GUSTAV FREYTAG

THE PICTURES OF GERMAN LIFE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

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The Pictures of German Life Throughout History

15th, 16th and 17th Century

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INTRODUCTION.

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In vain does the German seek for "the good old times." If even the pious zealot who condemns Hegel and Humboldt as the greatest of Atheists, or the conservative proprietor who is struggling for the privileges of his order, were to be thrown back into one of the last centuries, he would feel first unmitigated astonishment, then horror, at the position in which he would find himself placed. What now appears to him so desirable would make him miserable, and he would be driven to despair at the loss of all the advantages of that civilization which he at present so little appreciates.

Let a German proprietor endeavour to realize to himself the position of one of his ancestors in the year 1559. Instead of the house he has now, built in the old German style, surrounded by its English pleasure-grounds, he would find himself shut up in a gloomy, dirty, and comfortless building, placed either on a height destitute of water, and exposed to the cutting blasts of the wind, or else surrounded by the fœtid smells of stagnant ditches. It is true that three generations back dim panes had been added to the small windows,[1] and large stoves of Dutch tiles, which were fed with logs from the neighbouring forest, kept the cold out of the sitting-rooms; but the accommodation was limited, as it was occasionally necessary to defend the house against attacks from the citizens of the nearest town, roving bands of marauders, or reckless soldiers bent on

revenge because they had been cheated of half their pay by the neighbouring prince.

Comfortless and dirty is the house, for it is occupied by many others beside the family of the owner: younger brothers and cousins, with their wives and children, numberless servants, amongst them many of doubtful character, men-at-arms, labourers, and in 1559, mercenaries, may be added. In the court-yard, from the dung-heap is heard the cry of children quarrelling, and from round the kitchen fire the no less inharmonious sound of wrangling women. The children of the house grow up amongst horses, dogs, and servants; they receive scanty instruction in the village school; the boys keep the geese[2] and poultry for their mother, or they go with the village people to the wood to collect wild pears and mushrooms, which are dried for the winter meal; the lady of the castle is housekeeper, head cook, and doctor of the establishment, and is well accustomed to intercourse with lawless men and to the ill-treatment of her drunken husband. She is faithful, a thorough manager, proud of her escutcheon, of the gold chains and brocades belonging to the family; she looks suspiciously on the dress and finery of the wives of the counsellors of the town, who she considers have no right to wear sable and ermine, velvet dresses, pearls in their hair, and precious stones round their necks. The love and tenderness of her nature frequently gave elevation to her countenance and manners; but in those days, both in the homes of the nobles and in the courts of princes, much was considered decorous and was permitted to women of the highest character in familiar conversation which now would

be condemned as unseemly in the wife of a common labourer.

The daily life of the landed proprietor is one of idleness or wild excitement. The hunting is certainly excellent. Where the forest has not been laid waste by the reckless stroke of the axe, grow the stately trees of the primeval wood; the howl of the wolf is still heard in the winter nights; the hunters sally forth on horseback, with spear and cross-bow, against beasts of prey, stags, roedeer, and the wild boar, and all adopt the habits of the rough hunters. But whilst hunting, even in his own wood, every one must be provided with weapons against other foes than the wolf and the boar. There are few hunting-grounds concerning which there is not some quarrel with a neighbour or feudal lord, who often claims the right of following the chase up to the squire's castle; the squire is also set at defiance by the peasants of the nearest village, whose crops have been laid waste by the stag and the boar, and who hates the master of the castle for having beaten or thrown him into prison for crossing the path of the chase; and not unfrequently an arrow whistles through the darkness of the wood with other aim than a wild animal; or an armed band breaks through a clearing, and then begins a race for freedom and life. We will suppose the game to be brought home and cut up in the castle yard; then follows the banquet, with endless drinking of healths and wild revelry, and seldom a night passes without the whole party breaking up in a state of intoxication. Drunkenness was at this time a national evil, prostrating alike the powers of princes, nobles, and people. The guests at the hunt and the banquet are of the same

rank as their host--some are old cavaliers, constantly swearing, and relating anecdotes of the knightly feats they have performed in the greenwood against the traders and townspeople; others a younger race, hangers-on of the great feudal lords, who proudly wear the gold-laced caps given by these lords to their vassals.

Thus the week passes away. On Sunday it is considered a duty to attend the village church, and listen to the preacher's endless sermon, which generally breathes hatred to Calvinists or Papists, and denounces the factious Schwenkfeld or the apostate Melancthon. There is but little intercourse with foreign countries: the country gentleman gratifies his curiosity by buying from the itinerant pedler what was then called a newspaper, being a few quarto sheets published at intervals in the towns, containing very doubtful intelligence, such as a horrible fight having taken place between the sons of the Turkish sultan, a young maiden being possessed by the devil, or the French king having been struck on the head by one of his nobles. Sometimes the young squire listens to the songs of ballad singers, who recite similar news to old popular tunes, or, what is still more welcome, satirical verses on some neighbour, which the singer has been paid to propagate far and wide through the country. The reading which gives most pleasure at home, is either some astrological absurdity, such as a prophecy of old Wilhelm Friese or Gottfried Phyllers, or a description of the funeral festival of the Emperor Charles V. at Augsburg; besides these, theological writings find their way into the castle.

This life, which in spite of all its excitement is so meagre and monotonous, is sometimes varied by the discovery of a murdered man in the fields, or by some old woman of the village being accused of witchcraft. These incidents give rise to judicial proceedings, in the first case tardy and of little interest, in the latter fierce and bloodthirsty.

There are other annoyances in these times from which the landed proprietor is seldom free,--lawsuits and many difficulties. His father had sought to obtain money for the payment of his debts on the highway in his breastplate and saddle, and thus revenged himself for his injured rights. But now a new age has begun, and law asserts its supremacy over the self-will and independence of individuals; it is however an uncertain, dilatory, distorted law, which overlooks the powerful, and too often favours the wealthy. The young squire still rides his charger, armed with lance and pistol, but he is no longer eager to obtain fame and booty in war. The foot-soldier with pike and musket, and light-horseman of the town have outstripped him. Even at the tournament he prefers running at the ring; and if perchance he should encounter in the lists any person of distinction, he finds it more advantageous to allow himself to be unhorsed, than to contend manfully.

The condition of his peasantry is wretched: they have sunk from freemen to slaves; the rent they have to pay in labour, corn, and money, swallows up their earnings, yet he benefits little by it. The roads being bad and unsafe, it is impossible to export his produce: he is just able to keep himself and his household, for his income is small; everything has become dear; the new gold which has been

brought to Europe from America is amassed in the great commercial towns, and is of little advantage to him, and he is unable to maintain the state suitable to his position.

He holds obstinately to all he considers his right, and supports or resists his feudal lord according to his personal advantage; occasionally he follows him to the Imperial Diet. But in the Provincial States, he eagerly resists the impost of new taxes; he has no real love of his country, and only feels himself German in opposition to Italians and Spaniards, whom he hates; but looks with a selfish interest on France, whose King burns cursed Calvinists and engages German Lutherans at high salaries. The province in which he lives has no political unity; the sovereignty of his feudal lord is no longer a firm edifice, and his attachment is therefore only occasional. His egotism alone is firm and lasting, a miserable hateful egotism, which has scarce power to excite him to deeds of daring, not even to bind him to others of his own class. Rarely does the feeling of his own social position ennoble his conversation or actions; his education and knowledge of the world are not greater than those of a horsedealer of the present day.

A century has passed, it is the year 1659--ten years since the conclusion of the great German war. The walls of the old castles have been shattered, foreign soldiers have encamped within them, whose fires have blackened the ruins, and whose fury has emptied the granaries and destroyed all the household goods. The squire has now erected a new building with the stones of the old one; it is a bare house, with thick walls, and without ornament; the windows look on a miserable village, which is only partly

built, and on a field which, for the first time for many years, is prepared for cultivation; the flock of sheep has been replenished, but there are no horses, and the peasants have learned to plough with oxen. The owner of the house has no longer to provide for the horses of troopers and knights; a coach stands in a hovel,--a kind of lumbering chest on leather straps, but nevertheless the pride of the family. The house is surrounded by walls and moats with drawbridges; massive locks and strong iron work defend the entrances, for the country is still insecure. Gipsies and bands of marauders lurk in the neighbourhood, and the daily conversation is of robberies and horrible murders. There is great regularity both in house and village, and strict order is kept by the squire amongst his children, servants, and retainers; but many wild figures may be still seen about the court-yard,--disbanded soldiers who have taken service as messengers, foresters, halberdiers, &c. The village school is in sad decay, but the squire's children receive instruction from a poor scholar. The squire wears a wig with flowing curls; instead of the knightly sword, a slender rapier hangs at his side; in society his movements and conversation are stiff and formal; the townspeople call him your honour, and his daughter has become "fraulein" and "damoiselle;" the lady of the house wears a bunch of keys at her side; she is great in receipts and superstitious remedies, and her repose is troubled by ghostly apparitions in the old tower of the castle. When a visitor approaches, the spinning-wheel is hidden, an embroidered dress is quickly put on, the scanty family treasures of silver goblets and tankards laid out on the sideboard, a groom, who is just capable of making a

bow, is hastily put into livery, and perfumes are burnt in the room. The young squire when he visits appears as a gallant à la mode,--in lace coat and wig, and pays the most fulsome compliments to the lady of the house; he is her most devoted slave, he extols the daughter as a heart-enslaver, and declares that she is quite angelic in her appearance; but these finely turned compliments are bad sauce to coarse manners, and are generally interspersed with stable language and oaths. When conversation begins to flow more freely, it is directed by preference to subjects which are no longer ambiguous, and women listen, not with the naïveté of former times, but with secret pleasure, to the boldness of such language, for it is the fashion to relate improper anecdotes, and by enigmatical questions to produce a pretty affected embarrassment in the ladies. But even such conversation soon wearies, and the wine begins to circulate, the hilarity becomes noisy, and they finish by getting very drunk, after the old German fashion. They smoke clay pipes, and cavaliers of high breeding take snuff from silver boxes. The chase is again the amusement of the country gentleman: he tries to exterminate the wolves, which during the late war have become numerous and insolent; he exhibits rifles among his hunting gear, but no longer mounts his steed as an armed knight; his armour is rusty, his independence is gone, war is carried on by the soldiers of the Prince, and he appears at court only as the obsequious servant of his illustrious lord.

He is still firm in his faith, and adheres to the rites of the Church; but he holds in contempt the theological controversies of the clergy, and does not object to holding

intercourse with unbelievers, though he prefers Jesuits to zealous sectarians. The pastor of his village is poor and devout, and from living amongst lawless men, has lost much of his priestly pride; he strives to support himself by agriculture, and considers it an honour to dine at the squire's table, and has in return to laugh at his patron's jokes, and retail the news of the day. When it is a fête day at the castle he presents a pompous poem, in which he calls on Venus, the Muses and Graces, to celebrate in Olympus the birthday of the lady of the house. On such days there is music at the castle, and the viola da gamba is the fashionable instrument. Once a week the newspaper is brought to the castle, from thence it is sent to the parsonage, then to the schoolmaster and forester: the chief reading besides this consists of tedious novels and histories of adventures, or anecdotes of ghostly apparitions and discoveries of treasure; sometimes also dissertations on the phenomena of nature, the first glimmering of a more intellectual literature. The squire interests himself in politics; he distrusts Sweden, and abhors the regicide tendencies of England, but admires everything French, and whosoever can give him news of Paris is a welcome guest. He attends the Diet, but it is only for the sake of maintaining the privileges of his order; he lounges in antechambers, and by bribery endeavours to secure for his relations some appointment about the court. He unwillingly allows his son to study law, with the hope that he may, as royal counsellor, advance the interests of his family; in short, he looks upon the court and the government as wine vats to be tapped, so as to afford him a good draught. Germany is to him a mere geographical

spot, which he neither loves nor hates; his family or his order are all that he serves or cares for, and if one abstracts from him his high pretensions, and compares the remains of the kernel with the men of our own time, we should find more sense and rectitude in the stubborn head of a corporation of the smallest town than in him.

Again a century has passed, a time of little energy or national strength, and yet great changes have taken place. The year 1759 is in the youth of our grandfathers; numberless remembrances cling to our hearts; it will be sufficient to recall a few. The squire's house has no longer a bare front: a porch has been added, supported by stone pillars; the staircase is ornamented with vases; over the hall door a rudely carved angel holds the family arms emblazoned on a spiral shell. On one side of the building lies the farm-yard, on the other the garden, laid out with trim beech hedges and obelisks of yew. The old whitewashed walls are almost all covered with plaster-of-paris, and some are highly ornamented. There is an abundance of household furniture beautifully carved in oak or walnut; near the ancient family portraits hang modern pastil pictures, amongst them perhaps the daughter of the house as a shepherdess with a crook in her hand. In the apartments of the lady of the house there is a porcelain table with coloured tankards, small cups, pug-dogs, and Cupids of this newly discovered material. Propriety reigns everywhere with a strict stern rule; women and servants speak low, children kiss their parents' hands, the master of the house calls his wife "ma chère," and uses other French phrases. The hair is powdered, and the ladies wear stiff gowns and high head-

dresses; violent emotions or strong passions seldom disturb the stiff formality of their carriage or the tranquillity of the house.

The squire has become economist, and looks a little after the farming; he tries by selecting choice breeds to improve the wool of his flocks, and raises carefully the new bulb called the potato, which is to be a source of unfailing nourishment to man and beast. The mode of life is quiet, simple, and formal. The mother shakes her head about Gellert's 'Life of the Swedish Countess;' the daughter is delighted with Kleist's 'Spring,' and sings to the harpsichord of violets and lambs; and the father carries in his pocket the 'Songs of a Grenadier.' Coffee is placed before the visitors, and on high holidays chocolate makes its appearance. Everything is managed by government officials, and much is required of the country gentleman, who has to pay taxes without being consulted: he is a person of more consideration than the citizen, but is now far removed from the prince. The great noble looks with contempt on him, and it is well for him if he does not feel the weight of his stick: the officials of the capital interfere with his farming; they order him to dig a drain, to build a mill, even to plant mulberry-trees, and send him the eggs of silkworms, insisting upon his rearing them. It is a weary time; the third, or Seven years', war is raging between the king and emperor; the squire is walking about his room, wringing his hands and weeping. How is it that this hard man has so completely lost his composure? The letter on the table has informed him that his son, an officer in the king's army, has come unscathed out of the fight at Cunnersdorf; why then

does he weep and wring his hands? His King is in distress; the state to which he belongs is in danger of destruction, and it is for this that he grieves. He is greater, richer, and better than any of his ancestors, for he has a fatherland; the training of his generation is rough, manners coarse, and government despotic; his knowledge of the world is not greater than that of a subordinate official of the present day, but this feeling within him, either in life or death, makes him a man.

Life in every period of the German past was much rougher than now; but it is not the hardships of individuals which make the old time appear so strange to us, it is that the whole mode of life, in every thought and feeling, is so essentially different. The reason of this difference is, that at all periods of the past the mind of the individual was less free and more subordinate to the spirit of the nation; we may see this especially in the middle ages, but it may still be observed in the last century.

There was no such thing as public opinion. The individual submitted his conscience to the approbation of those with whom he lived; he committed to them his honour, interests, and safety, and only felt that he existed as a member of the society, thus rendering the necessity of union more urgent. How strikingly this tendency of the old times was exemplified in the clubs of Hanseatic stations! The constraint within their closed walls was almost monkish. Every word and gesture at the dinner-table was regulated, and this rule was maintained by severe punishments. The soldiers who roamed about together in troops from all parts of Germany, made laws for themselves, by which they kept

the strictest discipline, each being accuser and judge of the other. Upon a sea voyage the passengers selected from amongst themselves a magistrate, judge, and police-officer, who declared the law, imposed fines, and awarded even bodily punishment; and if at the conclusion of the journey any individual wished to free himself from this control, he had to take an oath that he would not revenge himself for any annoyance or injury he might have suffered under the ship's law; and it was the same with pilgrimages to the Holy Land, especially where it was question of any dangerous enterprise. For instance, when, in the year 1535, five-and-twenty men from Amberg undertook to explore the cavern of the "awful" mountains, their first act at the entrance to the caverns was to choose two leaders, and take an oath of obedience to stand by one another in life or death.

The same feature is to be found amongst the artists of the middle ages: thus did the life of individuals first find its full expression, in association with others.

One peculiar charm which we find in the national character of those early ages, is the union of a strong love of freedom with a spirit of obedience. To this characteristic of the old times may be added another. All, from the emperor to the wandering beggar, from their birth to their death, from morning till night, were fenced in by customs, forms, and ceremonies. A wonderful creative genius produced endless pictures and symbols, by which everything on earth was idealized. By these means was expressed the way in which the people understood their relations with God, and the right direction of all human energy; there were also many mysterious rituals which

served as means of defence against the supposed influence of unearthly powers. Even in law mimic and figurative proceedings were laid down. Whoever sought revenge before a court of justice for the murder of a relative, had everything as to garments and gestures, the very words of the accusation, and even their complaints, prescribed to them. Every transfer of property, every investiture and contract, had its significant forms and precise words, on which its legality depended. The knights were summoned to the lists by the herald; the bride was claimed and the guests invited to the wedding by fixed forms of speech; it was considered of importance which foot was placed first on the ground in the morning, which shoe was first put on, and what stranger was first met on going out; also, how the bread was laid on the table at each meal, and where the salt-cellar was placed. All that concerned the body, the cutting of the hair, baths, and bleeding, had their appointed time and appropriate regulations. When the agriculturist turned up the first clod, when he brought in the last sheaf, leaving a truss of corn in the field, in short, all the incidents of labour had their peculiar usages; there were customs for every important day of the year, and they abounded at every festival. Many relics of these remain to our day; we maintain some for our amusement, but most of them appear to us useless, senseless, and superstitious.

Many of these practices had been derived in Germany from the heathen faith and ancient laws and customs. The Church of the middle ages followed in the same track, idealizing life. The services became more frequent, the ceremonials more artificial. In the same way that it had

sanctified the great epochs of life by the mystery of its sacraments, it tried, rivalling the heathen traditions, to influence even the trifling actions of every-day life. It consecrated fountains and animals, and professed that it could stop the effusion of blood and turn away the enemy's shot by its blessing. Its endeavours to make the spiritual perceptible to the senses of the multitude, produced many proverbs and symbolical actings, which gave rise to the dramas of the middle ages. But whilst it thus met the imaginative tendencies of the people, its own spiritual and moral character was injured by all these outward observances; and when Luther accused the Church of thirty-seven errors, from the sale of indulgences, to the consecrated salt, and the baptism of bells with their two hundred godfathers, he was not in a position to perceive that the old Church had given growth to these excrescences, by having yielded too much to the imaginative disposition of the German popular mind.

The artisans liked to reproduce the formulas of their religion and guilds for their amusement: dialogue and gesture were interchanged, and thus dramatic representations arose. The initiated and best informed of every class became known by this; they had an opportunity of showing their nature under the traditional form. In such a way every young nation tries to represent life, and among the Germans, this inclination, together with the love of mystery, worked most powerfully in the same direction. It gave much opportunity for dramatic acting, though it was a peculiarly undramatic period in the life of the people, for words and characteristic gestures do not flow from the

inward man; they come with imposing power from external circumstances, leading, forming, and restraining the individual.

Such union of order and discipline belongs to the epic time of the people.

How the German mind outgrew these bonds we shall learn from the following stories of the olden time. In the course of four centuries the great change was accomplished--a powerful action of the mind brought freedom in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and a fearful political catastrophe brought destruction in the seventeenth.[3] After a long deathlike sleep the modern spirit of the people awoke in the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER I.

SCENES FROM THE HUSSITE WAR.

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(about 1425.)

Among the events of the thirteenth century, the wonderfully rapid colonization of the Sclave country east of the Elbe has never been sufficiently appreciated. In the course of one century a numerous body of German emigrants of all classes, almost as many as now go to America, spread themselves over a large tract of country, established hundreds of cities and villages, and united it for the most part firmly to Germany. Nearly the whole of the eastern part of Prussia extends over a portion of the territory that was thus colonized.

The time however of this outpouring of national strength was not the heroic period of Germany. The enthusiasm of the Crusades, the splendour of the Hohenstaufen, the short reign of German chivalry, and the greatest elevation of German art, were at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, whereas the colonization of the Sclave frontier was carried on with most energy towards the close of it. This was the period when Neumark and Prussia were conquered, and Lausitz, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Rugen, and Silesia colonized. But there was a striking difference in the case of Silesia; for whilst in the other Sclave countries the people were crushed by the iron hand

of the conqueror, and were compelled to adopt German habits of life, Silesia became the centre of a quiet, peaceful colonization, which spread itself far and wide over, the frontier towards the east.

How powerful a passion the love of wandering became in the German people at this period, is a point we will not attempt to enter upon. The expeditions of the Hohenstaufens into Italy, and still more the Crusades, had roused and excited the masses, who became restless and eager for foreign adventure; and the life of the peaceful labourer in Germany was full of danger, indeed almost insupportable. Pious monks, enterprising nobles, even princely brides were to be seen knocking at the doors of their peasantry, and trying to induce the young labourers to follow them to Poland. But little is known concerning this emigration; we do not even know from what province the great stream of Silesian wanderers flowed. There are grounds for thinking that most of them came from Magdeburg, Thuringia, and perhaps Franconia. There is no mention of it in the ancient manuscripts or chronicles; the only evidence concerning it might perhaps be found in the Silesian and Thuringian dialects, but even these have not been sufficiently investigated. We have however more knowledge as to who invited the Germans into the country of the Oder. It was the Sclavonian dukes of the Piasten family, who were then rulers of the country.

At the end of the twelfth century a race of ancient Polish princes resided on their paternal inheritance in Silesia; inferior to these were numerous Sclave nobles, and below them again a much oppressed and enslaved people. The

country was thinly populated, and poor both in capital and labour. The heights of the Riesenberge and the plains of the Oder were clothed with wood; between them stretched out miles of desolate heath. Herds of wild boars laired in the swamps, bears picked the wild honey from the hollow trunks of the trees, and the elks fed on the branches of the pine; the beaver made its home beside the rivers, the fish eagle hovered about the ponds, and above him soared the noble falcon. The beaver and falcon were more valuable in the eyes of the princes than their serfs. The peasants looked from their miserable huts with horror on the lords of the water and air, for the preservation of which they had to pay exorbitant penalties. What the earth yielded freely they had to collect for their rigorous masters and the Church. They had to pay tribute from the water and the heath of fish and honey, and heavy imposts on their arable land, sheaves of corn, grain and money; and a certain amount of service was required of them. The greater part were serfs; few were free. And not only the peasants, but also the artisans and tradesmen of all kinds lived in every gradation of servitude, ground down by oppression without hope or pleasure in their work. The Sclave cities only differed from the villages in being a larger collection of bare huts, surrounded by a moat and wooden palisades, and usually situated in the vicinity of a nobleman's castle, under whose protection they lived. In peaceable times markets were held in the towns. Even till the end of the twelfth century the merchants often made their payments, as in Poland, with the tails of martins and skins of squirrels instead of money. But the Silesian mines were already being worked; they yielded silver and

gold, copper and lead, and mining, which was considered the nobleman's right, was carried on actively. Mints were erected in all the great market towns, and, as in Poland, the coinage was changed three times a year; and the princes derived some of their income from tolls on the market-places, butchers' stalls, and public-houses.

Such was the country that was then ruled by the royal Piasten families under the Polish sovereignty, which, however, was often disputed, and sometimes entirely thrown off. A great dissimilarity might however be discerned in the different branches of the family. The Piastens of Upper Silesia united themselves closely with Poland, and kept up the Sclave habits in their country, so that even at the present day a Sclave population is to be found there; but the rulers of Lower Silesia adhered to the Germans. It was their policy to marry the daughters of the German princes: they set the highest value upon everything German, and German manners were introduced into the court; their children were sent to travel in Germany, and often brought up there, so that in the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Piasten family was held in great consideration throughout that country; they sought for knighthood from their relations in the west, and out of courtesy to them dressed their followers in their colours. They knighted their own nobles with the German straight sword, instead of using the crooked Sclave sabre; they preferred getting drunk on malmsey and Rhine wines, instead of the old mead. The German dances were in great request among the ladies of the court.

In this way a numerous German nobility was established in the country, for these courtiers or adventurers and their relations soon became landed proprietors, and the Sclavonian institution of the Castellan was replaced by the German feudal tenure. But an influx of priests and monks tended still more to the promotion of German habits; a stream of them poured incessantly from the west into the half-civilized country. Monasteries, cloisters, and other pious establishments sprang up rapidly, and became as it were the strongholds of German life; for the brotherhoods of the west sent their best and most distinguished members, and continued to furnish them with learning, books, and spiritual energy. The princes, nobles, and clergy soon became aware of the difference between German and Sclave labour; under the latter, large tracts of country yielded little produce, except wood from the forest and honey from the heath. The landed proprietors therefore, with due regard to their own interests, introduced everywhere German labour. Thus in Silesia the great truth first dawned upon men, on which rests the whole system of modern life, that the labour of free men, can alone give stability to a nation and make it powerful and prosperous. The landed proprietors gave up the greater part of the claims which, according to the Polish law, they had upon men who dwelt on their property, and which were so exorbitant that they derived but little benefit from them. The princes granted the inhabitants as a favour, the right of founding cities and villages in accordance with German law, that is to say, free communities, and this privilege was eagerly sought after, especially by the ecclesiastical bodies, such as Cistertians, Augustines, &c.

A regular method was pursued in founding these communities; but the fate of the villages was very different from that of the cities in the latter part of the middle ages. In the cities, as the body politic continually gained fresh strength, their rights and independence increased; the burgesses acquired by purchase the mayoralty, with its rights and jurisdiction; whilst, on the other hand, the villages were unable to protect themselves from the exactions of the landed proprietors and the burdens laid upon them by their princes; they lost much of their freedom, and many rights they had possessed at their foundation in the thirteenth century were only restored to them in the beginning of this present one.

It was thus that after the beginning of the thirteenth century a new German race sprang up with a surprising rapidity, bordering on the Oder, between the Reisenberge and the plains of Poland. The emigration continued for a considerable period, and the quiet struggle between the German and Polish races lasted long after the former had gained the predominance; indeed, in some districts it has not yet ceased. But for the most part the pliant Sclave race of Silesia peaceably adopted the new customs, as it was very advantageous to put themselves under German law. And thus the new race showed in its dialect, manners, and education a new phase of the German popular character which one may perceive has arisen from the union of the German and Sclave races.

The people who thus sprang up were not destined to an easy life, and it required all the excitability they derived from the Sclaves, together with the higher capacity they

inherited from the Germans, to preserve them from annihilation. Driven in like a wedge between Bohemia and Poland quite to the vicinity of Hungary, they contended with all these nations, dispensing blows and receiving them from their stronger neighbours. They were never able to attain to the independence of a united people. However strong particular communities and confederations became when it was a question of external enemies, the Silesians were almost always divided.

In the fifteenth century the country was visited by that terrible scourge the Hussite war. It is in that fearful time, when the fanatical warriors of the chalice burnt the Silesian villages and cloisters, and threw everything ecclesiastical into the flames, when the land was devastated for nearly a century by the horrors of war, that the peculiar Silesian character may be traced in contradistinction to that of the races dwelling in the adjoining country.

Whilst in the regions adjoining the Oder, and still farther off by the shores of the Baltic, the German race, proud of their recent conquest over the Sclaves, desired to improve themselves by union with Germany, a great Sclave population had arisen in the middle of the German states, the toughest and most stable of all that family: it was firmly incorporated in the Empire, and had long been under the influence of German culture. Prague in the beginning of the fifteenth century might have passed for a German city, for not only in its laws and commerce, but also in science and art it exhibited all the vigour and independence of German life. About 1289 the King of Bohemia rode as a German elector to the election of the Emperor, and waved the

golden glass at the coronation; the Bohemian minstrels and chroniclers wrote in the Swabian language and style, and Bohemian artists painted pictures of saints and windows for the German churches. Under the Luxemburgers Bohemia became the centre of the empire. The Bohemian throne was adorned with the German Imperial eagle and crown, and the flower of Germany's youth flocked to the many-turreted Moldavian city, in order to win in the first German university a nobler patent of nobility than the sword could give. It seemed then for a considerable period as if this fine compact Sclave country, lying with its mountain ramparts in the midst of Germany like a gigantic fortress, was likely to become the kernel of a great united empire, spreading far beyond the Rhine on the west, and to the Vistula on the east, or even perhaps to the swamps of the Theis. But just at this time an energetic reaction of Sclave popular feeling was roused in Bohemia against the Germans, and a long struggle ensued which fearfully shook the political, religious, and social life of Germany, rent the unity of the Roman Catholic Church, weakened the empire and threw it into confusion, depopulated large districts by a war full of cruelty, and amidst the flames of burning cities and the waning of millions, gave the death-blow to the Holy Roman Empire of the middle ages. It was the peculiar destiny of Germany that this great struggle should first break out among the teachers and scholars in the halls of the universities, and that the funeral pile of a Bohemian professor should give a new direction to the policy of German princes and people.

The auto-da-fé of Huss did not appear to the Germans a very striking or blamable occurrence; people in those days were hastily condemned to death, and there hardly passed a year that the torch was not laid to the stake in every large city. However great the grief and indignation of the national party of Bohemia might be at these proceedings, the wild fanaticism of the people was first roused by another, and greater crime of the reckless Emperor Sigismund, who, at the head of the orthodox German fanatics, began the strife by the great massacre in 1420; this outrage gave the Bohemians the strength of despair, and was the beginning of the wars which raged between the Germans and the Sclaves to the end of that century. Even after dissensions had broken out amongst the Bohemians themselves, and after the death of Georg von Podiebrad, feuds continued, and predatory bands spread themselves over the neighbouring lands, the people and nobility of Bohemia as well as those of the suffering frontier lands became lawless, and a hatred of races, less passionate but more savage and more enduring, took the place of fanaticism.

No land suffered more from the terrors of the Hussite time than Silesia, and it must be confessed that the Silesians showed to less advantage in this century than at any other period of their history; by the division of their country they were politically weak, and quite unfitted to withstand by their own strength the attacks of powerful enemies; when danger approached a feeling of the helplessness of their position came over them and disheartened them; but whenever they could breathe more freely, they became overbearing and full of high-flown plans