

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff to Levin Schücking in Mondsee

Meersburg, May 5th 1842, Thursday

It must come as very unexpected for my good boy, who is continually in my thoughts, that it is only today that I am beginning the first letter to him, and yet nothing other is responsible for this than the wish to write him a really good, pleasing letter in which I could boast about many long and beautiful poems and at this distance, appear in a pretty halo. Until now I have had only a very weak glimmer about me; have been properly busy only in the last few days and may not wait with the answer until the glory has fully developed. Why have I come so late to the work? Listen: for the first week I was depressed to death and could not have written a line for the life of me. I lay like a hedgehog on my four-poster bed and feared like death to take the old paths along the lake. Then Luise Streng came, who left me alone for scarcely a minute, drew me out of myself and within the whole week that she was here (admittedly in no pleasant manner) walked me forcibly over the most difficult moments by her valued company and conversation consisting of endless questioning.

But now there came another worry. Your letter from Ellingen should long have been here (i.e. promised for right after your arrival there) and you neglectful scamp are not at all worth the way we feared for you. Every morning I lurked on the stairs for the post messenger and Jenny and Laßberg were almost as concerned as I. Laßberg had already decided to write to the prince (considering his long-windedness, indeed great proof of love and care) 'Whether said young man is really arrived, or whether one must seek his sad remains in a lake, a sunken roadway or some other murder hole?', when your letter from Ellingen arrived. There was great joy in the house, although Laßberg had indeed expected the first letter to be for him; for the second I myself expected his address and I am telling you here that you should sit down straight away and catch up on what is missing, for you must not appear ungrateful for the unusual devotedness and truly fatherly love that this man showed towards you. Only for one moment did he accept your apology in the previous letter (where you declare yourself to be simple-minded) and really cannot release you from the duty to write once at least, so come on, go to it!

Now to go further in my simple chronicle. Right after reception of your letter, as I was just sharpening quills in order to take up work with fresh heart, Gaugreben came, kidnapped me to Berg, caught a cold on the lake, had to lie a-bed with a swollen throat and I could do none other for a fortnight than traipse from one bed to the other, the disabled wife in one, the husband close to choking in the other. Ten days ago, confound it, I returned and have had to make two journeys since then (to Heiligenberg and Langenargen) and arrange two visits (Wessenberg and Stanzen). N.b. both Brenkens were here. They came immediately after your departure and stayed ten days. I do not know what to tell about it, other than that they were dreadfully burdensome to me in my mood at the time. You can imagine that I have not been able to work much under these circumstances, yet even

now I have taken a good, strong run at it and for a few days have had the pleasant feeling of achieving something again. But today I had a letter from Mama at the same time as your letter. Mama's letter determined me to put aside everything else in order to work out my part of your contributions for the *Germany in the 19th century* without delay. My stay here will, of course, be only for a short time. Mama writes that 'she longs for me and feels alone and that I may return home to her with Fräulein von Wintgen who will be travelling up the Rhine to Meersburg, arriving on 15th June and travelling back from there'.

Thus I shall no longer stay six full weeks and as my leisure depends so much on circumstances, I must think about completing the most necessary part first, managing the other parts as far as possible. Perhaps I shall still send you the second manuscript (the poems) from here, perhaps not until Rüschaus. The first (*Deutschland*) I shall in any case send from here as soon as it is finished. Whether I am glad to come home? No, Levin, no. What made these surroundings so sad for me six weeks ago, now makes me them so dear that I can detach myself from them only with a heavy heart. Listen child – I walk the path to Haltenau every day, seat myself on the first step where I used to wait for you and look over, without a lorgnette, to the path at Vogels' garden. If anybody comes along, as happens a couple of times every day, I can imagine for a while, with my poor sight, that it is you and you will not believe how much that is to me. I also have your room here, where I can seat myself in your easy chair and not be disturbed by anybody. And the path to the tower, that I took so often; and my own room with the four-poster bed and the chair at the stove. Ah, goodness! Everywhere! In short, it will be very hard for me to leave here, on top of which 200 hours further than are already separating us. Do you really know how much I love you? I scarcely think so.

I have two letters from Elise, the first already from a few weeks ago. Oh, I have just remembered; you were still here and I told you about it. Now I have the second, dated 18th April. It concerns the young Braun whom she wanted to make your successor. The whole letter is almost filled with the *curriculum vitae*, circumstances and knowledge, etc. of this young man. It made me extremely sorry to have to destroy this wish so unconditionally, that I did not like to speak even to Laßberg about it. You yourself know, how little one can invite someone 200 hours distant to the few remaining bits of work and income. Jenny with whom I did speak, in order at least to be as agreeable as possible, also thought that the thing was so completely impossible, that it would only bring my *sanum iudicium* into discredit with Laßberg, if I started with it. I straight away answered dear Elise who has a quite false view of this business that she seems to regard as a permanent post and calls the 'library position at your brother-in-law's place' and had to destroy all her fine plans with a couple of strokes of the pen. You know she wrote casually in the previous letter about this idea and informed her mother about it at the same time, who had nothing more urgent to do than to inform Braun by first Post, from whose reply Elise made me a copy which really saddened me, so full of elation and

happiness is the poor man at the prospect of the permanent employment that he obviously takes this to be. One sees here what can become of a matter when it passes through several hands, or rather, pens. Both you and I have told Elise the circumstances of this position clearly enough and now it has become a formal office by the third letter. Incidentally, Elise writes very composedly, criticising my poems (sent to her by you) quite comprehensively, among which she likes best *Die junge Mutter*, writes about books that she has read, etc. Furthermore she writes 'Lutterbeck is now also gone away, as a professor at Siegen, as you will have read in the *Merkur*. He is said to be very pleased. Poor Frau Bornstedt has given up her lodgings, accommodated her furniture elsewhere and exiled herself for the whole summer to Herbern. The Swiss man seems to have changed his mind again, but she is said still to be in hopes of a marriage in the autumn. The invitation from Countess Bocarmé also came to naught and so the poor soul may then be out of sorts and deplorable enough. Schlüters are in Gräfrath again. Annchen Junkmann, sighing, said recently, "Yes, if one could only stay young for ever then I would certainly rather not marry!" (N.b. Lev – you already know that Annchen is marrying Schulte, her brother's friend?). 'At this point it occurs to me that I have long held an old letter from Junkmann addressed to Schücking for you. If this one does not become too thick in the process, I shall enclose it'. That letter was, in fact, enclosed and I am sending it on to you. It is as old as the hills but lovely (for, after I saw, from one page that Elise had attached, that she had read it, I also took the liberty). Junkmann is, indeed, a quite extraordinarily lovable product of Nature, for nothing about the poems mentioned therein has reached me. Have you already received them by another route, or are they still lying in Elise's desk? It is a sly little trick on Elise's part to write to you indirectly. She is a dear heart and I also soon told her everything about your departure and informed her of as much from your letter as I thought to do without being indiscreet and in the process urged her not to tell anybody, whoever it may be, when I write and even less one syllable out of my letters.

Although I was very cautious and left a great deal out of the extracts, I yet wished from you, dear heart, in future be it noted, what I am not supposed to tell her. According to our agreement at the time of your departure I was supposed to let her know everything affecting your situation (as you were previously accustomed to rely completely upon her discretion) and it was only my instinct which led me not to touch upon some things. In your last letter, however, the expression 'nobody, whoever it be' seems to want to exclude Elise, too, from cognisance. I should like you, from now on, to mark for me what she also is not to know (concerning your position and mood) by brackets. I am glad to give Elise the little filigree box about which I already wrote to her, but did not mention the curly contents, partly out of caution, partly from wanting to save up another a surprise for her. This time she writes nothing of her husband's posting, a sign, one hopes, that this plan has come to naught, which would much please me, both for her and my sake. May she find company elsewhere, which (possibly) appeals more to her than mine, she will

find nobody whom both natural attachment and circumstances have made it so much a duty and principle to stand by her under all circumstances. I would, for my part, also miss her greatly, especially now when of all those upon which I have refreshed and nourished myself for four years, only you and Schlüters remain. My God! What a few months can take away. I am right to shudder on every New Year's Day. One does, of course, find both something good and unexpected in every year (as you found your position, Reuchlin, Uhland, all the Stuttgart friends and the two dear boys in your charge) but, God knows, one also loses if one knew in advance, which would depress one completely. However, one can stand an enormous amount if it comes gradually and one works one's way through life, rather like through the winter when the summer has come to an end.

Levin, if you can, whenever you can, stay with your plan to come to Münster in two years; my health is not too bad now – I shall still be alive – do you hear me? Think that I am counting all the days. It is bad, that I cannot stay here through the winter, but I shall also not stay at Rüschaus but go to Hülshoff and take daily exercise, then I think that it will be alright. You will write to me here, at least once? However, it must again be on the old footing because Laßberg receives all the letters first and is far too eager for news of you, for me to be able to let him go away empty handed. But shorten the official report and let this be to the good of the private news. Do not write to me at Rüschaus until I have reported my arrival there. A journey of that length can be subject to 100 chances and delays and you know that I do not think my Mama capable of complete abstemiousness in the matter of correspondence. N.b. she writes to me of a thick letter that arrived from a bookseller (how she knows that she does not say) from Bielefeld and whether she should forward it to me. Answer: yes. What could it be? Do you know anything of it?

Every day I go to the reading room now, sit on your chair at the window and look at what the *Morgenblatt* is publishing. What did I find? First, your poem on the Meersburg, which put me in an embarrassing position, and well-earned, indeed, since the idea of erasing the good Laßberg alongside Uhland, while it did not come from me, it was approved, and now it is a load on my mind. 'My God! That looks as though Levin is publicly ashamed of it as too insignificant for a poem and now especially in the *Morgenblatt* that Laßberg will soon see'. It also did not take long for the critics' chorus to give voice. The flattering news of *Levin Schücking's beautiful poem about his Dagobertsburg* reached Laßberg from all sides, printed and by word of mouth – Pfeiffer, Baumbach, Stanz, the Meersburg notables. Everybody wanted to be the first to compliment him on it and I could think of no way of helping, other than admitting to having read it and thought that it had been shortened by the *Morgenblatt's* editorship (which arbitrarily deleted over half of your *Jagdstreit*) in such a way as to omit any verse not relating just to the scenic and historical. Poor Laßberg who, in childlike manner, so happy to see himself lauded before the whole world that he would almost have chased me out of bed into the museum to fetch the *news of his glory*, was, as it appeared to me, to be almost close to tears as he heard this and said in the most plaintive voice in the world, 'If, perhaps, Uhland and I are

to be erased in this way, then that should please me, for I do not like being spoken about'. I felt really sorry for him, but I do not believe that he suspects your own unkind hand in this. Jenny just as little, who is also quite ill disposed towards the disloyal editorship. I really do not know what we were both thinking about, since we knew Laßberg so well and could see all this in advance. It is even more necessary for you to write to him straight away and really sincerely, too. Human feeling has wondrous effects! Laßberg feels annoyed and offended at the same time by your poem and I think that some small shadow will be cast over you if you do not forestall it by evidence of your high esteem and devoted remembrance. It would be best if you were to give the poem to another paper that Laßberg sees, or one which at least circulates in Meersburg (e.g. the feuilleton of *Merkur*, or the *Didaskalia*) then the damage would almost be repaired and any subsequent suspicion prevented. Furthermore, in the *Morgenblatt* I found my poem to Junkmann, which comes out quite well, and then they have been feeding their public so mercilessly for 10 to 12 days with my tale (dubbed 'die Judenbuche' by Hauff) that all the poets who want to see themselves in print must be cursing me, for I and one other prose writer have temporarily divided the paper between us and shall probably not let one alien little blade push up for this whole month. I find that my printed prose reads quite well, better than and more original than the poetry, yet differently from what I had expected and your earlier opinion has, in contrast to mine, been confirmed. The dialogue (that I now see much improved by accentuation when reading aloud) is good, but below my expectation and in no way exceptional. By contrast, my own thoughts and turn of phrase in narrative style, far more original and striking than I had previously adopted and in that respect, given a bit of practice, I hope soon to be among the best; at least to my taste, which, admittedly, remains a personal taste, but incidentally does not flatter me and is satisfied only by that which would fully satisfy others. Are you laughing at me, you impertinent scamp? He who laughs last, laughs longest! Something proficient will become of me, but you must occasionally give me a push via the pen. Devil knows what an inspirational power over me you hold. Since sitting at this letter, I am itching like a hungry lioness to get my fingers on the material assigned to me (*Deutschland 19th century*) and then, I think, it ought to go on like a river; poems, lyrics, ballades, drama, I do not know what; the embodiment of an egg-girl. If you were still here, my book would have long been finished, for every word from you spurs me forward. N.b. You do not read the *Cölner Zeitung*? It carries an anonymous review of your *Dom*, that I shall copy for you (I cannot send the paper because Laßberg is now saving the *Cölnische Zeitung*, too). Here it is, then: 'Der Dom zu Cöln, etc. The advertisement of this excellent booklet, which appeared as the precursor to the ever more tremendously demonstrative national interest in the completion of the cathedral, which is growing day by day, arrives somewhat late. The writer of these lines had, frankly, expected nothing other than that the witty Schücking's piece would not pass unnoticed by the daily press in Cologne where, to judge by the subject, it ought to ring bells the loudest where it was printed.

Since this is now not the case, our advertisement is still not too late; an advertisement that cannot be for the purpose of observing the characteristics of the author in all phases of his rich development of ideas, and to show how his poetic philosophy illuminates the subject from all aspects in a witty and brilliant manner, but to a certain extent only documents them in the Book of Time wherein all endeavours towards a great religious and national purpose are written.

It would be an unfairness if Levin Schücking's name did not appear in it and this iniquity were the greater, since this author does not deny the religious element of his life, specifically the Catholic, in his writing. For example, look how well he furnishes proof of the symbolism in church architecture. How true are and remain the words with which he knows how to separate the living idea from mere fashion and the ostentation which are, unfortunately, already becoming mixed here and there into the matter of cathedral-building. "It is not enough", says Schücking," to make a minimum donation with the idea of salving one's conscience, etc." (here follows a brief extract up to *The Kingdom of heaven for a deed!*). Truly, this booklet ought to be found in the cabin of every steamship and every German who travels on the Rhine should, when he catches sight of the holy city, as the crane on the cathedral rises up before his eyes, read Schücking's wonderful poem, *Der Bettler am Rhein*, that, because of its splendour, we are showing unabridged at the end of our advertisement. We are convinced that when he lands he will put his gift, large or small, into the offertory box'. (the *Bettler am Rhein* then follows). N.b. I just noticed that the extract from your part that, out of laziness, I have not copied, contains only individual phrases, perhaps widely separated phrases. I shall therefore remedy this now. "It is not enough, says L.S., to make a minimum donation with the idea of salving one's conscience, in order to turn with a calmer conscience to the whole existence of the matter. You ought to make your offering out of an inner urge and out of love and for the sake of faith. You ought to throw your best silverware into the crucible, to make well and full tempered the sound of the new bell of the German spirit, that is to be cast. All should write their names in the Book of Life which was locked with seven seals and that the audacious hand of the century is pulling open before you. A deed, a deed! The Kingdom of heaven for a deed!"

Are you laughing at my enthusiasm in sending you this little piece of a crown of laurels? You will quite like putting this feather in your cap.

Also, an anonymous genius (I think it is Baumbach) in the *Constanzer Zeitung*, dating from Meersburg, complains, 'The departure of the witty writer of *Dom*, etc., Levin Schücking, whom we were so happy to have within our walls during the winter, in our Laßberg's Dagobertburg, and who has now responded to a call of honour from Bavaria' (these are not the exact words, but the content) and *Merkur* (they have the *Constanzer Zeitung* in Münster, too) hurried to take it up, so that we have had two helpings. (N.b. my poem *An die Weltverbesserer* has also been printed, first by the *Karlsruhe Zeitung* and then by *Merkur* – that is a new trend, I am sure – or is it so much better than the others?)

The 5th. Good morning, Levin. I have lain awake for two hours, thinking about you over and over again. Ah, I always think about you, but enough of that. I must and will not put you in a soft mood; must give myself courage, too and definitely feel that I would in the end lose both my vocation and your sympathy with eternal weeping-willow sighing, for you are a proud animal and love a person only if one is and does something brave. Write to me often; my talent rises and falls with your love. What I shall become, I shall become through you and for your sake, otherwise I should prefer and it would be much more comfortable to make up poems just to myself.

As soon as I have finished this letter I shall go *con furore* at the work. I am once more in the fruitful mood where thoughts and images pound against my skull, trying with all their might to reach the light and think to be able to send you the contributions very soon, although the psalm will certainly be two-thirds too long again, that you, in true surgeon coolness will amputate. Methinks, if I could see you for just two minutes every day – oh, goodness, for only a moment – then I would sing now enough to make the salmon jump out of Lake Constance and the gulls set down on my shoulder! We led a life of the gods here, indeed, in spite of your grumpiness. Am I cross with you? Ah, dear child, what bitter tears have I shed over having said such hard things to you, even at the last and yet there was much truth in them. But do not forget me, whatever may change with time. I am still your *Mütterchen* even if I live forty more years; is that not so, my lad, my village mayor, my little horse? What memories cling on, which can never be extinguished from these titles!

N.b. I have now arranged things such that my letters will be brought to me straight from the kitchen; now write what you will. If it does not suit me I shall not let Laßberg know at all when I get a letter and it is a shame that I have to leave so soon. Our correspondence would, from now on, be much safer and easier than in Rüschaus. Write to me that you love me. I have not heard it for so long and am so hungry for it – you silly, worthless little horse! But you must also write to Laßberg – to Laßberg – I cannot spur you on urgently enough. Jenny was here twice for the same reason (as she knows that I am writing to you at the moment). The poor thing is properly wretched about it, in double distress because of Laßberg's sadness (I can tell you, he is sad, for he really likes you) and for your dishonour, therefore, etc.

I already told you that Wessenberg was here. His personality is neither pleasant nor significant. However, I made his acquaintance too late, as he is obviously already very dull. They say that he usually treats women with the greatest disdain and almost as under age children. However, he made an honourable exception for me and after he had let me know, through Baumbach, much that was courteous about my poems and the wish to make my acquaintance, he now approached me, rather tactlessly and affectedly with the words, 'So. You are the poetess. Truly, you have a marvellous streak, unusual power', and so on and you cannot believe with what coquettish petty ostentation he sought to entertain me for the rest of the day, half protecting, half paying homage, which was

obviously terribly difficult for him, for he had to process every new thought for a few minutes, ere he grasped it and then followed it up with ringing applause when another subject had already long been under discussion. In addition to that, he seems to me to be boundlessly vain. Every expression, every movement of his head has something gracious; his conversation is littered with hints of his literary and religious position, persecutions suffered, etc. and, appropriate or not, everywhere of 'his intimate friend, Archbishop Spiegel' whom, in his outward appearances, he copied so exactly that the similarity is really astonishing, except that the innate, inimitably shrewd expression on the Archbishop's face looks like an almost ludicrous mask on Wessenberg's, because his natural features protest against it. In short, I think this great vanity and the pettiness and weakness accompanying it must always have seriously damaged Wessenberg's importance and since I saw him I cannot help thinking of this as much more responsible for the motive behind his conspicuous actions than anything else. He has invited me, in the most polite manner, to lunch with him on my next trip to Constance, but I shall definitely not take it up and – shall I admit it? – I tried to appear kind and witty in his presence, for the sake of the reputation that enjoys. We humans are like that! We accept a paper crown if we know that others see it as golden.

Laßberg drove me to Heiligenberg; a cold, bad outing. Everywhere nothing there remarkable to see, the castle quite beautiful but in general the grounds insignificant. Rainy weather, the view completely obscured by cloud; in the rooms a proper musty atmosphere and, on top of that, I had to look after the children all day because Jenny had stayed at home. Laßberg, on the contrary was very moved, which half put me off, half touched me. He guided me through all the apartments in which his Princess had lived one after the other, pulled out all the drawers that she had used and touched, I should like to say stroked, everything that had once been her property. Finally, in one small room I asked him 'Where did the Princess die'? (I had thought that it was in Italy). He looked at me with a stare, laid his hand in a little niche in the wall next to us, said, "Here. Here lay her head" and limped off as quickly as he could.

Later, he showed me her pretty, friendly house with a broad lime at the front: "There I lived with my wife for fourteen years. The upper windows were our living room and bedroom. My four boys used to play under the tree all day long". It was strange how this memory seemed to move him so very peacefully and soothingly. It must be consciousness of the order of things before God and man, worthiness, of the relationship, which so worked as to make everything else appeasing. A few days later we drove via Friedrichshafen to Langenargen, 8 hours from Meersburg, this time Jenny with us. Oh, how I thought of you, old heart; how many hundred times have I wished you here. You would have found what a genuine romantic point on Lake Constance is. By being here I had not had any idea of the like. Imagine the lake at least three times as wide as at Meersburg, a proper ocean; so wide that even one with good eyesight (Laßberg for example) can recognise nothing other than the Alps which along their whole length,

including the Jungfrau, show up in a thoroughly new and picturesque grouping as though in a mirror. You sit on the very fine balcony of a stately house (formerly a convent, now an inn) behind you, the folding doors of the refectory open, its whole length as if panelled with life-sized pictures of the old counts of Montfort, in heavy gilded frames. Below you, away across a little piece of flat beach, the endless area of water where you see 10 or 12 barges and vessels sailing at one time (there is more sailing traffic here than at Meersburg) to the left the very rich and urbanly elegant market town. Out into the lake, a bathing house to which an extremely narrow jetty leads, which is mirrored in the water and behind that a bay, full of sails and masts, just like a harbour but without the unpleasant walling. Then finally, to the right, not 200 paces from the inn, the main point, the splendid Montfort ruin (on a headland) the most beautiful that I have ever seen, with three towers, crenellated battlements and a triple row of very impressive window recesses with the finest mouldings which have, for the most part, withstood wind and rain and that one can, glancing along the recesses, see along them like a magnificent embroidery.

The ruin as such is not yet old (although a very old building). 50 years ago a bailiff lived in it, then the castle was sold for demolition and after the roof and the inner walls were torn down, an order came from Stuttgart (it is within the Wurttemberg domain) to halt work. Since then it has been standing in its deteriorating glory and is being undermined, little by little, by the waves which have burrowed many feet into the walls and which, when one is inside, roar as if subterranean, which is why a notice warns of the danger, before one goes in. (People still do it anyway). Now a poor flower seller has settled in there with his wife and child. The family huddles together in a makeshift way in the porter's lodge under the gateway arch. On the walls and bastions, wherever there is a patch of earth, it is all full of flowers in beds and pots. A goat bleats out of one of the cellar openings and a half-dozen white rabbits slips in and out through the little bottom window niches. You cannot believe how picturesque the whole looks. It is so romantic that one could not use it in a novel because it would sound too much like a novel. An unfamiliar merchant whom we met at Figel's yesterday and who was just on the way out of southern France, through Italy and last stopped at Langenargen, was quite delighted with it and said, 'he could compare it only with the most beautiful views at Genoa and Naples'. I, too, cannot tell you how small and shabby the local landscape seems to me since then.

When you come with your pupils during the year, do not miss Langenargen. Laßberg thinks that the undermining will be finished in no more than a couple of years and one fine day the whole ruin will come crashing down. Good heavens! Why have I had to enjoy such a lovely day without you. I was always thinking of you and the more beautiful it was, the sorrier I became that you were not standing next to me and I could take your hand and show you, over here, over there. Levin, Levin, you are an scamp and have stolen my soul. God grant that you look after it well. But you, on your Danube, love me too and also think about me; search for shells that are probably not there and have saved plant prints

and two stones for me. That is in order and were it in the end only ordinary gravel. That is how one should always think and create one for the other in order to keep love itself fresh. I shall also scrape things together for you – stones, plaster casts, rococo – as well as I can. As soon as one has enough together to send by ordinary Post, it is easily worth the cost and it is a great joy, receiving as well as sending.

I can scarcely look at your little shells that you found for me and gave me in the matchbox, you dear heart, without shedding a tear and they mean more to me than all the other unusual sea shells in my vitrine at Rüschaus. *Adieu*, Levin; think kindly of your *Mütterchen*, imagine often that I were with you and you were telling and confiding everything to me as if we were together there. Please think that often, so that no recess of your heart ever turns against me. I always want to tell you everything. *Adieu*, dear heart.

What you say about communion and confession is, I am sure, correct and great, deep salvation lies within this candid self-searching and indictment; do you imagine that I do not feel that? I have never doubted the salutariness, and belief in holiness often comes over me like an irresistible force. *Adieu*.

(in the upper margin of the fourth page) Write to me what you hear about Father and Pauline; also about Freiligrath and his whereabouts on the Rhine. I shall otherwise travel through and not know about it. Have you already sent him the 5 Reichstaler? I fear that you (could) forget it in your busy life and he is certainly in need.