

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Swift Pushkin Alcott
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Home Life in Germany

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Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Alfred, Mrs. Sidgwick

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8472-2320-7

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HOME LIFE IN
GERMANY

BY

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The Chautauqua Press
CHAUTAUQUA, NEW YORK
MCMXII

First Published May 1908

Second Edition June 1908

Third Edition 1912

HOME LIFE IN GERMANY

CHAPTER I ToC

INTRODUCTORY

I was once greatly impressed by a story of an officer in the German army, who told his English hostess that he knew the position of every blacksmith's forge in Yorkshire. I wondered at the time how many officers in the English army had learned where to find the blacksmiths' forges in Pomerania. But those are bygone days. Most of us know more about Germany now than we do about our own country. [1] We go over there singly and in batches, we see their admirable public institutions, we visit their factories, we examine their Poor Laws, we walk their hospitals, we look on at their drill and their manœuvres, we follow each twist and turn of their politics, we watch their birth-rate, we write reams about their navy, and we can explain to any one according to our bias exactly what their system of Protection does for them. We are often sufficiently ignorant to compare them with the Japanese, and about once a month we publish a weighty book concerning various aspects of their flourishing empire.

[2] Some of these books I have read with ardent and respectful interest; and always as I read, my own little venture seemed to wither and vanish in the light of a profounder knowledge and a wider judgment than I shall ever attain. For I have not visited workhouses and factories, I know little more about German taxes than about English ones, and I have no statistics for the instruction and entertainment of the intelligent reader. I can take him inside a German home, but I can give him no information about German building

laws. I know how German women spend their days, but I know as little about the exact function of a *Bürgermeister* as about the functions of a Mayor. In short, my knowledge of Germany, like my knowledge of England, is based on a series of life-long, unclassified, more or less inchoate impressions, and the only excuse I have for writing about either country I find in my own and some other people's trivial minds.

When I read of a country unknown or only slightly known, I like to be told all the insignificant trifles that make the common round of life. It is assuredly desirable that the great movements should be watched and described for us; but we want pictures of the people in their homes, pictures of them at rest and at play, as well as engaged in those public works that make their public history. For no reason in the world I happen to be interested in China, but I am still waiting for just the gossip I want about private life there. We have Pierre Loti's exquisite dream pictures of his deserted palace at Peking, and we have many useful and expert accounts of the roads, mines, railways, factories, laws, politics, and creeds of the Celestial Empire. But the book I ask for could not be written by anyone who was not of Chinese birth, and it would probably be written by a woman. It might not have [3] much literary form or value, but it would enter into those minutiae of life that the masculine traveller either does not see or does not think worth notice. The author of such a small-beer chronicle must have been intimate from childhood with the Chinese point of view, though her home and her friends were in a foreign land. She would probably not know much about her ancestral laws and politics, but she would have known ever since she could hear and speak just what Chinese people said to each other when none but Chinese were by, what they ate, what they wore, how they governed their homes, the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, master and servant; in what way they fought the battle of life, how they feasted and how they mourned. If circumstances took her over and over again to different parts of China for long stretches of time, she would add to her traditions and her early atmosphere some experience of her race on their own soil and under their own sun. What she could tell us would be of such small importance that she would often hesitate to set it down; and again, she would hesitate lest what she had to say

should be well known already to those amongst her readers who had sojourned in her father's country. She would do well, I think, to make some picture for herself of the audience she could hope to entertain, and to fix her mind on these people while she wrote her book. She would know that in the country of her adoption there were some who never crossed their own seas, and others who travelled here and there in the world but did not visit China or know much about its people. She would write for the ignorant ones, and not for any others; and she would of necessity leave aside all great issues and all vexed questions. Her picture would be chiefly, too, a picture of the nation's women; for though they have on the whole no share [4] in political history, they reckon with the men in any history of domestic life and habit.

Germans often maintain that their country is more diverse than any other, and on that account more difficult to describe: a country of many races and various rules held loosely together by language and more tightly of late years by the bond of empire. But the truth probably is, that in our country we see and understand varieties, while in a foreign one we chiefly perceive what is unlike ourselves and common to the people we are observing. For from the flux and welter of qualities that form a modern nation certain traits survive peculiar to that nation: specialities of feature, character, and habit, some seen at first sight, others only discovered after long and intimate acquaintance. It is undoubtedly true that no one person can be at home in every corner of the German Empire, or of any other empire.

There are many Germanys. The one we hear most of in England nowadays is armed to the teeth, set wholly on material advancement, in a dangerously warlike mood, hustling us without scruple from our place in the world's markets, a model of municipal government and enterprise, a land where vice, poverty, idleness, and dirt are all unknown. We hear so much of this praiseworthy but most unamiable *Wunderkind* amongst nations, that we generally forget the Germany we know, the Germany still there for our affection and delight, the dear country of quaint fancies, of music and of poetry. That Germany has vanished, the wiseacres say, the dreamy unworldly German is no more with us, it is sheer sentimental folly to believe in him and to waste your time looking for him. But how if

you know him everywhere, in the music and poetry that he could not have given us if they had not burned within [5] him, and in the men and women who have accompanied you as friends throughout life,—how if you still find him whenever you go to Germany? Not, to be sure, in the shape of the wholly unpractical fool who preceded the modern English myth; but, for instance, in some of the mystical plays that hold his stage, in many of his toys and pictures, and above all in the kindly, lovable, clever people it is your pleasure to meet there. You may perhaps speak with all the more conviction of this attractive Germany if you have never shut your eyes and ears to the Germany that does not love us, and if you have often been vexed and offended by the Anglophobia that undoubtedly exists. This Germany makes more noise than the friendly element, and it is called into existence by a variety of causes not all important or political. It flourished long before the Transvaal War was seized as a convenient stick to beat us with. In some measure the Anglicised Germans who love us too well are responsible, for they do not always love wisely. They deny their descent and their country, and that justly offends their compatriots. I do not believe that the Englishman breathes who would ever wish to call himself anything but English; while it is quite rare for Germans in England, America, or France to take any pride in their blood. The second generation constantly denies it, changes its name, assures you it knows nothing of Germany. They have not the spirit of a Touchstone, and in so far they do their country a wrong.

In another more material sense, too, there are many Germanys, so that when you write of one corner you may easily write of ways and food and regulations that do not obtain in some other corner, and it is obviously impossible to remind the reader in every case that the part is not the whole. Wine is dear in the north, but [6] it has sometimes been so plentiful in the south that barrels to contain it ran short, and anyone who possessed an empty one could get the measure of wine it would hold in exchange. Every town and district has its special ways of cooking. There is great variety in manner of life, in entertainments, and in local law. There are Protestant and Catholic areas, and there are areas where Protestants, Catholics, and Jews live side by side. The peasant proprietor of Baden is on a higher level of prosperity and habit than the peasant serf of Eastern

Prussia; and the Jews on the Russian frontier, those strange Oriental figures in a special dress and wearing earlocks and long beards, have as little in common with the Jews of Mannheim or Frankfort as with the Jews of the London Stock Exchange. It would, in fact, be impossible for any one person to enter into every shade and variety of German life. You can only describe the side you know, and comment on the things you have seen. So you bring your mite to the store of knowledge which many have increased before you, and which many will add to again.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Throughout the book, although I am of German parentage, I have spoken of England as my country and of the English as my country-people. I was born and bred in England, and I found it more convenient for purposes of expression to belong to one country than to both.

[7]

CHAPTER II ToC

CHILDREN

In Germany the storks bring the children. "I know the pond in which all the little children lie waiting till the storks come to take them to their parents," says the mother stork in Andersen's story. "The stork has visited the house," people say to each other when a child is born; and if you go to a christening party you will find that the stork has come too: in sugar on a cake, perhaps, or to be handed round in the form of ice cream. Most of the kindly intimate little jests about babies have a stork in them, and a stranger might easily blunder by presenting an emblem of the bird where it would not be welcome. The house on which storks build is a lucky one, and people regret the disappearance of their nests from the large towns.

When the baby has come it is not allowed out of doors for weeks. Air and sunlight are considered dangerous at first, and so is soap and even an immoderate use of water. For eight weeks it lies day and night in the *Steckkissen*, a long bag that confines its legs and

body but not its arms. The bag is lined with wadding, and a German nurse, who was showing me one with great pride, assured me that while a child's bones were soft it was not safe to lift it in any other way. These bags are comparatively modern, [8] and have succeeded the swaddling clothes still used in some parts of Germany. They are bandages wrapping the child round like a mummy, and imprisoning its arms as well as its legs. A German doctor told me that as these *Wickelkinder* had never known freedom they did not miss it; but he seemed to approve of the modern compromise that leaves the upper limbs some power of movement.

Well-to-do German mothers rarely nurse their children. When you ask why, you hear of nerves and anæmia, and are told that at any rate in cities women find it impossible. I have seen it stated in a popular book about Germany that mothers there are little more than "aunts" to their children; and the *Steckkissen* and the foster-mother were about equally blamed for this unnatural state of affairs. From our point of view there is not a word to be said in favour of the *Steckkissen*, but it really is impossible to believe that a bag lined with wadding can undermine a mother's affection for her child. Your German friends will often show you a photograph of a young mother holding her baby in her arms, and the baby, if it is young enough, will probably be in its bag. But unless you look closely you will take the bag for a long robe, it hangs so softly and seems so little in the mother's way. It will be as dainty as a robe too, and when people have the means as costly; for you can deck out your bag with ribbons and laces as easily as your robe. The objection to foster-mothers has reality behind it, but the evils of the system are well understood, and have been much discussed of late. Formerly every mother who could afford it hired one for her child, and peasant women still come to town to make money in this way. But the practice is on the wane, now that doctors order sterilised milk. The real ruler of a German nursery is [9] the family doctor. He keeps his eye on an inexperienced mother, calls when he sees fit, watches the baby's weight, orders its food, and sees that its feet are kept warm.

A day nursery in the English sense of the word is hardly known in Germany. People who can afford it give up two rooms to the small fry, but where the flat system prevails, and rents are high, this is seldom possible. One room is usually known as the *Kinderstube*,

and here the children sleep and play. But it must be remembered that rooms are big, light, and high in Germany, and that such a *Kinderstube* will not be like a night nursery in a small English home. Besides, directly children can walk they are not as much shut up in the nursery as they are in England. The rooms of a German flat communicate with each other, and this in itself makes the segregation to which we are used difficult to carry out. During the first few days of a sojourn with German friends, you are constantly reminded of a pantomime rally in which people run in and out of doors on all sides of the stage; and if they have several lively children you sometimes wish for an English room with one door only, and that door kept shut. Even when you pay a call you generally see the children, and possibly the nurse or the *Mamsell* with them. But a typical middle-class German family recognises no such foreign body as a nurse. It employs one maid of all work, who helps the housewife wherever help is needed, whether it is in the kitchen or the nursery. The mother spends her time with her children, playing with them when she has leisure, cooking and ironing and saving for them, and for her husband all through her busy day. Modern Germans like to tell you that young women no longer devote themselves to these simple duties, but [10] if you use your eyes you will see that most women do their work as faithfully as ever. There is an idle, pleasure-loving, money-spending element in Germany as there is in other countries, and it makes more noise than the steady bulk of the nation, and is an attractive target there as here for the darts of popular preachers and playwrights. But it is no more preponderant in Germany than in England. On the whole, the German mother leaves her children less to servants than the English mother does, and in some way works harder for them. That is to say, a German woman will do cooking and ironing when an Englishwoman of the same class would delegate all such work to servants. This is partly because German servants are less efficient and partly because fewer servants are employed.

The fashionable nurses in Germany are either English or peasant girls in costume. It is considered smart to send out your baby with a young woman from the Spreewald if you live in Berlin, or from one of the Black Forest valleys if you live in the duchy of Baden. In some quarters of Berlin you see the elaborate skirts and caps of the

Spreewald beside every other baby-carriage, but it is said that these girls are chiefly employed by the rich Jews, and you certainly need to be as rich as a Jew to pay their laundry bills. The young children of the poor are provided for in Berlin, as they are in other cities, by crèches, where the working mother can leave them for the day. Several of these institutions are open to the public at certain times, and those I have seen were well kept and well arranged.

The women of Germany have not thrown away their knitting needles yet, though they no longer take them to the concert or the play as they did in a less sophisticated age. Children still learn to knit either at [11] school or at home, and if their mother teaches them she probably makes them a marvellous ball. She does this by winding the wool round little toys and small coins, until it hides as many surprises as a Christmas stocking, and is as much out of shape; but the child who wants the treasures in the stocking has to knit for them, and the faster she secures them the faster she is learning her lesson. The mother, however, who troubles about knitting is not quite abreast of her times. The truly modern woman flies at higher game; with the solemnity and devotion of a Mrs. Cimabue Brown she cherishes in her children a love of Art. Her watchword is *Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes*, or Art in the Nursery, and she is assisted by men who are doing for German children of this generation what Walter Crane and others did for English nurseries twenty-five years ago. You can get enchanting nursery pictures, toys, and decorations in Germany to-day, and each big city has its own school of artists who produce them: friezes where the birds and beasts beloved of children solemnly pursue each other; grotesque wooden manikins painted in motley; mysterious landscapes where the fairy-tales of the world might any day come true. Dream pictures these are of snow and moonlight, marsh and forest, the real Germany lying everywhere outside the cities for those who have eyes to see. Even the toy department in an ordinary shop abounds in treasures that never seem to reach England: queer cheap toys made of wood, and not mechanical. It must be a dull child who is content with a mechanical toy, and it is consoling to observe that most children break the mechanism as quickly as possible and then play sensibly with the remains. Many of the toys known to generations of children seemed to be as popular as ever, and quite unchanged. You

still [12] find the old toy towns, for instance, with their red roofed coloured houses and green curly trees, toys that would tell an imaginative child a story every time they were set up. It is to be hoped they never will change, but in this sense I have no faith in Germany. The nation is so desperately intent on improvement that some dreadful day it will improve its toys. Indeed, I have seen a trade circular threatening some such vandalism; and in the last Noah's ark I bought Noah and his family had changed the cut of their clothes. So the whole ark had lost some of its charm.

Everyone who is interested in children and their education, and who happens to be in Berlin, goes to see the *Pestalozzi Fröbel Haus*, the great model Kindergarten where children of the working classes are received for fees varying from sixpence to three shillings a month, according to the means of the parents. There are large halls in which the children drill and sing, and there are classrooms in which twelve to sixteen children are taught at a time. Every room has some live birds or other animals and some plants that the children are trained to tend; the walls are decorated with pictures and processions of animals, many painted and cut out by the children themselves, and every room has an impressive little rod tied with blue ribbons. But the little ones do not look as if they needed a rod much. They are cheerful, tidy little people, although many of them come from poor homes. In the middle of the morning they have a slice of rye bread, which they eat decorously at table on wooden platters. They can buy milk to drink with the bread for 5 pf., and they dine in school for 10 pf. They play the usual Kindergarten games in the usual systematised mechanical fashion, and they study Nature in a real back garden, where there are real dejected-looking cocks and hens, a real [13] cow, and a lamb. What happens to the lamb when he becomes a sheep no one tells you. Perhaps he supplies mutton to the school of cookery in connection with the Kindergarten. Some of the children have their own little gardens, in which they learn to raise small salads and hardy flowers. There are carpentering rooms for the boys, and both boys and girls are allowed in the miniature laundry, where they learn how to wash, starch, and iron doll's clothes. You may frequently see them engaged in this business, apparently without a teacher; but, as a matter of fact, the children are always under a teacher's eye, even when

they are only digging in a sand heap or weeding their plots of ground. Each child has a bath at school once a week, and at first the mothers are uneasy about this part of the programme, lest it should give their child cold. But they soon learn to approve it, and however poor they are they do their utmost to send a child to school neatly shod and clad.

As a rule German children of all classes are treated as children, and taught the elementary virtue of obedience. *Das Recht des Kindes* is a new cry with some of the new people, but nevertheless Germany is one of the few remaining civilised countries where the elders still have rights and privileges. I heard of an Englishwoman the other day who said that she had never eaten the wing of a chicken, because when she was young it was always given to the older people, and now that she was old it was saved for the children. If she lived in Germany she would still have a chance, provided she kept away from a small loud set, who in all matters of education and morality would like to turn the world upside down. In most German homes the noisy, spoilt American child would not be endured for a moment, and the little tyrant of a French family [14] would be taught its place, to the comfort and advantage of all concerned. I have dined with a large family where eight young ones of various ages sat at an overflow table, and did not disturb their elders by a sound. It was not because the elders were harsh or the young folk repressed, but because Germany teaches its youth to behave. The little girls still drop you a pretty old-fashioned curtsey when they greet you; just such a curtsey as Miss Austen's heroines must have made to their friends. The little boys, if you are staying in the house with them, come and shake hands at unexpected times, — when they arrive from school, for instance, and before they go out for a walk. At first they take you by surprise, but you soon learn to be ready for them. They play many of the same games as English children, and I need hardly say that they are brought up on the same fairy stories, because many of our favourites come from Germany. The little boys wear sensible carpenters' aprons indoors, made of leather or American cloth; and the little girls still wear bib aprons of black alpaca. Their elders do not play games with them as much as English people do with their children. They are expected to entertain and employ themselves; and the immense educational value of games, the

training they are in temper, skill, and manners, is not understood or admitted in Germany as it is here. The Kindergarten exercises are not competitive, and do not teach a child to play a losing game with effort and good grace.

[15]

CHAPTER III ToC

SCHOOLS

German children go to day schools. This is not to say that there are no boarding schools in Germany; but the prevailing system throughout the empire is a system of day schools. The German mother does not get rid of her boys and girls for months together, and look forward to the holidays as a time of uproar and enjoyment. She does not wonder anxiously what changes she will see in them when they come back to her. They are with her all the year round,—the boys till they go to a university, the girls till they marry. Any day in the streets of a German city you may see troops of children going to school, not with a maid at their heels as in Paris, but unattended as in England. They have long tin satchels in which they carry their books and lunch, the boys wear peaked caps, and many children of both sexes wear spectacles.

Except at the Kindergarten, boys and girls are educated separately and differently in Germany. In some rare cases lately some few girls have been admitted to a boys' *Gymnasium*, but this is experimental and at present unusual. It may be found that the presence of a small number in a large boys' school does not work well. In addition to the elementary schools, there are four kinds of Public Day

School for [16] boys in Germany, and they are all under State supervision. There is the *Gymnasium*, the *Real-Gymnasium*, the *Ober-Real-Schule*, and the *Real-Schule*. Until 1870 the *Gymnasiums* were the only schools that could send their scholars to the universities; a system that had serious disadvantages. It meant that in choosing a child's school, parents had to decide whether at the end of his school life he was to have a university education. Children with no aptitude for scholarship were sent to these schools to receive a scholar's training; while boys who would have done well in one of the learned professions could not be admitted to a university, except for science or modern languages, because they had not attended a *Gymnasium*.

A boy who has passed through one of these higher schools has had twelve years' education. He began Latin at the age of ten, and Greek at thirteen. He has learned some French and mathematics, but no English unless he paid for it as an extra. His school years have been chiefly a preparation for the university. If he never reaches the higher classes he leaves the *Gymnasium* with a stigma upon him, a record of failure that will hamper him in his career. The higher official posts and the professions will be closed to him; and he will be unfitted by his education for business. This at least is what many thoughtful Germans say of their classical schools; and they lament over the unsuitable boys who are sent to them because their parents want a professor or a high official in the family. It is considered more sensible to send an average boy to a *Real-Gymnasium* or to an *Ober-Real Schule*, because nowadays these schools prepare for the university, and any boy with a turn for scholarship can get the training he needs. The *Ober-Real Schule* professedly pays most attention to modern languages; [17] and it is, in fact, only since 1900 that their boys are received at a university on the classical side. They still prepare largely for technical schools and for a commercial career.

At a *Real-Schule*, the fourth grade of higher school, the course only lasts six years. They do not prepare for the *Abiturienten* examination, and their scholars cannot go from them to a university. They prepare for practical life, and they admit promising boys from the elementary schools. A boy who has been through any one of these higher schools successfully need only serve in the army for one