

Rural life in our country

Taken from the manuscript of a nobleman from Lusatia

First volume

Author's introduction

I am a Westphalian, a regular Westphalian, specifically a man of the Muensterland, thanks be to God! I add and think well enough of every stranger, whoever he may be, to credit him with, like me, not wanting to exchange with any other being on earth the ground 'on which his living folk walk and in which his dead are resting', although since steam has been doing its best for about two decades to blow the native into a cosmopolite, fear of seeming to be limited and rusty has made it almost a fashion to uncover with a hand as unsparing as possible the weaknesses of the *alma mater* that one otherwise called Fatherland and soon will designate as one's fortuitous place of birth, thereby giving such shining proof of versatility – it is well known that is infinitely more dreary to be counted as absurd than as wicked – may the civilised world then take cheer, for its progress to the all-levelling unabashed manner of itinerant players, scissor grinders and unemployed musicians is quick and incontrovertible. However, hereditary defects are always hard to eradicate and I think that I have noticed that as soon as one goes robustly into detail on the modes of expression of these grandiose non-party beings and also presses the right latch here and there, they just smile as happily as a farmer with toothache.

God make it better, say I, and leave whatever interpretation to everyone. As far as I am concerned, I am, as already said, a human being *nullius in loco*, namely a man of Muensterland, otherwise a scion of good family, have studied in Bonn, in Heidelberg, also looked out from the Rigi mountain on a holiday journey and found the world not only vast but, what is more, exceedingly beautiful. Indeed a wonderfully precious moment and, for a poor student who for every silver dollar that he had put aside for this purpose had had to forego any other enjoyment, a deep, almost sacredly moving moment. Nevertheless, nothing compared to the first rustling of heather beneath the carriage wheels, nothing compared to the frolicsome crowding in of the first cloud of pollen that the first hazel hedge wafted into our carriage, after three long years spent abroad. This being so, I leaned right out of the carriage window and let myself be powdered yellow, like a Roman from the time of Augustus and, thus enraptured, breathed in the stifling kisses of my homeland. Then came my clear, quiet ponds with the yellow water lilies, my swarms of dragonflies which attach themselves everywhere like little gleaming cones, my blue, gold, striped butterflies that performed a fluttering minuet at every hoof-beat. How gladly would I have alighted and trotted alongside for a little while, but it seemed to me that I would have to feel ashamed in front of the people in the fast carriage and, above all, a pale, gaunt gentleman made me concerned, who looked just like a man of genius travelling in the pursuit of knowledge of human nature, for I am a child of honest people and do not want to figure as a sensitive moorland sheep in some journal. I shall, therefore, break off here and say only that I am again at home in our country after twelve years and earn my daily bread as bailiff to my good, benevolent master – who would not like to annoy one swallow on his roof, much less overburden his people – such that I can indeed quite easily manage my work. I have gained my healthy appearance, especially in the last five years since I have been living in the upper room in the tower, which is the healthiest in the house and offers me all sorts of little delights, such as

fishing out of the window and shooting herons away from the château pond.

The newspapers are also brought to me when the master has read them, and books from the lending library. Thus is my surplus time quite comfortably taken up and I remain adequately in touch with the political and literary outside world. I felt very strange as I unexpectedly encountered my dear little country in van der Velde's novel about ten years ago. It was almost as if I were become a lion and could from then on no longer go out in my ordinary coat. In recent years I have meanwhile hardened myself against it, since we Westphalians swarm around in literature like ants. I do not want to say anything against these writings, since I know all too well what would happen to me if, for example, I were to put a Russian or Kalmuck in the limelight. But this much is certain; that in the figures strolling through our streets, I have recognised no more than local people. At the same time it reminded me of how, in my grammar school years, I was staying with a quiet, decent family where every evening Walter Scott's novels were taken up one after the other. My host was a forester, his brother a military man and his wife's brother, who arrived punctually at seven with a long pipe and a strong aroma of ointment, a surgeon. My God, how we delighted ourselves with the Scotsman, but only I entirely purely because I had but a barely superficial knowledge of everything that he dealt with, the others, by contrast, found it all unsurpassable down to the dreadful howlers in each one's own subject and were often at loggerheads, such that they snuffed out the light in their zeal and smoke and fear took away my breath, for my hero lay meanwhile sorely wounded on the ground and it seemed to me that he would bleed to death, or he was hanging over a horrible abyss and it seemed to me that I saw one small stone after another crumbling away under his feet. From that I came to the conclusion, not at the time, but subsequently, that one occasionally has to accept a crow as a carrion crow, both out of fairness and not to take it too seriously with people, good fathers to their families, who, perhaps out of necessity, have concerned themselves with matters for the penetration of which the opportunity has not been given to them. Nevertheless, it seemed to me as often as I read, as though everything killed were calling for help and demanding its life of me. Since then I had no less peace from that which exists than from that which is gone for ever. Old misty memories out of my earliest years surfaced, glided across the accounts by day and came back at night in living embodiment, that I thought were no longer sheltered in my memory. I was once again a child and kneeling, curious and rapt, while the procession passed before me; the church flags, the broad banner of the religious guild. I saw clearly the embellishments of the reliquary forgotten these thirty years. Also the religious whom I had for so long known as old and shrivelled that it seemed to me that they could never have been young and independent. So dignified and demure in the white habit of their Order, they trod behind the good Reverend Father as behoves Christian worthies. Strangely enough in these dreams, all a child's limitedness and awe also overcame me again; I was somewhat less afraid of the Capuchins' beards; took only hesitantly yet eagerly the saint's image that they, with resolute nodding, sought out from their sleeves; looked bewildered behind me when my footsteps echoed in the cloisters and listened open mouthed to the prebendaries' monotonous responses which seemed to drone out of the closed chancel like an effect without cause. If I woke up then, I felt poor and depressed like one robbed, that all this and also so much other which is true of this country, which is so rich and truly lives, shall, from now on, have no existence, other than in the memory of a few ageing persons who, one by one, drop off like the foliage from the tree until the cold draughty wind of events also finds not one further leaf to blow away. Dreaming makes one foolish, it is said; it has made me

foolish enough (let me admit it and why not – to err is not a mischief and *non omnia possumus omnes*). One fine day, where weak sunshine gave me courage enough, I determinedly cut a dozen quills, took myself, so to say, by the scruff of the neck and thought: "Write down what you know, be it only for the master's children, Carl and little Clara". Rather half a loaf than none. Make a start, I then did, but if I were to say that it was good, then I would have made a fool of myself. As long as I was writing, it appeared passable and I occasionally had nice inspirations and, methought, quite poetic thoughts, but when I imagined it before the eyes of others or even printed, then it shot through me to the core, as if I were no genius at all although born, so to speak, with a pen behind my ear, yet doubtless only to keep registers and write out bills. I have not felt so ashamed in all my life, than when I then – as this happened a couple of times – overheard the mealtime bell and the servant surprised me, who, praise God, cannot read the written word. All eyes were upon me; I subsequently swallowed down my soup like a heron and I felt as though everybody was pointing the finger at me, who for all that, knew nothing of my secretiveness, except the two children. Upon my honour! It must be a frightened métier, that of a writer and I would not wish it upon a dog. I am therefore heartily glad that I have found this manuscript which contains everything and far more than I would have known to say and besides that, in a nice style that would have been difficult for me to achieve. The copy book lay in the archives under the stock book and I had pushed it in and out a hundred times or more without noticing it, but that day – it will be three weeks ago tomorrow – it rattled down to the floor after a bundle of papers and happy curiosity drove me to look inside. The writer is a nobleman from Lusatia, a cousin of a respected family extinguished twenty years ago, whose estates fell to him; the main estate as one held in freehold through inheritance, as the master's mother was a daughter of that house, the lesser possessions through purchase, from the brother of this Lusatian at the time of the repeal of feudal law by Napoleon. How the manuscript came to be here I do not know and the master, to whom I showed it also knew nothing about it. Perhaps my predecessor in office, who is supposed to have been of an alert, inquisitive mind, brought it with him from one of his tours of inspection. Two yellowed letters were enclosed, from which it appears that that nobleman had had to depart unexpectedly because his brother had fallen very sick with a nervous fever, that he, too, having arrived in the homeland, took sick and died caring for him. While the other was recovering, he may well have forgotten his manuscript in his fear and haste; he seems to have been a lively and well-meaning man, reasonable enough for a foreigner with the so rare talent for fully taking on an alien nationality, admittedly only half foreign, for Westphalian blood still passes through into the hundredth generation and I would regret that he had to die so early, if I did not consider that he could hardly still be alive now. Fifty-six years are a long time when one was already in the thirties beforehand. The respected and devout family with whom he spent that one summer, also had, one might say, to die out untimely; first the old master who caught cold while botanising and though he looked so smooth and well kept for his years, proved to be very weak, for he dwindled away from the slight cold like a puff of air. Then the young Herr Everwin whom they sent on travels until his majority and who met a sad end in Vienna in a duel over a perceived insult that the friendly nature of the young man did not intend. Miss Sophie died soon after them; she had never been really healthy and these two shocks were too hard for her. My master's mother had to pay with her life for the birth of her child. But who survived them all was the grandmother who, after the loss of her family members, moved here and took heart again, with great flexibility, in the upbringing of her grandson. I knew her as a woman as old as the hills, but lively, vigorous and in possession of all her mental powers up to the last breath. One could

almost have thought she would never die and yet at the end it was a slight stomach malady that took her away. Her memory is kept in honour and prayer and the benevolent master is always quiet and contemplative on the anniversary of her death. As I gave him the manuscript he was very moved and I did not believe that he would consent to its publication. After it had lain on his bedside table for fourteen days and he had spoken no word of it to me, he gave it back to me last Saturday, the 29th May with the rider, “written by a Westphalian it would be less significant; from the mouth of a stranger it is a manifest and intense witness which must not be suppressed in the family archive” – so be it then! And I am giving it to the public for pleasure or disapproval. It is not a novel, it is our country, our belief and whatever praise or criticism affects this, what the living have to bear, may that also come out of these dead pages.

First Chapter

The nobleman from Lusatia and the country of his ancestors

The château clock has just struck half past nine – it is not yet properly night – a narrow strip of clear sky hangs in the West and occasionally a bird in the bushes over there starts up out of its half-sleep and dreams anew half cadenzas of its song. However, here it is almost night; they have brought me a nice new candle, laid wood against the chimney breast, enough to roast an ox, and I am now to get between the sheets without more ado. Impossible; I make myself independent, secretly but the more surely, and nobody can tell of a morning that I play the silent benefactor of the house by night. True, not watching out for water or fire, but would still take care, if such things were not harmless in this country, as I surely must conclude, when every evening I see servant and maid rummaging about with flickering lamps in haylofts and stalls. These old walls which appear to be carrying at least their three centuries on their backs! Strange, slumbering country! Such gentle elements! Such a quietly sighing local wind, such dreaming waters! Such little peaceful thunderstorms without echo! And such quiet little blond people who never curse, seldom sing or whistle, but whose mouths form a cosy smile when, in the middle of work, they study the clouds every five minutes, smoke out of their short stemmed pipes towards Heaven with which they feel themselves on the best of terms. A quarter of an hour ago I heard the drawbridge creaking up. A sign that everything is down and dead and the house is, from now on, standing under the protection of God and the wide château pond which, by the by, has only knee-deep fords at a few places; however that does not matter, it is smooth water that covers it and one could not wade through it without becoming significantly wet: protection enough against thieves and ghosts! The night is becoming very starry. I can see innumerable milky points gradually brightening. Three gundogs and two Dachshunds are camping on the bare floor under my window and snapping at gnats that the decreed night does not yet want to let pass. From the stalls the soft mooing of a sleepy cow drones occasionally, or the stamp of a horse’s hoof, that is fighting the flies. The only nightlight burns in the room of my dear cousin out of Noah’s Ark. What is an honest Lusatian to do, who is used to starting his last hand at piquet at eleven? Around me are the library’s treasures: Hochberg’s noble *Rural Life*, Kerssenbrok’s *History of the Baptists*, Werner Rolewink’s *De moribus Westphalorum* and my host’s *Liber mirabilis* that cannot be too highly praised. But I feel like the Israelites who, fed with plain manna, yearned for the fleshpots of Egypt. Oh *Dresdener Staatszeitung*, oh, *Frankfurter Postreiter*, you who have sometimes rocked me to sleep, when shall I set eyes upon you again? Can the herrings and haddock of the *Münsterische Intelligenzblatt* take the place of my political dried cod? But why do I not write, or rather, why

have I not written for all these two months? Am I not in the land of my forbears? The country that my ancestor Hans Everwin left with such a heavy heart and of which he sings the praises in perfect monastic Latin, as a nightingale with a wig? *O angulus ridens! O prata fontesque susurro, etc. etc.* I know how glad I shall be to read these pages once when this strange intermezzo of my life lies far behind me; perhaps more than I yet think, for it sometimes seems to me as though that Westphalian blood, twenty times diluted, still wants to prevail within me. God preserve us! I am a genuine Lusatian – *vive la Lusace!* And now! It cost effort before I reached this fireside. I have ploughed through bad, bad paths and withstood dangers on land and water. The carriage broke down thrice and once I stood on my head, which is neither pleasant nor picturesque. Riding in a *Spitzgespann* (that is what they call a three-horse carriage here) of long haired farm horses, I have grubbed my way through the sand and all at once seen the front runner sink in a so called wave, a treacherous shifting breed of springs that I have otherwise encountered nowhere else and which is part and parcel of many a wagon road, and which keeps quiet the whole year, only to catch out some good Muenster soul in Spring as a punishment for sins that it had not committed. I jumped out of the carriage like an arrow, for – my goodness! – I was so confused that I thought of the North Sea and washing away. Of one of my little horses, only a bit of its nose and the ears were visible, with which it was twitching pitiably. Fortunately some peasants were nearby, who were cutting peat and took hold handily enough. “Hey! Johnny! Up, up!” Johnny could not get up and was struggling himself ever more deeply in. In the end they forked him out and he pulled away, downcast and dripping wretchedly, like the Philistine who was badly soaked for his serenade. For the time being, I found the ground beneath my feet safer and trudged alongside the through the damp heather, always thinking about our grandfather and his Horatian *o angulus ridens!* and what there was here to laugh about – the sand? the muddy horse? or my coachman in his bespattered smock, who was whistling the *Ave Maria* enough to make the moorland sheep melancholy? or, to top it off, I who was stalking from one molehill to another like a stork? Indeed, it was I who finally climbed laughing into the carriage, overjoyed to have fled, in the smallest seed, this blissful Arabia centuries ago – which at that moment seemed to differ from the classical by nothing more than the lack of shrubs and superfluity of puddles. Oh God, thought I, what might the hall of thy ancestors be like, thou good Everwin! A further half day’s journey and the region gradually cleared up. The heaths became smaller, flower laden and almost fresh and started to look almost idyllic with their herds of noticeably piebald cattle and dwellings scattered beneath groups of trees. Left and right, woods and as far as I could make out, fresh, healthy foliage, but earthen embankments as high as a man met the eye everywhere, which, overshadowed by bushes and shrubs, narrowed every roadway inevitably – for what purpose? Probably in order to preserve the mud that much longer. I questioned my coachman, a much-travelled man who had even seen Duesseldorf once and understood at least every third word of mine. “Oh, sir,” said he, “what sort of roguish roadways would we have if we had no embankment hedges”? Long live Westphalia, I thought. We ploughed ahead. Yelping dogs barked at us from all the houses, that I always heard called “Hound”, the longhaired dogs, the smooth without exception called “Teckel”. At the entrances of a few of the larger farms horrible Cerberuses raved away at the end of their chains and it seemed impossible for me to get in or out without being torn to pieces. All the things that one sees on a day’s journey between banked hedges – the sky above, the puddle beneath one! The carriage halted for a moment; four little boys all in tasselled caps and three jackets worn one over the other, red-cheeked like little apples, stumbled hurriedly toward it and

reached with their hands for the carriage door. I sought a couple of Dutch Stuebers¹ and Matthews² groats that someone had given me as change at the last station and called, as I threw them out of the door, "Take care, you boys," but they took to their heels and scrambled up the earthen embankment like hares just shooed away – "In Heaven's name, what sort of Croat or Slovak could that have been, who could speak no German and throw his money into the dirt"? I watched them staring after my carriage for a long time, as if, *sans comparaison*, after a departing camel. One of them had lost his wooden clog when taking flight and I heard it meeting an untimely end under the carriage wheel. My consolation were the ownerless Stuebers and Matthews groats which made it worthwhile for fat little Henry-John or John-Bernard (one chap in three is always called that here) if this was not beyond his thinking capability. Now I know that the poor things only wanted to kiss my hand and I already realised at the time, that they did not want to beg. Altogether, I saw no street beggars along the way and the land of my forefathers began to appear to me to be at least quite productive and cosy, although my eyes were still looking out in vain for the "Fat of the Land" from which the people were able to develop such completely round heads and sturdy shoulders, until, through the gaps in the embankment hedges across the heavy barrier poles, I penetrated the secret of the *Kamps* (strip cultivation) and meadowlands where I caught a glimpse of the elite of the cattle stalls – beautiful, heavy cattle, of the East Friesian breed that lay surfeited and snorting in the forest of grass shimmering with Golden Rod. Just look at the artful Muensterlanders, you who hide your good silver dollars on four legs behind heaped up earth and thorns so that no travelling diplomat gets an appetite for it on behalf of his master! I am too much the farmer that the sight of this could have left me unmoved. I thought of my dear Dobbritz³ and my curly-fleeced little lambs and felt the blood of my ancestor rolling toward the great-grandsons of his byres. Strange, that I can write this down as though I thought the same today and yet I am in an entirely different mood – but let us move on, to the destination! When the clay highways are as tired of me as I am of them, then they will be pleased that we are parting and I still feel myself mentally battered by the memory and am yearning my way toward the destination. But, before that, one more travel adventure; no small one for my coachman, and which gave me the first dawning concept of the character of this people. We had survived a rude shock. Our horses were having a breather in the heath, nostrils and flanks steaming. My peasant struck fire on a sort of fuse in a brass sheath, that he called his "perfectly good tinderbox". In the distance something bright red was moving among the cows. It came closer – it was a human being in scarlet livery, with a greyish black facial colour. I said nothing and observed my peasant; he slowly took the pipe from his mouth, slowly drew a rosary from his pocket, touched his hat twice without raising it and did not look up until the monstrosity was nearly parallel to him. It stood; it addressed him in a strange dialect: "Which way leads to Lasbeck"? My peasant waved his hand at a narrow, slurry-covered roadway. The dark haired man shook his head and looked at his boots that had already seen worse, "Can I then not go down there"? pointing to a footpath which took the same direction. "That might not be good," said the coachman thoughtfully. "Why not"? replied my dark haired man, choleric spirit on a short lead. Never shall I forget the expression of, I should say, quiet horror and pity with which my peasant answered. "Oh, sir, the master should not dare that. There is a crucifix standing there" The Moor uttered couple of *Sacré Dieus!* and *Coquins!* and off he trotted with his bundle of letters under his arm. Is that comical or moving? It depends on how one regards it. I admit that would gladly have done some good deed or other for my White-Smock at that moment. And his religious reserve without fear and hate, his deep

effusive good nature that even the Devil himself would be unwilling to lead into the Labyrinth lay so movingly before me that I turned the first loving glances in this country to his broad back as, so slowly telling the rosary, he strode alongside the horses. May God keep thee, thou good, patriarchal little land, land of my forefathers as I like to call thee, if one takes no exception to my share of Lusatian blood. An end to irony; I am driving through the long, broad avenue of oaks where their trunks, slim as upstretched anacondas, spread their as yet slightly leaved tops over me. I saw between the gaps in the trees a broad surface of water; grey towers appear. By heavens! It was a very strange feeling as I rolled across the drawbridge and saw the crusading knight of stone with his dog, of whom old Everwin so well-disposedly speaks, *Eques vexillum crucis sublevans cum molosso ad aquam hiante*. Old Hans Heinrich, art thou also waving thy flag protectingly over thy decadent branch to whom thy faith and country are become alien? In the chateau I was sort of half expected, that is to say, in general, where a couple of weeks are neither here nor there. A smart looking, dark haired youth in sky-blue and yellow livery, strictly in accordance with the book of coats of arms, opened the carriage door and immediately recognised the strange cousin as I spoke of 'chateau' and asked after the 'baron'. "The master is out bird catching, but her ladyship is at home". Then straightaway I heard within, "Your Grace, he is there, he is there, the gentleman from Lusatia" and saw on entry two more fat, passably crooked, sky-blue legs. That, then, was the entry into the halls of my fathers. Yes – hear how it went, you walls, I mean, and you groaning logs in the fireplace; for I cannot depend upon the three window-mirrors and two Dachshunds, as the window is closed. The lady of the house received me splendidly yet ill at ease; the little girl cousin dumbly embarrassed, the young cousin curious and embarrassed. The master proper, who entered almost together with me and held a chirping and fluttering bird in his hand at our first welcoming, was also ill at ease, but in a thoroughly solicitous manner. Everybody was ill at ease and thus, in the end, nothing more remained for me but to become embarrassed too. One saw how, in everybody, a suppressed cordiality was struggling with something that I could not fathom and was surreptitiously inspecting me from head to foot – was I not a *galant homme*, a flower of the nobility, and were not the two ladies at the court of Dresden sighing? I had judged the situation correctly – the braided coat, the rings on the fingers – that is how the humbugs in this country carry on and (between ourselves) whereby I had thought to impress these people living at the end of the world and had spent at least a good hour on it at the last staging post. That gave me the appearance of one who is about to topple over into bankruptcy and is seeking credit against his finery. Everything here is so fixed; one knows so exactly what each is worth, so that assistance and disregard of riches always come out only like distress signals and I am now convinced that my good cousin, behind all his greetings and bowings, was counting up all his interest due and tithings and how much of it ought to be expended on helping out a prodigal son of a branch of the family twenty times removed, in manner both chivalrous and Christian, yet without foolishness. Now I know this and it does not humiliate me – had I known it at that time, it would however, have put me into a lamentable inward state of shame and anger – nevertheless, the first day passed laboriously, although my cousin initiated me into all his joys and treasures. His species of flowers never seen before, of his own cultivation; his armoury, his agricultural riches, even the apple of his mind's eye, his inestimable *liber mirabilis* – I thought, for my entertainment – but now I know that it was a smart move by the old gentleman who was secretly sounding me out as to how it stood with me in the matter of the noble arts such as Latin, economics and affairs of knighthood. I felt like a sleepwalker and the more blindly I behaved, the more confidently. I can count a week as my time as a

novitiate, during which, by the day, a new sluice of goodwill opened hesitantly, the master's quite characteristic, gentle smiling became milder, his wife's sharp eyes became more radiant and open and on the eighth day, as the young Lord Everwin invited me into his salon and Miss Sophie, of her own accord, sang a beautiful, somewhat old fashioned song to accompaniment at the piano, I had graduated and was from then a child and brother of the house. I felt this as I spoke next morning of departing in order to give my sojourn a firm base which also forthwith rose beneath me. "Methinks" said the old master (one says master simply – 'Baron' is foreign and pompous) with a triumphant smile, "methinks you are staying nicely here out of harm's way until you have your claims in your pocket. Old Hans Heinrich's dog has barked away many a lawsuit for us; it will also not let anybody through the gate at you". I was reminded of my thoughts at the time I drove in under the sculpture and the old gentleman must have noticed something like that, because he shook my hand and said "My dear cousin!" and so I have now been here for two months. Messengers come and go and my affairs are dragging on. I help the master with his botany, catching birds and construing his *liber mirabilis*, emerging badly enough and using many a crib, which my cousin kindly lets pass unnoticed. I progress better in the occasional conversations about serious subjects and classic sciences, in which the old gentleman is splendidly well versed and I am not exactly a nincompoop. What delights me most, however, is the lively, fresh interest, the powerful imaginativeness with which he listens to all my accounts of cities, lands and above all the wonders of the green-painted vaulting in the castle at Dresden – these quiet people are sitting on the Pegasus without knowing it, I would say; they are living in an inward poetic charm which gives them more in dreams of that which their physical eyes will never see, than we other, surfeited human beings can grasp with our hands. I like being here – it would be a dullness to deny it and ingratitude at the same time. I am also not in any way bored. Here they pursue all sorts of good things, in a somewhat antiquated and narrow manner, but thoroughly. Also there are some of the strangest of queer fellows here, namely pure naturals and unaware of being so. When I think of all the things with which I yet have to catch up and to explain, before I once more reach this evening, this fireside and these midges which molest me mercilessly, then the wings of all the geese in the courtyard appear to be in danger; but now it is too late. My candle has already proved itself to be more than long lasting – it has run away more than burned down and the table is awash with tallow that I must clean off with bare hands before going to bed, if I do not want to be described as the messy gentleman from Lusatia by my friend Dirk. The light in cousin's room is burning dimly as in a dream – the stars all the clearer; what a fine night!

Second chapter

The master and his family

Ladies first! I am starting with the lady of the house, an exotic plant in this soil where, with her southern teint, dark hair, dark eyes, she looks like a Burgundy grape which has dropped into a basket of peaches. She stems from one of the few Rhineland families that they accept as their equals here and my cousin, who went to Duesseldorf provincial diets twenty years ago and was taken with a sudden urge to see the world, made her acquaintance in Cologne in front of the shrine of the Three Kings and there first felt the – at the time – extremely embryonic wish to make her queen of his house. She is that, also in the full sense of the word. A clever, brisk, efficient sovereign of the household, who knows

how to impress the boldest; and what does her credit, such a warm, appreciative almost to a passion, friend to the man who really has no wishes other than hers. All women who wear the trousers might well follow the example; it is most pleasant to observe this relationship. Without question, this woman is of higher intellect than her husband, but seldom has the heart been held so highly in esteem by the understanding. She does not conceal her supremacy as smart women do, but respects the master straight from her heart; knows how to construe, with the sagacity of love, each clear side of his intelligence, every firm side of his character and holds the reins only because the master is just too good to be able to deal with the wicked world. I have never noticed that lack of being worldly wise on his part had embarrassed her – on the contrary, her dark eyes would sparkle like stars whenever he produced his accomplishments, spoke Latin as well as he spoke German and showed himself to be familiar with old consolars like a Cicerone. The good lady has blood the colour of the grapes from her vines; she is passionate, I have even seen her very passionate when she assumes ill will but she quickly composes herself and bears no malice. She looks very imposing and distinguished, must have been very beautiful and would perhaps still be so, if her lively feelings let her put on a little more corpulence, for the inner fire consumes everything superfluous. As it is, she looks like a pedigree Arab steed. She fell in love with her new fatherland and likes to plead its merits, but in that manner of exaggeration that is often inherent in sensible people with a vivid imagination, who mostly speak ardently stirred about something that is strange to their own nature. Thus she had allowed all the old, occasionally astonishing, habits and rights of the house to survive and kept an eye on order and a reasonable equilibrium. I shall also refer to the respectable idlers over whom one falls at every step and whom, were they at my home, I would have had served by the horsewhip; here I should, myself, not want to see them offended. Beggars in the sense of elsewhere are there none, but poor people, old or weak persons to whom a meal as good as that served to the servants is served weekly and oftener. I see them daily in threes or more, camped on the step of the stone stairway of the entrance, shabby but upright and passing no-one by without a greeting. The good lady of the house does more; she goes down and makes the best of conversations with them, about world affairs, the weather, the honoured relations and what one otherwise talks about in neighbourly fashion. Which is why she is also regarded as a worthy, ordinary woman, which counts as popular and she is always ready with good advice, where she then, as appropriate, also assists in its implementation. I had greatly to admire her patience with an imbecile, the son from the miller's house the light of which I see at the moment shining across to here. The poor fellow went out of his mind over a marriage story, although not just out of love. He was the only son, she the only daughter and both parents alive, thus the prospect receded into the distance as each would have had to provide for himself and in neither of the houses was there room for four old people. Yet the parents allowed the betrothal behind the scenes with the stipulation that when two of them had died, which, at their age, would not be long in coming, the marriage could take place. Thus they all went on living peacefully and without impatience, until the bride's father, a carpenter, suffered a stroke and so became weak in the head, as a result x-x and began urgently to look for an assistant. Unfortunately, his journeyman was a cunning, wicked lad from the Sauerland, who turned all this to his own advantage. At every order that he lost, he spoke of the decline in custom and the excessive well being of the miller couple for whom he prophesied Methuselah's age and whom he claimed to have met now here, now there in x-x. Then he also slyly let the obligation to child and lord of the manor work on the frightened mind of the old man until he had

made the latter quite confused about right and wrong. The result was a second and this time legally binding betrothal with a stamped paper and seal between the despondent and intimidated girl and the Sauerlander. Two days later and the old man lay dead of apoplexy, and almost with him, the bridegroom's father also died of a slight chill, which was, truly, evidence of no tenacious life. Each held the initial period of mourning in silence at home, but then the miller's widow urged her son to discuss the details with the bride to be. As he went there, she was standing in the garden and from afar, he saw her throw her apron over her face and go into the house. Thereupon the mother came out and told him the whole bag of tricks, with much lament and stammering, whereupon he went back home. Since then, he could not overcome the affront. At the same time his mother whose powers quickly declined after the death of her husband, again gently urged Franz to marry. Two new plans, which were precipitately set up, came to naught. Franz had a deep, secret pride in his honourable family which for generations had looked after the master's mill and much more with credit, because he had grown up as the older playmate and semi overseer of the estate and even now still belonged among the favoured who, at weddings, had a dance with the young ladies of the house. Shame tormented him, his mother's urging and his fear of making a bad choice, or even being turned down again, left him no rest, day and night. Little by little, his eyes took on a somewhat glassy look and he suddenly started talking all manner of incoherent rubbish when dressing millstones – "All the chips that they picked up were genuine marriage stones and had to be stored safely" and for which he indeed set up a hiding place. Now he is quite deranged although full of politeness and when one steers him on to quite other subjects, is capable of really sensible opinion; but that seldom happens. His fixed ideas hold him as if with iron clamps and intrude, as prods with a spur, into every soothing conversation. His greatest distress now is a princess from England, whom they want to him to court, which alarms him as a good Catholic. He sees himself quite as her equal, yet he has a semi awareness of her high position and that she could easily imprison him and have him sent to the torture chamber if he refused and he is preparing himself, by reading the Bible, for his future martyrdom that he would like to escape if possible and daily holds long consultations with her ladyship who, with heavenly patience, helps him to invent cunning subterfuges and really, as I believe, alone saved him from complete madness. A shudder trickles through me every time when I see this picture of fearfulness; here, it excites only deep, unruffled sympathy. When one sees the patience and heartfelt civility with which this woman takes an interest in the never-ending tediousnesses, then one cannot but wonder at her deep charitableness which stands so much higher than mere giving of alms, as honour does above convenience. For that reason is she known as an upright, ordinary woman (I would say, popular). I often meet quite pure people in the corridor, with freshly washed aprons and buckles of polished pewter, who go in and out to her so freely and with honourable bearing like decent and honoured visitors – and, indeed, it is also more often for a confidential request for advice than for help. I feel awkward every time I encounter Clemens. But I have departed from my subject – the young master. He is called Everwin. In faithful sequence like the Heinrichs von Reuss, there is a little in the cup yet. Nineteen years old he is and has shot up tall like an alder; blond, with light blue eyes through which one could think to see into his brain. I often hear him in the next room, groaning and harrumphing aloud over the classics and old works of history with which he has difficulty such that his hair is standing on end by midday. I hear him designating me as Everwin the Diligent that is to say, industrious, so prettily with time in hand, as a horse draws the barge upstream. I shall also not exactly say too much about the little straightforward outbreaks of mischievousness to which his

early years occasionally gave vent, for example, when he hid his sister's gloves. He cultivates fine music, a main enjoyment and a really beautiful talent among the whole family, with a guilty enthusiasm. I, too, profit in full from his violin playing from time to time, not without pleasure, when I am just in a good mood and properly in the *dolce far niente* state. He bows his Viotti⁴ so softly and purely and at many passages with such a childlike mild expression, that I often think that he must be the *Papa en herbe* who cannot yet burst forth. This modest pleasure, unfortunately daily being devalued, is amply spoiled for me by the hours of practice in which too difficult material is undertaken deliberately. I could have ground corn enough for at least two mills with my teeth at these double stoppings where a wrong note always runs alongside. Now and then, Caro, his dearly beloved bloodhound, provides the third voice to it and that is the moment when a crotchety Englishman would hang himself without a second thought. My room is, by the way, the place of honour in the house and pride will put up with exigency. Apart from that, it cannot escape me that Everwin, when it becomes ear-splitting, draws the bow very quietly, as does a humane surgeon the probe and at times, even gives his Caro a kick for my benefit, which must surely be to him like an arrow piercing the heart. He is altogether a modest, spinsterish neighbour who creeps about on tiptoe of a morning and steals into bed in the same way of an evening, so that I scarcely hear the covers rustling. His friend and companion in everything is the bailiff's nephew, Wilhelm Friese, an extremely talented young man to whom Everwin has attached himself as an oyster to coral. I often see the pair, around six in the morning, setting off to the line of snares, in short hunting coats and leather caps, merry and girlish like a couple of novices from a convent in their free time. He has the shyness of a Joseph towards women and would vent an un-Christian hate against the unlucky person with whom one might tease. I would give two Muenster shillings to see him, for once, playing the suitor. Without doubt, his Wilhelm has to lead and he will likewise chew off all ten fingernails out of fear, although he can count as a scamp compared to him. Recently I was sitting at the exit of the new gardens which surround this country seat as nests with young birds surround an old grey tower. Everwin came across the fields, Wilhelm walking behind. I heard them speaking, but Everwin did not look back. "I will say it to you again" Wilhelm called out, "If you do not get yourself a better coat, you will never in your lifetime get a woman." "Oh, pah"! growled Everwin and ran like a courier and was already close to me without seeing me. "Do not run like that, sir. Let us consider the matter. You will not get round it. What do you think of blue with galloons; it would go very well with blond hair". "Wilhelm!" retorted Everwin threateningly and stepped over his ankles into the water. "Good morning, cousin" I said. "Look. You there? I trod in the water." "I can see that" and the pair trotted off sheepishly, Wilhelm the more affected; but he had been talking out of turn. Fräulein Sophie is like her brother to a tee, but is significantly more educated, with her eighteen years, and could be interesting if she took the decision to do that. Whether I call her pretty? She is so twenty times a day and just as often almost the opposite. Her slim, always bent figure is like an overgrown plant that waves about in the wind; her irregular but sharply defined features have, however, something highly aristocratic and can intensify to the expression of a seeress when she is listening to my tales of marvels, but that passes and only something kindly and almost embarrassingly demure remains. Her kind of teint which, ordinarily is from pale to colourless lips, gives her an appeal, and occasionally a non-appeal of her own, that makes one quite forget that this is a young girl before one. Then at the slightest excitement, either mental or physical, a slight blushing passes across her whole face, which comes, goes and returns unbelievably quickly like the flickering of the Northern Lights across the winter sky. This is especially the case when

she sings, which happens every afternoon for her Papa's delight during his pipe for the digestion. I am not a natural admirer of music, but an artificial one. My taste is, I admit it, one laboriously learned by heart in opera houses, yet I think that the young lady sings beautifully. Of her voice I am certain that it is full, flexible but of limited range. There it can be gauged, but this unusual modulation, these small suggestions, prohibited by the school, this deep, sad tone which, more hoarse than clear, more faint than powerful would hardly find favour outside, may give a born layman like me the impression of forceful pathos. The voice is weak, but weak like a distant thunderstorm the pent-up force of which one feels – deep, shivering like a dying lioness. Something supernatural lies within this sound, remarkable in relation to the delicate body. I am no doctor, but if I were the cousin, I should not let the young lady sing. During every pause a slight cough attacks her and her colour changes until it settles into little red patches which run into the ruff around her neck. I am frightened to death by it and often try to obviate the singing. Fräulein Anna with whom they believe I am somewhat in love, is certainly very presentable. She is a beautiful, brown haired child of the Rhine with flashing eyes, sparkling teeth, small elfin feet, trembling with suppressed playfulness like a cannonball on which the fuse is burning. She would like always to be talking and keeps silent mostly because she cannot find the right note on the local scale when we carry on our quiet, serious conversations of an evening. She ordinarily sits at the window and sighs impatiently at the clouds and winds that pass across to the vineyard slopes where her young companions are enjoying themselves while she has to play the young nun here at her Aunt's. For what? She cannot understand it and complains to heaven and fate. I think that they found that a damper was necessary for this 'water organ'. She honours her Uncle, but does not know how to appreciate him; toward her Aunt she bears a wrathful love, since she feels the related element and bubbles over with impatience to see it so confined. For all that, she has a stirring of sensitivity, loves the woods and peels bark from all the trees in order to breath out her complaints on to it. A shapeless outpouring of that sort recently fell into my hands, where, in sixteen lines the word 'yearning' occurs three times, 'misunderstood' twice and 'peace' four times. Sophie is almost unbearable for her and Everwin, whom she calls our governess or Lanky (slender, weedy) the eternal unwilling consoler of her boredom. She gives him salt to take with him when going hunting, sees to it that his bed sheets are tucked in so that, at night, he lies as if in a short sack, or empties his snares and hangs moles or black rags into them, which really offends him every time and is more hurtful than the sleepless night. As he lacks the skill and boldness for taking revenge, it is one-sided fun which is gradually building up a ferment of pinched malicious glee in Everwin's heart. I see an affected beaming cross his face when she meets with a rebuff from one of his comrades with her unintentional coquetry, or when Caro, after a swim, first shakes himself dry next to her and I suspect him of letting him fetch on her side for preference. She appears to be more favourable toward Wilhelm; calls him an educated young man and it seems to me as though she puts an extra little bow into her hair for his benefit, which he seems, unfortunately, not to notice. I think that altogether, two thirds of her sighs are directed at being unappreciated. Is it not hard, for example, that she who speaks French as well as she does German and can quote from Gellert, has to take arithmetic lessons here from a disabled corporal who lives at the exit from the park? – but for his reddish wig and his beautiful French in which he enquires after her *ton père* she would jump out of her skin – but now she has at least found a whipping boy, a bad apple to slake her thirst and may say and do things to him that the man shakes his head, yet has to laugh.

Fräulein Anna is piquant like x-x but it is unedifying to see someone here, who does not understand how to accept the ways of the country, whom mocking annoys and yet, through what is missing, one becomes aware and feels the monotony stroking one like a gentle soporific breeze. I just notice that I have the fault of writing myself into and out of moods, thus the paragraph about Anna made me almost rebellious against the house of my good Cousin whom I have saved as a morsel *pour la bonne bouche* until last in this section. God bless him every hour of his life. Misfortune can befall him only as purification; never in his lifetime has he deserved it. I find it impossible not to like this man. Even his weaknesses are lovable. Take his exterior for a start. Think of a tall, well built man, against whose broad shoulders and deep chest almost feminine hands and the smallest of feet stand out strangely. Then a very high, smooth forehead, extremely light eyes, a strong eagle's nose, a mouth and chin like a child's beneath it, the whitest skin that ever marred a man's face and a full head of child's curly but grey hair and the whole overlaid with a stream of kindness and good faith, so that it tempts even a quarter-rogue to cheat him, yet makes it almost impossible for a double rogue. The master looks quite aristocratic, benevolent and seignorial, despite his grey countryman's coat from which he is seldom parted and has courage for three. I saw him, out for a stroll where one had come upon prohibited paths, parrying an angry bull with his bamboo stick for almost five minutes until everybody had found safety behind embankment and ditch and, as Wilhelm said, who had run up with his walking stick to help as well as he could, the master looked like a Leonidas at Thermopylae. He is a passionate newspaper reader and friend of history and loves the spilling of blood in print. Eugen and Marlborough are names that make his eyes light up like lanterns, yet I am doubtful whether in the case in point the master would kill the enemy, or rather let himself be taken prisoner, in order not to burden his soul with a murder. He likes to dream of robbers and arsonists and when the yard dogs bark unusually at night and run to and fro at a dark corner, he has been seen, unaccompanied, in his dressing gown, dagger drawn, advancing into the suspected hiding place with truly determined anger to grab and imprison the miscreant whom he would, of course, have let go free next morning. At the beginning, I had underrated the mind of the master. He has his abundant share of the silently restorative poetic charm of this land, which almost compensates for the lack of real intellect; besides, he has clear judgement and that very subtle anticipation of what is suspect, which emanates from an inner innocence. His first opinion is always surprisingly right, his second already significantly deepened by Christian charitableness and whoever, as a declared rogue, views him today is tomorrow perhaps an ingenious man whom one would wish to be a little less clever. The master reads a lot, several hours daily and always something edifying, about languages, historical; as a change, descriptions of travels where his naïve imagination always outstrips the author and he secretly expects a new Eldorado or the discovery of the Garden of Paradise on every page. Altogether, this family seems to me to be like the scholastics of the Middle Ages with their restless, profound diligence and bottomless gloominess. All are educating themselves and adding to their knowledge well into the greying years and all believe in witches, ghosts and the Wandering Jew. I already said how music is much pursued here. Encouragement emanates mostly from the good lady who would like to bring out the best of whatever lurks in everybody, but the talent is the master's and there is nothing more delightful than to hear him at dusk, improvising on the piano of an evening. A real idyll, for a certain *grandeur* finds its way into this innocent, attractive music and bursts of chivalrous spirit in march-time. It never goes on too long for me to listen to it and all kinds of images out of Thomson's *The Seasons*, and from the crusades, crowd into my mind. Otherwise, the master has many

hobbies, all of the most childlike originality. Primarily, living ornithology (for the master takes up everything scientific). Next to his study is a room with foot deep sand and little fir trees which are renewed from time to time. The ever-open windows are secured with wire and therein chirps and flutters the country's whole population of songbirds – a specimen of each species from nightingale to tit. It is a matter of importance to the master to keep the series complete. The death of a linnæus is, to him, like the loss of a page from a natural history book. He is a real spy after every unusual vagrant. I see him early in the morning, already at five, stepping out across the bridge to his willow traps and sticky rods and back again in the burning midday heat, seven to eight times in one day. If I want to save him the trouble, from time to time, and promise to leave the trap properly closed, or to carry back the bird together with the sticky rod properly wrapped in my handkerchief, then he does give way to me, in order not to humiliate me, but he trots alongside and it is as if he thought my trivial presence alone could make the captured bird take flight. The master is also a thorough botanist and has many a beautiful tulip and flag in his garden. But that is not enough for him. His rich, inner poetry of the soul craves the wondrous, the fantastic – he would like to play a kind of harmless wizard and has come upon the most unusual whims which, once in a while, prove their worth happily enough and might be not without value for science. Thus, using a little velvet brush, he carries pollen neatly from the blue lily to the yellow, from the brown to the reddish and the resultant varieties are his greatest pride, that he displays as if he were Prometheus himself. He bemoans the lack of appreciation of the wild flowers, his beloved countrymen, which he tends, variant by variant, in neat little beds, like ranks of little grenadiers. Many a drop of sweat has the master shed when, with his little spade, he has been spending half a day searching for a rare orchid and something in his domain has shown up in the process, that he would otherwise neither have sought nor found. That is why the farmers like nothing less than the master's botanical excursions on which he secretly hopes for the fantastic, for example, a scarlet forget-me-not or a blue daisy, although as an intelligent man he does not actually believe this – but one never knows! Nature is wonderful. Nothing shows the master's rich, childlike fresh imagination more clearly than his already often mentioned *Liber mirabilis*, a laboriously gathered collection of old prophetic dreams and visions with which this land is covered as with a veil. Almost every tenth man here is a prophet, a clairvoyant; I fear, this one or that one just for the master's benefit. It is strange that these people all have a physical similarity – light blue, uncanny eyes which is to be endured almost apprehensively – I think that Swedenborg must have looked like this. Otherwise they are simple, often limited, incapable of deception, in no way differing from other small farmers. I have spoken with some of them and they gave sensible information about farm and weather, but as soon as my questions were about everyday matters, they were uncomprehending and yet some of these so-called prophecies and visions betray a magnificent power of imagination, come close to allegory and go well beyond the ordinary, such that I am forced to assume that they have a momentary mental intensification, as Messmer explains it in his new theory. Cousin, again, has collected all these indeed remarkable dreamings and translated them into very fluent Latin and saved them neatly in a booklike capsule, partly out of a schoolmasterly urge, partly in order to preserve them in an understandable form; and *Liber mirabilis* is written squarely on the spine in gold letters. This is his treasure and oracle to which he refers when World affairs look confusing; and whatever does not coincide with it is dismissed with head shaking for the time being. Dear Cousin, you have entrusted your treasure to me, although I know that you tolerate a blemish on your face rather than a spot on the pages. There it lies, red, golden and commanding, like an

English staff officer and I sit here like a bad spy take a secret map from your person. I would say good night, but you are healthy and pure in heart; I have to be up early tomorrow – we have seven tit traps to search.

Third Chapter

The morning was so beautiful! Nightingales left and right answered each other so resoundingly out of blooming bushes and hedgerows, that I was literally awakened by it at five and it was impossible for me to go to sleep again. Thus I rove about in the greenery until breakfast and with my layman's eye, had sight of the first blossom of the master's newest iris, ere the good Prometheus himself saw it. There was much talk and expectation in these days on account of this flower from the master's factory, which seems only a little deeper blue than the ordinary iris. But I think he will christen it *atropupurea* or *mirabilissima*. In any case, the flower looked attractive enough in its dewdrop veil and the gardens, in their green, gilded by the sun, their dew and blossom dress, had everywhere such a *beauté de diable* that I thought never to have seen anything lovelier. The damp soil is so conducive to flower growth and the songbirds, such that, intoxicated in the wonderful season of beautiful aromas, colours and singing, one forgets that everything is lacking, that one otherwise demands of beautiful surroundings – mountain, stream, rock. I must remark, because of the strangeness, that I felt quite poetical and had nearly sat down on the wet grass; in reality, slumped on to a bench and very much in the mood, pulled out a couple poems by Wilhelm, that Fräulein Anna had slipped into my hand with an arch smile and a slight blushing. I am not mistaken; her dark eyes rest on the young poet occasionally with an interest that boredom and sensitivity easily engender in this country. The shy little hen seems nevertheless not to sense one jot of it and I am unsure whether exposure would be to the detriment or advantage of the young lady, since his blue, chaste eyes appear to be seeking something quite other than Rhenish blood. Wilhelm is certainly a poet! I could have thought so by his ecstatic looks when we stand at the fishpond and the swans sail through the sun's glittering reflection, where he then really looks handsome; the rest of the time, however, clumsy and intimidated as behoves a young writer whom the kindness of the Lord has unnecessarily given as a companion to the uncle, just to provide free board and lodging to a member of the poor branch of the family. The verses are written on poor quality scribbling paper, often crossed through and certainly not intended for the young miss's eyes. She seemed to want to withhold one from me, with some affectation – this will be read first.

(here follows *Das Mädchen am Bache*)⁵

Oh, oh, young Wilhelm. What dangerous thoughts those are. Does it suit a poor young student who may *perhaps* be allowed to fall in love in ten years time? and now for the second poem

(*der Knabe im Rohr*)⁶

The young fellow has real talent and in a more favourable situation – no, rather not. Stay in your fen, let your imagination sink its fibres deep into your pond, and sway above it like a secret water lily. Be it a whole, if only a dream, a half-understood fairy tale, it is always worth more than the bland fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. On the way home I found his uncle, bailiff Friese in shirtsleeves at the well in front of the annexe, assiduously endeavouring to clean his office windows with the aid of a wisp of straw and endless dashes of water. His bald head shone like fresh bacon fat and I heard him groaning like a steaming horse, from thirty paces away. He did not see me and thus I could observe the

eccentric man at my leisure, in his negligee that was decorated at every place with many coloured rags, giving him the appearance of a walking pattern-card, for which his coat otherwise provides concealment. I have seldom encountered a face more like Harpagon's!⁷ Sharp as a shearing knife, with thread-like lips that are almost always closed as though they were afraid that they might let something useful escape and only when he becomes irritated, spray sparks of contempt like a tomcat when one strokes its fur the wrong way. Yet Friese is a sincere man for whom every groat out of his master's pocket falls like a drop of blood, yet is a speculator beyond compare, who trades in everything which is condemned as useless – rags, bones, part-burnt coal, rusty nails, the white sheets of paper from discarded letters and is supposed, in the course of thirty years, to have rummaged himself a goodly round sum from the rubbish heap. His room is accessible to no one, other than his trading partners and Wilhelm. He sweeps it himself, makes his bed himself; the clean laundry has to be hung on the door latch. *Intimae in viaticum* – I risked a storm, approached politely and asked for a couple of cut quills. He went blood red and drew the door to behind him like a crab, to hide his hind part. I followed him and gave him precedence only enough so that he could manage to get into his grey duffle coat, then I stood before him. He looked at me with an expression of horror, such as a high priest must, in earlier times, have hurled at a temple desecrator who penetrated into the holy of holies, hastily covered over something in the Babylonian chaos on his table with a cotton night cap, sought a bundle of quills, then in a peevish hurry a knife to cut the quills. It was not there; he had to decide to step into an alcove. I cast my eyes quickly around. The whole, wide room was covered as though with molehills through which a labyrinth of paths led. Clean small bones for the turner, rags for the paper mill, old iron, on the table empty pin cards, already half filled again with pins that one could see had been bent straight again and newly polished. I heard him opening a cupboard and quietly lifted the tassel of the blue cap. Copy books with writing on them, in the most varied formats, obviously memoranda: "Today the Lutheran gentleman again drank a whole bottle of French wine. The barrel at 48 silver dollars is almost empty". I stood as stiffly as a sentry, for Herr Friese walked in and I then soon made off, as triumphant as a wet rat. Dear Cousin, so shabbily supervised is your good nature! I never liked Friese, over and above which he is a fool who lets himself be teased in the most silly way by Katharina, the lady's maid, a cunning, jolly girl and the favourite of the lady of the house. This young Rhineland girl, generally speaking, causes a dreadful inflaming of passions in the chateau. Three Westphalian hearts sigh after her like the wind in a stovepipe – first the master's beloved Johann (only called Jan Fiddle by her) who, brought up expressly to be his valet, plays the violin quite well of an evening with Herr Ewerwin and with his few remaining hairs, tinged with grey and combed flat with tallow, ending in a ponytail, looks like an ill-treated hare. Then there is a Paderborn scallywag who first greeted me at the carriage – a cunning, good-for-nothing lad who makes up for the boredom that they cause him, by subjecting his fellows to all manner of teasing. He wheedles the master as he will and recently became somewhat embarrassing to him since he gave the cook, a poor rheumy person, three coloured silk threads as a cure, with the claim that it worked only if she carried a basket full of wood to the door of the master's room (until then his own task). The joke came out and the master was very angry about this cruelty of his Johann's. Indeed, I think that, since then, he also otherwise looks at him mistrustingly, for, as the master says, "Such things are not quite to be disavowed; one encounters unusual examples in the Paderborn region".

(not completed – published posthumously)

Notes:

An unfinished work first published posthumously 1860

¹ Stueber – Dutch coin of low value, obsolescent even at the time

² St. Matthews groat, a coin of low value from the Brunswick region

³ Dobritz – still a village in Anhalt-Lusatia in late 19th century

⁴ Viotti, Giovanni Battista – violinist, composer, conductor (1753-1824)

⁵ Possibly an allusion to her poem *Junge Liebe*

⁶ An allusion to her poem *Der Knabe im Moor*

⁷ Harpagon – the miser in Molière's comedy