior to National Socialism. "One speaks more about the perpetrator than about his victim. One researches and knows more about the mentality of the killers and their accomplices than about the minds of the people who died. The Jews who died, deserve to have their lives remembered. Moreover, knowing about the achievements of the Jews before Hitler can be a source of inspiration for young people who are about to shape their identities as Jews. The issue here has nothing to do with imitation: What is at issue is the understanding of a culture which was unique, but which can serve as a stimulus for creative work in a new world—for Jews in their own community life and as citizens of a new German society."

Goldmann tells a story: He attended a synagogue in New York, where the rabbi spoke about the difference in the lives of European and American Jews. While American Jews had developed impressive networks of religious association, social work, and support for Israeli institutions, their intellectual life lagged behind that of European Jews. Goldmann approached the rabbi after the services and said, "I felt overlooked," because the rabbi had spoken as if European Jews only came from eastern Europe. "Where are Buber and Rosenzweig, Hirsch and Herzl?" he asked. The next time, the rabbi corrected his oversight. The same ignorance is also prevalent in Israel.

"What is at issue is to keep in memory the Jewish culture and the general culture to which Jews have contributed so much, and to shape it in a living way. And even if one studies the tragedy of the Holocaust, one can only comprehend the dimension of the destruction, of the 'gap,' if one knows some-

thing about the lost, past culture."

"In the development and shaping of a new Jewish life," writes Goldmann, "the issue is to celebrate the rich life of that time, and not only to mourn its loss."

'A village idol'

by Dr. Joseph Ransohoff

Dr. Ransohoff wrote the following autobiographical sketch about his German uncle Sigismund sometime in the early 1900s. As the reader will see, it is a testimony to the breakthroughs made by Moses Mendelssohn and others in integrating Germany's Jews into the nation, through their crucial contributions to its Classical culture. As other of Dr. Ransohoff's speeches and stories attest, this outlook was carried into the United States, where he was of the first generation of that family to be born.

The story appeared in the posthumous book Under the Northern Lights and Other Stories, published in 1921 by his widow, and came into the possession of Dr. Ransohoff's great-granddaughter, EIR staffer Katherine Ransohoff Notley, on Oct. 2, 1990, just hours before Germany was finally reunited.

I learned to know him about the mid-seventies. A student friendship, cemented in the hospitals, brought me to the little Westphalian town where he had lived and worked for nearly two generations. It was on the Day of Atonement, and he was on his way to the modest little synagogue the first time I saw him. The tall, slightly bent figure was clothed in genteel broadcloth, the coat tightly buttoned and on its wide lapel was the Order of the Iron Cross. The face was clean shaven and showed about the chin and the mouth and eyes the lines and furrows that come to us all if life holds out. Over the square chin the lower lip projected out covering its upper mate, as one often sees it in persons of strong mind and given to thinking much and deep and hard. His forehead was shaded by the broad rim of his silk hat which was of a fashion I did not know, but it was not modern. As he walked rather briskly along, feeling the well-known way with his heavy stick, the first glance told you that he was blind. Such was my first impression of the octogenarian, village doctor of P[eckelsheim] who with his Iron Cross had gained the title of Privy Counselor to the King.

Because I spoke English, I gained ready access to his modest home, for he revered his Shakespeare as perhaps only German scholars can. I was a willing foil for the soliloquy and Anthony's oration which he recited with verbal accuracy but execrable pronunciation. Over the low bookcase were little busts of his favorite Shakespeare and Goethe. Between



Dr. Sigismund Ransohoff

them, hanging against the wall, was a framed, faded parchment signed by the Rector Magnificus of the University of Göttingen, dated 1817, setting forth that Sigismund R[ansohoff] was qualified to practice medicine, chirurgie [surgery], and the art of midwifery. Through thirty years with rare and short breaks, the physical and mental ills of human kind passed review before him, and he ministered to them all with pity and judgment, with patience and zeal. Above all he prided himself on being an able help-meet to the stork. His success in this work had spread his fame far beyond his little province, and time out of number was he summoned to save two lives where one had breathed before.

Mild and gentle this vicar of heaven had labored on earth, yet his spirit was sorely troubled by the wrongs done his people and his country. He and his had never lived in a ghetto. To the core he was a German. He had seen his beloved Westphalia made a plaything of the great Emperor; a kingdom for less than a decade. Seven of his colleagues of Göttingen were driven from the University because of their demands for a constitution.¹ During ten years, his cravings for freedom

1. The reference is to the "Göttingen Seven," professors who were expelled from the university and driven from the kingdom of Hanover in 1837 for refusing to swear a loyalty oath to the new King, Ernst August, Duke of Cumberland (England), and Queen Victoria's uncle. Among the seven were Wilhelm Weber, the Grimm brothers, and G.H. Ewald, the son-in-law of

gnawed at his heart. When the spirit of '48 swept the land from the North Sea to the Swiss Lakes and from the Atlantic to the Danube, the little town could hold the staid doctor no longer. On to Frankfort [sic] to watch anear the progress of the Diet. For more than a month he neglected his charges to uplift the hands of his compatriots in their struggles for liberty of thought, of speech, of press, and of creed, and above all, to a unified Fatherland. Only when it had been decided to submit a constitution, and to proffer the imperial German crown to Frederick William of Prussia, did this village idealist return home. Blessed was he as a messenger bringing glad tidings of freedom and peace. In the fullness of his joy he crowned with laurel the effigy of the King on his study mantel.

History has recorded how the work of the Diet was undone. Weaker than his convictions, the King declined the crown, nor would he consent that a constitution come between him and his people. With a rude shock, all Germany felt itself again enchained. As for the subject of this sketch, he was for the only time in his life beside himself with rage. When proofs of the royal weakness supplanted vague rumor, frenzy seemed to seize him, for in no other way were his words or actions to be explained or pardoned. It was on Sunday, about noon, when the little church was emptying itself, that the doctor appeared in the doorway, behind him his faithful coachman bearing in his arms the bust of the King crowned with laurel. Ramblingly he harangued the little crowd that gathered and listened in open-mouthed wonder. The climax of his speech came quickly. "Rule may this weakly King over a downtrodden people," he shouted, "but not in the house of one who would be free." Calmly he took the plaster model from the trembling hands of his follower and with all the force at his command, shattered it on the flagging of the street. As an oncoming storm will dissipate a crowd, this frivolous deed emptied the little square in a trice. No one cared or dared to be known as a participant of this *lese majestatis*. And as for the doctor, friends implored him to flee, to join the large stream that brought the best German blood to American shores. All in vain. He would abide the consequences which—never came. Whether the majesty of the law was blind or wise, the only dramatic episode in the history of this little village, that could have brought it national fame, was passed unnoticed and unsung. Its central figure resumed with love and zest the labor for which he was best fitted. Without surcease he worked until his seventieth year; he then became blind of a cataract. An unsuccessful operation left him in total darkness; left him to ponder over the thousand and one incidents of an eventful though seemingly monotonous life. The memories must have been pleasant for the most part, for a smile almost always lingered about the sightless orbs and full mouth. It pleased him that often in his infirmity he was consulted by his

Carl Gauss. See "How Fresnel and Ampère Launched a Scientific Revolution," *EIR*, Aug. 27, 1999.

youthful successor in difficult cases. He felt conscious of an unimpaired sense of hearing and of touch, and of his ability to reason from effect to cause, from symptoms to disease itself. Thus he would often guide the blow that he could not see to deliver.

So he was when I came to know him. I spent many hours of my long vacation with him in long walks or at chess, or at reading and conversing in English. Thus it chanced that I witnessed the culminating incident of his professional life. We were at chess. He had just taken my queen, when the summons came. The stork had for many hours hovered over a peasant home nearly four miles away. Neither the midwife nor the doctor could persuade the stork to leave his burden and be gone. Would he come? If sightless eyes ever light up, his were aflame. A flush as of youth suffused his face. He tested his muscles as if to see whether their strength was all there. For the moment he seemed to forget both his affliction and what he had learned since its coming. His sense of localization was shattered. In the flurry of the moment he brushed against tables and chairs and door jamb in the hurried search for his case of instruments, long disused. How fondly he handled them, each one, noting the curve of the blade, its temper and weight. We drove in the doctor's one-horse cab, that, like its owner, had seen years of service, and like him, had lost its luster, but was staunch at the core. As we slowly bowled over the smooth roads, it pleased the old man at my side to be told of the respectful greetings of the passersby. There was no difficulty in finding the home of the suffering woman. As we neared the edge of the peasant village, we noticed a small hushed crowd about a little stone cottage. From the gateway there was coming out that ominous little procession so often seen in ultra Catholic countries, a priest in cassock flanked on each side by an acolyte bearing the incense burner and crucifix. The last sacrament had been administered. Against the front of the house leaned the figure of a strong man, face to the wall, arms uplifted and crossed above the head. The back only was visible, but how it pictured despair as it heaved and fell with the sobbing.

The room of the suffering was hushed; exhausted nature was helpless. The holy church could bring peace of mind, but not surcease of pain. The curse of Eve, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children," was stamped on every lineament of this most stricken of her daughters. Here was the added curse; a mistake of nature. A babe borne to full fruition and all but doomed at life's threshold. Such mistakes had often come before this grand old man and been made right. How calm and confident he looked, now that he had been placed at the bedside. The well-trained touch had not lost its cunning nor the well-poised muscles their strength. On the sightless face I could read the progress of the case. The knotted muscles of the forehead pictured the hard thinking behind them. A beam stealing from the eyes to nostrils and mouth told the solution had been found. The piercing cries of the

patient swerved him not from his purpose, as with Herculean strength he brought the fine muscles of his arms into play. The suspense was great, but short. One prolonged shriek of anguish—followed as if in swift refrain by a smothered little wail from a newcomer on the stage of life.

Twenty-eight years later I again came to the obscure Westphalian village. It chanced to be All-Souls Day. I fell in with the little stream of men and women perennially wending its way to the rural God's Acre. Arrived there, I came on one who, like myself, looked the stranger. He appeared about thirty, and, from his bearing, of studious habits. Although evidently he had come some distance, he knew well the paths of the little cemetery. He walked straight to a grave that was far from new, and deposited thereon a wreath of wax flowers. Then I followed him to the little corner set aside for Jewish graves. Arrived at one he seemed to know well, he picked up a pebble from the roadside and laid it reverently with the hundreds already on the slab. I followed his example. For the orthodox Jew will have his grave cared for as Abraham did for Sarah in the Cave of Machpeleh, he covered it with stones. I looked at the simple inscription. It read, "Sigismund R[ansohoff], Doctor of Medicine. Born 1790—Died 1883." And in Hebrew characters, "May his soul be bound up in a bundle of life." Nothing more.

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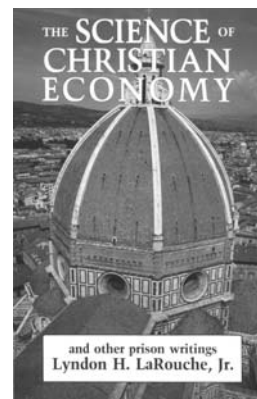
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