

Else Würgau-Rutsch

A German Childhood in the First World War

Memoir 1914 - 1918



Pauline, Else and Friedrich Rutsch 1916

Translated from the German
by Ruth Fleischmann

Published in German on www.kindheit.stefanmart.de
under Creative Commons Licence (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 DE)
Herford 2014



Else Würgau-Rutsch on her 80th birthday in Murrhardt, 30 December 1987

FOREWORD 2014

Else Würgau-Rutsch, born on 30 December 1907 in Hohenklingen in Baden Württemberg, died on 5 October 1992 in Herford in North Rhine-Westphalia. She was the only child of the schoolteacher Friedrich Rutsch (1879-1958) and his wife Pauline née Bonnet (1880-1965). The Swabian village in which she was born, to which she always remained deeply attached, today forms part of the town of Knittlingen in the district of Enz. In 1920 the family was moved to Murrhardt in the Rems-Murr district. Having studied the piano at the Conservatoire in Stuttgart, she opened a school of piano-playing in Murrhardt and taught there all her life – long enough to teach the children, and indeed in some cases the grandchildren, of former pupils. At the age of eighty-two she began to write down her memories of her childhood during the period 1914–18. In Herford, where she spent the last six months of her life with her son and daughter-in-law, she completed the manuscript of this book. It was written for her relatives and friends, to whom I sent copies after her death.

Now, one hundred years after the beginning of the first world war, which proved to be the prelude to the second no less terrible one, it seems to me that the time has come to make the book generally available.

Herford, 30 December 2013

Dr. Rainer Würgau

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE 1914

*Village and parents 3 / The second of August 5 / The gold car 6 /
Ringing of bells and the official bulletin 8 / The map of Europe 10 /
A visit to the military hospital 12 / My relatives 13 / Grandmother's journey to Bromberg 15*

CHAPTER TWO 1915

*Spring in Hohenklingen 18 / Honey and cherries 20 / Grandmother in Enzberg 21 /
The Enzberg children 23 / Wilhelm's place at the family table 25 / A morning in the Enz
meadows 26 The hay is brought in 27 / The barefoot children 29 / A letter from Friedrich 30*

CHAPTER THREE 1916

*"Sailors' fate" 32 / Little sun swirls 34 / Father called up again 35 /
War casualties from the village 37 / Duties 38 / The house 40 /
My Enzberg grandfather and his sister 44 / Grandfather's death 46 / Bread 47 /
The poppy princesses 49 / The copper collection 51 / The father of all 52 /
Aunt Emma and Uncle Johann 54 / The little head-piece 55 / Iron for silver and gold 57 /
"Seagull" 58 / Father at the Somme 62 / Correspondence with the front 65 /
War Christmas 67*

CHAPTER FOUR 1917

*Frost 70 / Mother's illness 70 / Father in the dugout 72 / The paper war of rules and
regulations 74 / Letters to the front 77 / The map of the world 79 / War reporting 80 /
Horrific news 81 / Mouth organ playing and dancing 83 / Father's return 84 /
Harvesting the corn on the hill fields 85 / The double floor 87 / I am caught out 89 /
Reformation Day celebration 90 / The red thread 91 / Berta's decision 93*

CHAPTER FIVE 1918

*The farm is sold 97 / A summer in the forests 100 / Friedrich's last letter 103 /
Prophetic dreams 106 / The lost war 107 / The billeted guest 110*

LASTLY 113

MAPS 115

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS 119

CHAPTER ONE 1914

Village and parents

My first home was in Hohenklingen, a small village in the fertile countryside between the river Neckar and the northern Black Forest, not far from the town and monastery of Maulbronn. Tucked in between orchards and vineyards, it peoples the little valley. Its houses climb the mountain slopes, the tops of which are covered with beech forests. My parents came there after their marriage in 1906; I was born there the following year and that is where I spent my childhood. We lived in the little community school on the steep village street, a pretty half-timbered two-storey building behind which lay a large garden.

Father was a teacher, mother a housewife, both tirelessly active. As was frequently the case in rural areas in those days, father was also cantor. During the week he gave his classes in school, on Sundays he played the organ in church and directed the choir. He also helped to found and manage a vintner cooperative. Mother's world was that of her work in house and garden: she grew fruit and vegetables, kept poultry and bees, sometimes over thirty colonies. My parents did not have much time to play with me. But that was not really necessary. In the immediate neighbourhood there were five boys of my age. With them I ran around, climbed and fought; my knees, like theirs, were always grazed and cut. "Go easy, Else, don't be so wild!" was the neighbour's constant admonition. As an only child, I also enjoyed the company of adults. I would besiege my father with questions about everything under the sun until it sometimes became too much for him; but he gladly explained things to me which he thought I could and needed to understand. I followed Mother into the garden, watched her hoeing and planting and begged to be allowed to work on my own at jobs I liked. Work was not yet clearly separated from play. Mother smiled and let me off if, after five minutes, I had already got tired of picking berries, for it was a beautiful, hot summer and she wanted me to enjoy one more season of freedom. After the big holidays, at the beginning of the school year 1914/15, I was to start my education – to become an ABC-recruit, as the saying goes. I was looking forward to attending my father's school.

But it was not to be. First of all, I had to stay in bed with a high temperature. Our doctor diagnosed measles, chickenpox and angina. "A bit much, all at once!" he said. My parents

closed the shutters outside the windows to keep the heat out and hung wet sheets inside the open window casements to cool the room and bring me some relief. During the worst night they put me into their bed to lie between them. It was oppressively hot and sultry. I awoke from an uneasy sleep with a violent nosebleed. My headache had gone, my temperature was down, the crisis was over. Father and mother could heave a sigh of relief and for the first time in many nights get some sleep.



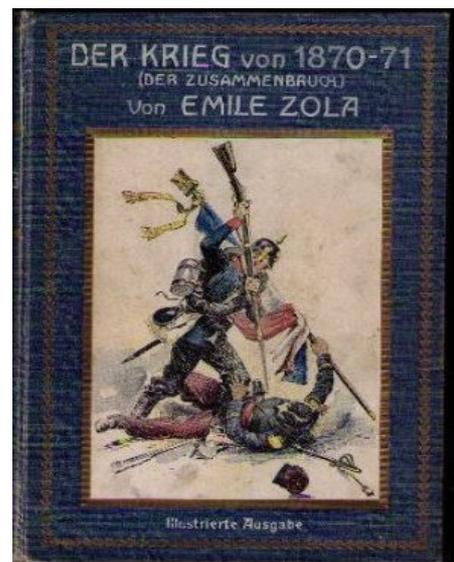
The school house in Hohenklingen, Else, Pauline, Friedrich Rutsch

The second of August 1914

The next morning they rose, as always very early. I stayed in bed dreaming in order to speed up my recovery. I was woken by the town-cryer's bell. Half-asleep, I heard it come nearer, then came an announcement, but I did not understand the words. Mother hurried into the room. "Mobilisation!" she cried. Father entered, deathly pale. The parents spoke with agitation. "Tomorrow", said father, "I have to go to the army!"

On the street outside the school building I could hear noise and confused voices: "When does your husband have to leave?" "Where do your boys have to register?" Mother went to the open window. I heard the voice of our young neighbour Anna. She was engaged and about to be married. In tears she told mother that her Adam would have to join up just the same. Now I was completely awake, sat up and asked: "What is mobilisation?" Father thought for a moment. Then he said: "The Kaiser has called all the men who have served as soldiers to take up arms. Everybody must register with his captain in the barracks. When they have all come and have been given their rifles, they will march to the station and board a train. They will be taken to the border, which they will guard to protect the realm. There has been shooting at the border. War has been declared and the enemy wants to invade our country and destroy towns and villages."

For us in the south-west the borders of the kingdom were those of France, and the enemies the French. I started thinking about what I had just heard and tried to remember what I knew about war. A picture on the cover of a book came to my mind. It showed a soldier standing over another man who had fallen to the ground; he had placed his bayonet on the other's chest and was about to stab him to death. The soldier on the ground had lost his cap. He was wearing red trousers and clinging desperately to his flag. The man who had knocked him down was wearing a helmet with a sharp spike on top. That spike and the blade of the bayonet frightened me. I was afraid of the picture, yet wanted to see it again and again. Father did not often show it to me. Rather he would take out a little box in which he kept mementos of his father, who had fought in the last war – the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1971. The box contained various medals attached to black-white-red



ribbons and a large, heavy rifle bullet. Grandfather had been hit in the leg by such a bullet and had been awarded one of the medals for it. His leg never quite recovered. But grandfather was grateful that it had not been amputated in the field-hospital and indeed that he had not been shot dead. Father was always quiet and thoughtful after he had put the book and little box back where they belonged.

I came to the conclusion that war must be something dangerous and evil, and began to be afraid of it. Could it not happen that my father might be shot dead in the war, or bayoneted? And what about my uncles? I had four: Uncle Wilhelm Kopp and Uncle Friedrich Kopp in Enzberg, Uncle Wilhelm Olpp in the Black Forest, and Uncle Albert Schmiedpeter in the Hohenloh district. I thought too of the fathers of my friends. I was now back in my small bed. The windows were wide open. A warm summer breeze came in, the swallows whirred and darted around, the scent of the roses in the front garden wafted in the window – all this I took in. But things were now different, no longer cheerful, and a heavy, dark cloud seemed to hang over everything.

But father comforted me when he said goodbye. Being with the territorial army was not dangerous, he said. He would not have to go further away than to Mühlacker. Where that was, I knew. You took the train from Maulbronn, but only for a short journey. Then you heard: “Mühlacker: all passengers please leave the train!” and then you waited for the bigger train which took you to grandmother in Enzberg or still further away to the Black Forest. It was this station and everything connected with it, including the many tracks, that father was now going to guard. That seemed sensible. I remembered what he had said and knew why the railway was so important for the war. When he was guarding the railway, he would not be sent to the border. It was quite a distance to those places where there was shooting. Because first came the Württemberg border, then you were in Baden, and France lay far away, far behind the Black Forest. That calmed me down and I forgot about the war.

The gold car

I was up and about again. One Sunday I was allowed to go with mother to Mühlacker. Father was going to be off duty for a few hours and we were allowed to see him. He was waiting for us on the platform. He wanted to know whether I had been obedient, and whether

I was still looking forward to going to school. Then he showed us where he had to go at night with the other soldiers along the railway tracks. The trains transporting soldiers and war equipment usually operated at night on account of the planes. There had been no alarms so far and mother was not to worry.

But she did seem to worry. One of her petticoats lay among her sewing. She had strengthened the hems on the inside with strips of linen. At the time father's salary was still paid out in gold and the linen bands were to be used to hide it. Mother planned to sew the gold coins into the hems in case we had to flee before the French. However, no news ever came that the French had crossed the border and the garment remained where it was. Nor was there any sign of the enemy planes and air ships for which we children were watching out. Instead, all sorts of rumours whirred through the air. We once heard that spies had stolen the government's gold car. It was said to be heading towards the border and to be about to pass through the village. Some people believed this, took their empty handcarts, ploughs, harrows and fodder-cutting machines out of barns and sheds, placed them sideways across the street, blocking it at three different places in the village. They remarked on how fortunate it was that there was only one road through the village and that it could therefore be barricaded completely. The same happened in neighbouring localities, as we discovered later on. Having completed the building of the barricades, everybody withdrew into their houses, listening and watching out for the spies in the gold car from the skylights and from behind closed window-shutters. That was really something for us children. But how we laughed afterwards at those who had fallen for the tale!

Reports of victories at the front gave rise to excitement and jubilation in our village. When one arrived, it was not announced by the town-cryer but by the ringing of the church bells. The front was no longer at the borders of the kingdom. Our soldiers were now fighting in Belgium; the city of Liège had been taken; the French were trying in vain to march into Alsace. I was as pleased as all the others, and nearly changed my mind about the war.

But one morning a murmur went through our village. The neighbours stood at their doorways looking down the village street. Something was happening down there. The women were whispering to each other, told the children to be quiet and folded their hands. The men took off their caps. Our young Anna had just been informed of the death of her husband, Adam. After he had signed up, he had been granted three days' marriage leave. Then he had gone to the front and had been killed in action straight away. Anna was now a war widow and

not yet twenty years of age. I still see her coming slowly up the street, supported by two women, weeping bitterly as she entered her mother's house.

The church bells and the official bulletin

The bells were rung again one weekday. My mother was standing at the window crying. I did not like to see her shed tears. It frightened me and I began to sob. Mother then picked me up, held me in her arms and told me she was weeping for joy. People were cheering outside. The bells were announcing a victory. Our soldiers had defeated a Russian army in Tannenberg in eastern Prussia, and had taken many prisoners. Prayers were said in the church, flags and decorations put up all over the village. Little black-white-red paper flags were stuck into the wreaths and garlands and also some with portraits of Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff. I asked mother whether father was going to come home now. She replied that the whole war had not yet been won but only a great battle.

The bells were often rung. In addition to Adam, six other young men from the village were killed in action. A mourning service was held for each of them, the entire community attending and the school children singing. The parson preached and comforted the bereaved. He said we should not only mourn our heroes but should be proud of them. We should be joyful and full of hope as they had given their young lives for the Kaiser and fatherland.

The teacher's wife – "Mrs Teacher", as my mother was called in the village – was now entrusted with a difficult official duty. She had to visit the relatives of the dead and seriously wounded soldiers, condole with them and give them solace. There was a hard day for me every week when I had to fetch the state bulletin for mother from the village elder. The elder had a long, snow-white beard. He had taken part in the 1870 war, as had my grandfather, had lost a leg and been given a wooden one instead. He walked with much difficulty, yet always held himself upright; I had great respect for him. His youngest daughter Luise looked after him. We children loved her dearly and always called her "Louise little aunty". There was a flock of geese on their farm with a gander who was as vigilant as a dog. But unlike the farmhouse dog, he was not chained but ran around freely, cackling and flailing his wings. If you approached him, he hissed and bit. I had already been nipped by him. All you could then do was to shout loudly for help, which I did until Luise came out the front door and chased

the brute away. Once she did not reach me in time. The gander took hold of my calf, embedding his beak in it. I screamed piercingly and tried to shake him off. But he did not let go and was so strong and heavy that I fell to the ground. At last the elder came and chased him off with his stick. “Your gander has torn my stocking!” I said with indignation. And so it was, which pained me much more than the scratches and bruises. I wept a lot and was not comforted until Luise little aunty pressed some sweets into my hand in addition to the official bulletin for which I had had to put up such a hard fight. Mother did not allow me to go to the elder any more and had the bulletin brought to the house from then on. The gander became ever crosser, finally stopping at nothing, attacking everybody without exception and so it was decided that he had to depart this life.

Mother always sat for a long time reading the bulletin. It published the lists of casualties, giving the names and home addresses of all those killed in action, missing and wounded, together with the section of the front on which they had fought. She told me too that our side had been beaten back by the French in a great battle at the river Marne, deep within France. But so far no enemies had penetrated into our kingdom and we two should pray that this would not happen. Every day I finished my evening prayer with the request: “Dear God, protect our kingdom and our Kaiser, and also the Austrian emperor, and don’t allow any French, English, Russian and Polish soldiers in.”



*Staats-Anzeiger für Württemberg, the official bulletin
Special issue 1 August 1914*

The map of Europe

Who the French were I thought I knew. I had only heard of the other peoples. Now I began to discover more about them. For I had now become a schoolgirl, and in the schoolroom below our flat hung a large map. Our young teacher, Mr Thumm, showed us where Germany, Austria and Hungary were. The countries waging war against us were also to be seen on the map: Belgium, France and England in the west; Poland and Russia in the east; and in the south Serbia and Italy. The teacher then questioned the older pupils. They had to come up and with the stick point out the borders of the countries and name towns and rivers. They were given little flags. Mr Thumm had them attach the flags to the map wherever our soldiers were. There were two fronts: one in the west and one in the east. We ABC-recruits were taking it all in. As there was at that time only one teacher in the school, classes one to four and five to seven were taught alternately, but generally in the same room. Mr Thumm now explained that everything we could see on the map was Europe. That was a fine new word. We repeated it and took pleasure in it. That was not enough for Mr Thumm, however. He wanted everybody to understand what it meant, including us beginners since we were present at the more senior classes. So he came up to the boy sitting next to me, to little Karl, put his hand on the lad's shoulder and asked: "Are you a European?" Little Karl stood up, stuck out his chest and called out, his deep voice loud and proud: "No, teacher!" Great laughter, above all on the back benches where the older pupils sat. I have to admit that I laughed heartily too, although I had no more notion of what a European was than had my neighbour. Our young teacher sang very beautifully and played the violin. So I soon grew fond of him and liked school better every day.



Red: Entente Powers (Britain, France, Russia, Serbia);
green: Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey) ; **yellow:** neutral states; **red lines:** the front; **blue names and crossed swords:** battles

We visited father again in Mühlacker. He inquired about school, was pleased to hear me praise the teacher and had me sing a little song which I had learnt from him. My parents discussed the war, they spoke about my uncles and the worries of my grandmother Kopp in Enzberg. Uncle Friedrich, her youngest son, had volunteered at the beginning of the war. He was only fifteen and a half, but the medical recruiting commission turned a blind eye and accepted him. He was now being trained in the barracks in Ludwigsburg. Aunt Berta, her youngest daughter, was doing voluntary service as assistant nurse at the Mühlacker railway station. During the day she worked on the farm with her mother and older brother, Wilhelm, who had not been called up. At night she got little sleep at the station. The trains were transporting thirsty and hungry soldiers to the front, who had to be given hot coffee and sandwiches. But there were also trains going in the opposite direction. They, too, were full of men: prisoners and the wounded. In the hospital trains Berta had to help dress the wounds and give them their medication. – “If I am sent to the front”, said father, “I will sign up as a stretcher bearer.” “Medical orderlies are particularly endangered”, replied mother. But father had taken a decision. “Everything is dangerous – but I will not shoot people.”

Visit to the military hospital

I was gradually beginning to get to know the serious side of life. I did not feel restricted by school or homework, but rather by the domestic duties which I now had to take on. The absence of the men and brothers had become noticeable in the village. As the women now had to see to the fields and vineyards as well as to house and stables, they had to get the children to help out. Mother had me clean shoes, stairs and corridors every day and go to the neighbouring village of Freudenstein for messages. As the teacher's wife, many community tasks were entrusted to her. Autumn was coming and it was a good year for blackberries. So mother went into the forest with other women and with the schoolchildren to pick berries. Many cans and buckets were filled from which she made juice in our wash-house. I was allowed to fetch the big sugar loaf for it from the grocer in Freudenstein and bring it home in the little handcart. It was wonderfully packed in blue and I helped to smash it with a hammer. It bubbled deep red in the wash boiler when we threw in the pieces. The juice was poured into bottles, the large bottles were placed in the small cart, bunches of flowers put in on top and off we went over the mountain and through the forest to Maulbronn, mother to the fore, followed by the schoolgirls. There was a hospital in Maulbronn which now served as a military hospital. The juice was needed there. We girls distributed our flowers to the soldiers. They thanked us, wanted to know what our names were and where we were from. Mother took the big girls with her into the wards where the seriously wounded were lying. The smaller ones were to wait in the garden and not to run away.

But we did. For there was a prison camp right beside the hospital: shacks on a meadow fenced in with wide-meshed wire. We approached the fence with caution in order to catch a glimpse of the prisoners. They were French, recognisable with their red trousers and caps. They had taken off their uniform jackets and were sitting or standing around in shirt sleeves. They were talking in their own language, smoking and laughing. The sun was shining gloriously. I stopped some distance from the fence and took a close look at them. They had small beards, dark hair and dark eyes, but otherwise looked just like our own young men. So they were our enemies! Was it possible that they could have cut off ears and fingers of us children, just because we were German? That is what the school children were saying. I would have to ask father whether it was true. The wounded with their bandages and sticks, and the prisoners who looked over towards us with no hostility at all – they were supposed to hate each other so much that they wanted to shoot each other dead? On the way home I told

mother about the prisoners and asked her again when the war would be over. But she had no answer. In the evenings I also had to pray for the wounded and the prisoners: “Dear Lord Jesus, cure them all and let them all go home and make the war stop soon.”



The military hospital in Maulbronn

My relatives

Meanwhile the fruit and grapes had become ripe and everybody was busy making cider and wine. Everything you touched was sticky; everywhere you went you were given the splendid brown or red juice to drink – even the air was sweet with it. Again I forgot about the war. October brought us more great joy: father had been furloughed, so was allowed to leave the barracks and return home for the moment. I remained in Mr Thumm’s class, however, for father taught the older pupils. We got the news from the Black Forest that Uncle Wilhelm Olpp was back at home again. The news from the Hohenloh district was less good. Uncle Albert Schmiedpeter was with the artillery and had to remain a soldier. Aunt Ida sent us a photo of herself and her three children. She wrote on the back of the picture: “Albert is still in Cannstatt and we do not know when he will be sent away.”

My parents kept another postcard. It was sent to my grandmother in Enzberg and is dated November 1st 1914. The picture part shows a view of Brussels. The text is hard to decipher and must have been written in great haste and agitation: “Dear Mother and brothers and sisters, All I can tell you is that we have been in battle for the past two days. Shells and shrapnel are just whizzing around us. Without comfort you would simply despair with the dead lying around everywhere. I was on patrol today and I can only say it was a miracle that I got back alive. I must stop now. Auf Wiedersehen [Until we meet again] Yours Friedrich. I don’t know my exact address ... Now you know that I am still alive.”

I must now tell you something about my relatives. My father, Friedrich Rutsch, was born in 1879 in Schrozberg near Rothenburg above the river Tauber. There in the Hohenloh region lived his uncles and cousins, many of them called Fritz. His father came from the inn called “The Lamb” in the town of Oberstetten, where to this day his relatives live. The family tree can be seen on the wall, going as far back as the 16th century. The Rutsches were farmers and innkeepers; some of them are described on the family tree as “farmers and schoolmasters.” At the time I am talking about, my grandmother, Marie Rutsch, still lived in Schrozberg, the place where my father was born. She had an inn which was run by her daughter Ida. Aunt Ida’s husband, about whom she was now worried, was my godfather. He had a hairdressing shop in the town. We visited her only a few weeks before the outbreak of the war. I had made friends with her children wee Clare, Gertrud and the small boy Albert.

My mother was from Enzberg. She was called Pauline after my other grandmother, and her maiden name was Kopp. My Enzberg grandmother was a widow who lived on the farm which had belonged to her husband’s father and his grandfather. Her husband, Karl Kopp, had died young, on January 2nd 1900, at the age of only forty-four. His eldest child, my mother, was twenty at the time; his youngest, my uncle Friedrich, was not quite one year old. Since Friedrich had gone away to join the soldiers, only two of grandmother’s six children were living on the farm: Wilhelm and Berta. Three daughters were already married – my mother and her two younger sisters Frida und Emma. Aunt Frida, my godmother, lived in a village in the Black Forest. Her husband, my Uncle Wilhelm Olpp, was a teacher like my father. Aunt Emma had married in 1914. Her husband, Johann or Giovanni Sinigalia – at that time I did not yet call him Uncle since there was a feud in the family over him – was an immigrant from Italy. He lived in Enzberg and had an artificial stone business there. I will return to all these people in the course of my story. The main emphasis will be on the fate of my Enzberg grandmother. For, apart from my parents, she was closest to me during those four years of

war. And of all the women in my family it was she to whom the war brought the greatest suffering.

Grandmother's journey to Bromberg

There was now a public telephone in the inn near the church. My mother was called to the phone there one December day. The call came from my grandmother in Enzberg. Friedrich, who had just turned sixteen, had been sent to the front and had been wounded right away. He was in Bromberg (now Bydgoszcz in Poland) in the military hospital. He was very seriously ill having come down with typhus in the hospital. The deaconess¹ who was looking after him had asked grandmother to come to him if at all possible. The boy had a high temperature, was hallucinating and calling for his mother. Several phone calls were made that day to Enzberg. My grandmother took Sister Clara's letter and telegram very seriously and was determined to undertake the journey to Bromberg to her sick son. My mother objected: "You can't do that – such a long journey, and in the middle of winter, and you all by yourself!" But grandmother had made up her mind.

She got the information, her papers, the tickets, and began to pack: sides of bacon, ham, smoked sausage, pork and beef fat, flour – whole-grain and white – and home-made bread. How could she get to Bromberg with all this luggage, travelling day and night and changing trains so often? She ignored all the misgivings of her children, friends and advisors. Her sole response to all the doubts was: "When I explain where I am going, why and to whom, everybody will help me." She was right. Throughout her journey she was given every assistance. When she arrived in Bromberg, she stood on the platform surrounded by her luggage and must have looked somewhat lost. A woman of about her own age addressed her: "Where are you going, little mother?" whereupon grandmother explained her situation. The communication cannot have been easy between the Swabian² and the Prussian dialect-speakers. The woman took the stranger from the station into her modest house and had her

¹ The deaconess movement began in Germany in 1836; it gave women an opportunity to become independent of the family: they were trained for nursing, childcare and social work. The diaconate was not a religious order, but most were close to Lutheran churches.

² The name derives from the ancient duchy of Swabia, which comprised the territory of modern Baden-Württemberg but was much larger.

stay with her family for the duration of grandmother's stay in Bromberg. She was there for six weeks. Sister Clara was very glad to see her. She hoped the visit would effect an improvement in the condition of the most seriously ill young man. Just as grandmother had been offered shelter as a matter of course, so too she helped the nurses to care for the many typhus patients in the hospital. Friedrich was unconscious most of the time. Grandmother sent a postcard to my mother on 18 December 1914: "Just to let you know that Friedrich is in a very serious condition; he has a very high temperature and is mostly no longer conscious. I am so glad that I came to him; he so longed for his mother and kept screaming: Has Mother not arrived yet? He is now so weak; the dear Lord only knows how long it will last. I can't leave my child who is so seriously ill. Greetings from your mother." She spent the first Christmas of the war at the sickbed of her son. Not until the new year did his health begin to improve. Grandmother left the eastern city, but not without giving what remained of her food to her hosts as a sign of her gratitude. They remained in contact for a long time. Letters were exchanged and grandmother always sent parcels at Christmas.



Friedrich Kopp (seated 2nd from left)
 Caption: "In memory of our stay in the Diaconate in Bromberg 1915"



Friedrich Kopp (standing, 4th from left)
 Caption: "Place of refuge for old warriors in the Diaconate in Bromberg War year 1915"

CHAPTER TWO 1915

Spring in Hohenklingen

Friedrich kept us informed about his improving health. In February he was able to get out of bed and to walk with the help of a stick. In March we got a postcard: "In memory of our stay in the Diaconate in Bromberg 1915" showing him with other patients on the mend at Sister Clara's side. He was hoping to be given leave to come home at Easter.

More field postcards with pictures arrived from the eastern front. One of them showed the interior of a Russian peasant hut. Everybody is together in the one room: the family, the goats, the pig, the hens and a German soldier. They are all scratching themselves. Underneath there was a little rhyming couplet, which has remained in my memory: "The father has lice; the child has lice / The master has lice; the servants have lice / I as billeted guest sit down with them / First I look on and then I scratch too." I showed this postcard around in school. We children laughed a lot over it, but our young teacher did not enjoy it. He spoke to us about the wretched hatred peoples had of each other and of the contempt for poverty. And we heard about the national pride of the Slav peoples, of the Poles, Russians and Serbs who unfortunately had so often been offended by us arrogant central Europeans. The Serbs were a poor but proud mountain people, who had to struggle to make a living from the barren soil and whose desire for freedom was being suppressed by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. That was the reason why the sad and terrible war had broken out. A Serbian revolutionary had shot the Habsburg heir to the throne and his wife while they were visiting Sarajevo. Thereupon the Austro-Hungarian emperor had declared war on Serbia and thus also on the Balkan states. The German Kaiser, an ally of the Austrian emperor, came to his aid. This alliance, our teacher said, had had terrible consequences: France, England, Russia had entered the war as our enemies.

Meanwhile there was heavy fighting in the west, in the east and in the south. Men were being killed in action or dying in the hospitals. Women, children and the old people were fleeing from the approaching devastation, mothers and brides in mourning. On both sides the church bells were tolling. Father studied the official bulletin and awaited conscription.

It was wonderful springtime weather. Everything was covered in white cherry blossom, the gardens were being filled with flowers; once out under the blue skies, you just did not want to go back into the house. The trees were greening. The old beeches at the edge of the forest high up over the village had an irresistible attraction for us, seeming to invite us to come for a swing. And so I made off up there with wee Ludwig³ and wee Gustav. There we joined forces to pull down the lower branches just within our reach; one of us clung to the branch, the others then let go. Now the force of the ascending branch propelled the child out over the slope. At the height of the arc, you let go, fell on to the lovely grass, and rolled down delightfully. We returned home with both clothes and consciences somewhat the worse for wear.



Cherry blossom in Hohenklingen

³ Swabians frequently add the suffix *-le* to names as a term of endearment, particularly to children's names. It derives from *-lein* meaning 'little'. It corresponds to the use of *-ín* in Irish, anglicised as *-een*.

Honey and cherries

Oh dear, mother was in a terrible state. But for a different reason: two colonies of bees had swarmed, had flown away with their queen bees and had formed a large swarm on a branch of a tree. Mother sighed: "Oh God! Dear father in heaven!" First of all she had to go looking for the colonies. If she found them, she had to shake them into a special basket or skep. That was difficult and dangerous. Usually a ladder and a long stick were needed. Watching this was frightening. The bees were very upset and in no time at all you would be stung in the face, on your arms, or anywhere there was a bit of skin exposed and it was very painful. Mother dressed up for the expedition. You would not have recognised her: she appeared equipped with a wide straw hat covered with a close-meshed veil reaching to her waist. Her arms were protected with long sail-cloth gloves and best of all: she had a huge pipe in her mouth protruding from a special hole in the veil. The bowl of the pipe was a brass receptacle the size of a cup into which dried and crushed poppy capsules had been stuffed and lit. Mother was smoking! She could not of course inhale the narcotic smoke, but had to blow it out, otherwise she would have become dizzy on the high ladder.

Once the swarming period was over and the bees were again behaving properly and working hard, the time approached when the honey they had gathered had to be extracted from the combs. That was also dangerous, but at least sweet work. I was put to work in the wash-house and had to turn the centrifuge. This was a circular cauldron, the interior of which could fit four to six honeycombs. The honeycomb frames were fastened to special fittings on the sides and the cauldron then closed. There was a handle on the side with which it could be revolved on its axle. I turned the wheel, slowly at first, and then faster and faster. After a while the honey flowed into a channel, then through a pipe the width of a finger and down into the containers positioned underneath. It came out golden yellow and was so sweet. But first mother had to get the honeycombs out of the hive and to take up the fight with the bees. For they did not willingly part with their winter food and to make them do so, she had to smoke and smoke. Then the top layer of each honeycomb had to be scraped off. With a long and very sharp knife the thin layer of wax was removed with which the bees had sealed the cells. And this wax covering was the reward for the turning of the centrifuge and watching. You put it into your mouth and sucked it. It tasted delicious. Whenever we were spinning the honey a host of children gathered, hoping for a slice of honey. Generally one or two hundredweight of blossom honey were harvested. Later came the acacia honey, and finally the

forest honey. I thought that was the best. It shimmered golden-green and its aroma and taste were stronger.

But the honey harvest was only part of the work that had to be done. Straight after the blossom honey came the cherries. That work was also quite dangerous, done on long ladders in dizzy heights. The women needed strength and skill when moving the ladders and placing them against the trees without damaging the twigs and branches. For the children this harvest was not a matter of idle watching and sweet lazing. How many times during the summer did the schoolgirls go with the teacher's wife to the hospital in Maulbronn! On the way there they were always laden with baskets full of bottles and glasses of cherry juice and cherry jam. How many tins of honey were brought there to the soldiers! We did not count them, but there were many, as we gave away part of every harvest. But it was also always a festive occasion for us, as it gave much pleasure both to those receiving the presents as well as to those giving them. Mother was particularly glad to be able to share what she had since her brother Friedrich was back again. Not far from us, in Freudental, he was in a convalescent home where the family was able to visit him and bring presents.

Grandmother in Enzberg

School closed for a fortnight during the hay harvest. Once the gardens and the early fruit had been seen to, we – father, mother and I – went to grandmother's farm in Enzberg, to save the hay. Before I tell you about the hay harvest, I must first give an account of my grandmother as I saw and knew her during my childhood and what I gradually learnt from my mother's stories about her fate.

She was really tall for a woman, slender, indeed almost gaunt. Her appearance was that of a prosperous farmer's wife, her manner of speaking simple and clear. She was a well-mannered woman, polite and correct in her dealings with people. On weekdays she wore simple clothes, with strong shoes and woollen stockings over the bandages on her legs. She suffered a great deal from varicose veins, having given birth so many times and done so much hard physical work. In summer she wore wide dark-coloured cotton skirts, as was the custom for widows, with a simple blouse also dark in colour and a small standup collar, fastened from neck to waist with many buttons. Her skirt was always covered with an apron, mostly grey

with red and green stripes. Her blouse was tucked in at the front, at the back it hung loosely over the apron strings. Her headscarf was always snow-white. She only wore it outside the house. On Sundays her dress was similar to that of weekdays, except that the material was finer. In the warm season she wore one made of black lustre, a shiny material out of which jackets were also made for gentlemen in bright to dark grey. – In our area black summer suits were often made from this material for clergymen. – In winter she wore black woollen clothes. I never saw her wear a coat. At that time in the country women wore large shawls instead.

Her maiden name was Pauline Bonnet, a name that sounded French but which was pronounced as a German one. She was from a Waldensian family, of which there were many in the region. These families had been driven out of their native Savoy in the 17th century on account of their strict Protestant faith and had been granted permission to settle in Württemberg. Grandmother was the daughter of a prosperous farmer and butcher who owned the Ox Inn in Ölbronn. Her father had sent her at the age of 16 to work in the household of a Stuttgart ministerial civil servant. Such positions provided farmers` daughters with the opportunity to learn how elegant households were run and to get to know city ways and manners. The lady of the house, who herself had no children, treated the young girl from Ölbronn very kindly, in many respects almost like a daughter. She called her Paula, as this name seemed more distinguished than Pauline. Grandmother`s apprenticeship lasted three years. She left the house as a 19-year old bride to marry 24-year old Karl Kopp from Enzberg, whom she had loved since childhood, very much against her father`s will. It was not so much that he objected to the young man, who was heir to a large farm with butcher`s shop and cattle breeding business, but that there was an older unmarried girl in the family entitled to a substantial dowry. However, the couple managed to get permission to marry. The wedding took place in Ölbronn in 1879, and was celebrated with all due ceremony in the inn belonging to the father of the bride. The dowry money and household goods were handed over correctly and punctually by her father, but not without his having made quite clear to his daughter that she would receive no further support from her family: “Never come here with lamentations and tales of troubles!” were his final words in the matter. Both his sons, grandmother`s brothers, shared his view.



Grandmother Pauline Kopp née Bonnet in Enzberg

The Enzberg children

Karl Kopp was able to bring his beloved little Paule home. The marriage was a happy one. The first child, also a wee Paule, my mother, was born in 1880. Wilhelm followed two years later. After a further two years a girl was born, who died three months after her birth. Grandmother mourned this child for a long time. Frida, my godmother in the Black Forest, was born in the sixth year of the marriage. Two years further on, Emma came into the world. Eight years after her, in 1896, came my Aunt Berta. In 1899 Friedrich was born, the only one of the children who had no conscious memory of his father. When the father was laid out in the living room in Enzberg on the second day of the new century, Friedrich was crawling around on the floor and playing at the feet of the family who were adorning the coffin with flowers.

Grandmother as I knew her was always at work and quiet and serious. When I went through house, garden or fields holding her hand, she would reply kindly to my questions

about the tools and appliances which were new to me and the work they were used for. I never heard her laugh or sing. But she did often scold – though not me or her people, nor did she speak ill of them. Her anger was directed against the gentlemen in the offices or in the town hall, when she had to appear before them to pay a tax she had forgotten about or if the fields had to be divided up differently or borders of plots adjusted. My goodness, could she get cross! “Idlers, wastrels, time-thieves” were among the milder of expressions used to describe the gentlemen, though of course only in the hearing of the family. It was strange that such a tranquil woman could wax so abusive. Her behaviour betrayed a certain helplessness and vulnerability. She had no knowledge of legal matters. Above all, she had no good friends in the village or among the authorities who could have advised her on administrative issues or negotiated with her without using the harsh military tone of voice at that time common in all official offices. As she was not fond of money, she treated it with caution and distrust. She was generous with food and implements, willingly loaning them out or giving them away if asked to do so, as long as it was not a matter of money. As far as business sense was concerned, she was the opposite of her husband, who had entrepreneurial talent and had been most successful in agriculture, cattle breeding and trade. His widow’s kindness and courtesy were interpreted as weakness and it was a source of some satisfaction to business rivals that, after the death of her husband, she had to part with some good pieces of land which he had added to his farm. As she had married against her father’s wishes, her brothers had turned completely against her. Three or four years after Karl Kopp’s death, the barn containing the entire harvest was burnt down; the insurance paid very little – it was never discovered whether arson was involved or not – and there was no seed for the spring. So with a heavy heart she decided to go to her father to ask for seed. She came away empty-handed. As far as I know from my mother, it was her last visit to her parents’ home in Ölbronn. There was nothing for it but to struggle through as best she could and she often sought relief from her troubles in abusive tirades, forgetting the polite forms she had learnt during her apprenticeship.

Her children were trained to work regularly from a very early age and often had to do hard labour. They all became industrious and reliable people, used to stepping in, helping out and sacrificing time and energy. The women set to work with temperament, often with superfluous energy. When confronted with the minor catastrophes of everyday life, they tended to wring their hands and cry out: “Dear Lord in heaven, whatever will we do now?” But they were always quick to find a solution. They never stood around idly in crises and

whatever they put their hands to, they saw through to the end with determination and persistence. After the work had been done, they spoke about the amount of energy and of time it had cost them – in particular if one of those involved was within hearing. This was done with an undertone of lamentation, as if it were a sacrifice and a heavy burden imposed on them by fate. There was an element of serious stress, almost of desperation in their characters, as if every action was a matter of life and death. At times that will indeed literally have been the case, for instance after the burning of the barn, but above all after the death of their father, who had always done all the planning and knew exactly what needed to be done. That is why their manifold lamentations were echoes of the great lamentation for the loss of their father.

Wilhelm's place at the family table

But perhaps I exaggerate and am only speaking of my mother, who as the eldest child experienced the death of their father in all its horror. And she too did her work serenely and happily when she was not harassed and was in good spirits. What great worry could not be forgotten for some hours or even days while doing the peaceful ever-recurring garden and field work! That grandmother did not only have the usual day-to-day cares but also big trouble, I noticed even as a child. As the children grew up, they were all able to get on with people; they were clever, adroit, knew how to assert themselves and get what they wanted. But the eldest son Wilhelm did not have this ability. Like the others, he was hard-working and good at his work but, in contrast to them, was shy and reserved, a troubled child. He had become like this during his schooldays. Things that came easily to the others, such as reading and writing, caused him the greatest difficulty. The mockery of his peers, unfortunately also of his sisters and brothers, and above all the disappointment of his father, undermined his self-confidence completely. He was a pleasant-looking, indeed handsome man, in good health and well proportioned, even if delicate rather than robust. But being timid, he only felt really secure in the vicinity of his mother, who protected him with much vigilance. He was a good farmer. In the stables and fields he knew exactly what needed to be done and when, and he did his work most meticulously. But he was frightened by everything beyond that. The things a good farmer has to be able to do for success in business filled him with fear: calculation, planning, buying and selling, getting the upper hand in dealings with businessmen and the authorities. That is why, to his mother's grief, he was not fully accepted as head of the family.

Grandmother had coped with all of this. The war increased her burden of worries, as the farm was now obliged to deliver produce to the state. A certain percentage of all products had to be handed over in return for payment: corn, potatoes, fruit, calves, pigs and later on hay. The uncertainty as to whether the farm could provide the amounts required often caused much stress. From spring 1915 a prisoner of war had been allocated to the farm: a Polish farmer who knew his craft and was very hard-working, but who hardly spoke a word of German. There we all sat at the long wide table in the kitchen: three men, three women and a girl. The place at the head of the table Uncle Wilhelm had gladly ceded to my father, whom he liked as he felt accepted by him. My father was himself a farmer's son, knew and loved all farm work, appreciated Wilhelm's competence and overlooked his weakness. Uncle Wilhelm sat on his right, the Pole on his left. Grandmother sat at the long side of the table, beside my mother and opposite Aunt Berta. I sat next to my mother, or next to Aunt Berta, of whom I was fond because she had a lovely voice and sang and laughed a lot. We often teased each other at table. Then we were told we should not be fooling around but ought to sit still. Cooking was grandmother's responsibility: she was good at it, always planned wisely and the food was invariably well cooked.

A morning on the Enz meadows

The Pole was brought back to the prison camp after supper and brought to us again in the morning – during the hay harvest by dawn. The three men and Aunt Berta went off at 4 am to mow the Enz meadows with their scythes and the necessary implements, including a large stone jar of cider. It was a splendid piece of grassland bordering the right bank of the river Enz for many kilometres at the foot of a wooded hillcrest in the direction of Mühlacker. On the left bank of the river lay the village, the country road and the railway embankment. Many acres of this land belonged to grandmother. So here the four swung their scythes, Uncle Wilhelm somewhat ahead, then my father, then the Pole. Aunt Berta came last. It was Wilhelm out front who set the pace. All the reapers following him had to cut their swathes to the same width. They could only mow until 10 o'clock as the grass became too dry after that. Those of us women who remained at home – during the hay harvest I considered myself one of the women – also had to rise early: at five. I liked getting up early in this house as I was woken every morning by the swallows. It was an old half-timbered house and the swallows had built their nests over every window. We made malt coffee, prepared the splendid milk and

cut good white bread. We breakfasted in some haste. We filled a large can with milk coffee for our reapers and packed the white bread into a basket. Then each of us armed ourselves with a pitchfork and a rake. My mother carried the heavy food basket on her head, never once touching it with her hands to balance it during the 15-minute walk to the Enz meadows. Once we arrived, we gave the reapers their hot coffee and bread. We women took the forks and began scattering the long windrows of mown grass. This was not heavy work but it had to be done carefully. The grass could not lie in thick heaps anywhere, as it had to dry quickly. The sun was shining, the dew glittered on the stalks, the smell of the mown grass was intoxicating – it was all quite magical.

Rows of slender poplars lined the bank of the little river at a certain distance from the water. In their shadow I heard a gentle murmuring. I was captivated. The pitchfork lay in the grass and I sat on the warm sand of the bank, having taken off my shoes and stockings. Off into the crystal-clear water! The coloured pebbles of the stream invited you to collect them. It was lovely to play, to dream, to watch the wagtails. A warm morning wind set the foliage of the trees in motion. It shimmered silver-hued against the deep blue sky. Now mother was calling. Stockings and shoes on again and back I was spreading the grass. The reapers had finished for the day and helped us. We marched home at midday, me holding father`s hand. We were walking along the railway embankment. I had forgotten the war during these morning hours. Now a train full of soldiers thundered past and all at once it was back again and very close indeed.

The hay is brought in

A light warm meal was waiting for us all at home. The men had a smoke and then went to the stable to see to the cattle. The women filled the large stone jars with cider, wrapped them in wet cloths to keep them cool and cut black bread and smoked ham. Everything was packed into a food basket. Then we all went back to the meadows together. The grass was now dry on the upper side and had to be turned. By the time we had finished doing this at the far end of the pasture, we were able to rake the now dry hay into small piles on the village side of the meadow. Four o`clock was time for a break in the shade of the poplars. The cider jars had been placed in shallow water near the bank of the river Enz; they were taken out and passed around. Everybody had their pewter drinking cup. Grandmother doled out the food. The men

were given double portions of meat. The women were content with their single portions and everybody ate their fill. We stood up and continued stacking the hay. Before the stacking was finished, Uncle Wilhelm set off home with me to harness the bay and fetch the hay wagon. In this I was driven back to the meadow. The hay wagon was filled up. The Pole climbed up and began to compress and pack the large bales of hay which father and Uncle Wilhelm were passing up to him on a fork. Aunt Berta led the horse along the rows of stacks, which gradually grew into a proper hay castle up on the cart. Mother followed the wagon, raking up what had fallen off. Then the stacked hay was secured by a heavy pole, which was attached over it. At the very end, once the pole had been attached with long ropes to the sides of the wagon, Aunt Berta and I as the youngest were lifted up on to the top of the pile. There we had soft seats. It smelled so nice and swayed so beautifully! We were pleased that we had saved so much good hay in one day.

But the day was not yet over. The men unloaded the hay in the barn. A cable pulley was used for this with a gripper: two outsize hay forks which folded into each other like a pair of hands and could lift hay in enormous bundles. The hay was shifted by the gripper from the wagon up to the hay loft, the top storey of the barn. Every meadow, every field had its own special place in the lofts of those barns. Grandmother was meanwhile feeding and milking the cows – there were four of them. And the bay was given his food, as were the little calf and the pigs. The small creatures, the hens, geese and ducks, were seen to by Aunt Berta, while my mother looked after the kitchen. In the evening we had soup made from fried bread and boiled potatoes with butter. The men were given smoked bacon or smoked sausage in addition and anybody who wanted could have sour milk cool from the cellar. The meal was a communal one just as the work had been. A prayer was said before and after the meal. The end of the prayer was different to that of peace time: “Protect all our dear ones in battle and bring peace to them and to us.” This was my second reminder of the war that day. The others will no doubt have thought about it more frequently. We were all tired and satisfied. I was happy too. The military police came to fetch the prisoner of war. The women discussed the work for the following day with the men. Everybody still had this or that to do, my mother above all to see to it that I went to bed. There I fell asleep with the pleasant hope that ten further days would be spent in the same way, provided that it did not rain.

Barefoot

After two weeks in Enzberg it was back home again, where our own work awaited us with gardens and bees. We in the country did not suffer food shortages. We still had everything we needed: bread, milk, butter and eggs as mother kept chickens. But as the peace we longed for would not come, other things were beginning to become scarce. Official announcements reached us through the town-crier, the “Bürgerfreund” [Citizens’ Friend], our local paper, and the official gazette. We were required to be economical, and to collect and hand over certain materials such as leather, woollen and cotton cloth. They even involved the clergy. One of our parson’s sayings made an indelible impression on me: “The time will come when we shall all have to go around in paper clothing!” The people were obedient. We were given wooden sandals. I too got a pair. They were not very comfortable. A two-centimetre wooden sole was secured by leather straps tied around the ankle. But they clattered marvellously when you ran. It was a great temptation to jump around in them in our long narrow school yard which was paved with sandstone. And you could make quite a racket when stomping up the stairs to our flat, much to my mother’s annoyance. This was one way of sparing the leather shoes. In the autumn when it became cooler I got out my leather bootees. But I had grown out of them. Mother had to buy me new ones. To do so she needed a ration coupon from the town hall. Another child was pleased to get the boots which had become too small for me.

Not only we children wore sandals or went barefoot during the summer; so did the women and that not just in the house but also in the stables and garden, and even while weeding the potatoes and turnips and mowing the fodder. Everybody took the executive order seriously and nobody was ashamed to wear wooden clogs or to go barefoot. One day my parents had to do some shopping in Maulbronn. I was allowed to go along with them, which was a great treat for me. Walking through the beech forests lit up by the summer sun was an experience. One of the messages to be done brought my parents to the railway station. I trotted along beside them. The station hall was open at the back, leading directly to the tracks. The fountain in the hall instantly caught my eye. It was in a niche inlaid with pale green tiles. There I quenched my thirst. My parents were standing a little further away. I can still see my father bowing to some passing gentlemen and taking off his hat. The gentlemen acknowledged his greeting graciously and continued on down the hall in the direction of my fountain. The one in the middle was the most elegant and dignified, and I studied him from head to foot. He carried a stick with a silver handle, wore a black jacket with white shirt and tie, grey trousers

and – I could not believe my eyes – he was barefoot! At first I was paralysed with fright, but then I burst out laughing at the sight of the unshod gentleman, continuing loudly and merrily until I noticed the severe expression on my father's face. Mother came over and pinched me. I did not understand why. On the way home I got a lecture. Father explained that I should not have laughed, as the gentleman was demonstrating to us how we all could save leather and was giving a good example by going barefoot. The gentleman was the most senior civil servant in the administration.

A letter from Friedrich

A rich autumn had arrived and cider once again perfumed the village air. The fermenting pomace was lying near the presses; inside the vats you could hear bubbling and boiling. We were given holidays from school and taught how to cut off bunches of grapes properly. In return we got bread and cheese with sweet wine in the evening in the winepress building. Afterwards nobody came to send us to bed too early. The adults were sitting with tankards full of new wine, they joked with us, laughed and sang. During the day it was different. There was an air of dejection in the village. You could hear complaints: "War and no end in sight". The soldiers back home on leave spoke of the superior strength of our enemies on the western front and how the long autumnal rains had turned the combat area into a desert of mud.

After his recovery, Friedrich had been sent from Freudental to the barracks in Ludwigsburg. He visited us during the summer – he was a slim, good-looking young man, very like his brother. He did not talk much, sat on the sofa and enjoyed mother's cherry cake. He carefully gathered up all the crumbs on his cake-fork, an occasion for father to hold him up to me as an example: that is what the army teaches you – to eat everything up tidily and waste nothing! Friedrich smiled and looked down at his plate. Now he was in the east again, with the III Battalion of the Fusilier Regiment 122, near the Serbian border. Two of his letters from there have survived. In the first, a letter of 28 September 1915, he apologises for his long silence, thanks the family for the five parcels which arrived safely, and describes a two-week march through Russia in the direction of the Balkans, as well as of impending battles. The second letter was written in a hospital in the Hungarian district of Temesvar:

14 October 1915

Dear mother and sisters and brother,

Now let me give you my address. As you will have learnt from my postcard, I have suffered a slight wound. I will not be sent to Germany, but as soon as the wound has healed, will go back to the front to my company. How it happened: I was battle orderly to the company commander and it was my duty to bring his orders to my lieutenant, also during the battle. So it was on 7 October, when we crossed the Danube. We had been two days on a large island from where we were to attack the Serbs on the other side of the Danube. Finally the time came. At 7 in the morning our artillery began to shoot, both small and large calibre. The trench mortars which were on the island began as well and the noise was such that you could not hear your own voice. Our regiment was under orders to occupy as quickly as possible the mountain on the other side of the Danube on which the Serbs had established frightfully effective positions. At 3 in the afternoon there didn't seem to be any Serbs left there, and we received orders to cross the river. The advance party had pulled the boats on to the Danube. Now we were told to board. When the first two boats were in the middle of the Danube, the Serbs trained their machine guns on them, shooting at them so that they sank immediately. So we had lost 50 men straight away. The Danube is 70 to 80 meters deep and a kilometre wide. The men who were drowned there were from the 10th Company. Now it was the 9th Company's turn. I had to move forward with the lieutenant and inquire whether there were any boats left. A heavy shell smashed down 5 meters from me. It knocked my helmet off and the weapon out of my hand and I was thrown 3 metres to the right. When I tried to get up, I felt the blood on my head. I went straight to the first aid station, got myself bandaged up and was taken that night to the field hospital. I will close now in the hope that my letter will find you in the best of health, as yours found me.

Hearty greetings

Yours, Friedrich.

Among the papers which my father kept there is a draft letter in my mother's hand: "I venture to request that Mr F. be so kind as to let us know whether war volunteer Friedrich Kopp is back with his company, or to pass on any information you may have about him. On 17 October he was discharged as cured from the War Hospital Section 122 – the section for minor injuries. He sent a card stating that he was to return to his company. Since then we have had no news whatever of him. We are extremely worried." There is no date on the note. But I recall that over Christmas we had got no sign of life from Friedrich and in the new year were for a long time unsure of his fate.

CHAPTER THREE 1916

“Sailor’s fate”

Father knew that neither his advanced age nor a previous lung condition would save him from being called up to war service. That is why he regarded every day at work in school as a precious gift. The school benefited, and in particular some trainee students who had good voices. They rehearsed in our flat once a week and sang songs composed for two or three voices, accompanied at the piano by father. These were performed to add enjoyment to small celebrations, but also at burials or funeral services.

Our Mr Thumm had not yet been conscripted because of weak lungs. Now he too was called up. The map of Europe which he had hung up remained on the wall. Every day we looked at it together with father; all movements on the front were marked with new little flags. We had to trace the front line with our fingers so that the names of the places where our soldiers were fighting would be imprinted on our memory. The new place names were also useful for practising the Latin script, to which pupils were at that time introduced only after they had learnt the German one. I still have a school exercise book containing such writing exercises. *Verdun, Verdun, Verdun* was one of them; another: *Somme, Somme, Somme...* We heard a good deal from father about the war at sea. These were the most spellbinding classes for us land-lubbers, who had never seen the sea but only heard of it. We looked in astonishment at the pictures of the large battleships and their artillery, whose shells had a range of twelve miles and weighed more than a whole removal van. Such ships were fortresses; they were made entirely of steel and carried crews of over a thousand men. We were utterly fascinated though by the U-boats, our wonder weapons, which down in the mysterious depths could sink one of those battleships with a single torpedo. How many men were on board? Twenty-eight, we were told – the exact number has remained with me. What did they feel as they sailed through the deep and the darkness? We were moved to imagine them going on deck after a long journey underwater to get a breath of fresh sea air at last. We shuddered at the thought of them sinking into the eternal night, entombed in their machines, if they were hit. It was frightening, but we wanted to hear ever more and put one question after the other – and not only the older pupils, and not only the boys. Such classes went by in a flash. All these emotions return to me even today when I read the music again of the song

“Sailor’s fate”, which the trainee students learnt at that time from my father. It began with the lines: “Stormy the night and the seas are high / Bravely struggles the ship”. When father at the piano let the bass tremoli roll so dramatically at the sinking of the ship, I was overcome by tears and unable to continue singing.

Des Seemanns Los

Tied

Stürmisch die Nacht und die See geht hoch

H.W. PETRIE-MARTELL.

Verlag von P. J. Tonger Köln/Rh.

Musik-Verlag.

Ausgabe für hohe-mittlere-tiefe Stimme	z.B. 1.50
Transcription für Klavier zu 2 Händen	1.50
Große Festsätze	1.50
Fantasie Transcription für Violine u. Klavier	.80
Ausgabe für Harmonium	.80
Zähler mit unterlegtem Text	.80
Violine allein mit unterlegtem Text	.25
Leute mit unterlegtem Text	.80
Trompete für Orgel-Schachwanke No. 50	1.00
Männerscher Chor Part. 40. 40. 40. 40.	.15
gemischten Chor Part. 40. 40. 40. 40.	.15
Säulenscher Chor	.15
Jubilationsmusik	.15
Diech Musik	.15
großes Orchester	.15

Seemanns Los.

Mittlere Stimme.

Langsam.

H.W. Petrie-Martell.

Singstimme.

Pianoforte.

1. Stürmische Nacht und die See geht hoch, tap-fer noch kämpft das Schiff.
 2. Als nun die stür-mi-sche Nacht vor-bei, ruh-ach so tief das Schiff.

Text und Musik Eigentum u. Verlag von P. J. Tonger, Köln a/Rh. P. J. T. 3780

Stich und Druck von G. S. S. Leipzig.

Our good neighbour Minna, the mother of my playmate Ludwig, had also finally been allocated a prisoner of war to help on the farm, which she had hitherto had to manage on her own with her four boys aged between four and eight. Her husband had been away fighting since the beginning of the war. Alfred, that was the prisoner’s name, was from Paris and was indeed no farmer, but a hairdresser. But he was a treasure – hardworking and skilled. He learnt quickly, not only the farm work but also German, and in particular cursing and swearing. That made it easier for him to help Minna bring up her half wild boys. He cut their hair; he combed and braided my long plaits. At that time we had discovered a dangerous game, which we played in a three-storey barn. In the middle there was a large threshing floor, into which the full harvest wagons were brought. The open space extended through all three storeys right up to the roof. Ladders were attached to both sides on which to climb up to the haylofts. Under the roof was the wheel for a lift with a rope running through it. This cable was our play toy. Under the wheel we stacked a large pile of hay and straw. First we Ludwig climbed up the ladders to the wheel. Shouting “Watch out!” he gripped the rope with both

hands and feet and hurtled down the three storeys, landing with a splendid thud on the soft pile. The cable slowed his fall and ensured that he did not miss the pile of hay. We copied him one after the other. Our guardian angels were never bored, as we disported ourselves so often without a thought as to what would happen if the rope were to become detached from the spool. But Alfred must have thought about it in our stead, for he became seriously angry with us, scolded ferociously in German and threatened corporal punishment. And it is true that we were much more careful from then on: we continued our game but made sure we were not caught any more.

Little sun swirls

Spring was approaching and our food changed. There were no more Brussels sprouts. And the chicory salad was coming to an end which mother had kept fresh in the cellar in crates of sand. I did not particularly like it as it was still tough even when finely cut, frequently stuck in one's throat and made one cough. But grass and herbs were now thriving in the vineyards. So mother gave me a small basket and a kitchen knife and I was sent off to collect lamb's lettuce. We called the tasty little plants "wee sun swirls". They grew in the vineyards almost like weeds. I knew where they were to be found in abundance and set out with pleasure.

March was not far away; the branches of the cherry trees had conspicuous buds and a fine brown-violet veil lay over the beech forest. The chaffinches were already making themselves heard. I slowly climbed up the steep vineyard steps keeping an eye out for starlings. My favourites, the swallows, would still be missing for a time. Once I reached the top I sat down on the sun-warmed stones and looked out into the distance. Below me lay my beloved village wrapped in a bright haze under the wide blue sky which white spring clouds were crossing. Each one was differently shaped. There were round, fat, long and slender ones. One resembled a ship, another a bear, a third a tower. I could see something in all of them. I wished I could fly with them. What would the earth look like if you were looking down on it from a cloud? It would surely make you dizzy. And what if from those heights you looked up still further? Would you see angels hovering around God's golden throne? What was heaven anyway? Was it not a city with tremendous walls and towers? "Jerusalem, thou high built city" was a psalm which my mother often prayed and sang.

But the earth on which I happened to find myself was beautiful. The edge of the vineyard terrace was blue with violets; further down pale yellow buttercups were already in flower. Up on the slopes under the bare branches of the hazels the white stars of the wood anemones were still shining. – “little bush wind roses” we called them – a name I liked as much as that of the little sun swirls. In other places they were known as “Rapunzels”. I already knew this word. I did not like it: it sounded like “Runzeln” or “wrinkles” and I was sorry for that girl with the long golden hair who had been given such a name by the witch. On the other hand, I could understand that one could develop a craving for fresh, green sun swirls. They grew here in huge numbers. Deftly and quickly I cut off the little tufts, filled my basket and looked forward to being praised by my parents when I got home. I was also looking forward to seeing father, who had been out all day but would be back by evening.

That evening we ate our sun swirls in a serious mood. Father had been examined by the military doctor. He was now declared to be “fit for use in war” as he had expected. The “temporary reprieve” – he also called it a “stay of execution” – would inexorably expire. It could only be a matter of weeks before he would be called up.

Father called up again

It came about in May: father received his marching orders and had to enlist. At first he was sent to Ludwigsburg, to the Defence Infantry Regiment 119. Mother packed his suitcase. He walked alone with her through the bright green beech forest to the railway station. He would not allow me to go with them: school attendance had priority he said, especially for a teacher’s child. And he said he would be granted home leave again before he was sent to the front.

I said goodbye to him sadly. I felt very forlorn in school. I did not like the young woman teacher who had replaced Mr. Thumm. She did not know how to make the classes interesting. The lovely singing classes stopped. She would not or could not play the violin. Instead she taught us sewing. She was billeted in our flat, which was of course a government flat, and she came running into the room every two minutes apparently needing something or to ask something but in fact what she wanted was to sit down and chatter. My mother, always polite and helpful, facilitated her where she could. But once she noticed that the young woman was

deliberately wasting her time, she ushered her out without ceremony once or twice. The young teacher resented that and from then on the relationship was strained.

During the time of his reprieve father had given me my first piano lessons and before his departure exhorted me to keep playing the pieces I had learnt so that I would not forget them. I did so conscientiously. But the repertoire was far too limited and the constant repetition of the same little songs got on our flatmate's nerves. She complained, and mother, realising that mere practice could not make up for the lost piano classes, kept me more at my knitting. There was no substitute for father's and Mr Thumm's explanations of the map of Europe. The teacher did not know what to make of the map. She allowed it to remain on the wall, but the little flags were no longer shifted around. They gradually gathered dust and fell off.

Of course, the victories were also becoming rarer. Indeed we were losing the sense of living in a great period. We had shared this feeling of elation particularly in hours of pain, while making visits of condolence and at mourning services for those killed in action. It was an emotion even those people had who were critical of the Kaiser and the military, such as my father and the young male teacher, who had nonetheless entertained us by sticking in the wee flags and teaching us sailors' songs. Now every child heard the praises sung of our brave sailors at the naval battle of Skagerrak, especially as a boy from the village serving on the fleet had lost his life there. But this battle was not regarded as a great victory. The bells were silent. Perhaps they had already been taken away and melted down.

The soldiers on leave from the front gave terrible reports in hushed voices about the battles for Verdun. They were treated lovingly and with consideration, almost like invalids. Certainly, everybody was proud of them. Children and adults sought their company and they were treated to the best of everything. Whenever a newcomer sat in the room with a small glass of wine, surrounded by neighbours and friends, people spoke in respectful, low tones. It was never loud or boastful. The word "attrition warfare", which came up in conversations, I did not understand. And there was talk of gas and of the great torments it caused. – The German title of the war novel "All Quiet on the Western Front" is: "Im Westen nichts Neues" ["Nothing New in the West"]. It was now nothing new at home that every day brought terrible casualties. It was nothing new that ever more women in the village wore mourning, and it was nothing new that ever more men were to be seen whose arms or legs were missing or who had lost their eyesight.

War casualties from the village

Father volunteered for duty to the medical orderly service and was sent to do a stretcher-bearer course. Before this began, he came home briefly on leave. My parents had long conversations about the family and the work to be done over the summer, here and at grandmother's. They also spoke about me. The outcome was a plan that mother and I should travel to Enzberg before the big holidays as we both found the new teacher disagreeable. The best thing would be to get out of her way. I was therefore to go to school in Enzberg. As I had been looking forward to other things, the plan worried me. But mother said it had to be and that it would be our "war effort".

We were fortunate that we were able to travel. It was very hot and we were alarmed to hear that there had been an outbreak of dysentery. Soldiers on leave from the front had brought it in and now young and old were affected. Many died. Our neighbour Anna, who as a war widow had given birth to her little boy, died of the disease after three days. Two-year old Adam was now an orphan. One of my playmates also fell victim to the epidemic. He was at secondary school; he was the eldest of four children. His parents owned the inn "The Eagle" in the neighbouring town of Freudenstein, which I often visited with my parents and had made friends with the children, especially with Hermine who was the same age as myself. I now understood that there could be war casualties even in our well protected homeland.

The school in Enzberg was run by an elderly teacher. Although he told grandmother that I was a good pupil, I could not abide him, because he could not speak without spluttering. I remember only one of his classes, during which he spoke to us about the Black Forest and the spirits in Lake Mummel. I loved the Black Forest and had hoped to be allowed spend the summer there, as I had done once before the war. For my Aunt Frida and her family lived high up on the mountain there, not far from Bad Liebenzell. I cannot recall whether at that time I already knew Wilhelm Hauff's fairy tale "The Cold Heart" about Peter Munk and the little glass man. The reason why I became so fond of the story later on is no doubt that I was familiar with the type of people that occur in the tale – with the charcoal burners, glass burners and woodcutters in the dark depths of the forest with its fragrant smell of resin and its solemn silence. But in the village of Unterlengenhardt it was bright and merry. It was even at that time a small health resort with particularly good air, situated on the edge of a plateau with a panoramic view over heights and valleys. My cousin Friedel was there, in a house sided with wooden shingles which was half town-hall, half school. She was a little younger than I,

had wonderful long plaits, which she liked me to braid for her. Later in the war a boy arrived: my cousin Wilhelm. My aunt's husband had a dachshund by the name of Walle. Everything imaginable for the ideal holiday was there: a garden, meadows, fields bordered and protected by high pine forests, and children with a comical dog. The similarity of the families' circumstances, the shared interests of the brothers-in-law – both went hunting at weekends and enjoyed going shooting together – and the sisters' good relationship made life uncomplicated and harmonious. Now Uncle Wilhelm Olpp was at the western front, at the Somme, where my father was soon to be sent. So all that remained of my dream of an idyllic summer holiday was one geography class in which I really paid attention.

Duties

As my mother aptly put it, our life in Enzberg was very severe. Mother took on the cooking and housework. As my father was away, my fifty-six year old grandmother did the work in the fields with Aunt Berta and Uncle Wilhelm. The same Polish prisoner of war had been allocated to the farm as the previous year, but he did not come regularly, probably because he was also needed elsewhere. I have unfortunately forgotten his name. He still could not speak German and so he did not spend much time with me. The others addressed him by his name and treated him with respect.

The amount of work I had to do every day was not inconsiderable for a nine-year old child. School came first. After the midday meal I first had to do my homework. Then I had to wash the dishes, tidy everything away in so far as I could reach the high crockery shelves, clean the table and seats, carry logs up from the shed and stack them next to the stove. After that two large double-handled wicker baskets full of potatoes were waiting for me down in the yard. These potatoes had long shoots. I had to pick them off. How long that takes with about two hundredweight of potatoes? Quite a while. In between times I had to see to the young little geese. I drove them across the yard and over the road to the fairly big stream, which at that time still flowed unrestricted and unchannelised through the village. There I let them swim. Although I had much empathy with the delight they took in water, minding them was far more difficult than fetching wood or picking shoots off potatoes. For they escaped and swam away off down the stream. I was left looking foolish and had to get into the stream, go looking for them and drive them back to the farm. My last task came when the clock struck

six: then I had to light the fire in the kitchen stove, put a large pot of washed potatoes on it and bring it to the boil. They had to be cooked by the time work was over for the day when the family came back hungry from the fields.

I quite enjoyed the work. I was never scolded; they were satisfied with me. I sang while doing the dishes; I could dream undisturbed while cleaning the potatoes. Sometimes my new school friends visited me and gave a hand. Martl from the house opposite was two years older than me. She too had to do a lot of housework as her mother was conscripted to work in a munitions factory in Pforzheim. Her father had been at the front since the beginning of the war. Agnes was in my class. I admired her beauty and her good marks, she my voice and my singing. Her mother also had to work producing explosives and her father, an engineer, was in the war. When we were doing undemanding work we passed the time telling stories and exchanging ideas about all sorts of incidents that happened in school and at home, mostly ones that made us laugh. We enjoyed a laugh and we laughed a lot, also about our teacher, whom we all found very odd. On hot days we wanted to go swimming in the river Enz. My girl-friends had nobody minding them in the afternoons. I too was often alone in the house. But my mother never went off to work in the fields without giving me strict instructions beforehand. It was always a struggle until she gave me permission to go to the river with my friends. My mother's policy was: work first, then pleasure. She was quite capable of increasing my work load so as to reduce the duration of my swimming outing, for which she had reluctantly given permission. But there I had a helpful ally: Uncle Wilhelm, who would give me a wink and, before returning to the fields, would carry a basket of wood or a bucket of potatoes up to the kitchen for me as if it was part of his work and not my job. Sometimes, if mother got cross and accused me of always trying to get off and avoid work, he would calm her down and praise me. He always came up with exactly the right things to say; he had great empathy and a sense of humour; he was anything but stupid. He now presided at table and I sat next to him whenever our Pole was not there. But I felt that, in spite of our close family association, Wilhelm remained reserved and very distant. He had fine very dark hair and a small moustache. His eyes were southern European in shape. When he lowered his gaze, as he often did, and when his face was not as sun-tanned as now, but winter-pale, he looked with his fine features and his well-formed forehead rather like a sad prince driven from his royal father's kingdom.

The house

My main pleasure in Enzberg was the exploration of the house in which our lives unfolded. It had been built before the Thirty Years' War, at the beginning of the 17th century, and had at times served as a Württemberg customs house. It still stands today and is a listed building. My grandfather was born in this house, as was his father before him and afterwards his sons. It now belonged to grandmother. Her children had grown up in it and regarded it as their home. Due to the war and the sacrifices it extorted from those at the front and at home, it was not, however, to be passed on to them. This is why I want to linger on this house a little.

It stood on the steep northern slope of the Enz valley, part of which was still covered in vines, close to the end of the town on the road leading to Mühlacker, taking up the greater part of the space between slope and road. The high, wide gable wall with beautiful half-timbering faced south towards the road, the entrance east towards the farmyard. The farm buildings were situated opposite the domestic dwelling. Stables and barns were under one roof and had been rebuilt in brick. But it stood on the foundations and over the cellar of the burnt-down old farm buildings. The cellar was very deep and spacious, and served as milk and wine cellar. Under the dwelling house there was a further cellar in which fruit was stored. The dwelling and farm buildings were connected by a shed in which the wagon and agricultural machinery were kept. The farm yard was enclosed by these three buildings.

They were separated from the road by a wall, in which there was an entrance and a smaller opening on the side. In the yard there was a fountain with a drinking trough for the cattle. The water did not flow continually but had to be pumped up. But it was as fresh as spring water and provided drinking-water for the farm dwellers. In the interior of this farmyard one felt as secure as in a castle.

The ground floor of the house was not lived in during my time there. In my grandfather's day the butcher's shop and its storage rooms had been down there with an entrance door leading on to the road, which had now been bricked up. The former shop was used to keep all sorts of junk from house and farm. Lime powder on the window sills and a heap of fine sand in the corner indicated that there had once been a workshop in the building. Uncle Johann had made artificial stone there before his marriage to Emma. The back rooms of the basement still housed equipment from the butcher's shop, including a number of copper boilers and basins which seemed enormous to me as a child.



Blick auf die evang. Kirche in Enzberg

View of the Protestant church in Enzberg, with the Kopp house on the right



The old customs house in Enzberg: an older engraving and a recent photograph

The living area was on the first floor. From a large corner-room you could see down on to the yard and on to the street. This was the living room. Under the windows looking out on the yard there was a bench, in front of which stood a large table. Next to it there was a walnut cupboard. Its companion piece occupied the space between the two windows giving on to the street. Opposite the bench, along the inner wall of the living room there was a piano of shiny black wood. During their father's lifetime, the three eldest daughters of the family had been given piano lessons and had played on it. They were all musical, intelligent, adroit with their hands and learnt quickly. Aunt Emma was the best of them, according to my mother. Unfortunately, I never heard her play and during my time she no longer came to the house, and if she had done so she certainly would not have felt in the mood to play the piano. The main attraction for me during my childhood was the large Wasseraufhängen cast iron stove standing or rather protruding from the back wall of the living room. In the winter it heated grandmother's bedchamber, which lay behind it. I was astonished at its various storeys. Each had a stove door, the sides of which consisted of a wrought-iron grid of ornamental plants. Images of animals were embedded in them: stags, deer, hares. The side panels were similarly decorated. Copper bed-warmers hummed and droned in winter behind the stove doors or fragrant baked apples hissed and sizzled. A heavy leather wingback armchair stood next to the stove. It was studded all round with gleaming brass tacks. Grandmother was of course seldom to be found resting in her easy-chair. The living room gave on to grandmother's room. Here there was an elegantly formed red plush Biedermeier sofa with a dark walnut table in front of it that glowed red in sunlight. Artistic crocheted covers lay on the sofa – all the daughters of the house had attended the domestic science school. I also remember a dainty little glass cabinet. However, the room was no longer a proper "parlour". In order to provide for the growing family, grandmother had put beds and cupboards here. I had to pass through these two rooms in order to reach the guest room, where I slept.

These were the rooms which occupied the entire width of the gable. They had in all five windows. Above them, under the protruding beams of the attic storey, hung swallow nests, whose inhabitants woke me up so very early. Coming from grandmother's chamber and from the living room, you came on to the passage-way. This corridor extended through the entire house to the back windowless gable wall, but was divided by a glass door in the middle, which separated the family living quarters from the rest of the house. When you passed through the glass door you came to the top of the stairs. The wide staircase led down to the main entrance; the narrower one led upwards to the lofts of the three attic storeys. The kitchen

was in the back of the house, overlooking the yard. The passage widened here, and extended to the other outer wall of the house. Two windows provided light and a view of “the corner”, the narrow little lane separating our house from that of the neighbour. Back still further the corridor lay in darkness. To the right and to the left you had to feel your way along past the doors leading to the small rooms in which long ago the farmhands and serving girls had slept. In the servant quarters and in the family living rooms there was planking on the floor, but passage and kitchen were paved with fine closely-jointed sandstone.

The kitchen was dominated by a huge wood and coal burning oven of polished steel. It was scrubbed every day. On the top there was a highly polished copper ship, as the big warm-water container was called. The cooking surface top of the oven had six openings. These could be widened or narrowed by adding or removing a set of rings. Six large earthenware pots, iron baking dishes or copper saucepans could fit next to each other on the range top. The fire in the range seldom went out. If you needed a fire for cooking, you put in some kindling and dry wood, blew on the glowing embers and within minutes you had a strong blaze. Next to the oven there was a sink with a drain and a tap connected to the main water supply. The large copper vessels with which water used to be brought from the well in the old days still stood in their place on a simply-made stand – a long wooden board supported by milking-stool legs. The kitchen was sufficiently spacious to have room for things no longer in daily use but still serviceable, which nobody wanted to throw away. The pewter ware was one such instance. This was kept on a shelf over the long bench behind the dining table. Table and bench were made of unpainted beech, as was the rest of the kitchen furniture. The pewter plates were still kept on this massive shelf while at table beneath it the family had for a long time now been using more robust and cheaper stoneware plates. The large pewter platters, however, were still used to serve roasts and vegetables. Cups and glasses were used for drinking. But at harvest time the pewter beakers came into their own again. These were unbreakable and could therefore be taken into the fields. The main principle was that everything was to be treated with care and nothing wasted which had cost time, work and money. After that came aesthetics.

But was that really so? Decoration was important too after all. There were always geraniums on the kitchen window-sill. And what about the efforts undertaken to keep the metal shining on oven and kitchen vessels? The milk vessels drying on the wide sill outside the other kitchen window sparkled when struck by the morning sun. But the reason for the constant scrubbing was the need for kitchen hygiene. Food could go off quickly and milk

above all required meticulous cleanliness. The shining was therefore a welcome side effect of cleanliness resulting from the same principles.

I preferred to go up to the dark lofts with grandmother, being afraid I might get lost in the maze of supporting beams and struts. Whereas hay and straw were stored under the roof of the barn, this was the real granary. The entire floor was no longer needed for storage as the cultivation of corn had been reduced on the farm. At the back of the loft there was a strong smell of dried plants, which hung in bunches from the beams. They were needed for seed or to make herbal infusions. Piles of thrashed corn lay in the front part of the loft which had to be turned regularly, that is shovelled from one heap to the next. This provided ventilation and it was work which I was allowed to do with grandmother. There was nothing of interest up there for an inquisitive little girl – nothing to rummage around in. But I was able to open two old oak cupboards in the passage of the house which were filled from top to bottom with interesting “junk”. My mother inherited one of them. It came with us every time we moved house. No matter where it stood in one house or another, it was always called “the corridor cupboard”. When my mother was still a young girl, the cupboard was said to have contained a very special treasure: stacks of fine paper with hundreds of geometrical drawings which my grandfather had done either for practice or for pleasure. I myself never found any such thing, but I do know from my mother that in his youth grandfather had developed a strong interest in geometry and wanted to become a land surveyor.

My Enzberg grandfather and his sister

But he was not able to opt for this profession: my great-grandfather, Christian Kopp, exercised his paternal authority and ruled it out. After all, he wanted his only son to inherit the farm. His son bowed to his wishes and learnt the more nourishing and less ambitious craft of the butcher. He cannot have disliked it, no more than he was averse to farming, otherwise he certainly would not have been so tireless and so successful at his work. He added considerably to the existing prosperity of the family. His cattle were the best to be found anywhere. We still have a medal from the Knittling District Festival of 1898. On it is the head of King Wilhelm of Württemberg and the inscription: “For service to agriculture”. The story goes that it was the king himself who presented it to him and shook his hand. Grandfather wanted his family to have everything they needed. He bought a *char à banc*. Such a vehicle

was, of course, no luxury for a cattle dealer who had to travel around the area a great deal. (In my time it was still in the outhouse, but was hardly ever used). Other things, such as the piano, were indeed less essential. That he had a sense of the aesthetic was clear from the many large-scale engravings of paintings in the house. I have a clear memory of a picture of Mignon of which I was very fond. He liked buying such things after concluding a good business deal. This was how the piano came into the house.

This had nothing to do with *nouveau riche* ostentation. His family was used to prosperity. I can judge this, since I got to know grandfather's sister, Katharina. My visits to her are among my most beautiful childhood memories. She had married a wealthy miller by the name of Gögel and lived in the Nussdorf mill in almost aristocratic circumstances. The dining room of the old house had something of the banqueting hall of a little rococo castle. Two of the walls consisted almost entirely of windows; on the one side the surrounding countryside looked in with its rich meadows and fields through which the clear quick-flowing mill stream flowed. This would have been paradise for the many trout were it not that anglers too have a claim to paradise. On the other side of the room the large glass front framed an enormous old walnut tree which stood at some distance to the house and would have been a prized embellishment of any royal park.

In this dining room there was always a bustle of miller lads, pretty serving girls and guests of all sorts. The upper end of the family table was always full. Farmers who had delivered corn and were waiting for their flour were served black bread and cider or a wee schnaps. Gentlemen who had come to do some fishing sat on the bench around the big green-tiled stove drying their wet trousers and capes. The hospitable miller chatted with everybody. The gentlemen, mostly manufacturers of gold wares from Pforzheim, tasted his good white bread and his superb white wine while waiting for the miller's beautiful wife to appear, who was in the kitchen preparing the trout they had caught. My grandaunt Katharina was just as sociable as her spouse and I remember how blissfully happy they all looked as soon as her bright laugh resounded. The miller and his wife knew how to entertain their guests by constantly teasing each other in a delightful manner. They loved each other too, had three children and lived well beyond their means. But the Enzberg dowry lasted until they had become wise enough to ensure that the economic decline of the mill did not take effect until after their deaths. I hardly knew their two sons, but did know their daughter Eugenie and her husband Walter Gauss, who was also a teacher. My father greatly admired Eugenie. Her son, my cousin Ernst Gauss, was a good friend to me all my life.

Grandfather's death

My Enzberg grandfather seems to have lived beyond his means in a very different fashion. He became ill in his best years, but continued on as before, devoting himself to business and to the farm without sparing himself. No doctor knew what was wrong with him and none of them could cure him. He died in agony of gangrene in the leg. When my mother was suffering from diabetes in her old age, she often wondered whether it could have been some form of that disease which killed her father. If so, it might have been this illness which aggravated a fault to which he unfortunately tended. He was a hasty, irascible man, liable to fly into a rage when something annoyed him. That made him the worst possible father for his son Wilhelm. He will certainly have been extremely worried about his son's failure in school. That is why he frequently felt entitled to punish him severely in an attempt to beat what he regarded as laziness and carelessness out of him. In so doing he inflicted grave injury on the gentle and vulnerable child, completely destroyed his self-confidence; this made the problem really serious. Wilhelm was good at maths. What may perhaps have just been a special sort of weakness in reading and spelling, which sometimes occurs in schoolchildren of normal ability, became aggravated due to the wrong treatment, leading to great fear of his father and what he stood for. His father was disappointed in him and attacked him as he could not cope with writing. Everything in writing therefore became his enemy. His father died, but writing continued to persecute him: the law, decrees, the administration, the state were waging war against him – a war of red tape and bureaucracy.

Grandmother never spoke to me in Enzberg of her dead husband. Later on, when she spent the last years of her life in my parents' house, she sometimes confided in me. She told me of the terrible grief he suffered knowing he was going to die and leave his wife and children unprotected. His final words of farewell in the night of his death showed this: "Wife, if I can, I will come back to help you, advise you and share your worries." She herself was on her deathbed when she made this disclosure to me. Her thoughts and her doubts were circling around God and the immortality promised through belief in His son. I was deeply moved when I heard grandfather's last words and stricken when she added: "But he never came: he never gave me any help, no matter how badly I was in need of it."

I will finish the chapter on my grandfather by recording one of grandmother's best memories of him. It comes from the time of their engagement, when both were in service – he as a soldier in Ludwigsburg (if I remember rightly with the cavalry) and she in the house of

the Stuttgart civil servant. As I have already said, the lady of the house took an interest in the personal life of her Paula. It did not escape her notice that the girl had a sweetheart. Many a lady in such circumstances would have found a way of avoiding the unwelcome responsibility. A letter to the father would have sufficed. But as she was fond of Paula, she did not take the easy way out. Rather she asked her to tell her sweetheart to call. What girl in her position would have waited to be told twice? The young man introduced himself and the lady cannot have found fault with him for she gave him permission to visit her Paula, his little Pauleen, in her master's house whenever he had Saturday leave. There he was invited into the kitchen, not infrequently by the lady of the house herself, who liked to chat with the young couple and to advise them on this and that. In the meantime Paula-Pauleen was to prepare a meal for her Karl. When he had finished, she was given the day off and her gentleman had to give his word of honour to bring her back by 10 o'clock. If I understood grandmother correctly, it was the trust with which the lady of the house honoured the couple that gave her the courage to marry against her father's wishes.

Bread

The Enzberg fortress was now my world in which peace ruled – for the moment – although worries about the war were with us on a daily basis. Every afternoon, for instance, women or older children came from the nearby town of Pforzheim asking for milk, eggs, butter, bread, potatoes. Now in the war summer of 1916 food was becoming quite scarce in town. Crowds of “hoarders” swarmed out into the surrounding villages in the hope of supplementing their meagre rations. For these people grandmother always put a few litres of milk into brown pots for me to sell, and often too a dozen eggs. In those days there was more buying than bartering. She also wisely provided a little pouch with small coins so that I could give change in case the purchasers only had big coins. They would often have been quite willing to forego the change and to pay more, either because they were pleased with what they had been given, or were already used to black market prices, or because they wanted to place the seller under an obligation. Grandmother would not under any circumstance tolerate the selling of food at higher prices and had impressed upon me that I was not to take one penny more than the official price. If children came, I was allowed to give each a piece of bread to be eaten right away. To this day I can still see a tall, thin lad, maybe fourteen years old, biting into a slice of bread which I had ineptly sawed off, collecting every crumb carefully in his hand and shoving

them into his mouth. I asked him: “Are you hungry?” He continued chewing, nodded and responded, his mouth full, with: “mhm”. The boy came frequently, got his milk, ate his bread, paid and thanked me.

We who had enough to eat also liked grandmother’s bread. Every fortnight was baking day. Then the wooden baking trough was put in the kitchen on the bench between the two windows. Dark flour was prepared for six large loaves of bread. White flour was put into a big copper bowl, enough for two loaves and two cakes. The previous evening a mother dough had been prepared from some sour dough and yeast. The sour dough, a portion of the previous dough, was kept from baking day to baking day in a bowl in the kitchen cupboard. Grandmother was up very early that morning. I watched the making of the dough with curiosity. First grandmother rolled up the sleeves of her blouse and washed her hands and arms. She placed a copper kettle of warm water next to the trough – the water had to be warm but not hot. First she mixed some flour into the sour-dough. Then came my task. Grandmother said: “Now pour in a big ladleful of water, but do it slowly!” With further additions of flour and water a smooth dough was produced which grandmother kneaded with her strong arms until it was ready to rise. (I almost forgot to mention the salt, which was added to the dough). Now the dough was gently dusted with flour and covered with a cloth to keep it warm so that it could rise. The same procedure was repeated with the white flour except that yeast was used for this and milk added instead of water. If she wanted the white bread to be really crumbly, grandmother kneaded a piece of butter into it. Two little pieces of dough were separated from the big mass. They provided the base of the cakes; once they had risen they were rolled flat and filled up. One was filled with a pile of peeled and finely chopped onions, which had previously been steamed with smoked bacon. The other was filled with a mixture of cooked and grated potatoes enriched with milk, sour cream, eggs, salt, nutmeg and sometimes a pinch of caraway. Potato cakes were thickly sprinkled with ripe poppy seed; onion cakes with lard crackling. On baking days these cakes were served hot for the midday meal with malt coffee. That was a banquet for us all!

But a lot of work had to be done before they were ready for eating. Both doughs had to be kneaded once more after they had risen; the dark dough was divided into six pieces and put into flat straw baking baskets. The white dough had been formed into loaves and cakes, which were put on baking trays. I had to fetch the handcart from the outhouse. Grandmother dragged over her largest bake board and laid it diagonally across the cart. Now everything was loaded on to it, all ten pieces side by side. I took hold of the shaft and pulled the vehicle carefully to

the nearby bake-house, whither I had transported wooden logs the previous evening. The old baker woman with the sooty face had already pre-heated the oven. She removed the spark-spewing kindling from it, perspiring all the while. First the cakes and the white bread were “shot in”. When they were done, they were taken out and more firewood added. It flared up brightly and burnt out quickly. The embers were now left in the oven. They were just pushed to one side to make room for the brown bread. Grandmother had arrived meanwhile and herself shoved in the big loaves. As on baking days the bake-house was used by several families, every loaf was marked before baking. Our white bread was adorned with a large star traced with a four-pronged fork, the brown with three rings. When the bread came out of the oven, grandmother dipped a soft brush into clear water and spread it over the crust of the bread. Now we loaded up our fine successfully baked bread again. Enfolded in a cloud of fragrance, I proudly pulled the cart home through the village.

The poppy princesses

I got to know some of the work done in the fields, and have particularly good memories of one task entrusted to me, since it was associated with playing. When after some days of rain the weather seemed likely to improve, grandmother reminded us in the evening of the weeds on the poppy field. So a day of weeding was prescribed for the following day. The poppies were not merely a baking ingredient, but – especially in wartime – an important oil crop. It provided a wonderful, completely odourless culinary oil which was ideal for roasting meat or frying vegetables. It could even be used instead of butter for baking. The poppy field was half an hour’s walk from the house. The plants were already high but not yet in flower. The work had to be done very carefully to avoid damaging the slender juicy stalks which proudly bore the green, still closed flower heads. You got to the rampantly growing weeds with narrow hoes. The poppies had been sown in rows. Each of us, Uncle Wilhelm, grandmother, Aunt Berta and I, had four rows to weed. With a wink, Uncle Wilhelm assigned me to the rows at the edge of the field.

He must have seen how I loved playing. These poppies were the most splendid play toys you could imagine. My hoe was soon lying on the ground. I picked off some flower buds, sat down on the raised edge of the field and became engrossed in my game. For the stalks of the poppies were my princesses. We were all invited to a ball and I had to see to their wardrobe. I

did so as follows: I cautiously removed the brittle green outer skin of the smallest flower bud. Then the little skirt of a ballerina appeared, white and very delicate, like fine silk. It was still somewhat crushed from the narrow encasing shell. I gently smoothed and fixed it, turned it down until the inside of the flower became visible: the long filaments representing the lovely hair of my youngest princess. And so I worked on with care, according to size. From the next bud I brought a pale rose-coloured dress out into the light of day. The frock of the second next one was two-toned: white and pink. The fourth was pale lilac and from the bud of a field poppy, which was only a weed and should not have been in the field at all, to my delight came a splendid wild red gown. And so I had gathered around me a number of beautiful girls, younger and older sisters of a princely family, all with deep black shining hair and attired in wonderful garments. I proudly gave my beauties names befitting princesses: Esmeralda, Roswitha, Lisinka, Kunigunde – I don't recall them all. The family had meanwhile moved on so far with the weeding that I was out of sight, lost to the world on the edge of the field. They went looking for me and were astonished to find me with my toys. But when I was able to present each of my magnificently adorned ladies by name, they all smiled and said nothing. I took up the work again and we finished the poppy field by evening.

Like the poppies, the potatoes had also been sown, or rather planted in rows. They too now had to be weeded, hoed and moulded. Again we worked in rows, I at the edge of the field so that I could rest and play. What could I play with this time? The potatoes were indeed still in flower, but alas they were no princesses. So whenever possible I dodged potato hoeing, preferring to pick off potato shoots and mind the geese and house. There I could from time to time pop in to my neighbour for a chat. – The punishment, if indeed it was one, overtook me promptly. Something happened which turned me off going to school in Enzberg.

Martel and I were once again standing on the bank of the stream, laughing and chattering. We suddenly saw the teacher we disliked approaching in the distance. We disappeared as fast as lightning into Martel's yard and from there on to the large outhouse belonging to her farm which was full of carts, farm implements, barrels and old junk. Our teacher had quite correctly interpreted our retreat: we wanted to avoid greeting him. He was furious and pursued us into the outhouse. Martel, of course, knew her way around and made herself invisible. But I heard the old splutterer come ever closer, my heart was beating wildly and in my terror I tried to hide quickly under a large washtub. But he found me, pulled me out, grabbed me by the shoulder and shook me. He scolded and shouted at me, saliva flying from his mouth: it was disgraceful not to greet a teacher, and especially for the daughter of a

teacher. At the next opportunity he would tell my father how badly I had behaved. I had to apologize to him, had to even shake his hand like a mechanical doll and say: “Grüß Gott, Herr Oberlehrer!” [Good day, teacher – literally: God greet you, Mr senior teacher]. When he had finally gone away, Martel crawled out of her hiding place laughing. I did not feel at all like laughing. In my distress I kept the incident from my mother. Knowing that people were less indulgent towards teachers’ children than to others, my father had warned me that I was to greet everybody and be polite to everybody, including those whom I disliked. If he heard of this matter, the result would be a telling-off, if not a beating – or so at least I believed.

The copper collection

Without realising it, I had encountered the tone of voice of the barrack square during this incident. I was not accustomed to it. It did not exist in the school run by my father, although he was a strict teacher. That I became familiar with it now was perhaps no coincidence. The ever heavier burden which the people had to bear made them irritable. The war enthusiasm had evaporated. But new sacrifices were demanded. The government issued an appeal for scrap metal, in particular copperware, to be selected and handed over to the town hall.

Grandmother was immediately willing to give everything away that was lying around unused, and she began a search of the house and outbuildings to see what she could donate. I was all the keener to help with this task as it provided an opportunity for me to take a peep at those rooms of the house not in everyday use and there to rummage around and discover secrets and treasures. Our treasure-hunt led us through the first floor, through the premises of the former butcher-shop, which were normally locked, through the kitchen and above all into the old servant quarters. We found pots of all sizes, ladles in all forms, basins, tubs, copper cake forms and heavy brass pans covered in verdigris. In one of the barns we discovered farm implements, very few of which were unuseable, but which were hardly ever used and therefore dispensable. We had finally had so much that our big cart had to brought out. We “women” – grandmother, mother and I – could only carry and load the lighter things, among them the copper vessels from the “water bench”. We needed Uncle Wilhelm for the pots and large pieces of equipment. But this time he was most unwilling to help. He resentfully flung tubs and cauldrons on to the cart creating a huge din. At the same time he shouted and scolded. He became more and more heated, his voice cracked. It was the first time I heard

somebody curse the war: “All this is being given away to make ammunition to shoot people. Is that the purpose of life to be torn to pieces by a shell?” Grandmother and mother tried to pacify him. They looked around fearfully. Had somebody on the street heard what he said? Would they pass it on, or even report Wilhelm? Or had the racket made during the loading drowned his voice? Trembling and pale with anger, Wilhelm harnessed the bay and drove the reverberating and clanking load from the farm. I was upset that our collecting had ended like this after such a merry start. I did not understand why Wilhelm was so agitated. Grandmother and I had meant so well and wanted to make a present of copperware to “our boys”. Mother and grandmother were both looking so alarmed, apprehensive and grieved that I did not like to inquire and my father, who could have explained everything to me, was unavailable.

All of a sudden I had had enough of Enzberg, not just of the school, but also of the farm and even of the family, in support of whom we had undertaken our “war effort”. I became homesick. I wanted to return to Hohenklingen, to our own four walls. This feeling was so strong that from now I kept badgering mother to go back home with me as soon as possible. My tears, whining and naughtiness made her heart even heavier. She too felt drawn to house, bees and gardens. But she stayed put, wanting to stick it out and do her bit. She tried to persuade me to be reasonable: “Don’t you see”, she said, “that we can’t abandon grandmother and the others now with the harvest beginning?” She also noticed that my pestering had to do with my dislike of the Enzberg school, for she reassured me gently: “The long holidays begin in a few days and then you will again enjoy being here as you used to.” And I was indeed relieved that I would soon no longer have to go to school to that teacher of ours, and I stopped bothering mother for the remaining weeks of our stay.

The father of all

I now realise that at the time I wanted to escape from the heavy psychological burden weighing on the Enzberg family. I have mentioned the increasing food shortages. In order to maintain supplies the government required farmers to hand over ever greater consignments. This affected Uncle Wilhelm very much. He complained, lamented and scolded when he did his accounts: what would remain for the family if “the state” took everything away? Why was he always picked on while others got away scot free? – Maybe he was mistaken in this regard and others were just better at avoiding the compulsory contributions. But perhaps the civil

servants overseeing the implementation of the obligations did indeed lean more heavily on Wilhelm, knowing him to be vulnerable. Wilhelm sat at home with the women, mother and sisters, while most of the men of his age and his much younger brother were on the battlefield. As a child, I was not aware that this was regarded as a disgrace. What sort of relationship he had with the military authorities I do not know. He was probably exempted from military service, being the only man on the farm, and at the same time discharged as unfit for service due to his weak nerves. In school Wilhelm had been mocked and scorned. His father had punished and despised him. He had survived all this. His school days were long since over, his father dead many years. He had found his bearings being safeguarded by the farm; he acquitted himself well at his work, winning the recognition of his sisters and brother-in-law. But now the terrors of his youth returned: the military as “the school of the nation.” This school made demands on him, tested him and rejected him when he was unable to fulfil them.

Furthermore he was aware of the fear in which his mother lived for the life of her youngest son. In the summer of 1916 this fear must have been particularly acute. Romania had changed sides and joined the war against us. Friedrich was in hospital in Beuthen, having been severely wounded while fighting in Siebenbürgen. – But for what were doctors and nurses doing their best to bring him back to health? For what had they saved his life in Bromberg? Only to have him risk it again and again? But did he actually have a choice? Certainly not. So they had to help him. But how? – Maybe Wilhelm sensed in the willingness with which his mother sacrificed her copperware her desperate anxiety about his younger brother and again felt disregarded. The war brought his inadequacy home to him anew on a daily basis, opening up the only partly healed wounds. That is why he hated and cursed it. Yet he had to obey his mother, load up the copper and drive it to the collection point. Even though out of consideration he was accorded the seat at the head of the family table – he did not count. In reality it was the war that sat at the very top, that “father of all”. How Wilhelm must have suffered over being an outsider I infer from a remark in a letter of his brother of 28 September 1915. He writes: “Dear mother, I have heard that Wilhelm must present himself to the military authorities for the medical. But mother, you have no cause to worry: Wilhelm is useless; he couldn’t be entrusted with a weapon.”

Aunt Emma and Uncle Johann

I would now like to commemorate my Aunt Emma, whom I have so far scarcely mentioned. During the war she seldom put in an appearance during my stays in Enzberg. I neither saw her in grandmother's house, nor can I remember having visited her in her Enzberg home, either by myself or with my mother, although she lived there during the entire period. But I do remember the imposing and beautiful woman from the time before and after the war. The heredity of the Bonnet family was very much in evidence in Emma who, like her brother Wilhelm, had southern European features, dark hair, dark eyes, was tall, vivacious and self-confident. Still taller was her husband and just as handsome with moustache and gleaming teeth, which he liked to display. He was known in the family as "the Italian". In my mind I called him "the Roman", although he was from Padua. The good-looking couple were destined for each other.

But only I thought so with my tendency towards romantic dreaming. My mother and my aunts bore a grievance against Emma for having fallen in love with Giovanni and for having married him in April 1914 in Enzberg in defiance of their mother's wishes. There had been bitter quarrels beforehand, after which Emma was ostracised by her angry sisters. The feud smouldered for many years during which time they never met and rarely exchanged a word with each other.

Johann had come to Germany without a penny, his capital being his strong arms and the advantage of expertise in a particular field, that of "terrazzo". The word has long since been adopted into our language. As it indicates, this material originally came from Italy, where of course the Romans were masters of stonework and had invented artificial stone. Grandmother had rented the empty shop premises to Johann and his partner; he made terrazzo there and Emma had crossed his path. When the war broke out he was in trouble. He remained a foreigner, for at that time marriage to a German did not automatically lead to naturalization, which cost a great deal of money. But he had just put his money into his business, only to find he had no customers. Since 1915 Italy had been at war with Austro-Hungary. When in August 1916 it also declared war on Germany, Johann was officially classified as an "enemy alien" and was deported to Belgium to work in munitions factories. Grandmother did support Emma and her new-born baby with provisions. She did not visit her, however. Nor did Emma come to her on the farm during our time in Enzberg. The falling-out was too recent for that and too fundamental. They did not speak of her either, at least not within my hearing.

Nevertheless I was aware of grandmother's troubles. To this day it saddens me that at the time I wanted to leave her, even though it was the natural reaction of a child: the discord in the house increased my homesickness and the impatience with which I begged my mother to depart.

The little head-piece

At long last I get out of the train in Maulbronn holding her hand and was glad when she turned off right after the station, taking the usual path to Hohenklingen. She had a heavy load to carry. Her Japanese straw travelling bag, which she always took with her whether she was going to Stuttgart or to Liebenzell, was almost bursting at the seams. We stopped as soon as the last town houses were out of sight. Mother took off her hat, attached it to the travelling bag with her hatpin and took out her little head-piece. This was a circular piece of padding made of fairly thick material. She put it on her head and with a strong swinging movement placed the travelling bag with hat on top of it. She balanced the soft load on her head without using her hands until we left the forest before Hohenklingen. She walked ahead, tall and slim, choosing her steps carefully on the uneven forest path, with other pieces of luggage in both hands. I trundled along in her wake carrying my little bag and admiring her. From time to time I looked back at a bird, or jumped over a pile of leaves, said hallo to old acquaintances such as the little students' fountain belonging to the monastery and to many trees that had long been my friends. I was happy.

Acacia trees had been planted almost everywhere on the edges of the forests which completely surrounded Hohenklingen. They flowered throughout the summer, their fragrance attracting the bees and providing them with much work. That brought work for us too: mother and I spun sixteen hundredweight of honey in the latter part of the summer that year! What was to be done with this boon? Mother managed to get hold of large stoneware pots in Knittlingen, each of which could hold a hundredweight. Tin containers could still be had. Furthermore she was told – in strict confidence – that a man from Freudenstein came to town regularly collecting all the provisions that people could spare: bread, flour, butter, eggs, bacon, meat, poultry, fruit, vegetables and, of course, honey. The only thing he did not want was milk as it slopped too easily. The vehicle he used was a reinforced children's pram which could transport at least two hundredweight. Because of the nightly police patrols he travelled

on small byways and paths from Maulbronn, Mühlacker, Enzberg, Niefern, Brötzingen to Pforzheim. My mother thought about it. This was downright black-marketing. Grandmother would certainly have advised against such dealings. (But then grandmother did not have several hundredweight of honey to market!) Apart from that the man was known to have a weakness for the bottle and to stare too deep into the glass, as they say. Could she trust him with her honey?

Then she took her courage in both hands and asked him whether he could perhaps take some honey. He laughed at her when he heard the quantity she had been thinking of: merely a few kilos. He could dispose of honey by the hundredweight! She should just let him know and he would bring along a hundredweight container. And indeed, when mother had spun again, he turned up as arranged with his high-wheeled pram. He pushed it into our long, narrow little yard and put down the empty container. He seemed none too steady on his feet. Mother preferred to load up herself, and swung the full can deftly up on to the odd vehicle, which bobbed up and down rather alarmingly on its springs. Then she settled up with him at the normal price. What he would charge for the honey in Pforzheim she did not want to know. Very pleased with the deal, he promised to come by soon again, took leave of the teacher's wife, of "Mrs Teacher", and set the pram in motion with a hefty jerk.

We children had gathered out at the entrance to the yard in hope of being given our honey slices, and awaited the swaying freight. Wee Ludwig said to me: "He's had one too many!" The high wheels of the pram had already hit the kerb. The pram capsized, the tin fell out, the cover sprang off and the honey poured out – into the gutter. The golden splendour flowed slowly and thickly down towards the village. We screamed loudly and the man, who suddenly sobered up, picked up the tin. Mother exclaimed: "Good Lord in heaven!" and sent a few children to the houses nearby to ask the people not to pour water on it. Then she ran into the house and fetched bowls and ladles – whatever she could lay her hands on. Everyone ladled and spooned the honey from the little channel back into the tin. The man kept calling: "Have a taste, children! Have a taste!" Mother almost wept when she looked into the half-empty tin and saw what was now floating around in her beautiful honey and she berated the man. He responded serenely: "Mrs Teacher, the Pforzheimers 'll ate it!" Finally we had to fetch buckets and brushes, and a mortified Mrs Teacher scrubbed away what remained of the honey flow lest somebody should slip on it and break a leg.

Iron for silver and gold

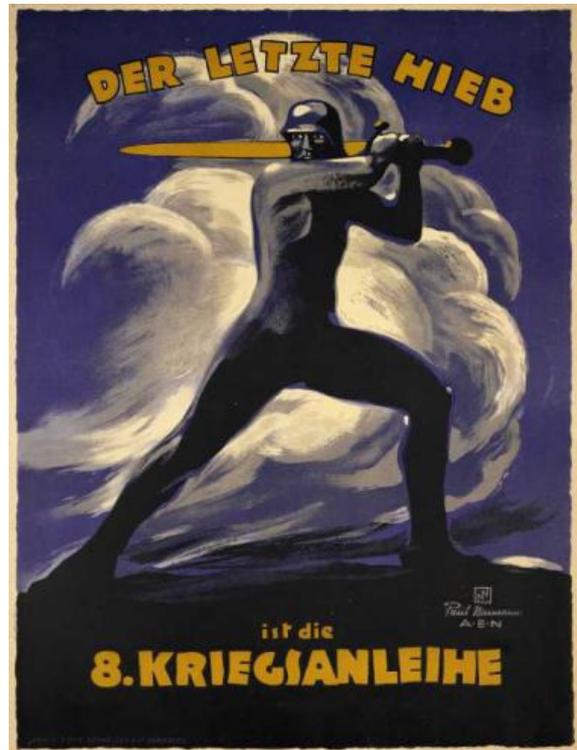
We were able to dispose of our honey without the pram pusher. A good deal of the harvest “flowed” over the mountain to Maulbronn, where the prisoner-of-war camp had meanwhile been closed down and turned into a hospital in which the multitudes of incoming wounded from Verdun and the Somme were treated. Schoolgirls again brought gifts: tins of honey, pots of jam, bottles of juice and flowers, which they pulled in well-packed handcarts through the beech woods. This was done as a matter of course: the government did not have to appeal to the public. But it did request a different form of donation. The war cost money. Gold and silver were in great demand – old coins, medals, jewelry, cutlery.

Mother selected six silver spoons which her father had given her as part of her dowry. She showed me the entwined monogram “K.K.” for Karl Kopp. She herself brought the spoons to the town hall in Freudenstein. After the collection period had ended there was an exhibition of the donated objects. Mother went to it to have a last look at her spoons before they vanished into the melting pot. She returned disappointed and angry: they had not been included. She complained to the mayor and to the parson, but to no avail. The spoons had vanished – and not into the melting pot. Somebody must have taken a fancy to them.

Many married couples gave away their wedding rings. The state presented them with iron ones in return. I saw some ladies and gentlemen with iron necklaces and watch-chains. Then I knew that Germany was in dire straits and that the citizens were helping. Those who wished and who were in a position to do so bought war bonds. Posters advertising them hung in railway stations and town halls. One of them I shall never forget. It showed a man with a steel helmet swinging a powerful sword. He is standing, legs apart, in front of a cloud or wave. I had forgotten or never paid attention to the text, which I now found in my history book. “The final blow – War bonds 8th issue. Apparently there was one further issue, shamefacedly called “Reich bonds”.

My mother had been provided with a handsome dowry. She regarded this money as an emergency fund and did not even touch the interest it earned. Her economy once probably saved my father’s life. Shortly after his marriage he came down with a serious attack of pleurisy. The insurance company paid the doctor, but not the stay in a lung clinic which the doctor deemed essential as no improvement had set in. Mother drew on her capital and sent her husband to Davos, whence he returned after six months completely cured. Ten thousand

marks remained. She and father agreed that this money should be invested in war bonds. She did so in the course of 1916/17 – that was the last she saw of her dowry, and of her silver spoons.



War bonds: the best savings bank!

The final blow: War bonds 8th issue

'Seagull'

Having described how economical my parents were and how willing to make sacrifices, let me add a story showing that they nonetheless did not forget to treat each other occasionally. Thinking about it now, I take pride in giving an account of this incident. My mother comes out of it well, cutting a fine figure both in the literal and metaphorical senses. But the occurrence was first of all for her an undeserved public shaming which offended her deeply. She was preached against. Our parson – the same man who had prophesied paper clothes for us – denounced her from the pulpit of our village church, in front of the entire congregation, for pride and indulgence in luxury, as she sat next to me in the pew. The occasion of the

sermon was mother's new hat, a farewell present from my father before he left for the front. She had worn this hat to church with pride, as the preacher rightly observed, but not with thoughtless arrogance.

I must digress a little here. Since his student days in the teachers' training college in Künzelsau, my father had been friends with the son of a prosperous brewer. Christian König was his name – König meaning 'king' in English. He was a teacher in Stuttgart-Botnang, and married to a gentle and pretty woman from a wealthy family. "The king" revered my mother; my father liked "the queen"; I was impressed by the "king's sons", one of whom was already sporting a grammar school cap. Mother enjoyed the compliments of her admirer and teased him because of his considerable girth. She greatly valued his advice in matters of fashion. He and his wife and son came to stay with us several times in Hohenklingen. Our return visit to Stuttgart gave my mother the opportunity to go shopping, whereby Mr König insisted on accompanying her personally to good shops. She never returned from these outings without something which was attractive and of course expensive. It was then up to Mr König to soothe his friend Fritz – dubbed "Fitze" since college – lest he should suffer a shock when he discovered the price. "Fitze", he said, "what harm? You have money and you have a beautiful wife and you don't dress her well!" Mother was standing there in guilty silence in front of father wearing the newly purchased mink collar with several tails. I stroked the gleaming brown fur. But "Fitze" was looking in admiration at his tall, slender wife and also remained silent.

Father was granted leave once more when he had finished his training as medical orderly. We travelled to Stuttgart to meet him. There was a special reason for this. Father wanted mother to have a good black costume made. Mr König knew a first-class Stuttgart ladies' tailor who still had material of finest quality – and my mother had honey. It was deemed that "given the lady's good figure" a single fitting would suffice. And so the costume was ready in three days. Now Mr König's counsel was again required. Under his supervision a cream-coloured lace blouse was purchased ("very festive") and in addition a dark-blue and green striped blouse of pure silk ("for variety"). Later on, after deaths in the family, a black lace blouse was bought. I was present on all these occasions. My tall, slim mother walked up Stuttgart's great avenue, aptly called King Street, at the side of her round friend, I strolling behind them, glued to the shop windows, whose displays astonished and intrigued the nine-year child from the country.

But Mr König was not yet satisfied with his lady's appearance: "That old chapeau must go: you need a different hat for this costume!" Mother still had father's money since the costume had been paid for with honey. So off with us to the best milliner. I no longer remember the hats she tried on first. But then one was brought out which completely took my breath away. It was made of velvet, the crown a shimmering light grey, the brim black. The form was functional, the brim neither curved nor fluted. The crown was not stretched tight, but was gently close-fitted. But – and this was the sensation – a large seagull was draped flowingly over crown and brim. Its small head and eyes were turned towards the front, the half-opened wings touched the brim, its body lay diagonally on the crown: a seagull just landed! Even the saleswomen were speechless. But they then lauded the beauty and elegance of this perfect lady – and mother was indeed now dressed as such. The price? Marks: seventy. – "You will take that hat," commanded the king, "I shall speak to Fitze." Mother: "I can't. That would be half our monthly income!" Almost in tears, she put it back on the counter, within my reach. I said nothing and just stroked the gull. The hat was tried on a second time and, as one might guess, it was not taken off again. And so my mother promenaded down King Street to the tram stop at Palace Place, seen and admired by many. And then it was my turn to receive a present. A charming little doll was now mine: in frock and little bonnet it lay on cushions on a miniature brass bed, all in white and ornamented with little blue silk ribbons. Sitting in the tram I thought "What will father say?" Then I looked from my beautiful mother to beaming Mr König and was glad. Father will have reacted similarly. I cannot recall when he first saw the seagull hat, but I do know that he approved of the purchases. As he was always more farsighted than we were, he will probably have had some misgivings about the gull. But with his marching orders to the front in his pocket he did not want to spoil his wife's pleasure in her new clothes.

Father did not have to listen to the parson's comments directed against those who, regardless of the difficult times, adorned their hats with bunches of flowers, feathers, even entire birds, instead of being economical and making sacrifices for the fatherland. Father was already on his way to the western front. Perhaps the parson would not have made these remarks in father's presence. They came lightly from his lips, a small improvised sideswipe. But they came across like the crack of a whip. There was dead silence in the church. Nobody coughed any more, there was no turning of heads for everybody knew that the teacher's wife was the target. Mother went pale. She remained seated, apparently serene, but neither sang nor prayed any more. She left the church her head high bearing the hat over which the

censured seagull hovered. She apologised to neighbours who greeted her with embarrassment outside saying that she had to hurry home as the dinner was on the oven and she was afraid it might burn. I registered that because it was not true. She never resorted to excuses normally. But now she made for home as though something really was burning. Going up the stairs she tore the hat from her head. In the bedroom she sat down on the bed and broke down in angry tears. Then she jumped up and took off the costume too. The cupboard doors were torn open and then slammed shut. Mother slipped on her simple weekday dress, still weeping. To cheer her up, I took hold of the hat, put it on myself and paraded around in front of the mirror. However, that only made things worse so that I began to fear for the safety of the unfortunate seagull. Finally I buried my head in mother's apron and howled bitterly too. Now it was her turn to comfort me. That also calmed her and she allowed me to pack the hat carefully away. She put the hatbox back in its place in the cupboard.

Father did not hear of the affair until six months later when he was back from the front. Mother confessed everything minutely and father did not reproach her. How could he have indeed, since he too had liked the hat. He and the parson had a rather complex relationship of critical mutual esteem. They both liked each other, but certain notions of the highly intellectual parson had often been a source of trouble to my father. He therefore sighed a little when he heard about the sermon and shook his head. But then he decided to look at the comical side. "One sees," he said, "that it is dangerous for the wife of a schoolteacher to have a nicer hat than that of the parson's wife!". Of course, mother never wore her seagull hat again during the war, nor ever again in Hohenklingen. However, she did wear it after the war for visits to Stuttgart. The story of the hat gave rise to much hilarity in Botnang. Mother put on a brave face and laughed too. From then on she was known in the König family as "Seagull".

I must confess that on account of this affair I harboured resentment towards the parson for a long time. After the war, when we were being instructed for confirmation, I always learnt my catechism under mother's supervision, having all the answers off pat in case he asked me. But I never volunteered to answer questions and sat in class as mute as a fish. He noticed this. He once kept me back after school and asked me how long more I was going to pout with him. I couldn't think of an answer and began to sob violently. He patted me on the shoulder, dismissing me with the words: "Well, be good."

Father at the Somme

I have anticipated and already brought my father back from the war, perhaps to make it easier to describe the frightening weeks which now followed for us. Yes, he was spared to us – a great happiness amid all the suffering which our family had to bear during this war. But now I must give an account of the sad day on which mother and I had to bid farewell to father when his leave came to an end. His birthday was on 10 November. His military pass states: “On 9. 11. 1916 transferred to the Reserve Medical Company on the battlefield.” This time I was allowed to accompany him and mother to the station. It was a grey and cheerless day. The path through our beech wood seemed dark to me. Not a bird sang. Our feet rustled through the dry brown foliage. We said goodbye when we came out of the wood on to the country road. He did not want to do this in front of others. Father kissed us. I had entwined my arms around his waist. He held mother and me in his arms and was very brave. He asked mother to be so too, and urged me to do as I was told and to be a help to her. And we were to write to him often. Now in the 84th year of my life, I still have a vivid image of that place where we took leave of each other. I often went there during my later life. A large crowd of people had gathered at the station to say goodbye to the soldiers, among them many friends and pupils of my father’s. Songs were sung and little bunches of violets distributed. Father was given a few right away. One he attached to his jacket, the others he gave to his comrades. Then the final waving and the question: will we see him again?

After days of fearful waiting, the first sign of life arrived from father:

20 Nov.1916.

My dear wife and child,

So far I have not received any news from you and I myself was only able to write a card. It was a dismal time when I wrote that: 15 m underground, 10 minutes from where the English took 12 stretcher-bearers prisoner. So you see how far we have got. If everybody got the baptism of fire that I did, they would remember it. Sent to relieve another medical company, we lay for 120 hours under the most violent shelling. 16 times I walked the death road, ¾ hour each time. I also experienced a 4-hour barrage of drumfire.

I only got back today and am still very agitated. This misery, death striding abroad – oh wife, it is so appalling, indescribable. I will write of it in more detail in a quieter moment. Only during the last mission was I afraid. We were carrying a first lieutenant when I realised that we

had been hit by a shell. It flung a stone against my ankle – have a lump there – otherwise we got through unscathed. The 12 prisoners were also freed. Haven't washed for 5 days; had 1 meal, slept for a few hours. Now am having my foot bandaged and will rest. Tonight or tomorrow I will write again. Greet everybody who asks for me. In agitation

Your father

Among my father's letters from the front there are two newspaper cuttings. One of them I would like to quote here, the other later on. The first is a poem:⁴

“When in the mud of the fields they wallowed / By wild terror and constant wretchedness followed / Awaiting thee, Death, ruler omnipotent, / In the hideous plight of drumfire turmoil – / What they suffered there, what deprivation / Dug in within the belly of the earth – / What they endured for us / No human mouth will ever adequately express.” –

The letter father promised:

Dear wife and child,

I have just returned from the first aid station. My right foot is fairly swollen around the ankle. The pain is mild but am now in the hospital area for a bit of treatment. My nerves are better today, so listen: Last Wednesday at night– we were already asleep – the alarm was raised: 80 stretcher-bearers to march off immediately to reinforce Medical Company No. 52. Up from the straw, on with the assault gear, steel helmet, emergency rations and off to Gomiécourt. Here a four-hour stay until morning, then a two-hour march to Puisieux to a medical dugout. On the way the shells came whistling by, ducked 2 or 3 times but then let them come. I did not feel afraid; a sense of apathy or dullness took over, which was better. Having arrived here we were sent straight to the trenches after a ¾-hour march to the regiment's dugout (map point 141) near the village of Serre (see report of the day in the official gazette).

It can no longer be called a village: a heap of rubble would be more apt. No painter, nor the best photographer could present it as nature does.– The street is constantly under fire, holes six foot deep in them from the English 28-cm shells, dead horses lying half on the road and half on the mounds of rubble, exhausted and dead comrades, stretchers hurled to the ground by grenades, the wounded – now of course dead – still strapped to them, one picture of desolation after the other. Then in the medical dugout this wretchedness, the groaning and lamentations

⁴ The German original rhymes throughout.

(especially of those with stomach wounds), these vaults of horror – and one used to hear people say: “God is merciful”. But now? Wife, those who have ignited this conflagration and those who do not wish to have it extinguished are no longer human beings. I would like to chain a few of them to me when I go through that road of fire – the peace question would soon be resolved. You know that I am not afraid; if I am hit by one of those monsters – once when we were on a mission an entire house was smashed down on to the street in front of us by one of them and we had to climb metres high up over the rubble with the wounded man on the stretcher. If I am hit by something like that the physical and psychological torments are brief, which is a comfort. And 16 times we went out; it is better with the empty stretcher, but with somebody on it it is hard and if it wasn’t the strong sense of duty which drives us on at the risk of our lives, then the loudly expressed gratitude of our own and the mute thanks of the enemy again and again give us fresh courage for the next mission. “Thank you, thank you, thank you” – words heard coming from the stretcher – “Decent men you are”, and our last one, a seriously wounded first lieutenant, had one of us come so he could shake his hand as he was too weak to speak. And then that Englishman: he pressed his hands together, looked at me, a look I shall never forget, and stammered: “Deutsch gut Kamerad” [German a good mate].

Well, we got through. We trudged through mud and water, often up to our waists. For the past 2 days it was so wet that I unfortunately picked up a nasty cold and cough. But I hope to be in good form again soon. I didn’t get to wash for 5 days. Last evening I had my first warm food: 2 beakers of sour bean soup. There was a lot of mineral water to drink as well as schnaps given ironic nicknames such as: “spirit of attack”. Tins of butter and meat which we captured and saved for later were eaten up on us by the Prussians, who don’t seem to have a very good reputation on the battlefield. Well, it is over. When I get home again I will be able to talk for whole evenings to you about these 5 days.

Dear wife, let the mayor read this letter too and explain that I cannot write to him at any length. It has all been too much for me. But now it is over. On the way back one last shell showered us with earth and stones. Had it been 10 m closer The food is good and plentiful. Always put a little note from you or Else into the packages. You can send me a pair of long stockings. I hope we will be let rest now. There is heavy fighting at the Ancre Stream and the Somme.

Your father

I found mother sitting in the room weeping with this letter in her hand. She read it to me between sobs. Naturally I did not understand the frightfulness of what was described (and hardly do even today). It was therefore incomprehensible to me why mother was crying. I

took her by the arm and shook her: “But father writes that it is over. He is alive, he will come back!” She took me on her lap and let me comfort her.

Correspondence with the front

That same day, under my mother’s supervision, I replied to father’s letter on a lined sheet of notepaper in my best handwriting, using the old German script: “Hohenklingen, 24 November 1916. Dear Father, We have received many letters from you. Mother read them all out to me so I know how you are and am often very sad about that. I pray every day to the dear Lord that He may watch over you and bring you back home to us in good health. I am looking forward to Christmas. But it will not be nice if you are not there. We want to go to Aunt in the Black Forest so that we won’t be on our own. Warm greetings from your Else.” Father’s next letter brought us some relief:

Thursday evening , 24 November.

Dear wife and child,

7.30 pm is post time here. Post is only sorted once a day and once a day (2.30 pm) post goes out from here. It always takes 3 – 4 days for a letter to get to me or to you. Well, this evening your 3 packages arrived safely. Very best thanks. One of them will be used as I write. The cigars were crushed, unfortunately. Don’t send any more cigars for the moment. We get so many (cigarettes too) that I can’t smoke them all. But put a few lines into every package. My two letters will have arrived in the meantime. But don’t go to anybody just to lament or bemoan. If I were with the infantry I would be 10 times worse off. On the way back from this hell I was grateful that we don’t have a boy. But it is over now and will not soon recur. I am still in the hospital area, that is to say am in the paymaster’s warm room doing clerical work. If I remain in this position, things will be easier. But come what may! My foot must be bandaged every day; the swelling is going down but the open sores are slower to heal.

Father was astonished to find good food at the front. The company “owns” 9 cows and therefore has fresh milk and butter “thickly spread”. He also writes of acquaintances: “Schwab visits me every evening and brings greetings from our neighbour – his fiancée.” Men who went their separate ways in peace time knowing little of each other now join forces:

“Bellon (from Enzberg) lives in Huber’s and is the hairdresser’s brother-in-law. There is also somebody from Merklingen and from Gründelbach, Schützingen, Zaisersweiher and Knittlingen. Rösler-Mühlacker is vice-constable. Being compatriots we promised each other before the battle that we would not leave each other down. Since then 4 of our men are missing.”

I quickly understood that the men needed news and support from home more than cigars. And so I took up writing like a schoolmaster: “Wednesday 6 Dec. 1916. Dear Father, How are you, are you in good health again. Today we sent you two packages one with bunz the other with jam, enjoy them. Dear Father, do remain in good health. You are heartily greeted by your Else.” “Hohenklingen 7 Dec. 1916. Dear Father, Your class is writing a letter to you here. I too hope that you are in good health and will soon come. We have long been wanting to write a letter, but the packidge was not yet full.” My school friends wrote: Hohenklingen 7 December 1916. Dear Mr Rutsch, At last we are writing you a little letter. I hope too that you will soon be better. If only the war were over so that you could go home and give your classes again in school. Hearty greetings from your pupil Immanuel Haberkern.” “Dear Mr Rutsch, We are writing you a little letter. You will enjoy that and we have often thought of you. You will prefer giving classes to being in the battles. You are heartily greeted by Luisle Kienle”.⁵ “Dear Mr Rutsch, We have just packed your Christmas present. We have already heard that you have become a lance corporal. We wish you lots of luck for your promotion. For Christmas we send you very best wishes. Warmest greetings sent by Gustav Mössner.” Father kept these children’s letters all his life together with the post sent to him at the front by relatives and friends. I add one more which on re-reading made me smile: “Dear Father, Thank you very much for the card and the money. Mother will buy me a nice Christmas present with it I am looking forward to it. One night I dreamt you had come and had brought me a little doggy that was wearing a wee crocheted jacket I was delighted. Come soon. Heartfelt greetings from your Else. ”

⁵ The pupils use both the formal mode of address (Sie) and the familiar form (Du) within the same letter, the latter tending to predominate. This indicates a fond relationship. The somewhat creative spelling and punctuation correspond to those of the children’s German letters.

Gofan Klinggen, den 17. Dez. 1916.
 Lieber Vater:
 Ich danke dir herzlich für die Brote in der Stadt.
 Die Mutter wird mir ein schönes Stoffkleid kaufen und
 schicken. In meine Wunschliste sind die feinsten
 Stoffe im Kleidergeschäft und ich bitte um ge-
 fällige Besorgung. Ich habe mich sehr gefreut. Bitte
 bald. Ich grüße dich herzlich
 Deine Elise

Letter of 17 December 1916 from Else Rutsch to her father

War Christmas

I had meanwhile made sufficient progress at needlework, having the good cause in mind, to be able to start knitting socks. Only the heels were sometimes still dangerous and I had to occasionally get mother's advice. How many pairs of socks, stockings, wristlets we made with our own hands that Christmas I do not know. They were presents for "our soldiers", to whom our father now belonged. But mother, who knew that the way to a man's heart goes through his stomach, did still more. She baked special long-lasting biscuits and stuffed them into the socks. Now and then a smoked sausage was packed in which grandmother had donated or bought from food ration cards we had not used up. (The coupons I had to fetch every week from the town hall in Freudenstein). And in spite of compulsory consignments to the state, donations to hospital and black market sales, our large honey pots were not yet empty. But how could we post honey? There were no tins to be had any longer, and glass jars were fragile. Mother invented a method. She bought a pile of strong greaseproof paper, cut the sheets into strips and on the sewing machine made tubes like sausage skins. She filled these with honey and tied up both ends. Neither heat nor cold nor vibration could damage the honey sausages: they were put into the packages and sent off to the front.

The third war Christmas was now approaching, the first which father would not be celebrating with us. For the first time I began to think about the expression “war Christmas”. Was Christmas not a celebration of peace? “Peace on earth to men of good will” was the message from the angels to the shepherds on the field near Bethlehem. The Kaiser himself had followed the example of the angels and had from on high promised the peace to the soldiers at the front which they so longed for. The generals of the army supreme command also said that the terrible war had to and would come to an end. The people in the village whom I met every day often had tears in their eyes when they spoke of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the victors of Tannenberg, who would now most speedily make peace provided we remained loyal to them and obediently did whatever they commanded. So I steadfastly believed that my diligence at praying, letter-writing, knitting and parcel-packing could accelerate the advent of peace and homecoming of my father. I fervently sang the advent hymns which we had been taught in our religion classes: “Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates” and: “How shall I receive you”. If one morning the Lord Jesus had really come down from heaven at the head of a group of angels in golden armour with flaming swords and had said: “Now then, it is time for peace!” I would have run over to them, wide-eyed like the other children, but my view of the world would not have been shattered. On the contrary, I would have happily announced to my mother that everything was now in order and that father would be coming home at once.

The soldiers at the front obviously took very seriously the imperial tidings of peace, which we Germans longed for and which we were prepared to make. In the greeting which father sent to our parson from the front he must have spoken of it, for in his reply the parson discusses it at some length: “Dear Mr Rutsch,” he wrote on 14 December, “many thanks for your card, which I was delighted to get. ... The main thing is that you are well and I do hope that you will soon be rid of that cough. You write that there is a general longing for peace. Well yes, *tout comme chez nous*, as the Frenchman puts it – “just as with us.” But I do not believe in the peace, despite the Kaiser’s message. Our enemies have not yet attained sufficient self-awareness. Until that happens, there will be no lasting peace. Despite all the terrors it has brought with it, this war will not be the last one. – However, I was glad to hear the peace message. Perhaps it was intended to anticipate a possible American peace initiative. Who knows? We do not see everything. But this is all mere conjecture and speculation emerging from the silence of the study which will not affect those in the grey uniform in their activities out there. – All is well here, thank God. Miss Sch. is settling down more and more;

she is at any rate very conscientious in her work and I am sure she will be a pleasant house companion for your wife. ... Now my warm greetings and best wishes for the feast days and new year and for your health from yours very sincerely M. Leuze, Parson.”

And so we sat in the little church in Unterlengenhardt, amid deep snow, with Aunt Frida and Friedel, but without father. A young Black Forest fir tree had been adorned with candles, the light of which fell on a carved wooden crib. The congregation sang “I stand here at your crib” and the parson preached. I have forgotten what he said. But he will certainly have spoken of the peace that came into the world with the birth of the child Jesus, and he will certainly have spoken of our soldiers at the front and their longing for peace. Maybe he also said that the soldiers on the other side of the front, our enemies, had the same longing, and perhaps he reminded the congregation that there could be no peace unless we were willing to forgive the injustice perpetrated by the others. – Outside the stars gleamed and sparkled in the black sky.

Our father celebrated Christmas far away from us. Soldiers from the surrounding positions had been brought into a church that was still standing undamaged. The field-grey congregation sang “Silent Night”, father played the Pilgrims’ Chorus from “Tannhäuser” on the organ and the army chaplain delivered his sermon. Whether the guns were silent that night, whether there were only stars in the sky or also flares, whether the celebrators got back safely to their trenches or whether there were attacks and casualties – I cannot say. Unfortunately father’s letter describing his Christmas at the front is lost. But no doubt our fathers in their dugouts thought with similar feelings of us as we of them, read or wrote letters and showed each others photographs of their relatives. There will have been singing, they will have exchanged the contents of their packages, smoked the uncrushed cigars, put on their new woollens and drunk brandy to warm themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR 1917

Frost

It had now become bitterly cold and remained so too in the new year. Night after night the thermometer sank to minus 20 degrees. Day after day icy fog wove itself around treetops and chimneys. Not even the smoke wanted to rise up into this bleakness and hung down, clinging closely to the roofs. Wood and coal were scarce. Lessons were shortened in school; at home we huddled together. Only one room could be heated. Our young teacher now often sat with us over a cup of coffee made for her by mother. The water had to be fetched from the well, as all the pipes in the kitchen were frozen. However, the frost brought us children a splendid sledge-slide of snow and white frost directly outside the front door. It extended down the entire village street, ending at the pond now covered over with thick ice. But the glory did not last long. The street was soon so slippery that people and cattle kept falling. Sand and sawdust were strewn and that was the end of our tobogganing.

As I could not knit incessantly all the afternoon or do homework, I remembered the neglected piano. Perhaps I wanted to avoid my unloved teacher. The piano was in an unheated room of our house, but mother brought me her thickest woollies and I sat down on the piano stool snugly packed up to the tip of my nose, only the small fingers were uncovered. But nothing came of the practising. No sooner had I struck the first note than rustling set in inside the piano. Some of the notes of the scale I tried to play produced absolutely no sound. I stopped in alarm. Yet the rustling continued. I called mother in. She thought the cold might have damaged the instrument. I was not to touch the piano any more to avoid doing more harm. When father came back, he would see to it. He did so, and it transpired that a family of mice had taken up residence in the piano over the winter and had chewed away the felt coverings of the hammers either because they were hungry or to build a nest.

Mother's illness

The cold was not good for mother. But a dispute into which she was drawn by our young teacher brought much worse trouble. I have already reported that the teacher was not the good

house-companion the parson believed her to be. Everything negative she heard was passed on and exaggerated. What was positive she either omitted or twisted, thus setting one person against the other. Now, in our village there were several marriageable belles who had ambitions with regard to our young male teacher. Their jealousies smouldered on even after he had been called up for military service and they infected almost the entire female population. For the absence of the menfolk altered the ranking order among the women. That gave rise to insecurity and belligerence. And so in the middle of the Great War a small one broke out: a minor Trojan war but with the difference that it was a war waged by women over a man. Our Fräulein Sch. was now in her element and made sure that the conflict parties did not run short of ammunition for their verbal assaults. One girl in particular could not get over the fact that the young teacher had eluded her. Her injured vanity required a scapegoat to blame for her misfortune and she seized on the notion, fed to her by our Fräulein, that it was my mother who had prevented the imminent engagement by spreading malicious information. Mother had had more to do that year than to meddle in the affairs of young people, but she regarded the accusation as insolent and challenged the girl. It would have been better had she not done so, for this now allowed the girl – the daughter of an innkeeper – to mobilise her pugnacious entourage against mother. For quite a number of people, mother was no longer the respected teacher's wife, but the wearer of the seagull hat and she had to endure comments such as "Who does she think she is anyway with that seagull hat of hers?" Deeply mortified, mother withdrew from the fray. Run down because of the cold, the vexations and agitations, she overdid it during a big laundry day, was exhausted and became seriously ill.

There she was in bed with awful toothache, a very swollen face and a high temperature. My dear neighbour, Luise Schwab, whose fiancé was with my father at the front, helped me to heat the bedroom and to boil potatoes for hot poultices. When that brought no improvement, she telephoned for the doctor. The only dentist was in Bretten at that time, 12 km from us and even in summer no easy journey but now quite out of the question for somebody so ill. But we had our good family physician, Dr. Pfeiffer. He came over from Maulbronn in a light sleigh with his little bag. Having diagnosed a root infection, he decided to operate himself on the septic jaw bone and to remove the tooth. He said he would return that afternoon as the light would be better. I was to have hot water ready. And come he did, bringing a young woman with him, his niece. He praised her as the strong and fearless girl which students of medicine had to be. He now needed her as his assistant to hold mother's head. He asked

whether I could face being present at the operation in case he needed something urgently. I was scared to death, but bravely nodded.

Mother had to be much braver during the following half hour. When it was over and all had gone well, I was instructed to make a camomile infusion every two hours through the evening and night, and to help her rinse her mouth. The doctor called the following morning to see his patient and was satisfied. Mother no longer had a temperature and the swelling had been reduced. But she was still very weak and it was three weeks before she was fully back on her feet. – That same doctor, a follower of the Bavarian healer Sebastian Kneipp, had brought me into the world and saved my mother's life and mine during that complicated birth. Following his advice, my parents gave me no meat whatever until I was six years old, and thereafter not much meat or sausage. Once when mother had eaten sausage that had gone off, he at once realised it was a case of serious food poisoning. He asked me earnestly: "Did you eat some of that sausage?" His response on hearing that I had not: "Thank God!"

Aunt Berta braved ice and snow to come over from Enzberg to look after mother. She was not her normal cheerful self, was downcast and dejected and in no mood for laughing or joking. She gave us news of her mother and brothers. Friedrich was out of danger, for the moment at least. He was in hospital in Ludwigsburg pending his complete recovery. It was Wilhelm who worried them greatly. He was becoming more and more bitter, did not have a good word to say about anybody, not even grandmother, and constantly denounced the compulsory farm-produce levies, the war and the state. If you tried to calm him down, his agitation only increased. It was becoming very difficult to put up with.

Father in the dugout

Exhaustion had brought about a temporary lull at the Somme, whence father's letters came to us. That did not mean, of course, that the cannons were silent. Now I discovered what the expression "attrition warfare" meant. In a long letter father described his life deep down underground, ironically dubbing it "nice and bullet-proof":

Ayette, 13 February

Dear wife and child,

I arrived safely this morning in the dugout. Visit me in spirit in this once impressive house.

The residents were driven out by a shell. – “Horror dwells behind the empty window cavities.” It is now uninhabitable. – Now search for the cellar door and climb down to me. Count the steps, 1, 2, 3 etc. up to 37. We are now down. Approximately 8 m of bedrock (all chalk cliffs) lie over me. – Dead safe, bomb-proof. Very necessary as the thunder of guns never ceases, not even for a second. – On entering my humble abode you will be quite dazzled. 2 electric lamps of 50 and 32 candle-power bring light as bright as daylight into the hole and automatically go on and off. – Eternal light. – I would need your Christmas-tree candles. – Now take a look around in your father’s dwelling. 1,60 m wide is his chamber, 6 m long and just high enough for me to stand upright. Continue on 1 m, and on the right there is a similar room leading to a wider exit on the other side in case one of the passages were to be destroyed. The next impression you will have is: it’s warm here. A stove radiates cosy warmth. The afore-mentioned item stands on 3 feet, is the size of an iron cooking pot, is covered with an inverted frying pan and requires constant feeding. It finds wood quite acceptable: the household furniture, door and window frames, stairs, rafters etc cost nothing after all. – Oh wife, what if this were to happen in our home. Life would no longer be worth living. – Make yourselves comfortable, please. 2 chairs, 2 little benches invite you to take a seat. For the first time in a while I can now say: that is my chair. A good feeling. I am now easily pleased, am I not, wife dear. You can take my seat. There in front of you the telephone. You are permanently on call. The doctors in the positions outside announce the number and type of casualty and summon either a car or a wagon. It is my duty to arrange for the departure of these vehicles and then report to the commanding officer. – So the duties are easy and simple. On the table there is a rack with six compartments. One compartment for official documents, one compartment for private property, one compartment for cigars, writing material etc. (Dear wife, I would be grateful for small sheets of notepaper and envelopes with *proper* adhesive strips). On the rack there is a nice Christmas tree which would be suitable for Else’s doll’s house. Furthermore, there is a crucifix. Yes, Saviour. It was the war that taught me what the concept of redemption through death means. A great sacrifice! The walls are adorned with postcards and decent pictures belonging to previous occupants. – That did me good: one so frequently comes across much ugliness – the sort of thing the swine in the communication sector are said to have. The walls, ceiling and floor are made from 7½ cm-thick boards called frames. We hang our equipment etc on nails. I say we: – another soldier is still with me so we have alternate shifts. He is a married dyer from the Reutlingen area, a nice obliging man. He has just gone off to get the food. At the moment there are 8 men in the company and we get 15 portions. Dear wife, we are not short of food. – There would be enough for you, too, and it is better than in the barracks. Bread in plenty, giant chunks of meat etc. This was my first experience of it today and the others say it is always like this. They say my predecessor put on a pile of weight while on duty here. When I have managed to do that I will have a photograph taken and then you can judge. “It is the custom from times of yore / Those with worries need liquor more and more.” The truth of this saying is in evidence here with the

brandy bottle glinting temptingly from the corner. – Books large and small are there for the reading but recent newspapers we do not have. – But you will be tired by now. You can lie down and take a sleep. 4 bedsteads are available, 2 are not in use. I don't want to describe these beds to you: I will explain that when I see you. How one sleeps in them I shall only be able to say tomorrow morning. – It is now 10 pm. I had to interrupt my writing. We had visitors from another tunnel and were chatting about the U-boat war. – Now my dears, sleep well and dream of your father. Dear wife, the post doesn't go as regularly from here as it did from Moyenneville. Don't be worried: I will be safe and well for the near future. – Good night – will write again tomorrow

Your Father

The paper war of rules and regulations

The great cold in our area had now broken. Mother sent me to Freudenstein to collect the food coupons and to buy the rations, as she had often done before. The paths were free of snow and dry; at crossroads there were still heaps of melting snow; coltsfoot was already in flower on the verges. I paused frequently and kept an eye out for buttercups and violets. Thus absorbed I did not notice that somebody was approaching from behind. A young woman whom I had never seen before greeted me and asked the way to Freudenstein. I said she should come with me as I was going there too. She told me that her husband was at the front near Verdun. When I replied that my father was at the Somme it was as if we had known each other for a long time. I asked whether she was visiting relations in Freudenstein. She said she was not and showed me the milk can in her bag. Did I think she might perhaps be able to get milk and perhaps a few eggs in the village? She had a small child who was now being minded by her grandmother since in Pforzheim, where she was from, it was so hard to get good food. The bread was getting worse and worse: now it went mouldy after only one day. I listened to her lamentations about the war and told her she ought to go to the city hall to get authorisation for a "small food purchase", otherwise the food could be confiscated by the railway inspectors. Then I accompanied her to the town hall office and spoke for her. She finally got her piece of paper and afterwards milk and eggs. She was so pleased about my precocious advice and help that a little parcel arrived from Pforzheim shortly afterwards with a pretty little bracelet for me.

Another little package, from my father, also arrived, but was a disappointment. Here is my letter of response: “Hohenklingen, 5 March. Dear Father, How are you are you still in good health. I did not get the mouth organ the packit was adressed to me alright and was packd quite differently to the way you packd and the paper was all squeezd flat and it was empty and I cried for a long time. Dear father, when you come be so good and bring me something. Fond greetings from your Else and also greetings from Eugen and his mother.” In the margin mother wrote: “Else does not write well any more, Fritz, does she? High time for you to come home.”

There was not only fresh cow’s milk at the front it seems, but also freshly painted picture postcards. Father sent us one. It depicts a shattered brick church, riddled with bullets. The broken tower juts up rigidly against the blue sky in which threatening clouds look as though they had been caused by fires or explosions. There is also a house in the picture with a tiled roof on which the sun is shining – the artist may have included it because of the blood-red colour.



The church of Hendecourt, France, 1916: an artist’s impression

In a photograph of the same scene of ruin with the stump of the tower, destroyed nave of the church and undamaged choir gallery there is no trace of a house: only heaps of rubble and blackened beams in what used to be the centre of a village. "Church of Hendecourt" Uncle Wilhelm Olpp wrote on the back..



The church of Hendecourt, France, 1916

These cards "From 26 Reserve Division War Theatre" were created and distributed by a department specially set up for the purpose. It is hard to imagine how generals think. With these pictures they probably wanted to demonstrate to the home front that they were not lazing around and taking it easy, but that there was something to show for the huge sums of money being spent on the war. Another of these cards shows a makeshift very roughly constructed plank-roofed shack cowering on the side of a slope, a Red Cross flag outside it and a few soldiers surrounded by torn trees, ragged bushes and barbed wire. My father wrote on it in pencil "First aid dugout Miraumont".

There is an inscription in father's hand on another picture postcard: "Buy a little frame for this card. It was made in Ayette, the place where I was on telephone duty." Mother did so and to this day I have the picture on my bookshelf. It shows a first-aid wagon drawn by two horses, several orderlies with Red Cross armbands standing next to it, one of them my father

in army boots (irreverently called ‘dice shakers’ by the soldiers), uniform, peaked cap and with the inevitable cigar.



Friedrich Rutsch (standing, 4th from left) in Alette, France 1916

Letters to the front

Father's older pupils were sad that they were celebrating the end of their schooling without him. So they sent him letters of thanks to the front: "Hohenklingen 25 March 1917. Dear Mr Rutsch, As you already know, today was confirmation, we had white weather [*i.e. snow*] all day, probably just like in France. I and my parents have often thought of you especially now at the end of my time in school as you were always such a good teacher. We are sending you a little something from the confirmation. Hoping to see you again soon and with greetings from your grateful pupil Karl Ehrismann and parents."

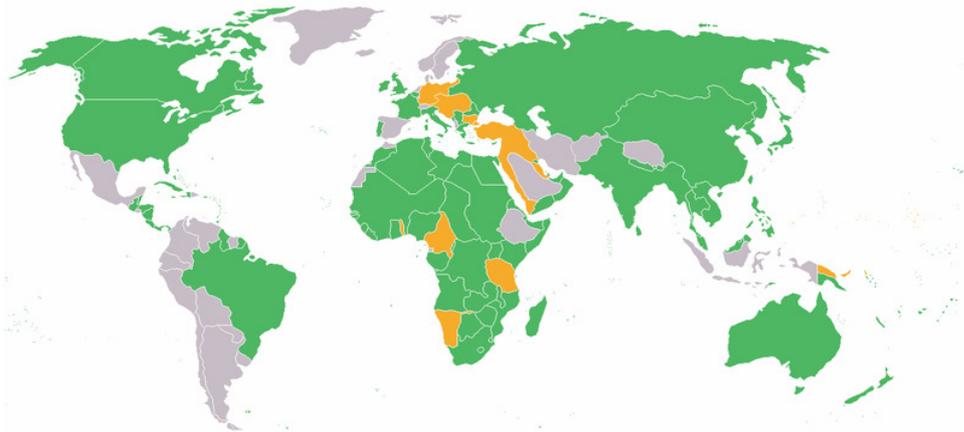
The writers of every one of the many letters which my father brought home with him from the war express the wish to see him again, the hope that he will return safely and that there will soon be peace. Not a single one urges the recipient to be patient in enduring suffering, to be courageous in facing death or to summon up the strength for heroic deeds. I cannot imagine that among the millions of letters sent to the soldiers during the war there are in fact any in which relatives or friends try to persuade the men at the front to make still greater sacrifices: “Dear son, be so good as to stick it out a bit longer for you see we need Belgium and a bit of France to enlarge our kingdom and our possessions, and if we don’t win everything will be taken from us again and the whole war will have been for nothing!” But this was in effect the message contained in the posters calling on citizens to buy war bonds and it was the message of the war reports. They said: the enemy is exhausted. Hold out, give of your best once more and then victory will be ours and we will be able to dictate the peace terms! The letters to the front, however, say: We are exhausted, at the end of our tether. What will happen if peace does not come soon?

Father’s cousin writes: “We never thought you too would have to go – your dear wife and little girl will worry about you. May God grant that you can come back home to them in good health. Babette Kellermann.” The wife of the Eagle innkeeper of Freudenstein: “On 6 February all 44-year old men who have not served are being called up and here at home the worries and difficulties are ever increasing. May God soon grant us the peace we long for. Yours, Johanna Hähnle and children.” My Schrozberg grandmother: “Ida was in Mergentheim yesterday; we wanted to go to a hairdresser who is a war invalid, but he has been sent to the front again. ... Now farewell my dear Fritz, may the good God protect you and watch over you and put an end to the terrible war. Your mother Marie Rutsch.” His sister: “Our business is making very little money – beer has become dearer again and the effect is very noticeable. The hairdresser shop is only open on Thursdays. But we will manage, if only things do not get still worse. Perhaps the war will end this summer.” His uncle of Oberstetten: “If only this terrible war would end, or if we even had some hope that peace would come soon – everybody is longing for it. I do not believe I will live to see peace as everything is becoming more difficult and we have nobody left to do the farming. They have taken away 100 men from here and when they do the medicals again our poor Fritz will be called up and if I have to go through that pain, I would rather not be here any more. ... What we have had to put up with since the war began: in the inn you can’t give anybody a glass of beer before 6 pm. Eggs have to be handed over according to the number of hens you have. They decide when you

slaughter. They weigh the flour, not trusting you to do it. You are supposed to save the potatoes and not eat much. Who would have thought it would ever come to this.”

The map of the world

Meanwhile the revolution had broken out in Russia. The older pupils in their thirst for knowledge had turned to the parson early on, who now took on the role of commentator and flag positioner. He was very sad and serious about the revolution. He thought it had come because of godlessness and was as infectious as the plague. Russia would indeed be weakened by it and peace would therefore be closer, but not for the poor Russian people, as there would now be civil war in Russia. Civil war was much worse than wars between peoples, because members of the same nation took up arms against each other. We should just imagine what it would be like if Germans were shooting at Germans. ... Then he spoke about the naval war. Here there were good tidings at last of victories of our forces. The map of Europe was not big enough to place little flags everywhere where our submarines had sunk ships. The map of the world had to be hung up. That of course also showed how huge the United States was compared to Germany and even the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The critical self-assessment which the parson believed our enemies were incapable of was obviously also lacking in our military leaders and commanders-in-chief.



Yellow: we “the Central Powers”; green: our enemies the “Entente”; grey: neutral powers

It was a near certainty that the United States would enter the war against us. Father mentions it in a letter of 16 March 1917: “My dear wife – is it true – America is supposed to have declared war? No end to calamity. Do you still have the courage to buy war bonds?” In

the same letter he wrote of constant retreat preparations: “In the course of a blasting one of our men was killed (sad and terrible) and 9 men injured. And: Yesterday my ear was very painful and I was not at all well. Maybe it was because of the fright I got which shocked me to the core.”

Father writes not long afterwards, on 28 March: “Dear wife and child, I was digging trenches today. On the road outside G., outside the churchyard we had to make dugouts and horse stables. We are now digging under the coffins. There is work enough. It will be summer before we are finished. Oh that war. To be undermining the resting places of the dead. ... I am having trouble again with my ear – but under no circumstances should one become ill when in the army, as we know – ‘Only ill?’ says the lady in the hospital to the poor fellow. – Better to remain healthy, go along with everything and survive. ...“ On 3 April 1917: “A week of suffering seems to have begun. The English attacked on 2nd. That meant bloody work. Many, many Germans wounded, even more English, though they were actually all Australians and blacks. We had some of them in the first-aid centre. Am very tired today. Worked the whole night till about 3. Oh humanity, oh misery. How good, how fortunate it is that you women do not have to and may not see *this*. Dear wife, you would collapse. The writer of the article knew nothing about the attack. It is easy to write articles. If only these fellows had to go to the front, and also those instigators of the misery, then I tell you there would be no more drumfire and no more machine-gun fire. No more for today. Keep writing to me. In haste – warm greetings from your father.”

War reporting

I do not know what journalist father was talking about. It was not so important really, as the war reports which mother cut out of the newspapers for him and sent to the front were all written in the same style: our enemies must be insane as they attack day after day, driving their men out into certain death. We, in contrast, are in command of the situation, and are reason and serenity personified. That our counterattacks are also ordered “regardless of the cost” is not mentioned. “The enemy did not move even one step forward at the Somme. On the contrary, in a counter attack at the decisive point in battle of the Ancre, in and around Grandcourt (2 kilometres to the east of Beaucourt), we drove the English out of the western part of the village again. The Serre heights, which the English dearly wanted to take, are still

securely in our possession, our guns spewing death and destruction from there down into the muddy plains, bringing in a grim harvest as they mow down the English attempting to storm the hill. Here the English expected success. When on 18 November that was denied to them, they repeated the mad attempt on 19 November. Once again in vain – and in vain cavalry and tanks waited in the background for their fateful hour. A Swedish newspaper estimates that at the beginning of the battle of the Somme every kilometre cost the Allies 16 000 men, and in the final weeks 46 000. These figures are nothing short of appalling, especially as, according to the same paper, the English have suffered far more than 600 000 casualties.”

It was no ordinary ear infection which was bothering father. His eardrum had been injured during the blasting that he had mentioned in his letter to us. He was to remain deaf in one ear all his life. But he was able to send us good news for Easter. The army doctors who were treating his septic ear had shown consideration and his transfer to Ludwigsburg was imminent. So greatly relieved and with much lighter hearts we went to Enzberg to be joined there by Aunt Frida.

As it was raining on Easter Sunday, Aunt Berta hid the Easter goodies which Friedel and I were to get in the big barn. In a dark corner I found my moss nest filled with big and small red sugar hares and many coloured eggs. My good grandmother must have exchanged many a pound of flour and butter to fill those nests with sugar hares for her grandchildren, for such things could no longer be bought in the shops. Friedel’s Easter nest, which was just as nice as mine, had been hidden higher up by Aunt Berta. Friedel was too small to see it up there, and she began to cry as she could not find anything. Aunt Berta lifted her up and said: “Look around you!” Friedel stretched out her little arms and cried out: “There it is, on top of the cart!” This picture I see vividly to this day: Aunt Berta smiling, in her arms small Friedel who was clapping her hands. This is my last unclouded happy memory of life on the farm in Enzberg.

The horrific news

On 4 May 1917 Aunt Berta found her brother Wilhelm hanging in the same barn in which four weeks previously we had been so happy together. She cut him down and tried to resuscitate him, but in vain. The horrific news came to us by telegram: “Pauleen come at once

– Wilhelm dead – Berta”. Mother packed essentials for herself and for me, put on her black costume and asked the neighbour to look after house and livestock during our absence. Then we set off on foot to the station. In the forest she removed her hat, attached it to the woven-straw travelling bag and swung bag with hat up on her head. Everything was as always except that she wept the whole way, also at the station and in the train. The ticket collector and passengers we encountered made way for her respectfully and left us undisturbed. A weeping woman in mourning holding a child by the hand – this was at the time a familiar sight, a typical street scene, so to speak. I just kept looking at my mother during the journey; I could not cry with her, although I had been fond of Wilhelm. That he was now dead only gradually sank in. I did not ask any questions. Mother could not have answered them anyway, although she must have suspected what had happened. In Enzberg we found grandmother and Aunt Berta weeping. Neighbours were there too, to help and to mourn with them. I was not allowed to see the corpse. They gave me small jobs to do in the kitchen and in the stable which I had always liked doing. This time I did not enjoy them. I felt hurt that they did not confide in me. Something special must have happened: why was I kept out of the room? Why did they not tell me? I was no longer a small child, after all. When mother brought me to bed, I plucked up my courage and asked what Uncle Wilhelm had died of. She was silent for a while, reflecting. Then she told me the truth. He was in a desperate situation, could see no way out and took his life. Two days before he did that, a commission had come to the farm to demand that he hand over so and so many hundredweight of corn and potatoes by a certain date. Wilhelm had had an argument with the men and shown them the almost empty potato cellar. Then they threatened to put him into prison. It had been a very serious dispute.

He now lay in his coffin, in a white shirt, surrounded by all the spring flowers in bloom in the garden, his hair still jet-black, his white face carefully shaven, his fine-boned hands folded on his breast. Silence and peace now reigned around him. Aunt Berta and grandmother spoke to the parson. An ancient ecclesiastical law stipulated that nobody who had committed suicide could be buried in hallowed ground. Some villagers believed this rule ought to be observed and spoke out against Wilhelm being buried in the Enzberg cemetery. The parson comforted grandmother, however. He told her that since 1900 the law was no longer in force and that Wilhelm could therefore be interred in the grave of his ancestors. So she was spared this pain at least. The parson also saw to it that the funeral service was conducted according to the custom with prayers, sermon and last blessing. A choir of schoolchildren sang as we – grandmother, her four daughters and I – accompanied Wilhelm on his final journey. The men

of the family, the brothers and sons-in-law, were absent, far away in the east and in the west. My father, who was least far away, was denied leave. It was therefore a war funeral, not only felt to be so by us, but outwardly too. Wilhelm was a war victim. In her great sorrow, grandmother bent down low over the coffin, repeating again and again: "But he is my child!" Then for the first time that day I shed tears. They were for grandmother.

Mouth organ playing and dancing

A small factory had been established in Knittlingen, not far from Hohenklingen, which produced mouth organs and accordions. Quite a number of girls and boys who had left school, and indeed women and men too, in so far as the latter had not been called up, went there on foot every day from Hohenklingen to be trained and to make some money. The young people were taught free of charge to play the instruments which they were manufacturing. The company is known the world over today, but it has long since moved its headquarters and production facilities to the southern Black Forest, to Trossingen. There too it continues to support the teaching of music with a college of music, the qualifications of which are officially recognised. The inhabitants of our district greatly regretted the change of location.

They were all very musical and knew many songs, which they sang whenever they met with others. On those occasions they always sang partsongs. They would sing too when they were on their own to avoid getting bored while doing monotonous work. Mouth organs were now gradually appearing in many households in Hohenklingen. First one child in the house learnt to play it, and then more, as the older brothers and sisters soon passed on their new art to the smaller ones. There was music on fine summer evenings, especially on Saturdays and Sundays: often duets, trios or even quartets. Those without a mouth organ had to make do, for the time being at least, with either singing or listening.

Then we discovered a new form of entertainment. At an angle behind the schoolhouse there was a big lumberyard in which firewood was chopped, garden fences and vineyard stakes made. We smaller children fixed it up for dancing. The floor was nice and springy and gave off a lovely smell of resin. One of us would strike up: a colourful miscellany of Strauss waltzes, Rhinelanders and Scottish dances interspersed with popular tunes such as the Berlin melody "In Grunewald, in Grunewald there's a firewood auction on". We were most of us

less than ten years old, but we spun around in pairs, boys with girls, or girls with girls, depending on how many were there. – Who had taught us? Just as in the case of mouth-organ playing, it was our older brothers and sisters. They of course only danced with us at home, and looked down their noses superciliously at our dance floor. For they had their own much nicer one up on the mountain at the edge of the forest. There the 14 to 16 year-olds whirled around “like rags on sticks” under the wide-spreading branches of old beech trees to the fuller volume of the concertina. We were only allowed to look on and learn here. When it began to get dark we had to go home. We went arm in arm, singing all the while. At the next occasion we tried out what we had seen there on our own dance floor. Nobody ever drove us away from it. Although the adults had a lot of work on their hands – and the children therefore numerous duties – they were kindly disposed to us, for we often spotted mothers, aunts, even grandmothers watching us from the doors or from behind the curtains and laughing with each other.

Father's return

Father had spent a further ten days in the military hospital on account of his ear. His health problem was now recognised as a “service injury.” There is an entry in his military pass: “From 23 7 to 31 10 17 discharged to Hohenklingen at the service of the Lutheran District School Authority Dürrmenz. We counted the days, the hours and finally even the minutes until he was due to appear on the village street coming from Maulbronn. Mother had done a big cleaning operation and polished every window, including those in the schoolrooms. While she was hurrying to the bake-house with her cakes, the cleaning devil took possession of me, commanding me to put a shine on the wooden steps leading up to the house. I worked on my knees, wielding a scrubbing brush. Jittery as I was, I straightened up while on the lowest step, sprang quickly to my feet, banging my skull against the solid handle of the open front door. It bled quite a bit and I started to howl. A hole in my head! Under normal circumstances that would have been a case for our district nurse in Freudenstein, or even for the doctor in Maulbronn. But not so on a day like this. Having got thus far with my meditations, I discontinued the howling.

What was to be done? I decided to patch myself up before mother would return, cry out in horror and tow me off to the first-aid station. Up in the kitchen I held my head under the tap,

pressing a wet cold cloth on the injured area. Pain and bleeding soon diminished. No need then for a doctor. Luckily I was still wearing my weekday dress. I took it off quickly, hid it and slipped on my Sunday dress with its white lace collar. What a state that would have been in had I already changed! As if nothing had happened, I went out to meet mother and help her carry up the sweet-smelling cakes. She did inquire why my hair was wet, but then father arrived and the accident sank down into the joyful tumult of his welcome. The memory of this reunion has remained with me all my life – as well as a small scar on my forehead under the hairline.

Father was worried about grandmother and Aunt Berta in Enzberg. How had they fared with the hay harvest and all the summer work on the fields? How had they been able to do without Wilhelm? Had they been able to get somebody to do his work? Mother reported: It had indeed been extremely difficult and they would not have managed at all had the Enzberg parson not intervened on grandmother's behalf and succeeded in having the Polish prisoner of war with whom they had all got on so well allocated to the farm on a full-time basis. She praised Aunt Berta too: "She did the work of two men and is only a young girl after all entitled to go out and enjoy herself." Now harvest time was coming and Wilhelm would be missed most sorely. The big holidays had just started. Father did not hesitate. Mother packed and only a few days later we were in Enzberg.

Corn harvest on the hill fields

Once again a man was sitting at the head of the family table in the kitchen, and grandmother was glad to leave the planning of the work to my father. Yet throughout the whole harvest, we realised that we could not fill the gap created by Wilhelm's death. For the reaping there was now only father, the prisoner of war, Aunt Berta and grandmother. At 4 in the morning they headed off with their scythes and sickles, climbed up the steep road leading to the elevation over the Enz valley where our cornfield was. Mother and I prepared the big food basket and the jugs and set out along the same path as soon as it was time for the morning break. It was half an hour's walk. After the meal we remained in the field to help. I laid out the ropes for the sheaves, placing them at equal distances from each other along the rows of cut corn. The three women followed me, gathered up the corn with both arms, holding the sickle in their right hands, taking up just the right amount, and laying it gently on the

ropes. Behind them came the two men, who tied the bundles of stalks into sheaves. They clasped the bundle, knelt on it to compress it, but did so with caution because the heavy ears of corn could easily break off the dry stalks. Then with all their strength they pulled the rope to, knotting it together at both ends. Small staves were attached to the sheaf-ropes using a certain binding technique that required practice as it had to be done speedily. Four to six sheaves were lined up together.

While the others were still busy with the binding, Aunt Berta and I walked home. There we harnessed the bay, loaded up pole and rake and drove back up the hill to the field. Father aligned horse and wagon carefully so that he could drive along the dead-straight rows of sheaves without touching them. The Pole climbed up on the wagon. Father seized the pitchfork and I had to walk with the bay, getting him to move and stop with clicks and “whoas”. Father swung the sheaves up on the wagon where the Pole caught hold of them and stacked them expertly. The higher the load grew, the more father perspired. Meanwhile the women drew the large rakes through the stubble to gather up broken-off ears of corn. Finally a sack was hung around my neck and I had to glean the remainder. That was for the small livestock at home. Now came the most difficult work of the day: getting the heavily laden corn wagon safely down the hill into the village and back to the barn. Had the haypole been properly lashed down? Our Pole shook his head and the two men once again swung on the ropes with all their might.

Now the Pole took the bay’s bridle. The hill was loosely gravelled. In many places the underlying stones were visible which had been worn smooth by the carts. The carter needed to know where the horse might slip or the wheels of the wagon get stuck. Father and Aunt Berta walked beside the wagon, supporting the swaying load with their forks. Horse and carter did their best. But in the middle of the hill – to the right the slope, to the left the vineyards – the left front wheel suddenly broke with an almighty crash. The bay strained on all four feet against the weight of the wagon now pressing against him, and the Pole rushed to crank on the brake. The wagon came to a halt: though leaning ominously towards the valley below, it had at least not capsized. However, our good bay was injured. A protruding piece of metal had cut a deep wound in his hindquarters. We unharnessed him quickly. Aunt Berta led him home to the stable and telephoned for the vet. Grandmother meanwhile went to neighbours to ask for help. After a while an old man came with a horse and cart. We thanked him and began reloading. When we finally reached the barn we met the vet, who was just leaving. He had stitched the bay’s wound and bandaged him up. He did not believe it was dangerous as the

horse was taking his food, but he would certainly need to rest for three days. We then brought in the harvest without further incident with a borrowed horse.



Harvesting the corn: photograph by Berta Kopp

The double floor

Father made a discovery while doing repairs in the house. In one of the empty servants' chambers our steps sounded oddly hollow. Father examined the floorboards. They were expertly fitted, but not nailed down and were easy to lift out provided you began at the right place. Underneath there was a second floor a metre and a half below. The space between the floors was dry and dark, and only accessible from above. What purpose could this have served in the old customs house, which had survived the Thirty Years' War? As a hiding place for valuables, food, or even people? Grandmother could not give us any information and could not recall her husband ever speaking of a double floor in the house. The discovery set father thinking and saddened him. If Wilhelm had known of the hiding place and had used it, he said, perhaps he would not have come under such pressure and would not have been driven to breaking point. I think he made these remarks to mother and me.

In front of grandmother at the family table we did not speak of the speculations and “what if’s” in connection with Wilhelm’s death, but we did discuss what ought to be done now. It was evident that grandmother had lost hope. She spoke with composure, but with bitterness. She would not be able to continue on to the next harvest, she was sure of that. Everything else was uncertain: how long the war would last, whether it would be fought out at home and the country devastated, whether Friedrich would come back. But even if he were to remain alive and return unscathed, she did not believe that he would be able to run the farm, or what was left of it. Berta wanted to train as a nurse and did not want to become a farmer. All grandmother’s daughters had wanted to leave the farm. What her husband had said on his deathbed in his despair would now come to pass: “When I die, the family will be ruined.” Father soothed her. Even if the farm had to be given up, rented out or sold, life would go on. “The farm is not the family – we are!” Her daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren would not let her down. And would she please remember: Friedrich was alive and could come back safely. He would then be more mature than when he had left and would value the peace. Then he could finish his apprenticeship, marry and become as good a farmer and cattle breeder as his father. Grandmother only shook her head sadly and was silent.

I only discovered much later that Friedrich had also been a problem child, though in a very different way than his brother Wilhelm. Where Wilhelm was lacking in self-confidence and assertiveness, his brother had rather too much of these qualities. He was quick on the uptake, got good marks and his teachers had no complaints to make of him. But his sisters had: he was often saucy to them and given to outbursts of temper which he vented on them. He may have suffered somewhat under the women’s rule. He did not accept his brother and there was no other male figure of authority in the house. Grandmother had to constantly mediate between the sisters and their younger brother. It once happened, after Friedrich had already left school and was serving his apprenticeship, that he had a quarrel with a young girl from the village, dragged her from her wagon and slapped her face. The girl’s father reported him and he was charged with infliction of bodily harm. In court when the judge asked Friedrich why he had done it, he replied that the girl had reminded him of his sisters. That amounted to an admission of guilt. I do not know what the outcome was. He was not imprisoned. If he received a custodial sentence, it must have been suspended. My father was present at the hearing, and then looked after him as much as he could. Friedrich was kept on at the apprenticeship, but a stigma remained. I am sure that his decision to volunteer for the war was connected with this. He took the matter to heart and wanted to make amends.

I am caught out

Father had to go to Leonberg on 18 September for renewed medical examination. The entry in his military pass states: "For 1 year service in home barracks only." So we had him back for a time and a new life began for us, both down in the schoolrooms and up in the flat. Fräulein Sch. was sent to another school and her knitting and crochet classes were discontinued. Instead father allowed me to take gymnastics with the boys. I was not in the least embarrassed – they were playmates, after all, with whom I had not only danced but often enough fought. The mouse-damaged piano was repaired and I was again given regular lessons. Scales, Czerny studies and little pieces by Hummel, Mozart and Beethoven came easy to me and gave me much pleasure. I did not do at all as well with chorales, much though I liked singing them. But mother insisted on one per week. She held them in high regard and knew about half of those in our hymn book by heart, many of which consisted of ten stanzas or more each. (She got much comfort from them during the last years of her life when she was almost completely blind). She too had a good ear and was very musical. She supervised my playing from the kitchen and often came into the room if I persisted with the same mistake. "This is how it goes," she would say and play the correct note or sing the section if her hands were wet. Practice began daily at eleven, after the end of morning school. Our living room clock hung over the piano. I was allowed to stop when it struck twelve. I always played my chorale last. What could be more obvious than to shorten this part of the practice? So at the beginning of the hour I climbed up on the piano stool, quietly opened the door on the face of the clock and moved the big hand forward a few minutes. Naturally I was found out and the chorale now had to be played at the beginning of my practice hour in accordance with the principle: "Work first, then pleasure."

There was a reason why my parents were not particularly annoyed by my swindle. While he was engaged to my mother, father was the teacher and cantor of the Waldensian parish in Gross-Villars. At that time there was still a church service on Sunday afternoons. Father sat at the organ on tenterhooks as he wanted to visit his fiancée in Enzberg. As soon as the service was over he made for the station at the double. It often happened that the train departed without him. Then he thought up a remedy. During the sermon he stole away on tiptoe from the organ gallery up to the clock tower and moved on the big hand of the clock. Then he made his way back to his seat without a sound. A rear view mirror gave him a view of pulpit and

parson. As planned, the clock struck five minutes before it should have. The parson, father used to recount, thereupon drew out his pocket watch, took a look at it, put it back and said: “Let us pray!”

The Reformation celebration

Why was it that there was generally friction between parsons and schoolmasters in the rural areas and often serious differences of opinion? In the Kaiserreich or German empire, elementary schoolteachers were subordinated to the clergy. There was a distinction of rank between parson and teacher: the parson belonged to the upper orders or ascendancy, the teacher to the populace. The school was under the supervision of the local clergyman, who had authority over the teacher. The teacher had to obey him, and to greet him first.⁶ Sometimes the teacher was expected to greet the parson’s son first, if he were a grammar school or university student and thus a person commanding respect. If the teacher did not do so, he could be reprimanded and get into trouble, as once happened to my father, who was so incensed that he fell ill.

Among my father’s papers I found a small oilcloth notebook in which he made notes for a ceremony in the church of Hohenklingen. 31 October 1917 was the quatro-centenary of Luther’s nailing of his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg and the school authorities encharged parsons and teachers with the task of organising special commemorative services. For his ceremony, Father chose the hymn “A mighty fortress is our God”, or rather he arranged the ceremony around the hymn, whose third stanza goes: “And though this world, with devils filled / should threaten to undo us, / We will not fear, for God hath willed / His truth to triumph through us.”⁷ I know of no text which reflects our mood in the autumn of 1917 better than does this one. We were filled with a great sense of defiance. All efforts were concentrated on standing firm in order to win the war notwithstanding. The authorities were doing everything to reinforce the people’s hopes of victory and to suppress any doubts about the outcome.

⁶ In Germany the social hierarchy is reflected in the customs governing who greets whom first.

⁷ Translation: Frederic H. Hedge, 1853.

Luther appears in my father's ceremony as an undaunted fighter and victor who prevailed in the struggle for the German faith. Hobach's poem "Who is a German man?" provided the foundation. It goes: Who is a German man? // Steadfast and courageous he fights for the great and good, // He bravely tells the truth to wise and fools alike, // Staunch he remains and loyal in his love for German freedom, // He prays and trusts in God, When all breaks down, he still goes on // That is the German man." The poem was presented and interpreted by teacher, pupils and congregation in dialogue and antiphonal singing: Luther's inner struggles as monk, his campaign against the sale of indulgences, his discourse before the Kaiser at the Reichstag [Imperial Assembly], his outlawing and banishment, and finally the victory of the reformation. The tributes were called to mind which were paid to him by other great Germans: Melanchthon, Hutten, Frederick the Great, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Heine and Arndt. The teacher spoke of the past three years of war and compared Luther with the Germans in the field. The congregation at intervals sang verses from the hymn "A mighty fortress", closing with the powerful words of the final stanza: "Let goods and kindred go / This mortal life also / The body they may kill: / God's truth abideth still / His Kingdom is forever."

I imagine that the service must have been very much to our parson's satisfaction, that he will have shaken my father's hand and expressed his appreciation. As the representative of the authorities, however, he was of course also obliged to voice his criticism. My father recorded his comments in the back of the notebook under the heading: "Comment on my ceremony". He jotted down: "I should have gone into more detail, for instance regarding prayers, exhortation to pray more etc. and more of this kind of thing."

The red thread

How good I was at praying in those days I do not remember. Certainly my knitting left much to be desired. My small knitting basket stood on the sideboard always containing the beginnings of a pair of grey army socks. Mother worked in a piece of red thread where I stopped and had me knit a further ten rows every day. As the socks were no longer destined for father, I now grumbled to have to do them. The knitting was to be done in the early afternoon. There was wonderful snow outside. Father was sitting at his desk marking pupils' exercise books. After a few days – the snow was still there – the red thread was missing. I

knitted just a very few rows, without counting carefully, and went off tobogganing with father's permission. It was the same the following day, and the day after that again. Conscientious as I was, I finally asked mother. She looked at me and smiled. Did I really not know what had transpired? I assured her that I did not. Well, father had spoken to her and asked her to stop adding the red thread. It seems that while absorbed in my work I had sighed aloud: "Would rather be sent to the front than to knitting!" That had disconcerted him. I myself had no recollection of my exclamation, but was pleased that I no longer had to do so much knitting.

Mother, on the other hand, knitted for all she was worth: socks, stockings, scarves by the dozen, she even finished several pairs of gloves. She probably got more done as she no longer had to undo the mess I often produced and laboriously repair it. Furthermore, father was there and now able to do all the errands for her. She could therefore concentrate on her Christmas baking. That was necessary, as only dark flour was now available, hardly any butter and no sugar. We had honey, at least, though not in such quantities as the previous year, but an abundance of dried fruit: damsons and sliced apple and pear which had been dried in the bake-oven. Mother experimented a little with various combinations before producing a fruit loaf which could withstand comparison with peacetime wares. A dozen wee loaves were tucked into the packages with the woollies. She added candles, these also being scarce commodities – for Christmas there was an extra allocation of two. We had sufficient, thanks to our bees who delivered wax to us. Candle-making? No problem for mother. She had grown up at a time when the old people still knew how to make many household goods themselves, for instance soap, which was now rationed.

Mother tried to remember how it was done. Had she not long ago watched grandmother make soap in the wash boiler from soda, sodium carbonate and animal fat and admired the bars of lovely firm, home-made washing soap? Beef tallow she had. Father had to procure the remaining ingredients for her. Once everything was in place she lit a big fire under the wash boiler. It did not smell good nor did the mixing work out. But with patient stirring and persistence mother finally managed to produce a thick white paste. To this she then added her remaining stock of soft soap to make the mixture supple. She spread it on her large pastry board, and with a wire cut it into convenient-sized squares. She proudly showed us her work. It looked delightful: a smooth trayful, yellowish-white, with a delicate chocolate-like glaze. We were highly impressed. Father carried it up to the attic for her. There it was to remain covered with newspaper to dry undisturbed for a fortnight. After a week curiosity plagued me.

I lifted up a corner of the newspaper – and my eyes widened to saucer-size. Instead of the splendid gleaming bars what did I see but shrivelled, grey things that looked like squashed matchboxes. Each piece had sweated out white powder, which you could blow away. It was such a comical sight that I had to fetch father at once. We both laughed. But mother wept on seeing the horrible mess. I can still hear her sobbing: “Now I don’t even have soft soap for my next laundry-day!”

Berta’s decision

We spent Christmas in Enzberg. We contemplated the beautiful tree in silence. Grandmother wept for her two sons, for the dead boy and for the soldier. We had had a truce with Russia since 15 December. But Friedrich was now in the west, in Belgium. He was in a comparatively quiet position with a supply unit – for the moment. How he was affected by the death of his brother, what his views on the future or the farm were – or whether he thought about such matters at all – I cannot say. No doubt his mother and sisters described the situation to him. What could he have said? How could he have helped? Grandmother’s autumn harvest was bad. The potato and turnip fields were sodden from constant rain. The fruit remained on the trees. Grandmother abandoned it to anybody who wanted to pick it or collect it off the ground before it rotted. Her faithful helper, the Pole, had been released after the harvest and sent home. He had sown part of the winter crops, but many fields remained untilled.

The time had come for a decision to be taken concerning the future of the farm. The feast days and coming of the new year provided an opportunity for a family council to be held. There were long deliberations and many discussions, often with raised voices and much agitation. Father and Uncle Wilhelm Olpp, who was on leave and had come down from the Black Forest to visit us, had the difficult task of creating calm so that the family would not rush into a hasty decision. Both still believed that something could be done about Berta’s plan to take up nursing. I well remember the drama when they sought to persuade her to marry. We were gathered around the table in the big living room, the windows of which gave on to the farmyard and the street. I had not, of course, been invited to the consultation, but in the general excitement they had forgotten to send me out. So I played on the corner bench with the little doll nurses and the doll’s bed that I had got for Christmas and paid close attention.

Together the two men took their young sister-in-law to task: This war, frightful though it was, would not last for ever and, God willing, would spare some farmers' sons who would be delighted to take a good-looking and capable girl if she were going to inherit a farm. At twenty it was easy to say: "I shall never marry!" Later on she would say: "You sold my farm and ruined my prospects of marriage!" Berta fought back fiercely: Never would she become a farmer's wife. She could not and she would not. And even if she wanted to, who would take as his wife the sister of a man who had committed suicide? They had no right to put such pressure on her and to torment her as though it would be her fault if the farm had to be sold. Her place was with the sick and the wounded. She knew that from the hundreds of times she had gone into the hospital trains in Mühlacker to bandage, tend and comfort the unfortunates and this was her final word on the matter. She was in floods of tears, and repeatedly banged her fists on the table. Only one other time, many years later, did I see her so beside herself. Then she ran weeping from the room. Grandmother and mother went after her to calm her, the two men stood in stunned silence. They knew that Berta was suffering after an unhappy love affair. Maybe they thought that if that was the reason why she did not want to marry, they could persuade her to change her mind.

If indeed Aunt Berta decided to become a nurse because of disappointment in love, then it must have been a very serious love affair and a very deep disappointment. For she stood to her decision – or oath – all her life and rejected every one of the suitors suggested later by father and Uncle Wilhelm Olpp. Among the candidates were wartime comrades of theirs: a prosperous saw-miller and a wealthy Black Forest farmer. She turned them down without a moment's hesitation, adding with gentle irony that she did not intend to set her cap at anybody since the only cap she wanted to wear was that of a Red Cross sister. And that she did.



Sister Berta Kopp, 1932

She served throughout the second world war. During the campaign in Poland, when there was a shortage of medical orderlies, she was sent to the aid stations directly on the front lines. What she experienced was utterly terrible. Once while on leave from the front, she spent the whole night telling us what the German military government in the eastern towns and cities

was doing to the civilian population, to the Poles and Jews. She wept incessantly, pounded on the table with her fists and implored us to hide her so that she would not have to return and witness what we were doing to the people in the east. “That is war,” said my father. He did not mean it as an exoneration. But return she did. She was sent to Russia and was with the army for the entire retreat. She remained with the wounded soldiers until the bitter end. After the war she worked in lung clinics and children’s hospitals.

When she retired, she did not move into the home for long-serving Red Cross nurses but built herself a small house in Enzberg in a vineyard which she had inherited from her mother, only a few steps away from the entrance to the farmhouse in which she had grown up. Aunt Emma and her daughter lived diagonally across the street in a lovely house which Uncle Johann Sinigalia had built shortly after the first world war. A third family house was soon to appear: Emma’s youngest son, Friedrich, moved with his wife and children into a house directly opposite. This was no mere geographic convergence deriving from the location of the sites, all inherited from the old farm.



*The four Kopp sisters in Enzberg around 1960:
(from the left) Berta, Frida, Emma, Pauline*

The sisters had long since become reconciled with each other and with their mother. Aunt Berta lived for over twenty years there on friendly terms with her relatives. She never wore anything other than her Red Cross uniform. She grew fruit which she sold in Pforzheim. She generally economised on travel costs, flagging down drivers on the road as she had been accustomed to do during the war when she was nursing the soldiers. I do not believe the resolute old lady in her nurse's outfit was ever denied a lift.

CHAPTER FIVE 1918

The farm is sold

The die was now cast, the decision to sell the farm taken. An estate agent was notified, who came over from Mühlacker very early in the new year. This time they did not forget to send me out of the room. Defiantly I sat myself down in grandmother's bedroom, into which the living room stove projected through the wall. To eavesdrop I only had to open the door of the stove. – “Eve” my father used to call me, for I always paid attention when adults were whispering together, sometimes hearing things not meant for my ears. But I loved the farm almost as much as our little schoolhouse in Hohenklingen. I therefore felt that the matter under discussion concerned me and that I was entitled to information. What then did Eve eavesdrop at the door of the stove? – I remember nothing of it. The business negotiations were far beyond the comprehension of a ten-year old. I am sure I did not stick it out too long at my listening post. Perhaps I tiptoed off soon in search of something more entertaining. But perhaps I fell asleep in the pleasant warmth of the stove and early dusk of the winter afternoon. What little I recall about the sale of the farm comes from conversations that took place at the Enzberg kitchen table. Grandmother found it hard to decide which plots of land should be excluded from the sale and kept for Emma, Berta and Friedrich to inherit. She wanted to keep those most suited to build on. Father suggested she should build a house right away on one of them for herself and Berta as long as the girl remained living with her, which should then be left to her one day. But grandmother was not in favour of the idea. She was adamant that she did not wish to own anything any more.

Grandmother would have liked to see the farm go to somebody who would work the land himself. But the farmers' sons who at the beginning of 1918 were of an age to take on a farm were either in the army or, if they had been discharged, had lost hands or feet. Meanwhile a potential buyer had been found, a quarry owner and dealer in building materials. His family name, Gössel, was the same as the maiden name of my great-grandmother, Katharina Kopp. I do not know now whether he in fact belonged to our extended family. But the letters which he wrote to my grandmother and father about the sale of the farm do not betray the slightest trace of a family bond, not even that of a most distant cousin. I am in possession of these

documents. They bear a highly ornate letterhead on which a factory with five smoking chimneys is to be seen.

Karlsruhe (Baden), 29 January 1918.

To Frau Karl Kopp, widow, Enzberg.

Having received yours of 27 inst., with list, I hereby inform you that, in accordance with your wishes, I shall come to you on Thursday next at midday. Having shown your inventory of the property to a professional expert, he having come to a very much lower estimate of its value than the price named in your communication, and being myself no friend of shilly-shallying, I now make you the following offer:

1.) Farmyard, house, barns with stable, shed	together	marks	17,000.-
2.) Meadows	together	marks	4,000.-
3.) Fields	together	marks	13,000.-
Summa		marks	34,000.-

Though the house is large, it is old and impractical needing several thousand marks immediate expenditure to make it even reasonably comfortable. For the meadows I have calculated M 35 per are⁸ – that is M 280 per $\frac{1}{4}$ acre⁹, since I hear that for the building of the canal only M 30 per are were paid. For the fields I calculated on average M 32 per are – that is M 256 per $\frac{1}{4}$ acre. I think I am making you a good offer for I will have to lease the farm to a tenant who, if he is to make a living out of it, will hardly be able to afford the interest on this sum. As I have other affairs pending, you will have to make up your mind quickly, if possible by next Thursday. Meanwhile with respectful greetings

K. Gössel

The Thursday in question was 31 January 1918, the day grandmother signed the deed of sale. A day of misfortune and a deed of misfortune! The interested party, “no friend of shilly-shallying”, had brought the typed contract of sale with him. Only the purchase price is entered in handwriting: M 34 000, as in his offer. Right of possession and use of the farm was to pass to the buyer on 1 March 1918, the charges on 1 April. The buyer undertook to pay M 5 000 after the signing of the agreement, a further 5 000 on 1 April. The remaining M 24 000 were to be paid at an annual rate of M 5 000 at 4% interest. But he reserved the right “to pay the whole of the remaining purchase price at any time”. No experienced businessman would have

⁸ An are is one hundredth part of a hectare.

⁹ The German term “Morgen” used in the letter varied regionally between 0.6 to 0.9 of an acre.

signed such a contract in which the buyer secured possession before making payment. My people did not take legal advice or have a notary involved in the sale, trusting in the integrity of the buyer. So there they stood after the conclusion of the transaction: in the short term they had saved on fees and time; in the none-too-longer term they let themselves in for major disappointment, trouble and agitation. At the time I did not understand what had happened; I can now divine to some extent through the correspondence what was going on. The buyer took the family by surprise by announcing that he intended to pay the entire remaining purchase price of M 24 000 by 1 April. The vendor was to grant him a reduction of 5 per cent on this sum – there was no such stipulation in the contract. One part of her money she could only receive in full if she agreed to payment in state bonds. Neither my grandmother nor her relatives had had any training in business matters, nor any experience of unethical dealings. They will only have realised what they had let themselves in for and what they were up against once it was too late. The buyer had no intention of giving the farm to a tenant. Being able to read the writing on the wall, he wanted to invest his money in land while at the same time off-loading part of his war and Reich bonds. Grandmother felt she was being blackmailed. Deeply humiliated, she handed over to her sons-in-law, who saw no other option but to consent to the proposed deal. I leave it to those experienced in business matters to assess the behaviour of the buyer and the options we might have had to fight back. Grandmother would probably have had to go to court to secure the full purchase price, as the buyer already had legal ownership of the farm. It would have served no purpose. Two years later the mark was worth 20 pfennigs. With the inflation of 1923 its value vanished into the abyss.

So the farm changed hands for bundles of paper which soon would not even be worth a box of matches. Fortunately none of us could foresee this. We only thought about the immediate future: finding a suitable home for grandmother. Berta was looking for a post as housekeeper. She wanted to be independent and to earn the money herself to finance her training. Grandmother began to sell or give away surplus household goods. Farewell, you meadows of the Enz valley and of the common! Farewell you fields in Herrenbrunn, in Burgfeld, in Frauenwäldle, in Lerchenrain, in Buchhalde! Farewell old, strong half-timbered house! Of course you are still there, somewhat spoiled or put to a different use. In my memory you are still exactly as you were when I was among you: you meadows sparkling in the dew and in the morning sun, you fields with your upright crops and poppies, you mysterious and beautiful house. But losing you was a bitter experience which none of us ever got over.

Summer in the forest

I only learnt from the history books of the serious food shortages suffered above all by the working people of the cities during the winter 1917/18, which became known as “the turnip winter”. We in the country did not put on weight, but we had enough to eat. Young women such as the one I encountered the previous year now became a familiar sight in the village. They came on foot or on bicycles, pale with sunken eyes. Each one had her bag and milk can with her, hoping she would not have to bring them back home empty. Whether on their arduous journey they had an eye for our splendid, sun-flooded forests? After the second world war I, too, was one of those women. That is why I know the melancholic feeling one has at the sight of a tree in blossom or a magnificent summer landscape while hungry children and parents wait at home. Such things were at the time unknown to me and my joy in the free and green out-of-doors unclouded.

A government appeal to schoolchildren in early summer provided ample opportunities for us village children to enjoy ourselves in the forest. There was a sad reason for the call. The horses in military service, the most innocent of all war participants, were gradually running out of hay and straw, not to mention oats. So the young people of school age were obliged to collect fodder for them, needless to say under the supervision of teachers and forestry personnel, organised along the lines of a military campaign. What they wanted was fresh foliage from beech, oak, ash, lime and hazelnut trees. Instructions were issued that the leaves had to be picked with care, were not to be torn off or hacked off, the branches were not to be damaged so that the trees would have a chance to produce new growth. And there was a reward: two marks fifty to be paid at the collecting points for a hundredweight of foliage. Great jubilation spread through the schoolhouses of the land, not because of the money, but because afternoon school was cancelled, or rather held in the forests with all classes together from third form on.

The mayoral office distributed sacks; the older lads organised a small hay wagon. Into that went the sacks and on top our bags with food for the break. Father had prepared us for the work during morning school, getting us to draw the leaves of the forest trees in question: the jagged-edged oak leaves and the rounded ones of the lime. After lunch we met outside the schoolhouse. Songs were sung: “Go forth my heart and seek out joy in this lovely summer

time”¹⁰ and “I feel mild air a-wafting, golden spring is flowing down”.¹¹ Singing we set off up the hill to enter into the green cathedral. There father bade us be quiet so that we could listen to the singers who lived here: the finches and thrushes, warblers and robins. He knew all their calls. The timid wood pigeons cooed softly, we heard the cuckoo so often in the distance that we got tired of counting. Meanwhile a jay flew up, screeching harshly. It was warning the other forest animals that human children were approaching. “The guardian of the forest,” father called it. Further away in the forest a woodpecker betrayed its whereabouts through its hammering and drumming. Father allowed a few lads to go looking for it, but on condition they did not frighten it off, as we all wanted to see it. The lads came back: “Teacher, we have found it,” they whispered excitedly, a big handsome green woodpecker!” Now we all held our breath, crept closer and watched the hard-working bird until it noticed us and made off in fright. Then we had to laugh to see ourselves crouching down on our hands and knees on the forest floor, pupils and teacher like Indians in the middle of a thicket of blueberry bushes. The blueberries were flowering in great abundance, as were the wild strawberries, and we took a mental note of the location to be able to return later in the summer to collect the fruit. We rested in the long soft grass of a half sunny, half shaded glade, listening to the stories about the various inhabitants of the forest which father told us in a low voice to avoid scaring off those in our vicinity, who were well aware of our presence. We had almost forgotten the purpose of our expedition. The sweet smell of the mosses and herbs combined with that of the lime trees flowering nearby on the edge of the forest produced an intoxicating, soporific, oblivion-inducing fragrance. Clouds of it drifted through the halls of beeches.

There was no help for it: the poor lime trees had to sacrifice as much of their fresh foliage as we could reach with the help of the pruning hooks on long poles which we had brought with us. The big lads lowered the branches with the poles, the big girls deftly picked off the leaves, and the small children, who could not reach up high enough, worked on the hazelnut bushes or held the sacks open or trod down the foliage in them so that a lot fitted in. Picking, laughing, chattering, we moved further and further into the section of the forest allocated to us. We ate our sandwiches as we worked and the sacks of foliage piled up on the hay wagon. In no time at all, evening had set in. We filled up the last sack and threw it high up on to the

¹⁰ Text by Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676); music by August Harder (1775-1813). The first line in German: “Geh aus mein Herz und suche Freude in dieser schönen Sommerszeit”.

¹¹ Text (1840) by Agnes Franz; music (1853) by Christian Heinrich Hohmann. The first line: “Laue Lüfte fühl’ ich wehen, gold’ner Frühling taut herab”.

wagon. The lads had their work cut out for them turning it around on the rough path. We pulled and pushed our load homewards, singing all the way, and delivered it safely into the parish council yard, where the weighing scales was waiting. Several hundredweight had been collected and we received money and praise from the councillor. We repeated the effort several times, going off with wagon and fodder sacks into the forest up to the feast of St John the Baptist on 24th June. Collecting foliage was forbidden after that. But the good days in the forest continued with little baskets and cans. Blueberries were dried as a good remedy for diarrhoea; it was even used in the field hospitals as other medicines were in short supply. There were rose hips in late summer, from which tea could be made which was rich in vitamins – “podkin tea” we called it. At that time I got to know many other plants growing in field and forest and discovered what they can be used for: lime blossom, centaury, septfoil, mint and camomile. Many a calligraphy and arithmetic class during my fourth year in school was diverted to the drawing of fruits of the forest and to the pressing of plants. I have forgotten a good deal of what I learnt at the time, but retained some of it and was reminded of it again after the second world war. I would like to end with a commemoration of the most common and most beautiful tree of our Hohenklingen forests.

During the famine summer of 1918 this tree had blossomed profusely, something that only happens about every four years. As the blooms are inconspicuous and odourless, we children would hardly have noticed them, were it not for father and the forestry officials who gave us classes in the forest. But there was no overlooking the boon which in the autumn rained down from the tall slender trees. The warm, dry weather made the bristly husks of the seeds burst open and out fell the small brown three-angled nuts, the beech mast or beechykins, as we called them. All you had to do was simply to pick them up from the forest floor. That was indeed more laborious than collecting apples or even hazel nuts or rose hips. You knelt on the ground and rummaged around among dead leaves and moss to find the little things. You kept the firm full ones in your hand, then putting them into the pot you had brought along with you. The thin ones were empty; you threw them to one side on a pile to make sure you did not pick them up again. Young and old knelt on straw mats, for otherwise after a few hours of beech nut picking your knees would be scratched and grazed. The amount that one single tree could scatter in its wider vicinity was inexhaustible – and we had thousands of such trees in our forests. The picking went on and on, schoolchildren and people from the auxiliary services collecting beech nuts by the ton in the state forests of Württemberg to provide cooking oil for the inhabitants of towns and cities and for the army. But there was enough for

everybody fortunate enough to live in areas with beech forests. There was not a family in the village that did not collect beech nuts and, depending on how big the family was and how industrious, they could pick so and so many hundredweight for themselves, which they often shared with elderly people living alone who could no longer undertake the arduous work and with the haggard foragers from the towns. The village mill worked until the small hours of the morning grinding and pressing.

“And they picked it up, one basketful after the other” – just as the children of Israel collected the manna in the desert. The people called it “our manna” and were pleased and grateful to have the heavenly boon. There may well have been good beech nut years later on, but they were not noticed as there was no famine. I can only recall one such good harvest: in 1947 people again went into the forests with kith and kin and sacks and baskets to collect the nuts. But that harvest was not as bountiful as the one with which we were blessed in the autumn of 1918.



“Forest women” 1918

Friedrich’s last letter

One weekend in September we went to Enzberg to see how grandmother was doing. She had kept a few meadows with fruit trees and a herb garden. Her small harvest was soon brought home. Outwardly grandmother seemed to be well: she had a nice bright rented flat which was big enough for her best furniture and yet small enough to be manageable. But

inwardly she was devoid of courage and strength. As we had foreseen, Friedrich had been sent to the front again. She showed us the letter he had written her. It was to be his last. I quote it in full, as it makes clear with what incessant frightfulness the war raged even after Verdun and after the battle of the Somme and the incomprehensible, appalling losses suffered in the battles on the western front in 1918.

Written on 30 August 1918.

Dear Mother and sister,

Am writing to let you know I am still well, which I hope you are too. Dear Mother and sister, the last battles near Arras were such as I have never experienced in all my time during the whole war, in particular the 28 August and that day I will describe to you to let you know what it is like on such a day of bloodshed such as I have never experienced in this war and that those who come through it can truly speak of a miracle. The II Battalion of our regiment was sent into action on the evening of 27th to join Regiment 126, which had been sent in before us and which we were now to relieve. When we got there we found that Regiment 126 now only had two heavy machine guns and about 30 infantry men in the front line. The others were dead, wounded or taken prisoner. We saw at once that we could not hold the position as we were too weak. On the morning of 28th it was fairly quiet, but from our trench we could see the English pushing their infantry and shock troops forward in the direction of our positions. But our artillery did not fire a single shot at the English, masses of whom were working their way forward. We knew then that a bad time lay ahead of us. In the afternoon around 2.30 the drumfire set in with such devastating effect that only seconds later, with all the dead and wounded, enormous confusion arose while at the same time the English seemed to be sprouting out of the ground and approaching our positions in masses. Tanks came in the lead, then blacks, then English. There were at least 15 times more English than us in the position. I and my non-commissioned officer in a few minutes fired 2,000 rounds out of our machine gun at the English, who then at once diverted to the left and to the right to get out of our line of fire. When we looked around, we saw that our comrades – those who were still alive – were retreating and we followed, leaving the dead and wounded behind. On the right and left the line had already been broken and also behind us. We took up position and I fired 500 cartridges at the English who were approaching in front of me so that there was a big gap. Then we jumped over the dead and wounded English, who shot at us with their revolvers. There were only two of us left; the others had been shot or taken prisoner by the English. I had my MG under my arm and my NCO used his revolver to shoot at the English who were running at us. All of a sudden my NCO screamed and fell to the ground – he was dead. And when I saw the English coming to attack me, I took his revolver in my right hand, put the MG under my left arm and retreated. The

English were approaching ever closer, then I saw a trench in front of me which our Reserves had occupied. Using my last ounce of strength I made it into the trench. Now our machine guns began to fire and hundreds of the approaching English were mown down, I could write you a whole book about what I have seen and experienced myself. Parcels 5 and 6 received with best thanks.

Warm greetings and hoping we may see each other again in good health

Your Friedrich

If it goes on like this, we shall lose the war and all our sacrifices will have been in vain.

How must such a letter affect a mother? I remember that we sat at the small table in grandmother's kitchen and wept. My father had read it to us. Grandmother, who already knew the letter, held her hands over her face the whole time. Slowly and with emphasis father read the end of the letter, adding words of comfort to Friedrich's salutation and the hope expressed that they would see each other again in good health. But then he read the postscript. His voice failed him and he was silent. He too knew that the war was lost.



Last picture of Friedrich Kopp (middle), eighteen years old, 1918

Prophetic dreams

When we were back in Hohenklingen we became very worried about my mother. She wept a great deal, also while she was going about her work. She often sat down, covered her eyes with her two hands or put her arms on the kitchen table and hid her face in them. She would remain like this for a while, for what seemed to me for a very long time, and no words of comfort, either from me or from father, could bring her relief. Father and I treated her as though she were ill; we shared observations and quietly held counsel with each other trying to find a way to make things easier for her and to help her. One morning while she was dressing she wept particularly violently. She sobbed her heart out, shaking so much she had to sit down on the bed. We supported her on both sides. I began to get frightened and also began to cry. Now father spoke to her more forcefully than he usually did. He implored her to tell us what it was that so tormented her. Then she told us about a nightmare that had haunted her for several nights and filled her with dread. In this dream she was led into a room with many beds but in which there were no patients or wounded men. The beds were all covered over with white sheets. That morning she had had the same dream. This time she was standing very close to one of the beds. There was a white sheet on it and on the sheet a white hand. She knew the hand and called out: "That is Friedrich's hand – Friedrich is dead!" For some days now it had seemed to her that something had indeed happened to her brother, only she had not wanted to say anything. But now she was quite sure: she had had a prophetic dream and Friedrich was no longer alive.

Mother had told us what had been troubling her. The horror she had felt in the dream now abated. Father assured her that the dream meant nothing more than what we knew since Friedrich's letter, namely that we must expect the worst. She will have realised that herself. But the fear remained. It was miserable watching and waiting in an agony of fear. The war was lost and could not continue much longer. Everybody felt that and some said so openly. But the fighting continued, every day with further casualties. Every hour, every minute could bring the dread news. I can well imagine why soldiers sometimes longed for the order to attack, not because they were aggressive, but because the waiting was more unbearable than what awaited them – a terrible end being preferable to endless terror. Maybe relatives dreamed so often of the death of their husbands, sons, brothers at the front because they could no longer bear the uncertainty. And how often did these dreams come true. Surrounded by such awful dangers, people needed no hidden powers, no second sight to have prophetic

dreams. Was one indeed helping the people who had such dreams by talking them out of the certainty the dream had given them, giving them new hope, only to have it subsequently dashed all the more cruelly? Did it help the tormented German people to be told again and again that victory was on the horizon if only they would give their all “to the last drop of blood”? – But it was one thing to say: “The war can still be won, so the sacrificing of life and property is meaningful”; quite another to say: “There is still hope that your brother is alive.” The generals who during the last two years of the war ruled Germany dictatorially erred in their assessment of the situation. But they not only deceived themselves: they deceived the people, concealing from them until the very end how things really stood.

The lost war

I have read that in the autumn of 1917 a new party was founded on the orders of the military supreme command. It called itself “Party of the German Fatherland”. Its members were company directors, landed aristocracy, senior civil servants and clergy: they belonged to the upper orders and wanted to determine what the people had to think and feel. What had happened to make the generals resort to such a plan? The Reichstag had passed a resolution which was to pave the way for peace negotiations. It invoked the authority of the Kaiser himself, who in 1914 had declared: “We are not driven by a desire for conquest.” The founding manifesto of the Fatherland Party states on this issue: “Large sections of the German people do not support the resolution of the present Reichstag majority concerning the most vital central questions of the Fatherland. Is there anybody whose heart does not yearn for peace? But weak-nerved peace demonstrations merely delay the coming of peace. ... The German Fatherland Party intends to provide support and backing for a strong government which will not weakly capitulate to domestic and external forces but which, with German steadfastness and unwavering belief in victory, is capable of interpreting correctly the signs of the times. ... To win peace soon, we must follow Hindenburg and hold our nerve. If we willingly bear hardship and deprivation, the German people will win a Hindenburg peace which will bring home the prize of victory for colossal sacrifice and effort.”

One year later the war was lost: On 14 August 1918, at a meeting of the royal council, Ludendorff reluctantly admitted that a military victory was not possible. However, the corresponding conclusions were not drawn; instead the generals waited for more favourable

circumstances in which to negotiate peace. But the situation deteriorated even more. ... On 29 September in the army headquarters Ludendorff had to admit unequivocally: "The situation of our army requires an immediate truce if a catastrophe is to be avoided." On 2 October my Uncle Friedrich Kopp died in the field hospital of Mons in Belgium, to which he had been admitted, seriously wounded, two days previously. Mother heard the news from Aunt Berta, who telephoned from Enzberg and had her called to the phone. I cannot say exactly when she got the news or how much time had elapsed between her dream and the tidings of his death. We discovered more about Friedrich's death from a letter written by the nurse who had tended him until the end. I quote it in full:

Hasselt, 22. X. 1918.

My dear Frau Kopp,

You will be yearning for a reply from me. But despite my best intentions, it just was not possible. The period during which your dear son and several of his companions came to us to die was for us carers, too, a time of immense difficulty. In such cases it is not only necessary to treat the poor patients, but to give them all the love one can and try to take the place of their relatives.

And so one day passes after the other in worry and fear for the lives of these young people in danger of being cut down in full bloom and in the evening one is too exhausted to think. Then came the day when our enemies launched an air raid on our hospitals in Mons, thank God only hitting one of them. Immediately afterwards came the order to evacuate the medical personnel there. We realised a long time ago that this withdrawal would come for us too, but had not expected the retreat to be so imminent. At first nobody knew where we could go, and now we are in Hasselt on the German-Dutch border, inactive for the moment until the hospital is fitted out. Today, having at last found a quiet corner, I want to try and answer all those motherly questions about your son who is now resting in the Lord.

I do not know exactly what day your dear son was brought to us, but the letter you received gives the date. It was around midday when the stretcher-bearers brought him. There was no external indication that he had been seriously wounded, but it was not long before I saw that this vigorous young life was approaching certain death.

The paralysis of both legs, the lack of control over bowel movement and urine, and his lack of awareness of this, led the doctor and nurses to suspect an internal injury to the spinal cord. Externally all that could be seen was an injury to the left shoulder. While that wound was being dressed your dear son told us that, after sustaining the injury, he was running to get beyond the

range of fire when a shell exploded nearby. He lay there unconscious for a time and, on coming to, discovered that he could no longer walk. It is therefore probable that the force of the impact or explosion of the shell was the cause of your dear son's internal injury.

The now departed young man hovered between consciousness and unconsciousness that afternoon, during the night and the following morning. Nonetheless he and a dying comrade asked to be given the Eucharist. We were rather afraid at first that their minds might no longer be able to take in the significance of the sacred ceremony, but their desire for it was such that our army chaplain decided to give both departing souls the sacrament to strengthen and comfort them. Later I asked for your address and your son repeatedly requested me to inform you that he had been wounded, which I promised to do that same evening.

In the morning I told him I had written to you, which seemed to ease his mind greatly. After we had bathed the poor wounded man, he lay quietly and peacefully almost all morning, without noticing that the Lord was hurrying home with him. I read some psalms; then, without a struggle, the soul left all earthly misery behind and entered the heavenly abode. He lies with many of his comrades in the cemetery in Mons. Should this town be spared devastation in the further course of this terrible war, perhaps it will be possible for you to visit his grave in peacetime, if God grants us peace.

Each grave will have a memorial headstone with ivy planted around it. You could perhaps obtain a photograph of it if you write to the local commander. You should do so as quickly as possible. As far as I can recall, your son did not ask to be buried at home. The soul has gone to eternal perfection and peace, as Christ in His mercy allows us to hope; where the body lies, there too is the Lord. He will comfort you, the mother of the departed, in your great affliction. In deepest sympathy

Sister Lisette

Heinrich von Fallersleben's poem: "O how cold it has become and the world so dismal, so empty at the core / Cold winds blow from the north and the sun it shines no more" was the song we were now learning at school. It corresponded perfectly to the sorrow and fear in our hearts. It was stormy outside. The trees bent low and allowed the wind to take their leaves. The last grapes had gone to the winepress. The garden produce had been harvested, but nobody thought of preparing the beds for the winter. It got dark very early. What were we waiting for? For death? For peace? – Grandmother had written for and received a photograph of her son's grave. The iron cross which he was awarded was also promptly sent to her. It lay

in its box on a small black-white-red ribbon. The pain of looking at it we could only imagine. We went to Enzberg to comfort her and attended the memorial service for Friedrich.

A few days later, on 11 November, the truce was at long last announced. We had yearned for this day, mother and I praying every evening that there would be no more deaths and no more wounded. Now it was there and I thanked the Lord Jesus in my evening prayer. But we felt neither relieved nor happy. I saw the pain in mother's face, and bitterness too, even rancour. Our hearts had been so crushed that they needed time before they could expand again. To this day I regard it as a cruel and bitter mockery that such pain was inflicted on my grandmother just days before the end of the war – as if the world were not ruled by a merciful God, but by a cold and heartless machine or even by an evil spirit.

The billeted guest

Our hearts recovered a little during Advent. Something strange happened. We were singing: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors". And behold the great barn doors were opened up in the village, hay wagons and implements brought out into the yards and left there regardless of the wet. We were making preparations for the arrival of a large host, which did in fact materialise. Not in shining armour did these warriors appear, but grey, wet, exhausted, starved and tattered. Not from the high heavens did they come, but out of the depths of hell, and glad they were to have escaped from there. A retreating company was billeted in Hohenklingen. They had ordnance with them, drawn by horses whose ribs could be counted. They placed their large field kitchen, known to the soldiers as the "gulash cannon" in the timber yard and lit a fire in the huge oven. They took their meals in the covered forecourt of the winepress; they slept in haylofts and on straw bales. They were all from northern Germany. Their captain, a tall, slim man with greying hair, came from Hamburg. He came into the schoolroom, saluted, and showed father his billet order. We gave him the room which the young lady teacher used, and put the mattress on the floor as the bedstead was too short for him. When everything was ready, he gave a friendly nod. We were not to worry about food for him: he would eat with the men.

My mother would not hear of that, however, and invited him to our table, indeed insisted that he eat with us. – What does one cook for a captain? One of her younger chickens had to

lay down its life. She even went begging for him in houses where she knew that an animal had recently been slaughtered. There was sauerkraut with liver sausage and crackling, lentils with smoked bacon and always homemade spaetzle, the spaghetti of Württemberg. Father offered the captain a glass of his wine, whereupon he thawed, ate with a hearty appetite and praised kitchen and cellar to the skies. He willingly took two or three helpings of spaetzle, but never more meat, and only sipped his wine. He was 48 years old, a salesman and officer of the reserve. I can see him sitting at the place of honour at the table, eating the pancakes with delight which mother had filled with her raspberry and red-current jam.

He stayed with us for a week. He once even carried up the coal buckets for mother. He pulled my long plaits. He had children too, among them an 11-year old daughter, whom he longed to see again. I had to play the piano for him. I had practised a little Mozart minuet. He knew it: he told me it was from “Don Giovanni”, his favourite opera. Whether I knew what an opera was? I didn’t really. He said it was music and theatre together and he described with rapture the magnificent splendour of the productions he had seen in Hamburg. My father meanwhile fetched his opera music and he and I together played the aria “My dear swan” from Wagner’s “Logengrin” for the Hanseatic captain. As he knew something about music, he will have drawn his own conclusions.

He and father had long conversations every evening till the small hours of the morning. They spoke about the war we had lost and about the future. The Kaiser had abdicated and fled to Holland. The republic was declared, even before the truce. The sailors had mutinied in Kiel, Germans shooting at Germans as our parson had feared, and as in a revolution there had been huge mass demonstrations in the big cities, above all in Berlin. Now a tense calm reigned and the retreat proceeded in good order. – Whether the captain was in favour of the republic? My father was. He was said to have been in a great humour the day the republic was declared: he was walking from Maulbronn to Hohenklingen, kept throwing his hat into the air and shouting “Long live the republic!” I was not with him, but mother told me about it. And I do know how pleased father was that the new state abolished clerical control of schools. He often spoke of it.

The captain was extremely cautious in one respect, indeed fearful. He asked father to permit his orderly to sleep in his room and kept the door firmly locked during the night. But nothing happened to him while he was with us, nor to his soldiers. People slipped them tasty snacks, they could sleep for as long as they wanted and were able to organise a big wash-day.

The barns were flagged for days with long-legged and long-armed grey military underclothes. There were problems of communication and much laughter arose over our Swabian language. The company moved off again without further ado. There was no military music and no quartering ball as there used to be after manoeuvres. But they did not leave altogether unwept and unsung. The Hamburg captain corresponded with us for a long time, grateful for hospitality received but also troubled about the future.

LASTLY

What this future was to bring, we know: the most appalling war in the history of mankind was to be followed by one still more appalling. Our clever parson was to be proved right when he said of the first world war: “This war will not be the last one.” He did not believe that there could be peace on earth. But my father was also right when, at a memorial ceremony for the 400th anniversary of the Reformation, he quoted Luther’s verses about the Reich or empire which had to remain to us. Of course it has not survived into our own time, but was merely given a reprieve of 27 years. For, difficult though the peace of Versailles was which the victors imposed on us, they left us the Reich. It just became smaller. Alsace-Lorraine, which we had won after the great victory of 1871, was lost again, together with territory in the east, and the colonies. But the core remained. Instead of being satisfied with that, our military and their supporters were beside themselves with rage. They, who had ignored all opportunities to negotiate with the enemy when it was still possible, blamed the people for the lost war. They did not blame those who held out utterly irrationally to the last in the hope of winning Belgian and French ore reserves and mines and of keeping the conquered territories and colonies. They did not hold these people responsible for the defeat, but the starving people, the striking munitions workers, the mutinous sailors who in the last days of the war did not want to put to sea in their steel coffins for a burial at the bottom of the ocean. The legend of the “stab in the back” myth was born; many embittered people were willing to believe it and in free elections the poor fools voted the second slaughterer into office. He brought about another world war. When that ended with our unconditional surrender, Germany not only lay in ruin and rubble – we had also lost the Reich.

All that has long since passed into history. Now in my 84th year, I have neither the strength nor the time to write of that period of my life. The second world war took its bloody toll on my family. Fathers who had returned safely from the first war lost their sons in the second. My Hohenlohe uncle and godfather Albert Schmiedpeter lost his son Albert, Uncle Johann Sinigalia lost his Alfred, and Uncle Walter Olpp his Karl in the very last days of the war. My cousins Ernst and Wilhelm Gauss came home seriously disabled; the husbands of my cousins Friedel Olpp and Clärle Schmiedpeter experienced the horrors of the Russian campaign and spent many years as prisoners of war. My parents and I remained all our lives deeply attached to all those who survived. – It is good to be able to visit houses that have been

in the family for generations, such as the inn “The Lamb” in Oberstetten, as I had the great pleasure of doing some time ago. But in that regard, too, my father was right: The farm is not the family – we are! I shudder to think of those who are sole survivors and whose entire families: mother, sisters, brothers and all the relatives were exterminated. We must not only call to mind what happened to us, but what our people did to others, to the peoples all over Europe.

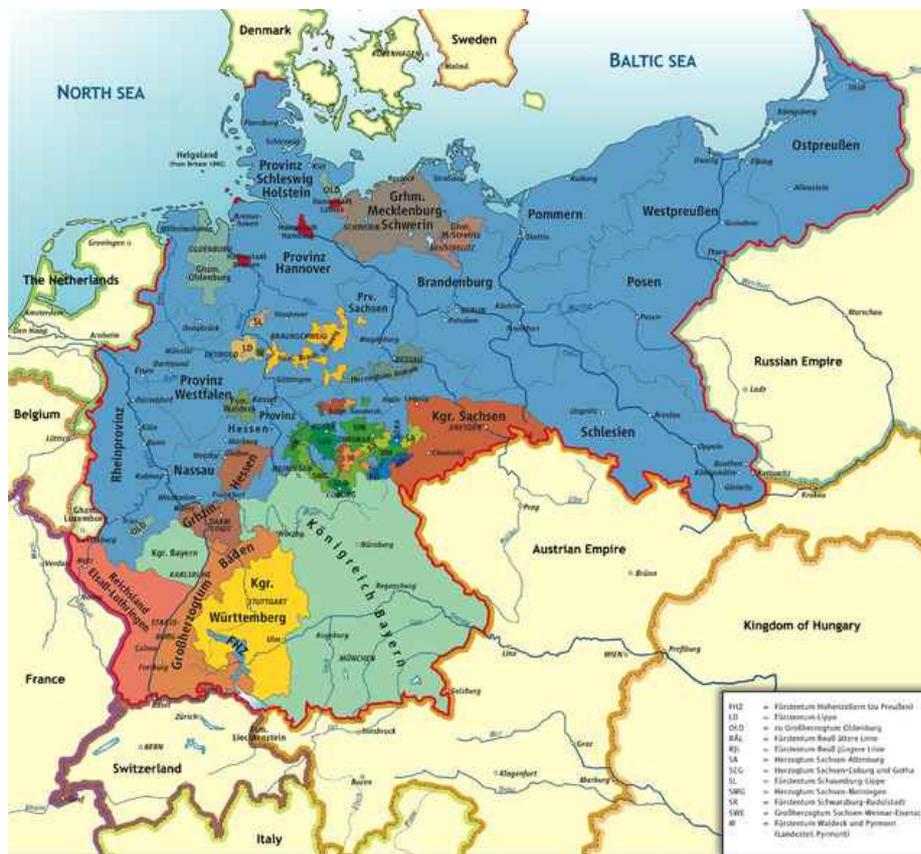
Let me conclude. The war imprinted itself indelibly on the mind of the child that I was. If you have read my narrative, you will understand why I felt compelled to record my memories of it. Many of the images and scenes which I have described have been with me all my life. Others had paled, but in the course of the writing revived and took on colour again. And some which I had completely forgotten came back to me as I read the letters from the front. More than once, when sorting the letters and other documents, I noticed how one’s memory can fail and even play tricks on one. Where I could have sworn that I had my facts about something or other, the documents proved conclusively that I was wrong. My father’s military pass was a great help for the verifications. I was also able to consult my cousins: Wilhelm Olpp in Kornwestheim – who unfortunately did not live to read my story – and Friedrich Sinigalia in Enzberg, from whom I have the letters sent by his uncle Friedrich Kopp from the front, and much information about his parents Emma and Johann Sinigalia. I read as much as I could about the period. That is, of course, no guarantee for the accuracy of what I wrote. I endeavoured to put down what I know and not to withhold anything. It will scarcely be the whole truth about my family. As I love my family and am proud of them, I may have overlooked or glossed over their mistakes and weaknesses, which are also mine, and may have unduly emphasised their good sides. May the descendants of my grandparents, for whom I have filled up these pages, compare what I have written with what they have heard from their own people.

MAPS

The Federal Republic of Germany with 16 Länder 1990



The German Reich 1871–1918

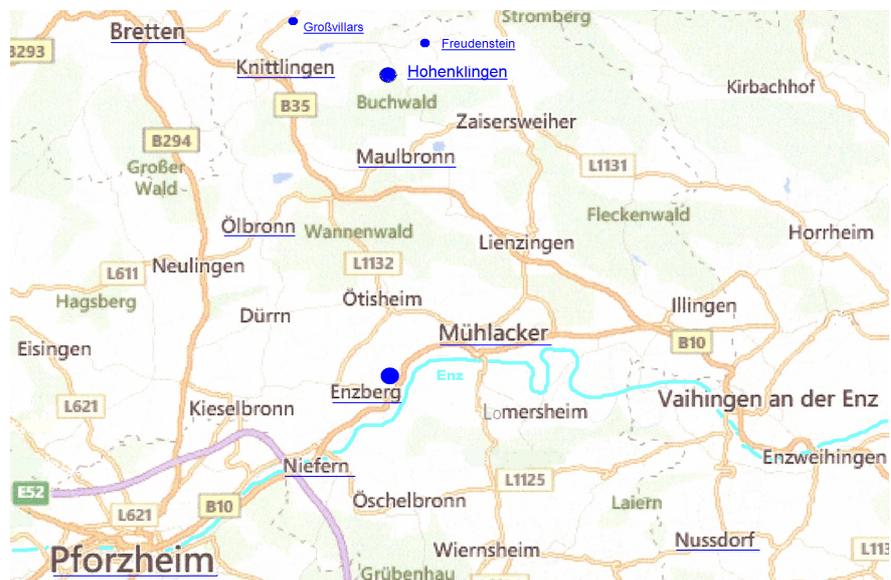


The Kingdom of Württemberg 1806-1918



Place names in blue: birthplaces of Else's parents, Enzberg and Schrozberg

*Part of the Enz district,
Baden-Württemberg 2014*



In blue: places named in Else's narrative

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Cover</i> : Pauline, Else and Friedrich Rutsch 1914	
<i>Frontispiece</i> : Else Würgau-Rutsch on her 80 th birthday, 30 December 1987	
The school house in Hohenklingen with the Rutsch family	4
Cover of Émile Zola's <i>La Guerre et la Commune 1870-1871</i> , German edition	5
Württemberg <i>Staatsanzeiger</i> Special Issue 1 August 1914	9
Map of Europe 1914	11
The military hospital in Maulbronn	13
Friedrich Kopp recuperating in the Bromberg Diaconate	17
Cherry blossom in Hohenklingen	19
Grandmother Kauline Kopp née Bonnet in Enzberg	23
"The Sailor's Fate", song by Petrie-Martell	33
The Kopp farmhouse in Enzberg	41
War bond advertisements	58
Else Rutsch letter of 17 December 1916 to her father	67
2 postcards of the village of Hendecourt, France, 1916	75, 76
Friedrich Rutsch in Alette, France 1916	77
Map of the world 1916	78
Harvesting the corn in Enzberg	86
Sister Berta Kopp	94
The four Kopp sisters c. 1960	94
"Forest women" 1918	103
The last picture of Friedrich Kopp 1918	105
Map of Germany 1990	115
Map of the German Reich 1871-1918	116
Map of the Kingdom of Württemberg 1806-1918	117
Map of the Enz district of Baden Württemberg	118