

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



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**The Story of My Life –Volume  
06**

Georg Ebers

# Imprint

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**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF  
GEORG EBERS**

**THE STORY OF MY LIFE FROM  
CHILDHOOD TO MANHOOD**

**Volume 6.**

Translated from the German by Mary J. Safford



## CHAPTER XXI.

### AT THE UNIVERSITY.

The weeks following my graduation were as ill suited as possible to the decision of any serious question.

After a gay journey through Bohemia which ended in venerable Prague, I divided my time between Hosterwitz, Blasewitz, and Dresden. In the latter city I met among other persons, principally old friends, the son of my uncle Brandenstein, an Austrian lieutenant on leave of absence. I spent many a pleasant evening with him and his comrades, who were also on leave. These young gentlemen considered the Italians, against whom they fought, as rebels, while a cousin of my uncle, then Colonel von Brandenstein, but afterwards promoted in the Franco-Austrian war in 1859 and 1866 to the rank of master of ordnance, held a totally different opinion. This clever, warmhearted soldier understood the Italians and their struggle for unity and freedom, and judged them so justly and therefore favorably, that he often aroused the courteous opposition of his younger comrades. I did not neglect old friends, however, and when I did not go to the theatre in the evening I ended the day with my aunt at Blasewitz. But, on my mother's account, I was never long absent from Hosterwitz. I enjoyed being with her so much. We drove and walked together, and discussed everything the past had brought and the future promised.

Yet I longed for academic freedom, and especially to sit at the feet of an Ernst Curtius, and be initiated by Waitz into the methodical study of history.

The evening before my departure my mother drove with me to Blasewitz, where there was an elegant entertainment at which the lyric poet Julius Hammer, the author of "Look Around You and Look Within You," who was to become a dear friend of mine, extolled in enthusiastic verse the delights of student liberty and the noble sisters Learning and Poesy.

The glowing words echoed in my heart and mind after I had torn myself from the arms of my mother and of the woman who, next to

her, was dearest to me on earth, my aunt, and was travelling toward my goal. If ever the feeling that I was born to good fortune took possession of me, it was during that journey.

I did not know what weariness meant, and when, on reaching Gottingen, I learned that the students' coffee-house was still closed and that no one would arrive for three or four days, I went to Cassel to visit the royal garden in Wilhelmshohe.

At the station I saw a gentleman who looked intently at me. His face, too, seemed familiar. I mentioned my name, and the next instant he had embraced and kissed me. Two Keilhau friends had met, and, with sunshine alike in our hearts and in the blue sky, we set off together to see everything of note in beautiful Cassel.

When it was time to part, Von Born told me so eagerly how many of our old school-mates were now living in Westphalia, and how delightful it would be to see them, that I yielded and went with him to the birthplace of Barop and Middendorf. The hours flew like one long revel, and my exuberant spirits made my old school-mates, who, engaged in business enterprises, were beginning to look life solemnly in the face, feel as if the carefree Keilhau days had returned. On going back to Gottingen, I still had to wait a few days for the real commencement of the term, but I was received at the station by the "Saxons," donned the blue cap, and engaged pleasant lodgings—though the least adapted to serious study in the "Schonhutte," a house in Weenderstrasse whose second story was occupied by our corps room.

My expectations of the life with young men of congenial tastes were completely fulfilled. Most of them belonged to the nobility, but the beloved "blue, white, and blue" removed all distinctions of birth.

By far the most talented of its members was Count (now Prince) Otto von Stolberg-Wernegerode, who was afterwards to hold so high a position in the service of the Prussian Government.

Among the other scions of royal families were the hereditary Prince Louis of Hesse-Darmstadt and his brother Henry. Both were vivacious, agreeable young men, who entered eagerly into all the enjoyments of student and corps life. The older brother, who died as

Grand Duke, continued his friendship for me while sovereign of his country. I was afterwards indebted to him for the pleasure of making the acquaintance of his wife Alice, one of the most remarkable women whom I have ever met.—[Princess Alice of England, the daughter of Queen Victoria.-TR.]

Oh, what delightful hours we spent in the corps room, singing and revelling, in excursions through the beautiful scenes in the neighbourhood, and on the fencing ground, testing our strength and skill, man to man! Every morning we woke to fresh pleasures, and every evening closed a spring festal day, radiant with the sunlight of liberty and the magic of friendship.

Our dinner was eaten together at the "Krone" with the most jovial of hosts, old Betmann, whose card bore the pictures of a bed and a man. Then came coffee, drunk at the museum or at some restaurant outside of the city, riding, or a duel, or there was some excursion, or the entertainment of a fellow-student from some other university, and finally the tavern.

Many an evening also found me with some friends at the Schuttenhof, where the young Philistines danced with the little burgher girls and pretty dressmakers. They were all, however, of unsullied reputation, and how merrily I swung them around till the music ceased! These innocent amusements could scarcely have injured my robust frame, yet when some unusual misfortune happens it is a trait of human nature to seek its first germ in the past. I, too, scanned the period immediately preceding my illness, but reached the conclusion that it was due to acute colds, the first of which ran into a very violent fever.

Had the result been otherwise I certainly should not have permitted my sons to enjoy to the utmost the happy period which in my case was too soon interrupted.

True, the hours of the night which I devoted to study could scarcely have been beneficial to my nervous system; for when, with burning head and full of excitement, I returned from the tavern which was closed, by rule, at eleven—from the "Schuttenhof," or some ball or entertainment, I never went to rest; that was the time I gave the intellect its due. Legal studies were pursued during the hours of the night only at the commencement of my stay in Göttingen.

gen, for I rarely attended the lectures for which I had entered my name, though the brevity of the Roman definitions of law, with which Ribbentropp's lectures had made me familiar, afforded me much pleasure. Unfortunately, I could not attend the lectures of Ernst Curtius, who had just been summoned to Gottingen, on account of the hours at which they were given. My wish to join Waitz's classes was also unfulfilled, but I went to those of the philosopher Lotze, and they opened a new world to me. I was also one of the most eager of Professor Unger's hearers.

Probably his "History of Art" would have attracted me for its own sake, but I must confess that at first his charming little daughter was the sole magnet which drew me to his lectures; for on account of displaying the pictures he delivered them at his own house.

Unfortunately, I rarely met the fair Julie, but, to make amends, I found through her father the way to that province of investigation to which my after-life was to be devoted.

In several lessons he discussed subtly and vividly the art of the Egyptians, mentioning Champollion's deciphering of the hieroglyphics.

This great intellectual achievement awakened my deepest interest. I went at once to the library, and Unger selected the books which seemed best adapted to give me further instruction.

I returned with Champollion's *Grammaire Hieroglyphique*, Lepsius's *Lettre a Rosellini*, and unfortunately with some misleading writings by Seyffarth.

How often afterward, returning in the evening from some entertainment,  
I have buried myself in the grammar and tried to write hieroglyphics.

True, I strove still more frequently and persistently to follow the philosopher Lotze.

Obedient to a powerful instinct, my untrained intellect had sought to read the souls of men. Now I learned through Lotze to

recognize the body as the instrument to which the emotions of the soul, the harmonies and discords of the mental and emotional life, owe their origin.

I intended later to devote myself earnestly to the study of physiology, for without it Lotze could be but half understood; and from physiologists emanated the conflict which at that time so deeply stirred the learned world.

In Göttingen especially the air seemed, as it were, filled with physiological and other questions of the natural sciences.

In that time of the most sorrowful reaction the political condition of Germany was so wretched that any discussion concerning it was gladly avoided. I do not remember having attended a single debate on that topic in the circles of the students with which I was nearly connected.

But the great question "Materialism or Antimaterialism" still agitated the Georgia Augusta, in whose province the conflict had assumed still sharper forms, owing to Rudolf Wagner's speech during the convention of the Göttingen naturalists three years prior to my entrance.

Carl Vogt's "Science and Bigotry" exerted a powerful influence, owing to the sarcastic tone in which the author attacked his calmer adversary. In the honest conviction of profound knowledge, the clever, vigorous champion of materialism endeavoured to brand the opponents of his dogmas with the stigma of absurdity, and those who flattered themselves with the belief that they belonged to the ranks of the "strong-minded" followed his standard.

Hegel's influence was broken, Schelling's idealism had been thrust aside. The solid, easily accessible fare of the materialists was especially relished by those educated in the natural sciences, and Vogt's maxim, that thought stands in a similar relation to the brain as the gall to the liver and the excretions of the other organs, met with the greater approval the more confidently and wittily it was promulgated. The philosopher could not help asserting that the nature of the soul could be disclosed neither by the scalpel nor the microscope; yet the discoveries of the naturalist, which had led to the perception of the relation existing between the psychical and

material life seemed to give the most honest, among whom Carl Vogt held the first rank; a right to uphold their dogmas.

Materialism versus Antimaterialism was the subject under discussion in the learned circles of Germany. Nay, I remember scarcely any other powerful wave of the intellect visible during this period of stagnation.

Philosophy could not fail to be filled with pity and disapproval to see the independent existence of the soul, as it were, authoritatively reaffirmed by a purely empirical science, and also brought into the field all the defensive forces at her command. But throngs flocked to the camp of Materialism, for the trumpets of her leaders had a clearer, more confident sound than the lower and less readily understood opposing cries of the philosophers.

Vogt's wrath was directed with special keenness against my teacher, Lotze. These topics were rarely discussed at the tavern or among the members of the corps. I first heard them made the subject of an animated exchange of thought in the Dirichlet household, where Professor Baum emerged from his aristocratic composure to denounce vehemently materialism and its apostles. Of course I endeavoured to gain information about things which so strongly moved intellectual men, and read in addition to Lotze's books the polemical writings which were at that time in everybody's hands.

Vogt's caustic style charmed me, but it was not due solely to the religious convictions which I had brought from my home and from Keilhau that I perceived that here a sharp sword was swung by a strong arm to cut water. The wounds it dealt would not bleed, for they were inflicted upon a body against which it had as little power as Satan against the cross.

When, before I became acquainted with Feuerbach, I flung my books aside, wearied or angered, I often seized in the middle of the night my monster Poem of the World, my tragedy of Panthea and Abradatus, or some other poetical work, and did not retire till the wick of the lamp burned out at three in the morning.

When I think how much time and earnest labour were lavished on that poem,

I regret having yielded to the hasty impulse to destroy it.

I have never since ventured to undertake anything on so grand a scale. I could repeat only a few lines of the verses it contained; but the plan of the whole work, as I rounded it in Gottingen and Hosterwitz, I remember perfectly, and I think, if only for the sake of its peculiarity and as the mirror of a portion of my intellectual life at that time, its main outlines deserve reproduction here.

I made Power and Matter, which I imagined as a formless element; the basis of all existence. These two had been cast forth by the divine Ruler of a world incomprehensible to human intelligence, in which the present is a moment, space a bubble, as out of harmony with the mighty conditions and purposes of his realm. But this supreme Ruler offered to create for them a world suited to their lower plane of existence. Power I imagined a man, Matter a woman. They were hostile to each other, for he despised his quiet, inert companion, she feared her restless, unyielding partner; yet the power of the ruler of the higher world forced them to wed.

From their loveless union sprang the earth, the stars-in short, all inorganic life.

When the latter showed its relation to the father, Power, by the impetuous rush of the stars through space, by terrible eruptions, etc., the mother, Matter, was alarmed, and as, to soothe them, she drew into her embrace the flaming spheres, which dashed each other to pieces in their mad career, and restrained the fiercest, her chill heart was warmed by her children's fire.

Thus, as it were, raised to a higher condition, she longed for less unruly children, and her husband, Power, who, though he would have gladly cast her off, was bound to her by a thousand ties, took pity upon her, because her listlessness and coldness were transformed to warmth and motion, and another child sprang from their union, love.

But she seemed to have been born to misery, and wandered mournfully about, weeping and lamenting because she lacked an object for which to labour. True, she drew from the flaming, smoking bodies which she kissed a soft, beneficent light, she induced

some to give up their former impetuosity and respect the course of others, and plants and trees sprang from the earth where her lips touched it, yet her longing to receive something which would be in harmony with her own nature remained unsatisfied.

But she was a lovely child and the darling of her father, whom, by her entreaties, she persuaded to animate with his own nature the shapes which she created in sport, those of the animals.

From this time there were living creatures moved by Power and Love. But again they brought trouble to the mother; for they were stirred by fierce passions, under whose influence they attacked and rent each other. But Love did not cease to form new shapes until she attained the most beautiful, the human form.

Yet human beings were stirred by the same feelings as the animals, and Love's longing for something in which she could find comfort remained unsatisfied, till, repelled by her savage father and her listless mother, she flung herself in despair from a rock. But being immortal, she did not perish.

Her blood sprinkled the earth, and from her wounds exhaled an exquisite fragrance, which rose higher and higher till it reached the realm whence came her parents; and its supreme ruler took pity on the exile's child, and from the blood of Love grew at his sign a lily, from which arose, radiant in white garments, Intellect, which the Most High had breathed into the flower.

He came from that higher world to ours, but only a vague memory of his former home was permitted, lest he should compare his present abode with the old one and scorn it.

As soon as he met Love he was attracted towards her, and she ardently accepted his suit; yet the first embrace chilled her, and her fervour startled and repelled him. So, each fearing the other's tenderness, they shunned each other, though an invincible charm constantly drew them together.

Love continued to yearn for him even after she had sundered the bond; but he often yielded to the longing for his higher home, of whose splendours he retained a memory, and soared upward. Yet whenever he drew near he was driven back to the other.

There he directed sometimes with Love, sometimes alone, the life of everything in the universe, or in unison with her animated men with his breath.

He did this sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly, with greater or less strength, according to the nearness he had attained to his heavenly home; but when he had succeeded in reaching its circle of light, he returned wonderfully invigorated. Then whoever Love and he joined in animating with their breath became an artist.

There was also a thoroughly comic figure and one with many humorous touches. Intellect's page, Instinct, who had risen from the lily with him, was a comical fellow. When he tried to follow his master's flight he fell after the first few strokes of his wings, and usually among nettles. Only when some base advantage was to be gained on earth did this servant succeed better than his master. The mother, Matter, whom for the sake of the verse I called by her Greek name Hyle, was also invested with a shade of comedy as a dissatisfied wife and the mother-in-law of Intellect.

In regard to the whole Poem of the World I will observe that, up to the time I finished the last line, I had never studied the kindred systems of the Neo-Platonics or the Gnostics.

The verses which described the moment when Matter drew her fiery children to her heart and thus warmed it, another passage in which men who were destitute of intellect sought to destroy themselves and Love resolved to sacrifice her own life, and, lastly, the song where Intellect rises from the lily, besides many others, were worthy, in my opinion, of being preserved.

What first diverted my attention from the work was, as has been mentioned, the study of Feuerbach, to which I had been induced by a letter from the geographer Karl Andree. I eagerly seized his books, first choosing his "Axioms of the Philosophy of the Future," and afterwards devoured everything he had written which the library contained. And at that time I was grateful to my friend the geographer for his advice. True, Feuerbach seemed to me to shatter many things which from a child I had held sacred; yet I thought I discovered behind the falling masonry the image of eternal truth.

The veil which I afterwards saw spread over so many things in Feuerbach's writings at that time produced the same influence upon me as the mist whence rise here the towers, yonder the battlements of a castle. It might be large or small; the grey mist which forbids the eye from definitely measuring its height and width by no means prevents the traveller, who knows that a powerful lord possesses the citadel, from believing it to be as large and well guarded as the power of its ruler would imply.

True, I was not sufficiently mature for the study of this great thinker, whom I afterwards saw endanger other unripe minds. As a disciple of this master there were many things to be destroyed which from childhood had become interlaced by a thousand roots and fibres with my whole intellectual organism, and such operations are not effected without pain.

What I learned while seeking after truth during those night hours ought to have taught me the connection between mind and body; yet I was never farther from perceiving it. A sharp division had taken place in my nature. By night, in arduous conflict, I led a strange mental life, known to myself alone; by day all this was forgotten, unless—and how rarely this happened—some conversation recalled it.

From my first step out of doors I belonged to life, to the corps, to pleasure. What was individual existence, mortality, or the eternal life of the soul! Minerva's bird is an owl. Like it, these learned questions belonged to the night. They should cast no shadow on the brightness of my day. When I met the first friend in the blue cap no one need have sung our corps song, "Away with cares and crotchets!"

At no time had the exuberant joy in mere existence stirred more strongly within me. My whole nature was filled with the longing to utilize and enjoy this brief earthly life which Feuerbach had proved was to end with death.

Better an hour's mad revel,  
E'en a kiss from a Moenad's lip,  
Than a year of timid doubting,  
Daring only to taste and sip,

were the closing lines of a song which I composed at this time.

So my old wantonness unfolded its wings, but it was not to remain always unpunished.

My mother had gone to Holland with Paula just before Advent, and as I could not spend my next vacation at home, she promised to furnish me with means to take a trip through the great German Hanse cities.

In Bremen I was most cordially received in the family of Mohr, a member of my corps, in whose circle I spent some delightful hours, and also an evening never to be forgotten in the famous old Rathskeller.

But I wished to see the harbour of the great commercial city, and the ships which ploughed the ocean to those distant lands for which I had often longed.

Since I had shot my first hare in Komptendorf and brought down my first partridge from the air, the love of sport had never slumbered; I gratified it whenever I could, and intended to take a boat from Bremerhaven and go as near as possible to the sea, where I could shoot the cormorants and the bald-headed eagles which hunters on the seashore class among the most precious booty.

In Bremerhaven an architect whose acquaintance I had made on the way became my cicerone, and showed me all the sights of the small but very quaint port. I had expected to find the bustle on shore greater, but what a throng of ships and boats, masts and smoke-stacks I saw!

My guide showed me the last lighthouse which had been built, and took me on board of a mail steamer which was about to sail to America.

I was deeply interested in all this, but my companion promised to show me things still more remarkable if I would give up my shooting excursion.

Unfortunately, I insisted upon my plan, and the next morning sailed in a pouring rain through a dense mist to the mouth of the Weser and out to sea. But, instead of pleasure and booty, I gained

on this expedition nothing but discomfort and drenching, which resulted in a violent cold.

What I witnessed and experienced in my journey back to Cuttingen is scarcely worth mentioning. The only enjoyable hours were spent at the theatre in Hanover, where I saw Niemann in *Templar* and *Jewess*, and for the first time witnessed the thoroughly studied yet perfectly natural impersonations of Marie Seebach. I also remember with much pleasure the royal riding-school in charge of General Meyer. Never have I seen the strength of noble chargers controlled and guided with so much firmness, ease, and grace as by the hand of this officer, the best horseman in Germany.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE SHIPWRECK

The state of health in which, still with a slight fever recurring every afternoon, I returned to Gottingen was by no means cheering.

Besides, I was obliged at once to undergo the five days' imprisonment to which I had been justly sentenced for reckless shooting across the street.

During the day I read, besides some very trashy novels, several by Jean Paul, with most of which I had become familiar while a school-boy in the first class.

They had given me so much pleasure that I was vexed with the indifference with which some of my friends laid the works of the great humorist aside.

There were rarely any conversations on the more serious scientific subjects among the members of the corps, though it did not lack talented young men, and some of the older ones were industrious.

Nothing, perhaps, lends the life of the corps a greater charm than the affectionate intercourse which unites individuals.

I was always sure of finding sympathizers for everything that touched my feelings.

With regard to the results of my nocturnal labour the case was very different. If any one else had "bored" me at the tavern about his views of Feuerbach and Lotze, I should undoubtedly have stopped him with Goethe's "Ergo bibamus."

There was one person in Gottingen, however, Herbert Pernice, from whom I might expect full sympathy. Though only five years my senior, he was already enrolled among the teachers of the legal faculty. The vigour and keenness of his intellect and the extent of his knowledge were as amazing as his corpulence.

One evening I had met him at the Krone and left the table at which he presided in a very enthusiastic state of mind; for while emptying I know not how many bottles of Rhine wine he directed the conversation apparently unconsciously.

Each of his statements seemed to strike the nail on the head.

The next day, to my great delight, I met him again at Professor Baum's. He had retreated from the ladies, whom he always avoided, and as we were alone in the room I soon succeeded in turning the conversation upon Feuerbach, for I fairly longed to have another person's opinion of him. Besides, I was certain of hearing the philosopher criticised by the conservative antimaterialistic Pernice in an original manner—that is, if he knew him at all. True, I might have spared myself the doubt; for into what domain of humanistic knowledge had not this highly talented man entered!

Feuerbach was thoroughly familiar to him, but he condemned his philosophy with pitiless severity, and opposed with keen wit and sharp dialectics his reasons for denying the immortality of the soul, inveighing especially against the phrase and idea "philosophy of religion" as an absurdity which genuine philosophy ought not to permit because it dealt only with thought, while religion concerned faith, whose seat is not in the head, the sacred fount of all philosophy, but the heart, the warm abode of religion and faith. Then he advised me to read Bacon, study Kant, Plato, and the other ancient philosophers—Lotze, too, if I desired—and when I had them all by heart, take up the lesser lights, and even then be in no hurry to read Feuerbach and his wild theology.

I met and conversed with him again whenever I could, and he availed himself of the confidence he inspired to arouse my enthusiasm for the study of jurisprudence. So I am indebted to Pernice for many benefits. In one respect only my reverence for him entailed a certain peril.

He knew what I was doing, but instead of warning me of the danger which threatened me from toiling at night after such exciting days, he approved my course and described episodes of his own periods of study.