

Chapter One

ZACHARIAS

When in 1933 Hermann Loening was asked to leave his employment in the *Reichs Industrie Verband*, it was an earth-shattering experience for him and Eva, his wife. That we as children did not fully comprehend what was happening is probably due to the fact that we were too young, even though Marie at the age of twelve must have been aware of something going on. The fact that our family shared the fate of thousands of other families is irrelevant to our history. In this history that I have compiled I really want all of us who are descendants of Hermann and Eva: the Vorwerks, Jouberts and Loenings to realise that we have every reason to be proud of our ancestors. We are descendants of two remarkable families, the Loenings and the Gierkes, and I have tried to record their history as accurately as possible.

In an effort to establish a little more about Zacharias Löwenthal who later took on the name of Carl Friedrich Loening I tried to find out more about Jews in Germany during the 18th and 19th century. Questions like where did this particular family come from, how it happened that some ancestor chose that name etc, did not get me very far. The history of the Jews is indeed very interesting but it does not really help us. Perhaps that is just as well as it seems that this man regarded himself very much as a citizen of Germany and that being Jewish was incidental.

If anyone is interested - the book *A History of the Jews* by Paul Johnson can give you all the details you might want. There is a wealth of information about the whole development of the Jews that emerged from the Bible to be found in the book.

Let us therefore just go to the details we have to hand. These details come from an article by Herbert Meyer in a document *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* [Archive for the History of Publishing] published by the Historical Commission of the German Book Trade. It is titled *Carl Friedrich Loening, Lebensbild eines deutschen Verlegers im 19. Jahrhundert* [the life of a German publisher in the 19th century].

Zacharias Löwenthal was born on 4 August 1810 as the fourth child of a family of

seven. His father came from Ladenburg where he was a merchant. His father's Hebrew name was Lemle that was perhaps changed to Johann Ludwig just as his mother's name Dolzie seems to have been changed to Theresia. Her maiden name was Dinkelspiel and Meyer stresses that she belonged to a very old Mannheim family. Both grandfathers had the name Zacharias so it seems that he was named after them. Meyer could not definitely establish where Zacharias was born but it was probably in Mannheim even though his parents only moved there from Ladenburg in 1815.

The growing boy spent his youth in these two neighbouring towns. At the age of 18 he was entered as a student of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Heidelberg University. Meyer records that it was during this time that he met Heinrich Hoffmann, who as a medical doctor later became a family friend as well as their doctor. As the author of *Der Struwwelpeter* he was to play an important part in making the publishing firm Rütten and Loening famous.

After five semesters Zacharias left the Heidelberg University and his name appeared as Dr Phil in München in the summer of 1833. Meyer noted that he could not find an entry of the doctoral thesis at the München University. What is quite clear is that it was as a result of his friendship with Karl Gutzkow, whom he must have met in München, that he enthusiastically began to plan the establishment of a publishing firm in Mannheim. He hoped that his father would be able to help him financially once he had obtained the necessary experience. He therefore spent some years as an apprentice in various publishing houses in Germany.

Many years later Gutzkow made some autobiographical notes and wrote that his friend Zacharias had an 'ideal nature'. He added that Zacharias had been unwilling to pursue his studies despite the extensive work he had already covered; instead he was determined to become a publisher. According to Gutzkow the two friends went to Berlin together. There they spent a happy summer in a little house on the river Alster near Hamburg. Later Gutzkow spent some time in his friend's home in Mannheim as well.

In 1835 the publishing firm called *C.Löwenthals Verlagshandlung* was opened in

Mannheim. The plan was that this firm should be at the disposal of authors who wanted to express the progressive ideas and ideals of the ‘Young Germany’. Was it Gutzkow or Löwenthal who was regarded as representative of this young Germany? It appears that they were both part of this progressive movement. Apparently there were several young authors who believed that they had been called to introduce a new epoch of German literature. The great author Goethe had died in 1832 and with his death the great age of romanticism and classicism had passed. These young men wanted to represent the present age: they felt that they needed to be critical of their environment, to evaluate, attack and shake up the comfortable homes of the *Biedermeier* period. To them Mannheim seemed to be the ideal town for their new publishing house. Not only because it was Löwenthal’s home town, but also because the state Baden, where Mannheim is situated, was then regarded as the most progressive, free-thinking state of all the German states and the one that was most open to the newer, revolutionary ideas.

In the book on the history of the firm *Rütten & Loening* by Alfred Frommhold the fate of this first attempt of establishing a publishing firm is recorded and does not need be repeated here. [See Appendix A]. That the subsequent upheaval was at least partially due to Gutzkow’s novel *Wally, die Zweiflerin* is fairly obvious. They had regarded Heinrich Heine, the poet, as a friend yet it may well be that it was he who denounced them. This is immaterial now; the fact is that within a very short time the firm was forced to close down as the government decided that the owner [i.e. Zacharias Löwenthal] had opened this publishing house without the necessary documentation. Meyer noted that he had indeed been aware of this but he had also ascertained that none of the other publishing houses had this documentation either.

A lengthy court case followed and eventually Zacharias was declared innocent while Gutzkow himself was sentenced to a prison sentence of a month. From then on, however, the name Löwenthal was associated with revolutionary ideas throughout Germany.

Meyer says that he could find very few details as to how Zacharias spent the next eight years. While we can well imagine his disappointment and feelings of disillusion, it appears that no details as how he coped with this are available. In July 1838 he was

married to Anna Louise Reinach in Mainz. She had been born in that city on 6 April 1812 and was the daughter of a wealthy estate owner. It seems that her financial situation was such that, were it necessary, she could help her husband during these years. The only other detail we know about her is that she was also Jewish.

The young couple seem to have changed their residence several times and are recorded to have resided in both Mainz and Mannheim. His father died in May 1838 and they may have lived in his parents' house and travelled from there. In January 1842 their first child, a daughter Meta, was born – as there is no further reference to this daughter she probably died at an early age.

In 1843 the couple was in Paris where Heine noted that he had met Löwenthal several times and stated that he did regard him as the book trader of 'our Young Germany' but added that although he wanted to achieve much, he didn't quite know how he was to do this. Perhaps of greater importance to us is that the eldest son, Edgar, was born in Paris on 14 July 1843.

About this time Zacharias was granted citizenship of Mainz after which he preferred not to be reminded of his origin in Mannheim. Only a few months later, in October 1843, he received permission to reside in the free city of Frankfurt. We have no idea how he went about finding Joseph Rütten or how he persuaded him to help him start his publishing venture in this city, that at that time was regarded as one of the most important cities of books in Germany. We know that he did find Rütten, a businessman in Frankfurt, who was willing to be the business manager for this *Literarische Anstalt*. From the outset it was Löwenthal, not Rütten, who took a leading role in this new venture.

Frommhold's book gives us details of the important works that were published in the firm. We seem to know this publishing house best as the publisher of the children's classic *Der Struwwelpeter*. During the early years the firm published many important literary works but to my knowledge sadly no mention of this fact was ever made within the family circle, but it seems that this firm was in the forefront in publishing progressive literature during the 19th century in Germany.

I can tell of only one occasion when the publishing firm was mentioned to me. When I had just learnt to read and was ill in bed, Walter, a year younger, brought me a pile of children books to read to him. I spotted the name Loening printed on the book in the spot that I now know to be the publisher. I was quite excited about that, and having asked my mother about it, was told that it was indeed the name of our ancestor.

It is sad that we never spoke about all the other books by well-known authors that were published by this firm nor can I recall copies of them in our home in Windhoek.



Postcard to commemorate the 300th issue of the firm's most famous book

There was one other occasion that it was mentioned when it was found that a woman teaching in Windhoek, a Miss Hoffmann, was indeed a granddaughter of Heinrich Hoffmann. I was told of the co-incidence of meeting her in Windhoek and how it was on the insistence of our great-grandfather, the publisher, that the *Der Struwwelpeter* was printed at all.

Among the serious works that were published was an early work by Engels and Marx. Engels wanted the firm to publish *Das Kapital* as well, but according to Frommhold, Engels stated that Löwenthal had doubts as to the wisdom of publishing this revolutionary work. Other works that were obviously regarded as too

revolutionary for the times were published, however, and as a result Löwenthal was asked to leave Frankfurt. Various appeals both by himself and his friends were fruitless and he had no choice but to leave the city in 1847 and move his family to Mainz. In Frommhold's book we find the details of how the politics of the day influenced the fate of this man although thanks to Rütten the firm was established and remained open for the rest of the century.

After the 1848 revolution Löwenthal appealed to the authorities in Frankfurt and was then granted permission to return to Frankfurt. It was then that he altered his name to Carl Friedrich Loening. During the following years three more children were born to the couple: Richard [1848], Marie Caecilie [later to be known as Lili] born in 1850 and Gottfried born in 1851.

It appears that Löwenthal was very popular in Frankfurt, but after being involved in political activities the permission to live in Frankfurt was withdrawn once again in 1852. A number of men associated with the book trade appealed to the authorities to allow him to stay. This appeal was, however, refused because it was known that he had previously been in Mannheim where he had been in trouble with the authorities. Meyer commented that it is clear that he could not get away from the ghost of his past. Once again the family found refuge in Mainz. It is mere conjecture but he probably kept in close contact with Rütten, and would direct and give advice from there.

It was here in Mainz that on 12 July 1847 he and his family were baptised into the Lutheran Church. He was following the example of many other Jews at that time: to quote Paul Johnson “many Jews took their ticket to society through baptism”. Like many others he must have felt that he was no longer part of the Jewish community. There is no doubt that this man was a German and identified strongly with the ideals of the ‘Young Germany’. Whether this was motivated from a sincere Christian conviction rather than as a political convenience must be left to conjecture. From what we learn about the family it is clear that the children were brought up as practising Christians.

In 1974 Lili Wegener, granddaughter of Lili Loening, recorded her reminiscences of the time of the Third Reich and mentioned that when she was at school in the early twenties a classmate had asked her whether her grandmother was Jewish. She had to think about this as there had never been any mention of this in her home and she had never heard of it. She added: “My grandmother was small and dainty and had black hair. Her ancestors were descendants of Spanish Jews”. In a footnote she added that in the decades before Hitler the Jewish-Christian descent was of no importance whatsoever. There were many ‘mixed’ marriages and many Jews were officers in the German army during the 1st World War. They were Germans.

While Zacharias lived in Mainz he had to travel to Mannheim several times where he would be with his brother Daniel. He was required to report to the police in Mannheim and described himself as a pensioner. We can only presume that there was capital available and that the loyal Rütten made it possible for him to have some

funds.

He had to wait three years until he was eventually permitted, as a result of a renewed application, to return to Frankfurt on 21 September 1854. Meyer writes: “Not long after that”, but it was in fact almost three years later that the authorities officially permitted the citizen Dr Phil. Zacharias Carl Friedrich Löwenthal of Mainz to change his name to Carl Friedrich Loening. After yet another two years the ‘permissionist’ who had been expelled from Frankfurt several times, was granted citizen rights in the free city of Frankfurt. In his application he quoted that a capital of 100 000 *Gulden* was available. Money talks! He had to be released as a citizen of Mainz in Hesse before he was permitted to pay suitable amounts of money to various charitable institutions and received the much longed-for citizenship of Frankfurt. It was then that the firm changed its name to *Rütten & Loening*.

An inquiry on the Internet threw up the name Loening several times and a direct e-mail to a man with the name revealed that it was an old name originating in the north of Germany. The informant stated that during the Hitler regime the family was approached and told to force those who bore the name Loening who were Jewish to change the name. They refused to bow to the request or demand, and as far as we know no further action was taken.

Meyer continued that it is part of this strange, somewhat tragic life that it seems that this man could not enjoy this achievement that he had fought for so many years, for long. He doubted if this convinced and unbending 'forty-eighter' would have been happy in Frankfurt after the city was forced to become part of Prussia in 1866.

[My limited knowledge of history does not permit me to comment on this except that 1848 was the year of the revolt with which the revolutionists had wanted to achieve a breakaway from the rule of the princes. It was unsuccessful but certain rights were won. However, once Frankfurt became part of Prussia and thus lost its status as a free city, it had to obey the laws of Berlin. After the Franco-Prussian war the German empire was founded in 1871. There is more about this in Frommhold’s book on the firm.]

Meyer could not establish any possible additional causes that could have contributed to make Loening's life in Frankfurt unhappy, yet he moved to Heidelberg shortly before the foundation of the German empire. His eldest son, Edgar, was living there. What made this man, now a citizen, who had twice been forced to leave the city, leave it voluntarily? We, together with the author of this article, can only guess what inner battles he fought before he came to this decision. Meyer could not find the name Loening in the Frankfurt address book of 1870 in the alphabetical list of inhabitants but next to the name of the firm *Rütten und Loening* the name 'Dr Carl Friedrich Loening - owner' the words 'in Heidelberg' were added. And in Heidelberg he appears to have had his own house from 1876 to 1880.

We do know that he continued to lead the firm together with his partner Rütten until the latter died in 1878. Rütten's nephew, Heinrich Oswald, together with Loening's son Gottfried, took over the management of the firm until tragically Gottfried died at an early age in 1887. What happened to the firm after that is described in Frommhold's book.

Loening spent twelve or thirteen years in Heidelberg and might have enjoyed the contact with the many significant people who lived in this, the oldest, university city in the new empire. And yet in 1882 or '83 he followed his son Richard to Jena. [As far as I know Richard was a bachelor]. Edgar had by then moved to Rostock where my father was born in 1885. Great-grandfather Loening was to die in Jena in 1884 at the age of 73. His widow, Anna Loening, moved to Halle once Edgar was settled there as my father recalled that as a young child he could visit the ever kindly grandmother on the third floor of the house that the family occupied in the *Händelstrasse* [see Appendix B]. She died there in 1892.

As so often in biographies of men who made their mark in the 19th century the women are ignored. We are told that they were married and the names and dates of the marriage are noted. We also note that the wives bore their husbands children and the names and dates of birth are given. But very little else is known about the women.

How fortunate then that some descendants do take the trouble to write things down. The important links to our history are of course the Loening children - particularly

Edgar and Lili, [or Caecilie as she was called at birth]. More about the little I know about Edgar, my grandfather, in a later chapter, but Lili is so important to our history that she deserves a special place as well. Not that we know much about her but her own daughter Hilda did record some facts. She described Lili Loening as the only daughter who grew up with three brothers in a protected, highly civilised home. It is interesting that Hilda could also only recall that the firm *Rütten & Loening* was of importance to the family because of *Der Struwwelpeter*, although she does make mention of the many classical publications of the firm.

She mentions that Lili's parents were Jewish but "soon after their marriage" they joined the Lutheran Church: as recorded above, more than ten years elapsed between the date of their marriage and the date when they were baptised. Edgar was born before that but Richard, Lili and Gottfried were presumably baptised soon after birth. Hilda stressed that the children were brought up in the Lutheran Church. Lili Wegener added that Lili's eldest daughter Anna, a woman of considerable importance and influence in the pre-2nd World War years, wrote to the Lutheran minister in Frankfurt to ask him to issue a birth certificate for her mother with the name as Loening so that the non-Aryan descent could not be traced. The birth certificate showed the name at birth to be Löwenthal. How very sad - I do not for one moment want to cast a shadow on the wonderful Gierke family of the *Carmerstrasse* in Berlin. However, the horrible events that were to bring about the 2nd World War, forced the members of that family to resort to all sorts of subterfuges. I am hoping that with this history we can always lift our heads high and say: "Yes, our great-grandfather, our ancestor, was Jewish and we are very proud of him".

Now we need to first look at the Gierke family and their fate in another part of Germany as well as the fortunate circumstances that brought about the marriage of Otto Gierke and Lili Loening. This was to become the first association of the two families.