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Disdain and Delight: A German Visitor Reports from America in 1839

The period of colonial migration in the eighteenth century was followed by waves of disappointed and desperate people escaping from Europe to America. Unfulfilled promises of reform from the ruling princes before the final defeat of Napoleon, the devastation caused by a generation of conflict, and the crushing defeat of the Polish uprising—all directed hopes of a better life towards the United States, which was regarded as a country where a degree of freedom existed, that Europeans had never known. By the middle of the nineteenth century Irish and Germans were forming a large proportion of the immigrants, the former escaping from tyranny and famine stayed mostly in the north east, the latter settling in Pennsylvania west of the Appalachians. The German newcomers were renowned for their diligence, conscientiousness and public spirit, but by the 1830s offsprings of eighteenth-century immigrants were not so familiar with standards, traditions, and conventions of the Old World, their values being molded more by their environment, where physical stamina and resourcefulness were of prime importance, land was cheap, and where material gains tended to displace spiritual, ethical, and intellectual concerns.

The pessimistic mood afflicting many in the Europe of Metternich was given literary form in a number of novels, including E. A. Willkomm's *Die Europamüden* [Those Weary of Europe] (1838). The author belonged to a generation of Germans frustrated by their inability to do away with social and political injustice. Irksome too, was the abrogation by the German rulers of reforms Napoleon had introduced in their territories, when his troops were in occupation there. Not only intellectuals but peasants also were desperate for a chance to improve their lot. As one contemporary observer put it: "The history of the peasants fills one of the most shocking pages in the great book of human misery."¹ So immigrants to the United States included intellectuals, aristocrats (Friedrich von Steuben was one of them), but also farmers and other manual workers.

Not everybody in Germany approved of the emigration of fellow citizens. Willibald Alexis (1798-1871), author of novels about the contemporary scene, believed that those planning to emigrate were mistaken about the prospects of better living conditions in the New World. Apart from that, he did not approve of their abandoning the Fatherland.² Nor did another novelist, Louise von Gall (1815-55), wife of Levin

Schücking and daughter-in-law of Modestus Schücking, who presented the New World in an unfavorable light. A young physician in one of her novels did not like America because of the "raw materialism" over there. Despite his readiness to accept the political principles of the New World, he imagined America to be like a newly laid-out park, without trees and shade—a stark contrast to the Germany of forests and ancient fortresses.³ Such a negative view of America was confirmed by the return to Germany of a number of disillusioned expatriates, who were commemorated in a novel by Ferdinand Kürnberger entitled *Der Amerika-Müde* [The Man Disenchanted with America], 1855, which is a counterpart to Willkomm's novel mentioned above.

A literary figure who recorded his own deep disappointment in 1832 was the Austrian poet Lenau. Seven years later the feeling of disillusion, even of betrayal, was echoed by a visitor from north Germany, who took up residence in Steubenville, Ohio, i.e., in the same region, the Appalachian plateau, as Lenau had.

Paul Nicolaus Bernhard Joseph Schücking (1787-1867), known as Modestus Schücking, was born in Münster, Westphalia, son of a highly placed judge.⁴ He received his education in the turbulent period of the Napoleonic Wars, and after three years' study of law at the University of Münster entered the legal profession, making steady progress as judge and public servant in the territory of the local duke of Arenberg. In this capacity he was very active and succeeded in carrying out his plans for improving the roads and postal service in a rather remote area of Westphalia. In addition he appears to have had a social conscience, inasmuch as he showed concern for poverty-stricken inhabitants of the marshland, visiting them in their huts, and obtaining funds from the ducal treasury for relief of their distress. In other respects, too, he worked to improve living conditions for people under his jurisdiction, including increased medical facilities.

This and other areas of Westphalia were strongly, not to say rigidly Catholic in their beliefs and thinking. Modestus Schücking was schooled in the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, and in sympathy with the teachings of a fellow Westphalian—the Roman Catholic theologian Georg Hermes, who endeavored to combine Catholic doctrine with the teaching of Kant. Hermes's influence was considerable on the western borders of Germany, but in 1835 his writings were put on the *Index* by the Vatican. Not surprisingly Schücking's interest in the Hermesian teaching made him *persona non grata* with the Catholic establishment in his district, as did his campaign for tolerance between the Catholic and Lutheran faiths. After submitting to pressure and relinquishing his post, he embarked for the United States with his third eldest son Alfred in July 1838, and remained here for about two years before returning to Germany. In three hitherto unpublished letters to a colleague and friend Justizrat D. in Münster, Schücking supplied information he had acquired about American life and institutions, adding his own impressions of them.⁵

Letter 1

Steubenville, Ohio, 15 March 1839

In these letters to Münster my intention to contribute to a correction of current ideas of American affairs makes it imperative I do not omit education and instruction, since nothing sheds more light on the nature of a government than its concern (or lack of it) for the intellectual and moral fiber of the citizens. In addition, this is important for those pupils in German schools who, when observing the stream of emigrants, will wish to know what to expect, if they were to join this exodus with a view to finding a post as teacher in America.

I don't know what reception my words will have, when I say with North American bluntness that the sole justification of a government by the people is that the people are sensible, thoughtful, and supportive. Only then could one consider them competent and worthy to govern; and only then would they be capable of voting into office enlightened and loyal representatives and officials. How is the Republic to survive and prosper, if the people cannot see the dangers that beset it, the obstacles that arise and the necessary reforms; or if they don't show restraint, dedication, and genuine patriotism? And yet, although the Founding Fathers, Washington, Penn, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, etc. recommended serious interest for a system of education embracing all classes of citizen, from the wealthiest to the poorest, the country still lacks the means of creating an informed public opinion, which lends so much strength to the constitution, whereas an unschooled opinion leads to prejudice. Education is so essential for the detection and thwarting of sly and dangerous encroachments on the people's liberty, for combating the inordinate greed for money, and to sow the seed of virtue throughout the land. "Build and support public schools in every part of the Union" said President Monroe.

Since then much has been written on the subject of education, and much has been said in Congress and the legislative bodies of the individual states. But it is as if, surrounded by a hundred steam-driven, whirring and clanking wheels in a wool factory, they were delivering a lecture on the ultimate aim of human existence! No doubt many a good law has been passed and large sums spent; and yet in the city of New York alone there are nearly 10,000 children who do not attend school. How many future thieves, arsonists, murderers, and streetwalkers are growing up among these? But should citizens of a republic not have the liberty to let their children grow up without education? What a vicious circle! The authorities proclaim the great need of education, and in doing so concede that the parents are uneducated, and at the same time assume that these parents will recognize the importance of education and their own great responsibility for neglecting this, and that they will then send their children to school: the result being that in the metropolis 10,000 children still don't attend school! No reasonable system of education can be expected to operate without vigorous intervention of the legislature and extended powers of the administration. Very recently in the Pennsylvania legislature a member proposed requiring parents to send their children to a public school for at least a few hours on a few weekdays,

and the proposal was opposed!

It was only in the states of New England (Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine) that the first settlers showed foresight and lively interest in this matter, and already in 1628 a law was passed introducing compulsory education. In 1647 an elementary school was established for every fifty families, and a high school for every hundred families. Education in New England today is much sounder than in other states, and there is no difference between the young people who have studied in the academies and colleges of New England, and their counterparts in Germany, except for the Americans' superior public speaking. This is so general in this country, that in all the numerous churches I have visited, I have never known any preacher who became confused or hesitant in his delivery, or who could have improved his diction—and this despite their rapid speech.

The intelligence of the Americans is on the whole good (which is not to call into question that so many of them are astonishingly ill-informed about anything outside their daily routine). On the other hand, dull-looking individuals are rare in this country, that is to say among the native Anglo-Americans. Yet, notwithstanding their custom of doing all that is necessary in grand style, it is to be regretted that with all the discussions and decisions, so little is achieved on a national scale for the good of the whole community. A commission for education in Washington as supreme central authority, and a chief inspector in each of the twenty-six states would produce the most salutary results. But since education is at present in the hands of local authorities under the supervision of the individual states, the realization of a national standard is seriously hampered by the Constitution. Meanwhile Congress has gone beyond urgent recommendations and introduced the excellent measure of reserving a piece of Congressional land for a public school in every township. (Unoccupied territory within the United States and not belonging to any of the states, Indian tribes, or private individuals, is known as Congressional land).

[Here follow details of the surveying and quantifying of the land.]

In the states where the public school system has been introduced, it is under the authority of a superintendent. Ten to fifteen schools constitute a school district, which has an inspector, each school having its own trustees. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography are taught, but with the exception of New England, Easton in Pennsylvania, and Cincinnati in Ohio, there are no schools for training teachers. The salaries are between \$20-\$30 per month; in some other areas \$400-\$500 per annum. In the summer months they have time to improve their knowledge, while the children stay at home for more important things.

In March 1831 the legislature of the new state of Ohio passed a law requiring a fund to be raised in every county for the education of white children in the public schools, and that every township be divided into school districts. In Ohio the importance of the public schools lies in their potential rather than in their achievements so far. In this context the news from most states is heartening. According to the latest report of the superintendent of public instruction in the state of Michigan, it has 245

townships, 3,500 school districts, and \$19,716 have been raised for school buildings. Since the intelligent Americans are able to learn a subject without much trouble, there is no shortage of capable teachers, but rather of parents who appreciate the merit of skillful teachers.

In Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri where most of the German immigrants settled, education is lamentable beyond description. (Many are now going to Florida and Texas, where they can get a few hundred acres of land free, and be scalped by the Indians, or sunburnt free of charge.) When they arrive, generally their first step is to acquire all the bad habits of their new country, while divesting themselves of all the good moral precepts of their native land. Liberty makes them insolent, and equality uncouth. They soon recognize the goal of the North American to make money, and they fail to reconcile political liberty with moral responsibility. To avoid hard work, they build bars and taverns, and sell toxic drink like the best of Americans.

Throughout their first years they all have a dreadful time. If later things have improved, these people have become so awful in the meantime, that they could no longer make a success of their lives. Since they are neither German nor American, the educated German avoids them, finding their mish-mash of a language, their physical and moral depravity insufferable. They are held in contempt by Americans, who have to be persuaded not to judge the German people by this crowd. (If at times I don't feel disposed to undertake the persuasion, I claim France as my native land, and am then assured of a good reception much sooner.) There is nothing to equal the coarseness and ignorance of the so called Pennsylvanian Germans, that is the descendants of German immigrants of a century or more earlier. Their only teachers are Methodist preachers on horseback—"the blind leading the blind." They are so mean that a weary traveler asking for refreshment or a bed for the night, must chop wood in payment, no matter how tired he may be. On the other hand, they allow a lodger meeting with their approval to sleep with their daughters. In western Pennsylvania there are whole counties, where the inhabitants (called black Germans by the Americans) will not hear of education, in order, as Mr. Wolz in Pittsburgh put it, that their children might become bigger donkeys than themselves.

My esteemed friend, for the sake of those Germans who have not yet emigrated, let me note that in the vast western states, where schools are virtually inaccessible, and parents brutish, the children inevitably grow up coarse and ignorant. Whatever the relations between the English-speaking and German-speaking population, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography are, in accordance with the law, taught in English in the elementary schools. Although, with the permission of the principal and district inspector, instruction may be given in German, in most areas it is impossible to find a teacher who could teach in both languages. Consequently elementary schools are not adequately equipped for German children, who are thus denied benefits from school funds to which their parents must contribute like other citizens. Would it not be sensible and appropriate to allow each district to decide whether instruction be given in the German or English language, or in both, as the German population increases and makes a growing contribution to agriculture and industry? In this way German children would learn more about American laws and institutions, and merge

with the American people.

Beside these public schools there are denominational schools, in which children are indoctrinated with the faith and thinking of the particular sect. They are mostly to be found in cities and especially in the numerous wealthy communities, just as tree nurseries exist only on the estates of rich people. The Sunday schools are noteworthy, too. On a few consecutive Sundays at about 1:00 p.m. I saw six young girls ride past, and in answer to my enquiry whether they were farmers' daughters, heard that they were children of the wealthiest residents in Steubenville on their way to a Sunday school four, five, six, or seven miles upriver in Virginia. Mrs. Scott had been an enthusiastic teacher of religion. She told me that her success in reforming unruly children and evil older people had brought her into contact with Mr. Scott. The job was not without its hazards: on one occasion it was only her skill as a horsewoman that enabled her to escape from an attack by marauders, and since then she had always been escorted by an armed black servant of her father. The Presbyterians are determined to maintain and increase the number of Sunday schools. In sermons and tracts their appeal to conscience includes the question "Am I a Sunday school teacher?" In 1834 it was estimated that 80,000 Sunday school teachers (male and female) taught 600,000 children. When one considers the ever increasing number of settlements without religious instruction; that the preachers are also missionaries, who serve between four and six communities in a circuit of ten to thirty miles, one has to commend highly the dedication of young people who guide the errant children of rough parents to God. If we also take into account that these young adults are coolheaded and (apart from the Methodists) free of fanaticism, we can be confident that they do a lot of good.

And now, my esteemed friend, I am going to take you to the academies, colleges, and universities; that is to say from the democratic to the aristocratic sphere; or perhaps I should not reckon them to belong to the latter, although entrance to these establishments is confined to the people with money, their products being candidates for the elite in scholarship, the civil service, clergy, and so on. The academies and colleges are usually private institutions, with and without state support. When the boys can read and write and have received instruction in the fundamentals of arithmetic, they are sent to the academies, which in some cases accept only day-pupils, in others day-pupils and boarders. The fees of boarders average \$150, day-boys' fees \$50 for ten months, April and October being vacation periods. Lessons in modern languages, music, and drawing entail extra fees. Subjects offered include English, Latin (and sometimes French, German, Italian, and Spanish), Geography, Rhetoric, Mathematics, Algebra as far as quadratic equations, logarithms, arithmetic and geometric progression, solid geometry and area-measurement; i.e. everything with an eye on skill in surveying and the basic essentials of the natural sciences.

These courses in the academies lasting three to five years are intended to prepare students for direct entry to the business world and for more successful activity therein, as well as for admission to the colleges. Academies and colleges are generally organized as legal business corporations, i.e. the state accords them the *jus universitatis* in the Roman legal tradition, or if you like, a legal identity. They have a board of trustees to

protect and further their interests. When first established, the academies are frequently subsidized by the state, in order to keep the fees moderate and to increase the number of students. The Pennsylvanian legislature, for example, allocated an annual grant of \$500 for a period of ten years to those incorporated academies with forty students and \$250 to those with at least twenty-five students.

The insolence and uncivilized behavior of the boys make the teachers' task arduous. They are children of men who have become wealthy in this country, and are yet so driven by the need to make more money that they have no time even to eat their midday meal in a decent manner. How then can one expect them to give time to their children? In any case, what could they say to them, when they themselves know nothing except how to make money and the amazing improvements in our country? Politeness, urbanity, yes humanity itself seem to be unknown to the middle and lower classes in North America. Liberty, which is not the hallmark of a particular form of government, is doubtless favorable to the development of a lofty moral sense; but liberty in this North America has produced instead of humans, boors and blockheads, inasmuch as uninformed public opinion holds complete sway over them, and everyone must vote as his party demands. Many a boy takes so readily to this false notion of liberty and equality, that the father (the twelve-year-old addresses him with "sir") is soon unable to tame the young brat, and has to send him to a reformatory.

Mr. Scott is reputedly a strict disciplinarian, so the most unruly boys are sent here. Punishment in the academies takes the form of exclusion from games, retention after school hours, double assignments, banning boarders from the meal table, and so on. However, Mr. Scott occasionally feels compelled to have recourse to the cane, but even so cannot stop objectionable habits such as constant spitting (learned from their tobacco-chewing fathers), lolling and lounging about, even during prayers.

In the colleges moral philosophy, natural philosophy (natural sciences), and mathematics are taught at an advanced level, where the learning process involves papers read in colloquia. At present there are said to be eighty-eight colleges in the Union, and in addition twelve law schools, twenty-six medical schools, and thirty-five theological schools. They are also generally incorporated by the state in which they are situated, assigned a board of trustees, and subsidized by donations. For instance, the state legislature of Pennsylvania has granted the incorporated colleges a subsidy of \$1,000 for a period of ten years, if the number of students reaches one hundred, \$500 to those with at least forty, and \$250 when the total reaches twenty-five students. The legislature in Indiana also gives very generous support to the university in Bloomington, whose president Dr. Wylie recently gave great offense by leaving the Presbyterian Church [Schücking wrote "catholic presbyterian Church"] to join the Unitarians.⁶ Many states such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Virginia have allocated substantial funds for schools, the last named earmarking the sum of \$1,233, 523, of which \$45,000 is spent annually on the education of poor children. The Federal Government reserves large areas of Congressional land for academies and colleges: according to a report of 2 April 1832 a total of 10,713,317 acres had been allocated to colleges, academies and public schools. The University of Alabama is sited entirely on such land.

Colleges generally have four classes: freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Students from academies can skip the freshman year; indeed, those who are especially well prepared can skip the sophomore year too. However, there are colleges that were formerly academies and have not attained more than a mediocre standard in their new status. In some western colleges scholarship is rather superficial, notwithstanding the removal of original obstacles to more profound instruction. Colleges in the eastern states have sounder standards in this respect, receiving encouragement and aid from cities nearby. To be sure, in Harvard, Brown, Yale, Amherst, Union College in New York State and in Princeton the academic standard bears comparison with that in the best European universities. The number of professors varies from one institution to the next, Union College (with 286 students) having nine in addition to the president, but Columbia four. German academics would often find unacceptable the combination of subjects taught by one person; in Columbia, for example, the professor of philosophy and ethics also teaches rhetoric, belles lettres, and political economy! As for the professors' salaries (generally speaking, they are five to ten in number), these are in the range of \$500 to \$1200. I think you would like to read in the enclosure to this letter about the number of the faculty, courses of study and the terms (calendars) of one of the most prestigious universities, i.e. Union College with its 286 students.⁷ The universities are colleges where students specialize in particular subjects. You become Doctor of Laws or Doctor of Medicine (as understood in this country), whereas in the colleges a broader range of subjects must be covered. Dr. Pappen told me he had attended medical courses for about three winter semesters at the university in Philadelphia and, after completion of a dissertation and a rigorous oral examination, graduated Dr. med. The whole catastrophe cost \$300, including fees. I shall probably come back to this pretty state of affairs, but just in case I forget, let me mention that Aesculapius, god of the medical art, can see his priests here multiply daily, for in twenty medical schools there are 2489 students, compared with 1058 in thirty theological institutions. The latter must be a source of interest to the former, since in the lunatic asylum of Massachusetts the number of religious fanatics has grown to seventy in the last six years. As for the academic libraries, in 1834 it was calculated that they held 190,056 books, and the libraries of literary societies 87,000. Textbooks in the English language are written entirely by Americans.

As I have already stated, an important difference exists between the academies themselves, as also between the colleges. This is a natural consequence of the fact that they are mostly private institutions and not under the control of a public authority (and that many are richly endowed, e.g. Girard College in Philadelphia and Columbia College in New York). The American is only too ready to curtail the salary of teachers and the food of the boarding students, and the principals often have to haggle like their grandfathers before them, finally giving up and being succeeded by a better or worse one. As a consequence, partly in order to eliminate the disparity in standards between these institutions, and partly to ensure that all are imbued with the same sound and high-minded purpose, it is most important that the President of the Union create a supreme council for education for the whole country, and that similarly in every state a council for education be created with the governor as chairman, under

the supervision of the supreme (federal) council for education. This salutary and virtually essential arrangement would encounter few obstacles, in the absence that is, of resistance by a powerful political faction to any development that would allow the federal administration to intrude in the affairs of the individual states.

[Here follows a reference to a newspaper report in Charleston (now in West Virginia) of an account of the Prussian school system given by one Benjamin M. Smith, which the governor of Virginia suggested might be adopted in his state. Smith, a Virginian had traveled in Prussia among other European countries, and had studied the organization and administration of education there.]

On the whole, educated Americans have the greatest respect for the Prussian government, which they associate with progressive and enlightened views; especially do they respect the Prussian monarch himself.⁸ The American aristocracy, both the materially wealthiest on the one hand, and the most highly educated on the other, is in favor of universities because, detesting the prospect of mob rule, it sees in higher education the means to nourish superior ideas and increase the number of its own ranks. However, it should be recognized that in this democracy education is very handicapped, because only the non-denominational schools can be regarded as the seed of future elementary schools in the Republic. As far as education goes, America on the whole seems to resemble its richest soil where the vegetable and animal thrive, but children develop their basest urges, without anyone trying to inculcate higher aspirations. Consequently the fertile soil is covered with poppies, wild grass and tares, and very little wheat.

In a democracy the aim and system of education must justify that form of government, showing it to be the right and only true one, thus giving it a firmer, more secure foundation. Democracy in America must gradually acquire a different basis; it must become more than just a negation of despotism, if it is not to collapse like their frailty built houses. It must change from one of material gain and prosperity to a bedrock of human dignity and spiritual values. This would be a difficult task for the schools to perform, faced as they are with the ignorance and meanness of parents, for whom the world is no more than a vast market place, and life itself a process of buying and selling. Nevertheless, it has to be a prime function of the schools to inform future citizens of their moral responsibility to each other, and to the community. This would also be the most appropriate way to pay homage to the Founders of the Republic, vis: Washington, Penn, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, etc. The conviction that the schools here are not only most deficient in qualities befitting a republic, but that in addition the whole organization of the university system is in every respect antirepublican, was recently expressed by a member of the House of Representatives of our state (albeit not from the most important point of view) in the following words.

[Here follows a lengthy extract in German translation from this speech.]

You see that in this speech instruction and education are considered mainly from the economic and political viewpoint. Yet the importance, the necessity of a better school system becomes even more evident, when we think of the thousands of neglected children in the seaports, of the frequent murders, of the universally practiced deceit provoking laughter rather than anger; then again, when we recall that travelers must keep an eye on their personal effects, and that so many divorces are being sought, generally by wives of drunkards who ill-treat their children (at present forty-seven cases are on file in Ohio and even more in Connecticut); and when we take into account the number of girls who go astray every evening in New York, New Orleans and other cities, in greater numbers than the women and girls of Münster choose the right way on Good Friday—all these facts providing grounds for improvement in education are ignored, and the idea that government should intervene to ensure such improvement is denounced as infringement of the individual's liberty. (How could liberty hinder the struggle for liberty?)

Recalling one of the reasons for my report, I should mention that those who have acquired the knowledge and qualities necessary for entrance to a school, especially if they were educated in a Prussian school, would be admitted readily to a public school in the United States, but they would have to submit reports on their moral character. University-trained persons would do well to make contact with a reputable Anglo-American family, and obtain a recommendation from them. In this way they should find a position as teacher in an academy. A letter of introduction is essential for access to genteel Americans. Once accepted, you are welcome in their home, among their relatives, and to their church. It was quite by chance that I became acquainted with the preacher Kämmerer in Pittsburgh, won his approval, and then was introduced by him to Mr. Lorenz, an immensely wealthy Presbyterian. In this way my association with the Presbyterians began, and it was through this channel that I arranged for my son Alfred to be given a position as teacher of mathematics and languages in the academy and in the seminary for young women here, with free board and a salary of \$350, or 470 Thaler.⁹ Once employed by the upper class, it depends solely on his work and demeanor how soon he obtains a lucrative appointment or even a chair in a college with a salary of \$800-\$1200. Alfred's fellow student in Osnabrück, Bernhard Rölker, is now a professor in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Those who wish to make a living solely by teaching languages fare badly; but if they can offer music in addition, their prospects are brighter. Good and dedicated teachers of music are in demand and well remunerated, not because people are particularly musical, but because music is in fashion.

In this present report on immigrants, knowledge of the English language is assumed. The excellent instruction Professor van Dillen gives in this subject in Osnabrück, has proved of the greatest value to Alfred, making him acceptable to the German-Americans and enabling him to teach mathematics in an academy and, moreover, in the American-English dialect—this being better than the "old English." And how is my English? Well, whenever I can, I speak French, but I can manage a little more than just "Good evening, sir!"

[The first letter ends here.]

When reading the second and third letters, it should be borne in mind that the writer, Modestus Schücking, came from a country where women were allotted a role as subservient as in any other in western Europe. Prominent German publicists such as W. H. Riehl (probably the first academic sociologist in that country), Hermann Marggraff, Karl Gutzkow, and Robert Prutz were unanimous in proclaiming that a woman's place was in the home, and that she should not aspire to appear in public life. Those women who published (e.g. Ida von Hahn-Hahn, Fanny Lewald, Louise von Gall, and Therese von Bacheracht) were often ridiculed by the arbiters of taste and dismissed as bluestockings. When girls received any formal education at all, it ceased at the age of fifteen. Thereafter and depending on family circumstances, the daughters were given some tuition in needlework, painting, music, and dancing. The fortunate exceptions had enlightened fathers, who gave them the opportunities for further study, at the same time encouraging a positive attitude to progressive ideas. As mentioned above, Modestus Schücking was an unusually broad-minded public figure in Westphalian society, permeated as it was with intolerance and bigotry.

Letter 2

Steubenville, 25 March 1839

Let me give you my view of the available education for females in the United States. The prerequisites (and the need) for the improvement of the male sex by the female are perhaps more vital here than in any other land of the civilized world. Nowhere can women be more devoted to the home, and nowhere invite more respect than here. Consequently, their influence for moderation of the commercial drive of their men, and for the liberation of suppressed ideals, together with their role in the development of their children's mind and disposition, would be all the more significant if they themselves had the training for a profession that requires empathy, judgment, tact, and adroitness.

On the whole, it can be said that so far the government has done little or nothing to promote this beneficial influence of women, which can be observed not only in the home, but in all sections of society; and this despite the urgent need for regeneration of the male sex, including infusion of the spiritual element.

Yet in this respect the authorities of this young nation are not to be blamed, when one considers how inadequate education of females in Europe is. The fact that in this country there is almost as large a number of academies for girls as for boys is in itself evidence that females are seen to be as eligible by nature for education as males. The ladies' academies or seminaries are mostly managed by ministers of religion and their wives, and in Catholic institutions by nuns. The curriculum comprises reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, secular and ecclesiastical history, dates and sequences of historical events, mythology, practice in written style and in public speaking, prosody, science, philosophy, ethics, music, painting in watercolor and on silk, needlework, etc.

Boarders' fees amount to \$150-200 per annum; for day girls \$50. Extra fees are charged for music (piano and harp): \$40-50; drawing and painting on silk: \$20-30; French or German \$20-30. You see, dear friend, that money, a lot of money is required to become a well-informed, highly educated lady, and many a gentleman will not take kindly to handing over so many of the banknotes that are so dear to his heart. But there are much more powerful reasons to look sour, when contemplating a world in which the key to the sanctuary of the mind and soul, to the realm of the most sophisticated delights has to be made of gold. Under such circumstances is it not absurd to speak of liberty and equality on this earth? The seminary in this town, headed by the Rev. Beatty, has 80 girl boarders up to the age of twenty-two, and 120 day girls. They are taught by recently appointed female teachers and include children of five, seven, and nine years, so delightful and charming that one wonders how their mothers can bear to be without them, often thousands of miles away in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

If they had a belltower, the buildings of these seminaries would resemble a Catholic convent. Mr. Beatty's is 165 feet long with two stories and a semi-basement, each story having twenty-three windows. The front of the building facing the river Ohio has four Ionic columns supporting the architrave, and between these is a balcony from which one can watch the 1600-foot-wide, limpid, silvery waters flowing past, leading one's gaze to the wooded foothills that come down to the river bank, but stopping short of the site of Steubenville. The view includes the additional attraction of a playground, fenced off from the river by a stack of cast iron, with a charming scene of groups of children in perpetual motion. Every hour colorful steamboats hurry past on their way to Cincinnati, or upstream to Pittsburgh, and the young girls (as distinct from the young ladies) wave their white handkerchiefs, as they exchange greetings with the passengers.

The success of the process of instruction and education depends largely on the quality of the female teachers, and since there are no training establishments for them, the female academies vary a great deal. But as a rule American women, with their keen commonsense, easily master the field of knowledge germane to their interests or requirements as teachers.

Acquaintance with the teachers of the academy in this town, ladies between twenty and twenty-eight years of age, and with the most highly respected lady principal, would soon change any biased opinion that women are less able to study the world around us, and less entitled to the enjoyment inherent in such study. After getting to know these ladies, one would also have to revise any ideas that, because by nature they are closer to children and more lenient, they are less endowed by the Almighty with the talents and qualities that make a successful teacher.

As for the material taught, I have read essays by female pupils here on history and as exercises in style, which were very praiseworthy. Moreover, perusal of their calculations in astronomy convinced me that in this subject they teach more than just names and constellations. Mrs. Beatty told me that in astronomy just enough is taught to enable the pupils to see the glory of God.

The lady teachers do not have to cope with the naughtiness and bad habits that

make the job of the male American teacher so difficult. Mrs. Beatty maintained that the principal method of discipline she used was moral conviction. She believed that in this way discontent and bitterness could be avoided and a rational self-control inculcated. Moral conviction would later be the sole means of these future wives and mothers to exert influence on their husbands and children. A most favorable factor is the very profitable three-year stay in the seminary, compared with the one-year residence in German boarding schools, where the pupils leave at just the time their interests and abilities are being awakened and their personalities revealing themselves. Some American girls continue their courses even for four, five, and more years.

Although in these establishments they do not always go deeply into the subjects taught, and not all the girls are equipped with basic and comprehensive knowledge when they leave, yet especial talents are given incentive and opportunity to develop, and on the whole the curriculum retains its value as training of the intellect and critical faculty, important as these are in later life.

In many European professional families the marriage soon becomes boring, because the wife does not understand her husband. In America the contrary is more often true, for here, it seems to me, women are more cultivated than the men. I was once asked by Mrs. Mary Lyman, one of the teachers at the seminary here, "Are not the ladies well-behaved, very genteel?" "So far," I replied, "I found the last to whom I spoke better behaved and more obliging than the one before. And yet I could also add that they are not well-behaved, when in the matter of courtesy they leave the gentlemen so far behind." Flattered as a lady, but stung as an American, she countered "It is true, I cannot speak from experience, but I believe there are many educated and cultivated men in America." This, of course, I did not doubt. The joking remark I occasionally made, i.e. Nature created only swans for the Delaware, Hudson, and Ohio rivers she dismissed as an inept European compliment, at the same time taking me gleefully to the window, and pointing to a gaggle of geese on the river Ohio nearby.

If the historical sense is very strong in America and in individual cases the specialized work excellent, yet in most institutions, it seems to me, there is not enough attention given to the philosophy of education and of the accompanying instruction. Formal intellectual training in the "classical" subjects should be interspaced with hours for free discussion, lectures, and essays which help to mold the temperament and promote sympathetic understanding. In addition to acquiring insight, the girls would in this way learn to identify with the sensibility and conscience of others, and in later life exert a moderating, civilizing influence as wife and mother for the benefit of their country.

[The writer ends this second letter with a translated extract from a speech by a Florida judge praising the role of women in society.]

Letter 3

Steubenville, 29 March 1839

Yesterday morning the public examination in the ladies seminary was concluded. (These Presbyterians celebrate the Sabbath more than any other day; they don't observe even Good Friday.) What I experienced on this occasion not only confirms my opinion of female instruction here, which I conveyed to you in my last letter, but also fills me with admiration. The most senior of the examinees were seven young women between eighteen and twenty years old, whose bearing betrayed neither overconfidence nor nervousness. You should have heard how questions were answered about the Constitution, from the local judge to the Supreme Court, from the town mayor to the President in Washington; then about Congress, the states and state legislatures, the function of governors, and so on. Other questions were about court procedure during a trial by jury, from the prosecutor's address up to the sentence after the verdict; on geography taking us to the 5,300 ft. high Mount Katahdin in Maine, then to Niagara Falls with its spectacular beauty; later from Lake Erie via the new canal down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans; then up to New York via Florida, the Carolinas, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. The answers to such questions demonstrated a knowledge of this enormous continent, exceeding that which many a German girl has of the county in which she was born. Such questions, especially about ethics and metaphysics often made me anxious for the youngsters, even though their looks of confidence in the one being questioned showed that they would not be all that nervous when their turn came. Their explanations of the difference between the concepts of virtue and genius, audacity and fortitude, the noble and the sublime, good and evil, were most satisfactory—yes, I can say admirable and surprising. There could be no possibility here of such a performance through mere cramming, since the questions of the external examiners could not be foreseen and, moreover, called for elucidation, substantiation, and application. The adjudicator from Columbus asked Miss Patricia Livingstone from Augusta Springs in Virginia to offer a comparison of Washington the liberator, and Napoleon Bonaparte. You should have heard how the pretty girl displayed her knowledge of the country's history, and have seen the halo she gave the high-minded generator of her nation's independence—in contrast to the egoistic man whom, she said, she would call godless, if he had not proclaimed himself a god to his people and the whole world. After a number of girls had graduated and received their diplomas, their three-year course having concluded, the elderly adjudicator from the capital made a speech praising the seminary and assuring his audience that in the future he would recommend the seminary in Steubenville as a model school.

Of course, my dear friend, one realizes that the education of females is not as good everywhere as in this school, and one rarely finds such a wise, educated and angelic woman as Mrs. Beatty. (I shall always remember with gratitude how she declared herself ready to show my son Alfred the same goodwill and kindness as she had to me.) In New England the schools often have 300-400 girls and a good reputation, as do several schools in Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. Some say the girls from

these schools are too clever and conceited; that you can identify them by their posture and gait, especially the mincing steps of the Philadelphians. According to this view, their conviction that they are well educated makes these young women vain, bold, and arrogant, thus destroying that feminine charm deriving from demureness and modesty. But these observations are not to be interpreted as opposition to the education of females, but only to the deficiencies and mistakes that occur here, as indeed in all human activity. If feminine charm or benevolence is based on naturalness, simplicity, and modesty, then this naturalness must be refined, not crude, and simplicity should emerge from unity in diversity, from harmony of heart and mind, coming from modesty and other virtues.

On close examination these qualities appear no less essential for male as for female courtesy, and the lack of them equally evidence of a poor education. That the deficiency is more often associated with women than men, is to be attributed partly to the male's claim to be more competent to judge, than vice versa, and also to the scarcity of educational establishments for females, a state of affairs which under different circumstances would not exist. Her young girls, Mrs. Beatty told me, grew up cultured, though not erudite. She mentioned one of her young graduates, Miss Margery Wilson, who was neither conceited nor prim, nor arrogant. When on first acquaintance with this young lady at a party, she heard that I had a son in Pittsburgh, she ran to sit on a stool at my feet, declaring that she had always wished to get (*eriegen*) a German gentleman. She asked me to describe Alfred's appearance and personality, and finally asked if she could get him. When I replied that I had no doubt she could, since Alfred had my tastes and that she would certainly have got me, she signed the announcement of the engagement I prepared there and then, on the understanding that the marriage would take place by Whitsun. —Thus it went on to the amusement of those present.

These women are sensible, competent, and agreeable, inviting trust and goodwill, Providence having endowed them with a gentle upbringing. For example, although to undertake a walk of four or more miles to visit a friend, as German and English girls do, or to take part in a picnic in the countryside would be one of the most extraordinary experiences of their lives, they do have, on the other hand, an engaging disposition which even a north American faultfinder could not fail to respect. However, if in general the women of this hemisphere have too much freedom as children, inasmuch as they have to fend for themselves when still too young, it is the task of the educator to modify this sense of independence and teach the girls the importance of *reason*, alongside their impulses. Those women who have had the advantage of such guidance in school grow into capable, respected, and influential wives and mothers. At the same time one must concede that there are women here, whose charm is tarnished by a display of exaggerated self-confidence; but even these are respected citizens, influential wives, and certainly good enough for these North Americans, of whom it can hardly be said that it was God's purpose to give *them* loving wives!

My positive assessment of American women may be ascribed in part to those I met by chance, enhanced as their image is by the nature of their menfolk. In any case, there is no question of preferring them to German women, who are superior in

beauty, charm, and warmheartedness, and whose qualities I extol in conversation with American ladies. You will receive my next letter from New York. Farewell!

Schücking's style of writing (the *Kanzleistil*) was that of the German lawyer and administrator. It has some long sentences with encapsulated clauses which, in translation, occasionally call for resecting, but without a change of the meaning of the original.

The letters were from a man belonging to a society in which discipline in the home and elsewhere was traditionally strict. The value of his observations and impressions rests on his intelligence, education, experience, and liberal cast of mind. As a former judge he had practical knowledge of human nature and caprice. The sharp tone in his criticism of the habits of descendants of middle-class German immigrants was induced, at least in part, by embarrassment when faced with the decline in standards since the arrival of their forefathers, distinguished as they had been by their orderliness and capacity for hard work.¹⁰ However, here and there we do find hints of humor. His attention to education in the report is an indication of the interests of the man, his account of the teaching personnel, students and their performance being especially illuminating—not least of all the emphasis on the education of girls. In the first letter the proposed establishment in Washington of a federal authority for education touches a topic still controversial today, as indeed is the sensitivity of individual states to federal control, of which Schücking was well aware. He returned to his homeland after two years in this country, but his legacy proved to be the role of his two sons in the public life of the United States.

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Notes

¹ Levin Schücking (1814-83), *Der Bauernfürst* (1851), 1:42. The author was a son of Modestus Schücking, writer of the letters translated here. For information about the potato rot of the 1840s as impetus for the emigration of German peasants, cf. Mack Walker, *Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

² *Schattenrisse aus Süddeutschland* (1834), 78f.

³ *Gegen den Strom* (1851), 1:188.

⁴ Sources of the following details of his career in Westphalia are housed in the Schücking Museum, Sögel, Westphalia.

⁵ I wish to record my indebtedness to the living descendants of Modestus Schücking, especially to his great-great-granddaughter, Frau Annette Schücking-Homeyer, for providing me with the transcripts of these letters, and permission to publish them in translation. The translation is mine.

⁶ By legislative fiat the college in Bloomington became a university on 15 February 1838. At that time it did not receive generous financial support from the state. Cf. Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University*, vol. 1 (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1970), chap. 4. Schücking's reference to Indiana University President Wylie's joining the Unitarians, thereby offending the Presbyterians, is possibly connected with Wylie's involvement in interdenominational disputes among the Presbyterians, while he was president of Washington College, Pennsylvania, and ten or more years earlier than the date of this letter. Cf. Clark, op. cit., 37.

⁷ The enclosure appears not to have survived.

⁸ This is a political statement. Modestus Schücking, the writer of these letters and a man of liberal views, was a bureaucrat normally resident in Westphalia and, since the repartitioning of Germany after the Napoleonic Wars, a subject of the King of Prussia. This King Frederick William III had failed to fulfill the promise to his people of a constitution, once Napoleon was defeated. Furthermore, he soon confirmed his standing as a reactionary monarch by reversing the liberal reforms of Stein, Hardenberg, and Humboldt. It seems that Schücking's statement that the King was at that time enlightened and progressive, was made to present an image acceptable to the Prussian authorities. The fact that Frederick William III honored him for his book *Krone und Tiara* (1838) is also pertinent here. It is, moreover, highly improbable that well-informed Americans would have entertained "the greatest respect" for that autocratic monarch.

⁹ Alfred Schücking (1818-98), the third son of the writer of the letters, was born in Dülmen, Westphalia. He remained in the USA after his father returned to Germany, became an American citizen and made a career as teacher (in Jefferson College, Pennsylvania), journalist, vice-consul for the Netherlands, and advocate of the interests in the USA of Prussia and various smaller German states. He received several honors from German luminaries, including Otto von Bismarck. He also played an important part as a lobbyist in persuading Congress to institute a regular postal service between this country and Germany in 1847. Another son, Prosper Ludwig Schücking (1829-87) became an American citizen and eventually, in 1867, undersecretary in the State Department.

¹⁰ Seven years earlier the Englishwoman Frances Trollope (1780-1863; mother of Anthony Trollope) had published her book *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, which in some respects anticipated Schücking's impressions of the personal habits of people in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

