

Chapter Five

HERMANN AND EVA

The seventeen-year-old Hermann ended his letter to his imaginary friend Hans with the words that he did not quite know what the future held for him but he knew that he was destined to follow an academic career. He did mention that he might study natural sciences but was as yet not certain whether he would actually do it. [See Appendix B]

He did in fact attend the universities in Halle, Bonn and Tübingen and started on a course of Chemistry. He changed universities quite a few times as was the custom in Germany in those years. He did pass the first examination in Chemistry and published essays on *Phrenosin* in conjunction with Thierfelder [I presume a professor with whom he was studying] in the journal *Zeitschrift für Physiologische Chemie*. This indicates that he would have done well had he pursued this scientific field. However, the tendencies towards allergies foiled hopes towards further studies in this field. It may well be that skin allergies and especially mercury as well as the asthma made a career in this field impossible.

As a result he changed his field of study to National Economics and when he presented his thesis he achieved his PhD with *summa cum laude*. He gained this at the University of Tübingen. When war broke in September 1914 he volunteered for military service but lasted only one day in the armed forces because his eyesight was too weak. Instead he was appointed to work in the Chamber of Commerce in Stuttgart and was there until the end of 1915. He was then called to do some preliminary work for the establishment of a Statistical Office in Bromberg for a few months and then went on to Danzig where he did some work on supplying provisions and the supervision of mass-feeding, as well as other work connected with the war for a Board of the Prussian State. The end of the war in November 1918 found him in Brussels as scientific assistant to the Chief Administrator of Flanders. All this indicates that he was actively involved in war work.

In December 1918 he accepted an appointment in the *Deutsche Industrierat* [Board of German Industries] which a few months later changed the name to the *Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie*. A few years later he was made head of a department and in a

CV drawn up after 1938 he explained that this department dealt with social policy, matters of transport, public policy with regard to industrial management, questions of civil and criminal law and procedure both in Germany and foreign countries. He was also a member of an administrative board that dealt with labour exchange and unemployment. In 1923 he was also appointed manager of an organisation that comprised work with employers and trade unions. To sum up - he was involved in, and became very knowledgeable about, social and political conditions both in Germany and in those foreign countries with which the German government dealt. In his CV he summed up his leaving this employment with the words “left in the summer of 1933 in connection with the political change in Germany”. These are the words that gave rise to my writing the Loening/Gierke family story. Before we get to the emigration, though, a little about the events that led to 6 October 1919 - the date Hermann and Eva were married in Polanowitz.

I have not dwelt on the political and historical aspect of the time and how it affected



an estate like Polanowitz and its situation near the Polish border in a part of the country that the Poles considered to be theirs. Had it been situated in another part of Germany its history would have been very different. The fact that it is there caused special problems.

In 1914 the 1st World War broke out and the whole atmosphere of the estate changed. Among other things prisoners-of-war were drafted to work as labourers, presumably to replace the Polish labourers who were conscripted to serve in the army. As a result these men had to be catered for and were fed from the kitchen. It was then, that at the tender age of fifteen, Eva was sent to the kitchen to supervise the provision of meals.

It could not have been easy but she learnt much that was to be useful in her later

life. After about eighteen months of this kitchen duty her parents decided that Eva's education needed to be completed. As a result she was sent to Hohensalza in April 1916.

There she and her younger sister Tina boarded with a family and attended the *Hohensalza Lyzeum* run by Hedwig Müller. Within a year - in March 1917 - Eva graduated with a very good report.

While the marks for French were not altogether satisfactory her German and mathematics were very good. She also learnt English and the marks were satisfactory. The grounding from the governesses was no doubt solid but she would have had to work very hard to do as well as she did. Tina who, according to what Eva told me years later, spent that year looking out of the window to see if there was anything of interest to be seen in the street, presumably stayed another year. The war was still on and so Eva went back to the kitchen, although it was at this time that Hermann saw her and decided that she was the girl for him. It may be that he paid a visit to Polanowitz while he was in Bromberg. However, he thought that she was as yet a bit too young for him to approach her. He would wait, certain that he would have another chance later.

Peace came on 11 November 1918 at 11.00 a.m.! A defeated Germany had to cede the Province of Posen to the Poles. No doubt, that was a bitter blow to grandfather Walter, but at least his two elder sons survived this dreadful war and came back to their home and could work on the estate. It is fertile land and a hungry Europe needed food, so economically things probably went well.

In May 1919 a jubilee was being celebrated in the *Carmerstrasse* and Eva, relieved of kitchen work, which she had carried out so faithfully, was sent as a representative of the family to Berlin. She stayed with her aunt, Frida, sister to Luise. She was a translator and her English was very good. She also had contact with some Japanese, although we are not sure if she actually spoke the language. From letters that she wrote when Eva was in Windhoek it is clear that there was a very special, close relationship between this spinster aunt and this young niece who told us that she felt closer to her than to her mother.

Hermann decided that he had waited long enough. He had a ring ready for her and this was the appropriate time to woo her. So it happened that Eva came home to her aunt and announced that she had become engaged, and she had the ring to prove it.



These photos of Eva and Hermann were apparently taken at the time of the engagement

We can only imagine the conversation that went on long into the night - Frida was not one to go to bed early. She had to tell Eva that she didn't think her mother would approve of a marriage to a man with the surname Loening. No doubt over the years Frida had probably more than once heard that her sister did not like her sister-in-law, Lili - we must remember that she was a Loening. So Frida suggested that it would perhaps be better that Eva returned the ring when she was to see Hermann again the next morning.

Hermann of course would have none of it and his powers of persuasion were such that Eva and Frida were both charmed by him, while I am sure that the *Carmerstrasse* Gierkes were delighted with this turn of events. Owing to the turmoil that existed in Germany in that post-war period, trains were delayed and did not run regularly. So it was decided that it would be better if Eva remained in Berlin for a week or two longer. I expect her parents knew her to be safe with the aunt and the *Carmerstrasse* family. But a letter had to go back home to inform them of this engagement.

As far as my memory serves me the nearest town to Polanowitz was Kruschwitz from where the post was collected. On a spring afternoon Walter and Luise von Gierke went by horse-drawn transport to collect their post. On the way home Luise reads her daughter's letter and exclaims: "*Etwas Schreckliches ist passiert*"! [Something dreadful has happened!] "*Ja, was denn?*" "*Eva hat sich mit einem Loening verlobt*"! [Eva has become engaged to a Loening] to which he shouted: "*Wundervoll*"!

I am sure that during the next few months Hermann persuaded his future mother-in-

law that he would take good care of her daughter. None of them was to know that circumstances were to force her to follow him to Africa fourteen years later.

On 6 October 1919, a beautiful autumn day [four days before she turned 20] Eva, as the first of the Polanowitz children to leave the home, was married to Hermann Loening at Polanowitz. The marriage certificate gives all the details and shows that Hans von Gierke, a farmer, aged 24, and Carl Loening, a Professor of Medicine aged 42, were witnesses. The marriage officer came to Polanowitz as did a Lutheran minister who provided an extract from the marriage register to certify the marriage in the most beautiful script. I am sure that most, if not all members of the *Carmerstrasse* Gierkes as well as all the Halle Loenings were present, although it would have been tinged with sadness for Marie as she had lost Edgar earlier that year.

The young couple settled in a villa in Wilmersdorf, a suburb of Berlin. It was an unfortunate choice of suburb as its very humid atmosphere caused by its situation adjacent to one of the many lakes on the river Havel, affected Hermann's asthma very badly. Eva recalled how most nights she would wake to find him inhaling some substance. It must have been very worrying and distressing for them both.

They did undertake various trips - either on official duty or on holiday - and were affected by the inflation that hit post-war Germany very badly so that the money they had with them was suddenly almost worthless. How Hermann managed to adjust this we don't know but it was certainly one of the memories Eva had of her first years of marriage.

Post-war conditions in Germany were to affect Eva personally even more. She fell pregnant and like many young women in that condition she was violently sick. And the food that was available in Berlin was so very different from the wholesome farm products she was used to from Polanowitz. She craved calcium and poked the walls in the house to get some lime. In later years she recalled the rancid margarine which was the only spread available. It was also alleged that Marie's teeth were never very strong because Eva could not tolerate much of the food that was available at that time. I am sure that visitors from Polanowitz who would bring some fresh food, especially butter, were eagerly awaited.

The whole family was delighted when on 23 September 1920 a healthy little girl was born - the first grandchild in the Polanowitz Gierke family. She was named Marie Luise Anna after her two grandmothers and the great-grandmother and aunt. She soon acquired the nickname of *Mäuschen* [little mouse] as she was such a lovely little thing. The *Carmerstrasse* family called her *Mariechen*.

The asthma attacks continued and when in October 1921 the patriarch Otto von Gierke died the *Carmerstrasse* family reorganised the house. This made it possible for Hermann and Eva to move into an apartment recently vacated by the Wegener family [the one daughter, known as Desi, had married a marine officer, Wolf Wegener]. Hermann and Eva with the little Marie were to live there for five years. When we were in Berlin in 2006, Marie recalled that while they lived there, she was allowed to run to the corner in the late afternoon to meet *Papa* coming home from the office.



When it became time for Marie to attend school the next move was contemplated. This resulted in the purchase of a house in the suburb Lankwitz some time during 1926. It was called *Das Schlösschen* - a little castle. It was hardly that although it was, judging by the photographs, a roomy house with living rooms downstairs and a surrounding garden.

A wall divided it from the neighbouring property and one of my earliest memories is of peeping through an opening in the wall decorated with wrought iron.



The three-and-a-half bedrooms were upstairs. The kitchen was in the cellar and food was sent up by a lift installed for the purpose. In the cellar there was an apartment

that was the home of a couple - *Herr und Frau* Dietrich. [I can't help but wonder if they had first names! Even today the Germans are so very formal and hardly ever use first names.] *Frau* Dietrich was the cook and he was general handyman around the house and garden. Marie is vague as to whether she did any other housework but cannot remember any other maid. I have no recollection of either of them although Marie remembers *Herr* Dietrich smoking in the downstairs toilet which she used when playing in the garden. Eva related in later years that *Herr* Dietrich apparently predicted that "*unser Goldjunge*" [our golden boy] would become an engineer. This because he observed how, typical of a little boy, Walter stuck his fingers into electric sockets.

My only recollection is of a *Kindermädchen*, a nursery maid. I was five years old when I left the house and the memory is vague. Photographs do show summer days spent in the garden and walks in the snow in winter. I have one clear memory of a winter day when we watched Marie ice-skating.

All this developed over the next few years. When the family moved in 1926 preparations had to be made for Marie's school career which would have started in April 1927. She had a very happy time at school and made some good friends. She has kept in contact with her very best friend, Annemarie, and they resumed their correspondence after the war so that this friend is godmother to her elder daughter, Eva. When we were in Berlin in 2006, we met up with her. She recalled that, when Marie was not there, she still came to visit the house and enjoyed bathing the younger children. When Marie and her husband Ernie Vorwerk visited Germany in 1973 they spent time with this friend as well.

By this time Eva was pregnant again and in November 1927 I was born and was named Luise Susanne Ernstine. It was perhaps inevitable that I would acquire a nickname as well and Eva told me that the summer sun of 1928 gave me a tan which made her say that I was like a *Maikäfer* and so it became *Käfer* [beetle] which name stuck! I must admit that I disliked being called Luise as it sounded so 'old', so I didn't object to the nickname which was used by everybody and throughout my first years in school. I have to thank the teacher who, when I was enrolled in the English section of the school I attended in 1940, said that it sounded Louise in English. But

the German relations still call this old woman *Käfer!*

An incident that was linked to my birth was the fact that Marie had contracted whooping cough. Eva was not allowed home with the new baby until the older child was sent away. Marie seems to remember without any rancour that she was put on a train to Halle - a journey of about an hour and a half. It is rather surprising that a seven year old with an infectious cough was expected to travel by herself! She was, however, well cared for by *Grossmama* Marie and *Tante* Anna who showed her many interesting sights. She recalls only one unpleasant incident when *Tante* Anna wanted to be firm with this good and sweet child and insisted that she should rescue a nailbrush that had fallen into the lavatory and Marie refused to do so. The little battle of wills was eventually solved by the maid who came to call them for lunch and forced the child's hand!

A year later in December 1928 to the great joy of the whole extended family a boy was born to Eva and Hermann - Walter Edgar Karl named after his grandfathers and great-grandfather and uncle. A most moving letter by her mother-in-law to Eva expressed the joy of the family. He was known as *Das Bübchen* [little fellow] when he was small.

Life in Lankwitz was busy and it was a house where many young people gathered. Marie tells me that Hermann wanted to make sure that his young wife should meet other young people and among other activities they went to some dancing lessons. [I cannot imagine that he would have enjoyed those!] These led to other festivities and Marie thinks that it was on one of these that they might have met Ernst Rudolf Scherz. He was a young chemistry student presumably by then employed in Berlin. He began to spend a lot of time at the house. I think it is perhaps only fair to mention it that he was very much attracted to Eva. This was to lead to a lifelong friendship, as the rest of this story will reveal. That the situation was fraught with difficulties can be imagined although we as children accepted it as normal. If there was tension we were not aware of it.

He brought other young people into the house among them a photographer friend Annelise Fusshippel always known to us as *Füsschen*. Another young woman who

was to play an important part in our future life was Ilse Ebersbach. There were also colleagues who brought wives and families and there were many social activities like hikes and picnics in the outlying areas with other folk. Marie says that on those occasions when others hailed him Hermann began using the word: *Huka*, which his friends adopted as a nickname for him. In later years we used it as well rather than the formal sounding *Papa*. Although he would have preferred us to call our mother *Mama* I think that Marie introduced the more informal and customary *Mutti*. In later years she abbreviated it to *Mu* because she said it was shorter to write when she wrote to her from England. We all called her that to her life's end, as did her sons-in-law and her grandchildren.

A dog named *Schwamm* was part of the household. He must have been a very docile animal as I have no memories beyond the fact that he was there and he can be seen on photographs. When the household was being dissolved he went to the *Carmerstrasse* relatives.

One incident which broke the routine of work and home life in Lankwitz was a trip for Hermann in 1929 to the USA. He recorded his impressions of this trip in a pamphlet. It is titled *Die Landstrassen in den Vereinigten Staaten, ihre Verwaltung und Finanzierung - Eindrücke von einer Studienreise* [the motorways of the USA, their administration and financing - impressions of a study trip] and was published in 1930. He was a member of a big commission that investigated motor transport with all its complications at a time when the motor industry became big business in America. The well-known German *Autobahn* was built on the foundation of the recommendations of this commission.

There are two relics of this trip that were to remind us of it. One is the photograph done by a professional of Eva with the children. Eva is holding Walter, the baby of a few months, Luise aged perhaps sixteen or seventeen months, stares at the photographer and an angelic-looking



Marie, aged 9, gives a semblance of a smile. Hermann had wanted it so that he could have a picture of his family with him, but he never liked it because the photographer has Eva almost in the background instead of highlighting her.

The other relic was a green cabin trunk that opened up like a wardrobe so that it could be used in the cabin. Suits could actually be hung in it and there were separate boxes in which shirts and underwear could be kept and little drawers allowed the traveller to store his cufflinks and collar studs in a safe place as well. It was extremely heavy and difficult to open. In Windhoek it served as a stand in the bathroom, it then came to Johannesburg where it gathered dust in the cellar and ended its life with the family in Himeville when the Jouberts moved there in 1991. In March 2001 it was sold for R 100 to a Zulu-speaking inhabitant of the village. I hope he finds it a useful piece of furniture.

How much did the upheaval of those years in the post-war, pre-Nazi Germany impinge on this busy life and how often did Hermann discuss these problems with his friends and family? The Gierke family of the *Carmerstrasse* had their experiences because they were labelled non-Aryan, so there is no doubt that the whole family was aware of the ever-increasing pressure exercised by the Hitler regime. I wonder if Hermann felt himself secure in his situation at the *Reichs Industrieverband*?