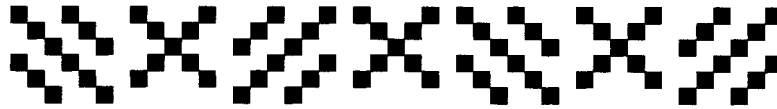


“Life in the Wild”:
Three German Letters from Indiana,
1852-1853

*Edited and Translated by Frederic Trautmann**



In 1852 and 1853 a German resident in Allen County wrote three letters about Indiana and the United States. The letters were published in a collection of essays, letters, and newspaper extracts, titled *Atlantische Studien, von Deutschen in Amerika*.¹ The German writer was inquisitive, literate, perceptive, and critical; and he discussed many aspects of the land, the people, and the way of life. His letters are skillfully written and provocative. Detailed, vivid, and scathing, they add up to a worthy description and a graphic account.

Yet the letters are as mysterious as they are valuable. Their author, addressee, and editor remain unknown. The author signed himself Ddkd, the editor is not named, and attempts to identify them have failed. The letters reveal the addressee only as a German in the eastern United States (a friend of Ddkd's) but nothing else. Nor is it known why *Atlantische Studien* was compiled, or for what audience it was intended, or how Ddkd's letters came to be included. In sum, three letters and their anonymous author, nameless editor, shadowy addressee, cryptic purpose, and arcane audience pose a riddle that defies solution.

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¹ See *Atlantische Studien, von Deutschen in Amerika* [Transatlantic Studies by Germans in America] (8 vols., Göttingen, 1853), I, 43-49, 170-73, III, 161-66. This work has not been published in English. In the interests of unity, coherence, and emphasis, some early sentences and phrases in the first letter have been rearranged; and two passages from there have been inserted later, as indicated by an ellipsis and footnotes. Long paragraphs have been broken into smaller ones. Words in English in the original are italicized in the translation.

Atlantische
S t u d i e n.

Von
Deutschen in Amerika.

Vierter Band.

Göttingen,
Georg Heinrich Wigand.
1854.

Two inferences are possible. First, Ddkd might have been a Forty-Eighter. The Forty-Eighters were German émigrés who had taken up arms for the Revolution of 1848 and fled when it failed. Though some were ordinary citizens who had fought as common soldiers, the famous ones were intellectuals and professionals, commanders of insurrectionist forces, and actually or potentially prominent figures. The best remembered is Carl Schurz. In America, Forty-Eighters entered various occupations. The exceptional Schurz had a multifarious career as political leader, military officer, newspaperman, lecturer, author, diplomat, United States senator, and secretary of the interior. Some Forty-Eighters, even ones who had never before seen a plow or touched a hoe, became farmers—notably in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Called “Latin farmers” because of their proficiency in the classics, they could quote the Greeks and Romans while hacking at the wilderness and grubbing for a livelihood from stubborn soil. Passages of Hesiod’s *Works and Days* fell from their lips more readily than trees before their axes. Notable was Friedrich Karl Hecker, quondam officer in the Revolution, who farmed in southwestern Illinois.² Unlike hundreds of thousands of ordinary Germans who emigrated for economic reasons in the 1850s, Forty-Eighters were mostly unwilling exiles; educated and accomplished people seldom emigrated unless forced. Forty-Eighters loved Germany and wanted not to leave it but to change it. Having fought to right its wrongs, most Forty-Eighters would have preferred success and prominence in the Germany they would have improved, instead of back-breaking labor on a continent they found oppressed by ignorance and slavery.

Ddkd, presumably male, sounds like such a man. In his third letter, dated June, 1853, he says he arrived “four years ago,” which corresponds to the coming of the Forty-Eighters. And, though farming, he writes with subtlety, erudition, complexity, and skill not to be expected from a lifelong farmer; he also quotes Latin. Furthermore, he seems to share with Forty-Eighters the status of a displaced person, not a willing immigrant. At the end of the first letter, he appears sad about “the forsaken fatherland” and seems to miss “loved ones” and “many a good comrade,” as if he is involuntarily separated from them. Again, early in that letter, when rejecting the entreaty to come east, he speaks like a newly arrived Forty-Eighter without American roots: he could have set-

² For a description of life on Hecker’s farm, see Frederic Trautmann, “Eight Weeks on a St. Clair County Farm: Letters by a Young German,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXXV (Autumn, 1982), 162-78.

tled anywhere, and he wanted to avoid Forty-Eighters' quarrels with established, Americanized Germans. He seems to have been urged to return to big-city life. Moreover, throughout the letters, he expresses an anti-American anger common to many Forty-Eighters who looked for high-mindedness, freedom, and culture in the United States but instead found corruption, slavery, and chewing tobacco.³

A second possible inference is that *Atlantische Studien* was published in response to the controversy in Germany over emigration. Mid-nineteenth-century Germans debated the wisdom of leaving the homeland and of choosing the United States as a place to settle.⁴ According to one writer the immigrant could expect cheats and deadbeats everywhere in America.⁵ Another, after traveling to the United States to see for himself, reported chaos that passed for government, claiming that political conditions were as wild as the most daring mind could imagine and as perverted as the most deviant one might create.⁶ Others took an opposite position, such as Gottfried Duden, who returned from America to argue for emigration because Germany was overpopulated while America, particularly the Missouri River Valley, was a fine place to settle and fulfill an immigrant's dream.⁷ *Atlantische Studien* is expressly and uniformly hostile to the United States and thus represents the anti-emigration position.⁸ Perhaps its editor and authors took refuge in anonymity to vent anti-American spleen. At any rate, *Atlantische Studien* appears intended for Germans curious about emigration to the United States.

Setting the tone in the first essay, "Illusions," a writer identified as "B" says the collection's purpose is to dispel misconceptions and put truth into the literature of emigration. America is

³ Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (Philadelphia, 1952), 71.

⁴ John D. Barnhart, "The Ohio Valley Frontier," in Thomas D. Clark, ed., *Travels in the Old South: A Bibliography* (3 vols., Norman, Oklahoma, 1956), II, 4, 58.

⁵ Ludwig Gall, *Meine Auswanderung nach den Vereinigten Staaten . . .* (2 vols., Trier, 1922). Partly translated by Frederic Trautmann, "Pennsylvania through a German's Eyes," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, CV (January, 1981), 35-65; and "New York through German Eyes," *New York History*, LXII (October, 1981), 439-61.

⁶ Friedrich Schmidt, *Versuch über den politischen Zustand der Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika . . .* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1822).

⁷ Gottfried Duden, *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nord-amerikas und einen mehrjährigen Aufenthalt am Missouri [in den Jahren 1824, '25, '26, und 1827]* (Elberfeld, 1829); Gottfried Duden, *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America and a Stay of Several Years along the Missouri (during the Years 1824, '25, '26, and 1827)*, edited and translated by James W. Goodrich et al. (Columbia, Missouri, 1980).

⁸ Wittke calls the collection "unfriendly." Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 113.

a land of materialism and superstition. Morality is declining. People flee corrupt cities for the frontier, which in turn is speedily corrupted. "If our pages appear overloaded with murder, mayhem, and other bloody scenes, executions, shameless crimes, and devastation of human life in the broadest sense, we cannot avoid such garish tales; they are characteristic" (vol. I, p. 8).

Ddkd, then, could be a Forty-Eighter joining the German argument against emigration. Certainly he has little nice to say about Indiana or the United States; good is slight, evil great. Indeed, he resembles B's people who flee corrupt cities for the frontier, which in turn is speedily corrupted. He rebukes the United States for slavery, governmental ineptitude, political depravity, and the Fugitive Slave Act. Disliking much about Indiana, he grumbles over money-grubbing and grouses at ignorant men, unruly children, lazy women, barbarous table manners, and monotonous food. He does approve of the state constitution adopted in 1851, claiming it represents tolerance, honesty, and respect for freedom, qualities he finds and approves in Hoosiers generally.

Ddkd's reproach and anger seem sincere. Neither a hack nor a blockhead but an excellent stylist with a lot on his mind and the power to express it, he conveys complicated and significant ideas with studied precision, measured nuance, and uncommon verve. His wit imparts energy, and his irony adds color; his third letter is spiced with hilarious comments on ghosts and poltergeists, while his first is disingenuously acid in referring to Yankees in "the incomparably civilized East." Perhaps his attitude was biased, his viewpoint distorted, his judgment skewed; maybe his words bite unfairly; and no doubt he abused Indiana and savaged the United States. What he finds wrong with Germans—"Germanic nonsense," lack of judgment, harmful imitativeness, and "other undesirable qualities"—matches neither in amount nor severity his lashes at so much of Indiana and the United States. But as his partiality is not absolute, so he is not an extremist. If he lacks balance, he does not necessarily slight the truth. His observations, however one-sided, and his criticisms, though caustic, deserve to be reprinted in English. And they deserve to be read as part of the picture of life in mid-nineteenth-century Indiana and foreign reaction to it.

Allen County, September, 1852

In your last letter, old friend, you urged me to abandon the West. Leave it for good, breathe big-city air in Philadelphia or

New York, and things will seem more like Europe and home: that's what you said. Your intentions are good, I'm sure. But you can't be serious, you know me too well, so your plea must have been only a kind-hearted turn of phrase: that's what I think.

Perhaps, since I departed, much has changed to the advantage of Germans living in Philadelphia and New York. Nothing else could be expected after the incredible immigration and pullulation those cities have experienced.⁹ But I gather, from what I see in the news, that conditions are not attractive enough to lure me from here. Despite my fifty years, I don't want to be an objective observer in the East. I am too sanguine, and too proud of my national heritage, not to participate.¹⁰ I would also have to be afraid of Germanic nonsense, and of getting into party quarrels. Therefore, though I applaud European comfort, and appreciate the material pleasures, I would not be happy in the East. My spleen would be unnecessarily riled, even were I lucky enough to avoid the arguments, advanced for my own good, in favor of the freedom that remains there. *Exempla sunt odiosa* [Examples are offensive].¹¹

So I prefer life in the wild. Yes, it is secluded and withdrawn. You would dislike it. But do not assume I'm apathetic and unobservant. Raw Nature, wild in her dominion, offers much to peruse. And what could a dynamic thinker find more rewarding than to adapt to savage surroundings while studying, in the perspective of a wilderness, the problem of developing a useful, worthwhile life under these primitive conditions?¹² [. . .]

⁹ Adverse economic conditions brought masses of immigrants in the 1850s.

¹⁰ In this unclear allusion, Ddkd may mean that in the East he could but watch helplessly the nation's political corruption, whereas here he can take part in the development of a new and more honest place and perhaps, in Wittke's words, "infuse Anglo-American civilization with a 'Germanizing process.'" Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 74. Thus, near the end of this letter, he speaks of teaching his American neighbor the German way with potatoes and rutabagas.

¹¹ This obscure paragraph probably refers to hardships suffered by recent German immigrants and to strife among German-American factions. Forty-Eighters, especially those whose academic training equipped them for artistic and literary careers rather than manual labor, found little work, particularly in the East. They took what jobs they could get, however menial; went hungry; and suffered other privation. Some died prematurely. Others committed suicide. Many, perhaps Ddkd too, seem to have gone South and West in search of a better life. Moreover, idealistic and high-minded Forty-Eighters questioned the United States. Why was it neither as noble nor as free as they had expected? And political corruption and black slavery shocked and angered them. The Forty-Eighters' disillusionment intensified conflict with the older German element that had accepted America and been assimilated. The resulting strife was fierce. See *ibid.*, 71-75.

¹² These metaphysical remarks suggest that Ddkd had more intellectual training than most lifelong farmers.

Let me assure you, then, that in spite of hardship, I am still satisfied with the decision to settle in a forest in the hinterlands. I want yet to wrest my subsistence from Nature, like any backwoodsman. What on Earth is to be had without effort? If unfamiliar labor raises many a drop of sweat, I rest in the true dignity of a free and independent man.¹³

Accordingly, I live in Indiana, which has a new and essentially humane constitution [the Constitution of 1851] that guarantees freedom to Indiana's people. Under the old one, in force when Indiana entered the Union in 1816, only American citizens could vote. Today, foreigners also have that right if, before the election, they have been in the United States for a year, and in Indiana for six months; and if they have sworn their intent to become citizens.¹⁴

The constitutions of most of the young states of the West and Northwest embody at least the possibility of such progress,¹⁵ and are more humanely and honestly written than the humbug behind the national government, a travesty of centralized administration.¹⁶ The lauded federal constitution was a modern, functional, manly, worthy robe of state; but the politicians of cupidity have infringed it to tatters, patched it with rags, and degraded it to the cloak of a scoundrel. True, since the promulgation of Indiana's new document, no blacks are supposed to have entered Indiana and settled, which may seem inhumane to their angry friends. But Indiana has never had many blacks.¹⁷ In the light of practicality, exclusion can be nothing but a boon to the state. For I

¹³ Here, different from the typical "Latin farmer," Ddkd resembles Friedrich Karl Hecker, the Forty-Eighter who thrilled "like Cincinnatus of old in following the plow." Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 117. Ddkd and Hecker favored Thoreau, who went to the woods to live deliberately, to face the essence of life, to learn what life had to teach, and to be plain, honest, and autonomous. Conversely, most Latin farmers failed, and few had anything positive to say about farming after they tried it. See *ibid.*, 112-20.

¹⁴ The constitutional convention's provision for alien suffrage, Indiana's sole official act to promote immigration in the 1850s, may have encouraged Ddkd to settle here. See Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis, 1965), 39-40, 60, 544. The granting of alien suffrage would have impressed a foreigner like Ddkd.

¹⁵ Ddkd likely means broadened suffrage and probably the exclusion of slavery.

¹⁶ The allusion seems to be to slavery and political corruption. In this paragraph and the next, he refers directly to slavery and, in the third letter, to corruption.

¹⁷ In 1820, 1,420 blacks, one percent of the state population, lived in Indiana; in 1850, there were 11,262, nine-tenths of one percent of the population. In Allen County, there were 102 blacks in 1850. Article XIII of the Constitution of 1851 prohibited blacks from settling in Indiana, reflecting dominant white prejudices. Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* ([Indianapolis], 1957), 44, 53, 63-68.

doubt that a state's sovereign people, who have never been involved with slavery, should atone for the sins of slavery in nearby states, and take in the depravity excreted by slave states. And I want to know how long the humanitarianism of our pro-black enthusiasts would last, were they asked to share bed and board with a treacherous Cato or a noisome Brutus;¹⁸ not all the blacks' defenders can be incurably infected with the abolitionist itch. Indiana is closed even to the free black? The rest of America, as well as other parts of the world, offer space and opportunity for him to feed himself.

Let it be clear, however, that in my charter for freedom, blacks are to be equal before the law.¹⁹ The Compromise [of 1850] and its provision against fugitive slaves, a mockery of humanity in the nineteenth century, could only be the brainchild of American mercantile greed, and the spawn of venal, shameless politicians.²⁰ In the East, for example, Quakers (those hypocritical screwballs) are always trying to hire the free black. They tell the world they do it out of Christian charity for the poor devil. In fact, Quaker merchant and Southern planter think alike, namely that the black endures onerous labor and, used to privation since birth, subsists on a minimum of cheap rations. In turn the free black, often born a slave, knows how low he stands in the eyes of the law. Therefore, though a human being, he is a tool in the hands of the sanctimonious sharpers.²¹ Because he produces incomparably better and takes ill much less in the mild climate of the East, he is more exploitable than a white of any national origin.

But let me speak again of where I live.

Indiana is still heavily forested and, compared to most new states of the West, thinly populated. At last count, 1,250,000²²

¹⁸ Popular names for blacks, slave and free.

¹⁹ Forty-Eighters and Germans in general opposed slavery; but few, except Karl Heinzen, stood this firm for equal rights. See Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 191-96. And Ddgd makes plain in the previous paragraph that his charter for freedom, and his idea of equality, have limits with respect to blacks.

²⁰ Among the measures that composed the Compromise of 1850 was the Fugitive Slave Act, which stiffened the original fugitive-slave statute of 1793. Americans of various antislavery persuasions denounced the Act of 1850 as unenforceable, iniquitous, and brutal. See Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (New York, 1964).

²¹ Although Quakers supported humanitarian causes such as penal reform, and led the attack on slavery, Ddgd seems to feel that their mercantile pursuits outran their humanitarianism. "The popular conception of the Quaker as a shrewd businessman has a long history and cannot be lightly dismissed." Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (1948; rpt., New York, 1963), 46. Calling Quakers "hypocritical screwballs," Ddgd appears to think them odd for their kind of religion.

²² The population figure is probably too high. The 1850 federal census counted 988,416 people in Indiana; the 1860 census listed 1,350,428. Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 537.

people lived in these approximately 1,800 square miles. The soil is as fertile as could be wished; the forests yield an abundance of wood and lumber of all kinds; farming and especially cattle raising are plentiful sources of food; and the climate and the people's health are no worse than in the bordering states of Kentucky and Ohio. So why does Indiana grow so slowly in relation to other states? The only explanation I can give is that Indiana's big landowners do not try to attract immigrants by spreading shameless lies in eastern ports: the humbug of the American West as a land of milk and honey, and promises of pots of gold. The township where I live may have 150 people.

This region possesses no great natural beauty; the West's wide-open spaces, at least those I've seen, are poor in beautiful scenes. The terrain is hilly. The prairie, extending northwest, provides for fresh, free-moving air and thus health to those who get used to the West's sudden changes in temperature. In big cities, businessmen and loiterers live near muddy rivers, turbid canals, and stagnant lakes; seal themselves hermetically against atmospheric influences, dress in flannel from head to foot; drink brandy, whiskey, and strong beer; even though the temperature may be in the seventies. I cannot recommend such practices. They are wrong and rural people's superior health proves how wrong they are. The country dweller, the American accustomed to shifts in the weather, wears nothing but homemade coats and trousers of light wool and a cotton shirt, defies the worst of heat and cold, and enjoys good health.

I do not deny, however, that even the strong and robust European who settles hereabouts must have bouts of fever until his body is used to drastic fluctuations in temperature. We are at the same latitude as the Caspian Sea but powerful northwest winds here destroy any similarity in climate. These prevailing American winds are probably caused by countless big and small lakes in the Northwest.

Beginning at Buffalo and the farther west you go, the more pronounced the difference between cultivated land and forest. Such forests, sometimes impenetrable, are especially true of western [northeastern] Indiana, where I live. Scattered, lonely, log cabins and frame houses, and occasionally large fields of corn and wheat, stand at edges of expansive prairies or of clearings that display marks of plow and axe, and disclose the presence of sparse population. Everything is so uniform, so arranged to meet the most basic needs, so monotonous—like a Yankee on Sunday.²³

²³ By Yankee, Ddkd means old-time Anglo-Americans, especially New Englanders and their descendents. In passages elsewhere, he uses Yankee and native-born American interchangeably, as did many Germans in the United States at the time.

Around here a poet must despair of producing the plainest prose. If he forsakes popular thoroughfares and trains and boats, pockets a compass, and strikes out on narrow paths through endless forest and across limitless prairie, he can expect any necessary inspiration from nothing but emptiness or perhaps from meeting a local bear out for a stroll.

German settlers are mostly poor and generally Americanized in the way they eat. Americans have far too little sense for anything but moneymaking and the most essential—one might say the most primitive—of needs. When I found it convenient to build a little house in a garden some distance from where I live, several neighbors smiled at my airy garden house and asked if it was going to be a birdhouse. Many things, especially those outside usual life and habits, are likewise still foreign to American self-sufficiency. There is no variation in their lifestyle and enjoyment. Fried salt pork, corn, pancakes, cornbread prepared with baking soda (hence Yankees' melodious belching after a hearty meal), together with an awful extract of a weed supposed to be tea, or weak coffee in which the cracked beans float in pieces like shelled peas—that is what Americans eat day in and day out, and this amid a bounteous Nature that will yield anything to him who makes a little effort.

Accordingly, gardening and fruit-growing are on a very primitive level, and anything like horticulture is out of the question. In all my time in the West, I have never seen a pear, a cherry, or a European plum. Local vegetables include beans, cabbage, cucumbers, and turnips. Potatoes are also grown but certainly not as an essential food since the Yankee's indispensable nourishment is corn. He can live on it alone if he must. Potatoes have therefore come only recently into demand because of increasing numbers of Germans and Irish in the cities. Americans usually raise them on newly broken land that is wettest and richest in humus. The bigger the potatoes, the better (Americans think), because peeling small ones hinders fast eating. Recent German immigrants, in their folly, are inclined to imitate this foolishness in raising potatoes. The low-nutrition Rohan variety, which we in Germany would not even feed to animals, is all the rage here. This year, for the first time, I succeeded in persuading my neighbor, an intelligent and respected American, to stop raising potatoes in that pernicious way and to plant on higher, healthier ground, in soil mixed with sand.

I also gave him rutabaga seed and told him to sow it after Midsummer Day, to get winter rutabagas. In vain! He sowed in early spring and for quite a while his family has been gnawing at the big, yellow balls, for want of something better. The good

fellow saw them served cooked at my house but said cooking was too much "*trouble*" for his *missis*.

Understandably, for Yankee women oppose work. Sporting clothes in the most garish colors—Kentucky women are particularly partial to them—such a woman often rocks mindlessly in a rocking chair all day long, Bible in hand, child—perhaps an infant, perhaps a year old or more—crying at her breast, eyes gazing skyward: such is the epitome of pleasure for the Yankee woman of the West. Only in this way she realizes her full dignity and follows her highest calling: idleness and childbearing. Immigrant Jewesses especially support such behavior most enthusiastically. Proper upbringing of children is out of the question, for the state of morality is too uncertain. When a Yankee urchin runs wild—good-bye, obedience! And when such an unruly child decides to misbehave, all these people's attachment to the Bible notwithstanding, it acts with extreme savagery to its parents.

Americans in general are praised for cleanliness of body and household. But if you look at what an American woman does, and remember that she usually has her husband's help with domestic chores, her work from day to day is little more than preparing meals. Whoever has eaten these *breakfasts*, *dinners*, and *suppers* will agree that preparing one takes scarcely a quarter of an hour. Friday or Saturday is usually washday and husband or a son is again called into service. Cotton cloth is so cheap here that no thought is given to mending clothes made of it: one shirt on one's back, the other drying on the line. Likewise, tablecloths and blankets. To be condemned, after a hard day's work, to spend the night in a Yankee bed with its well-known, checkerboard-pattern "*quilts*," is to remember or anticipate a bed of boards. This actually praiseworthy cleanliness causes the Yankee women little "*trouble*," to use the American term.

Cooking, keeping house, and mending in the true German way are very much harder here. The good German wife also helps her husband in many tasks, which would never occur to a genuine Yankee woman. But it is unpardonable when German lack of judgment, and its tendency to imitate, copy the Yankee wife's insolence and lose sight of the virtue of tidiness. But we can hope that these and other undesirable qualities of an earlier and less responsible lot of German immigrants will be offset by the example of the more-cultivated group now arriving here.

If I'm harsh, perhaps too harsh, in evaluating our countrymen in this hemisphere, I'm also awake to the disgraces of the dom-

inant race.²⁴ What I have experienced here is in some ways different from what you have had occasion to observe in the incomparably civilized East. There the Yankee is at the apex of indolence; but something of a European polish has necessarily smoothed his rough edges, like gold plating over base metal. Still he is business-minded, greedy and, since he knows nothing else of value, exuberantly self-important. At the same time he is no less ignorant than his bucolic (one could say half-savage) yet not so insufferable brother in the West. Both kinds of Yankee are crafty and bright. Unfortunately they abhor knowledge not relevant to business and moneymaking. Intellectually lazy, they accommodate themselves to a Biblical notion of what Providence has ordained. In this respect, at least as far as rationality is concerned, they seem to have come to a conclusion about political progress that aligns them with the humbuggers in Baltimore.²⁵

The lamp dims and says, "Time to close." It must be midnight; the owl hoots loudly in the forest outside, a sign that the new day approaches. An almost deathlike hush prevails in Nature's endless expanses. Your friend is perhaps the only thinking being in a radius of miles hereabouts; and his thoughts—bright and keen—are of the forsaken fatherland, of his loved ones, and of many a good comrade.

Allen County, December, 1852

You know from my last letter how western Americans are best described: not so much simple as uncouth. Which is no exaggeration. For example, they eat all fruit half-ripe. In summer and fall their physicians are therefore very busy treating all kinds

²⁴ German intellectuals often looked down on American culture, and contention between Germans and Yankees was strong. See Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution*, 178-79; and Joseph Schafer, "Yankee and Teuton in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, VII (December, 1923), 161-63, 170.

This paragraph has been inserted here from volume one, page forty-four of the original.

²⁵ The major parties, Whigs and Democrats, held their conventions in Baltimore in June, 1852. Both adopted conservative platforms, favoring the Compromise of 1850 and strict construction of the Constitution, but opposing international alliances, direct taxation, and high tariffs. On internal improvements the Whigs opposed federal participation, whereas the Democrats favored a modest federal program. Richard C. Bain and Judith H. Parris, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records* (2d ed., Washington, D.C., 1973), 44-49; Robert A. Diamond *et al.*, eds., *National Party Platforms, 1831-1972* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 29-31. Therefore, the platforms were at least as favorable to the South as to the North, particularly on the Fugitive Slave Act and tariffs. Ddkd probably called the conventioners "humbuggers" because he felt their platforms compromised principles for the sake of party unity.

of dysentery that these Aesculapians noise abroad as cholera and for which they prescribe the most audacious medicines. Thus, at least in name, this malady shall not leave the West. With many Americans, since heavy tobacco-chewing has so blunted the taste that sour can scarcely be distinguished from sweet, the digestive system has probably been likewise desensitized, in some measure justifying the physicians' drastic measures. But many Americans who are not slaves to chewing tobacco are like savage Indians in their genuine loathing for quality food. The gentry or aristocracy around here are no exception. They claim for themselves the right to go about sometimes in outlandish dress because, with true German philistinism, they judge a stranger's worth by the cut of his coat or, at least, by the value of his hat, without regard for what is under the hat. In essence, city dwellers in the nearby commercial center of [Fort] Wayne are no different.

I have occasionally come in contact with them through a German doctor of jurisprudence. This capable young man learned the necessary English in a short time and, to Americans' amazement, passed the bar examination. He intended to earn his living as a lawyer. But to the American mind he was still not *smart* enough; for, here, intelligence and accomplishment lack clear definition and often amount to vulgarity and coarseness. Therefore the West has many lawyers who, with few exceptions, belong to a class of beasts whose natural history would fill many pages. Their ruthless avarice and callous greed are unmatched anywhere in the world, and their most disreputable counterparts in Prussia and Saxony are weak bunglers compared to these professional fiends. (I don't know whether your lawyers are any better in the East.) In short, this young J. D. had to give up trying to earn a living as a lawyer or, as they say here, trying "to make money." I visited him several times at his *boardinghouse* in Wayne and could observe that men and women of the city were as barbarous at table as were men and women of the country.

Yet it was Wayne's most fashionable boardinghouse, run by a colonel's widow from Virginia. Everything I saw confirmed what I had read in Germany about how bad American food is and how hastily Americans eat it. (Cooked squirrels, incidentally, which can't be told from pups or rats, seem to be a delicacy here.) Everything was gobbled as fast as possible, and one guest after another threw to the winds his credentials as a gentleman and got up and left. In barely twenty-five minutes the food had been bolted and not a word uttered. Together with vulgarity and unedifying table talk came a generous helping of hypocrisy: at table, temperance was given perfunctory approval; but many of those gentlemen went directly from there to the *grocer*, who was well paid to leave

open a back door and provide an appropriate back room. There they play a dishonest game or tickle their palates with the repulsive brew they call brandy.

But let us return to the shady forests, where even the American is also a more wholesome and natural person than the urban moneyed aristocracy. Still, even in the backwoods, an army of drones and charlatans strives to confound the humbler farmers with incredible sectarian humbug.

Not long ago, in the forest near my home, Methodists held a large assembly, a so-called "*camp meeting*." About three thousand made temporary quarters under trees for several days and, with continual singing and praying, worked themselves into a frenzy. If you have not witnessed these shenanigans, it is hard to imagine what they are like. I noticed especially how the clerical scoundrels moved young women of marriageable age, and older ones, to the most passionate exaltation, to partake of the Holy Spirit, and to enter heaven on earth: the threshold of divine bliss. Paroxysms of laughter and cataleptic trances frequently overcome these creatures—proof positive to the singing and praying congregation that the Holy Spirit has descended on them. Then they are transported on the wooden platform they call *heaven* where their preachers rave like maniacs and foam at the mouth until their voices degenerate to hoarse roaring, their teeth rattle, and their arms fall lifelessly at their sides. Whoever is moved to mount this heaven of boards enters the presence of the Holy Spirit and rants wildly.

There is usually no lack of carnal delights during this spiritual gathering. Food and drink appear at regular intervals.

For all their strong sectarian passion, people in these forests are nonetheless tolerant. In that respect, even cultivated Germans could look to them as models. Religious conditions are not a factor in how people behave as neighbors and citizens. Theft is almost unknown hereabouts. Our homes, storehouses, and barns have no security beyond a simple bolt. If we kill a deer or other large animal in the forest and cannot immediately bring it away with us, a hunting knife stuck in its chest holds it for us unconditionally. More likely than theft is assault and battery—for revenge or because of a quarrel or, more often, in a burst of anger. No one need fear, however, that the rights of a free man will be infringed through brutality or any other means. The backwoodsman loves freedom and equality above all else, and he will see them observed for friends and neighbors. This axiom passes from father to son and is inviolable around here.

On the other hand, ignorance—of formal learning, other countries, and world events—abounds. People here have the most peculiar notions of "*the old country*," as they call Europe. A very

capable farmer, basically an enlightened man, said to me: "I know all about kings. Kings don't wear hats like us folks; kings wear golden crowns and live in golden houses." And he began praising the low cost of American government. This honest farmer certainly knew nothing of the millions the leaders of this country annually swindle out of the American people.²⁶ There are individuals in the forests of Indiana who have never seen a uniformed soldier. People here occasionally pride themselves on their forefathers' deeds and in their pride look down on all immigrants, who, to be sure, all too often act ignorant and boorish to Americans. Still, the American is never at a loss. With axe, gun, and knife he will feed himself and, sooner or later, in accord with the principal characteristic of his nation, be intent on business and "making money." These skills lead him to overrate himself much too readily, and he judges everything foreign by his limited education and simpler circumstances.

Allen County, June, 1853

Commercialism and the mania for making money seem to have so gripped Americans that little else matters, and that they are less and less capable of other endeavor. Thus, for example, even in this thinly settled western region, a good Anglo-American farmer is as scarce as hen's teeth. For these calculating Yankees, awaiting the annual harvest is far too slow a way to make money, and to earn a living by working a farm is "*too much trouble*." Therefore, like a cat for a mouse, the Yankee waits for somebody to buy his farm. The quickest profit, however narrow, is always what he prefers; for he thus gets capital and the means to speculate. Always scheming, he breaks the blade of many a knife on the tough wood of his chair or table, from which he seems to whittle his thoughts. These farms, objects of speculation, betray at once to any knowledgeable person that they are nobody's permanent possession. Because the owner hopes daily for the Irishman or "*Dutchman*" who will buy the farm, and sometimes because of greed, sloth, or poverty, he often so neglects the farm except for planting. Yet, with American impudence, he will ask an almost unbelievable price. He justifies it with bombast that exceeds the bluster of landlords and small-time rural gentry in Germany. When at last, after significantly lowering the price, he finds a buyer and the farm is sold, he heads west with bag and baggage.

²⁶ Probably a reference to widespread political corruption. See Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (8 vols., New York, 1947), I, 165-70.

Long has he desired to move there, and there he hopes to find a true Eden; for America too has its share of fabulists whose publications (products of boneheaded American printers) disseminate to the ignorant the most incredible tales.

Until recently, old women, especially Germans, did a good business among Americans, telling fortunes and being otherwise clairvoyant. But since poltergeists have found their way to the western forests and into the pages of those silly papers, the popularity of female clairvoyants seems to have declined. Poltergeists have caused nonsense to take a different turn, and farmers around here have been made quite sick in the head. It is really too bad that this country is so poor in infamous spooky places—old castles, dilapidated monasteries, haunted houses, etc.—where these ghosts could find a more suitable home. Our fatherland, Germany, has an excess of them, and a pretty penny could be turned if they could be exported. At present, ghosts here have to be satisfied to do their tricks on posts and fences.

Still, ghosts have been put to good use as messengers. Here it may be a father, or there a sister, who wants to know whether son or brother has arrived safely in California and will return in one piece and loaded with treasure. Among farmers in this region have spread the most remarkable yarns about California and other faraway states and territories: Texas, Oregon, etc. In California, they say, one planting of wheat suffices for three years and produces three harvests. People believe you can reap there without sowing. In southern Texas, according to local fancy, cattle eat their fill in winter on grapes in the forests. People expect miracles in cattle-breeding there. Generally speaking, people here have as perverted a notion of the outlying parts of America as people in Germany often have of America as a whole.

But when these gullible Americans reach the land of their dreams, they soon realize that their hoped-for Cockaigne has not been found and that, for better or worse, they must again take up plow and axe, and plant and prepare for winter. Minds therefore beginning to clear, they return to their old occupations and keep the trusty "*rifle*" at their sides, to be ready should desirable game appear or a band of Indians lust after guns and scalps. Thousands, partly encouraged by such humbug, annually leave their homes in the older states and make room for immigrants. The decline in wild animals confirms the growth of immigration. Last winter we had fewer lynx, bear, etc. Not even deer are as frequent as before.

A different group of migrants, businessmen from the cities, as well as doctors and lawyers, follow these movements west with more mature purpose than that of the army of farmers that pre-

ceded them. Like wolves they track the trailblazers, after making over their former enterprises to new owners. Meanwhile, true wolves leave white settlement and attend their patrons, the Indians.

The businessmen begin migration with greater understanding and better equipment [than the first pioneers] and take ample supplies of everything they think will sell well in distant regions. Reaching spots they hope will favor mercantile operations, they set up gristmills and sawmills first, and build inns, general stores, and supply depots. Of course a parochial German entrepreneur will have trouble picturing such a business when he hears that a hundred miles, perhaps more, from the limits of civilization and in the middle of a primeval forest you come upon a motley collection of sheds and mug-shaped buildings of boards or logs, usually near a river where crude gristmills and sawmills have been erected. However, several days a week, in and around these buildings, a veritable fair is held.

Enter one of the buildings, distinguished by size and the sign "*Cheape Ware Store*," and find all necessities of the civilized world in jumbled piles. Beside soft soap and lumps of butter or lard are fine fabrics from Saxony's mills. Above barrels of flour, sugar, coffee, whiskey, syrup, etc., are piled boots and shoes of all kinds. Beams are hung with dresses, stockings, shawls, saddles, bridles, and caps. Among them are to be seen ironware and tinware, under whose weight the beams threaten to snap. There is even jewelry: the play of light on large bundles of glass beads draws covetous glances from Indians. In this spacious building's every corner are stacked all kinds of raw animal skins. Farmers and Indians move among them, passing the whiskey bottle and waiting their turns to barter pelts and be humbugged by the smart storekeeper. At the mills, logs and grain are unloaded and, armed with receipts of delivery, farmers hurry to the store to exchange them for groceries, shoes, and clothing. Usually in remote regions a city develops from such a settlement. I believe I do not exaggerate when I say that, in many a country town in Germany, not as much merchandise is to be found in all stores and shops combined as is sometimes available in the stock of one enterprising Yankee in a far corner of the West.

Such entrepreneurs are patron saints of slowly growing numbers of farmers in distant places. Farmers, often in a several days' journey to a store that supplies all their needs, bring hard-won fruits of labor and, one suspects, part with them at the lowest prices. The exchange is called "*trade*." Except Indians, nobody is more at the mercy of traders than the western farmer. Traders do business by lying and cheating, especially in grain. Still the

farmer must usually count himself lucky if the trader is kind enough to take his produce; the farmer has nowhere else to traffic unless he wants to travel a hundred miles to the first city on the edge of civilization. Drunken, negligent, and unfortunate farmers often mortgage property to traders and never get it back. Clever traders thus become land speculators, so notorious in the United States.

If the corner of the world where the newly rich storekeepers and land speculators reap a tidy profit becomes a state, their friends impose them as senators and representatives on the people of the region in some spectacle of a convention. The last elections showed clearly the nature of grassroots democracy in its typical American form. Traders and speculators elected to public office have gotten what they wanted and can now play even more successfully at growing rich—at public expense. Indeed, a representative from North Carolina said: “Money will put anything through Congress.” It is possible that America has always lacked disinterested politicians and diverse viewpoints on great issues, and that this sort of politics has led, not to progress, but to deterioration in statecraft; for it increasingly regresses to what governs America: the business of filling politicians’ pockets.

Were this description not true, it would be hard to imagine how, in Washington, the fathers of the country could so grossly represent ignorance and turpitude.²⁷ And it would be inexplicable how, without blushing, Americans dare praise the tin stars that flicker across their senatorial heaven. Americans hail those counterfeit luminaries as if they were the sun and the light of the world.²⁸

As an example of how an American in the West can attain public office, honor, and wisdom, take the career of Mr. H., now one of the most important land speculators around here.²⁹ When

²⁷ Probably a reference to legislative paralysis and, again, to graft, bribery, and other corruption in Congress. See *ibid.*, 163-70.

This paragraph has been inserted here from volume one, page forty-four of the original.

²⁸ Ddgd’s sarcasm probably expresses his contempt for policies that produced the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act in particular, and for southern (conservative and slave) power in the Senate—in Holman Hamilton’s words, “the stoutest remaining bastion of southern security.” Holman Hamilton, “Compromise of 1850,” in David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 264.

²⁹ Possibly Allen Hamilton, who was born in Ireland in 1798 and emigrated to Quebec in 1817. Arriving in Fort Wayne in 1823, Hamilton became deputy registrar of the land office but soon turned his attention toward the Indian trade. A commissioner for the extinguishment of the Miami title in Indiana in 1840, he also served as U.S. Indian agent to the Miamis from 1841 to 1844. Leon M. Gordon II, “The Red Man’s Retreat from Northern Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVI (March, 1950), 47; Rebecca A. Shepherd *et al.*, comps. and eds., *A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly*. Vol. I: 1816-1899 (Indianapolis, 1980), 161.

victory over the Miamis and Potawatomes ended Indian wars in the region, and a tract of land opened to white settlement, Mr. H. was a young *loafer*. He had an old silver watch and with its magical ticktock made the local Indian chief so desire the watch that he deeded Mr. H. two thousand acres of the best forest land for it, now part of the city of Wayne. An old watch, which he sold a drunken savage, began Mr. H.'s fortune—his passport to esteem and public office.

Another example is Mr. La S., a French Canadian.³⁰ He came to the area about ten years ago, crude and naive like most French Canadians. He married an Indian chief's widow, who soon died. Her heir, he got plenty of real estate and liquid assets. He, too, gained public office and honor through wealth. Last year the people elected him as a reform candidate, and he now sits in the legislature in Indianapolis, where he probably chews the head of his cane, a pastime he has seemed to practice with virtuosity every time I've had the good fortune to see him.

It happens equally often that incompetents succeed in a career that in Europe requires strict academic preparation. If a young American fails in business and entertains no prospect for success in western adventures, he packs his bags and goes to an institution of higher learning in one of the big cities. He need stay only a year or at most a year and a half, to master the humbug of law or medicine. When I arrived here four years ago, a young butcher lived in the nearby town. He was dissatisfied with his earnings. One day I heard he had closed his doors and headed for Cincinnati to become a doctor. The year had scarcely passed when the butcher returned with his medical degree. Thus empowered to kill people, he set up shop at once and, as would be expected, proved himself a successful dealer in burial plots. Doctors and lawyers supplement their income by dealing in land, grain, cattle, and hogs, *wholesale and retail*. Cash being scarce in the West, barter gives the business cliques latitude for lies and deceit.

Immigration is frequently handled by such companies, for it is known, a foreigner can win at law against an American only in the most favorable circumstances. Seldom is it thought worth the trouble to provide an interpreter in such court cases. On the

³⁰ Probably Francis D. Lasselle (1807-1864). Born in Monroe, Michigan, he moved to Indiana in 1825. A Democrat, Lasselle served in the Indiana House in 1853 and as Allen County commissioner, 1854-1858. His second wife Catherine (Pocongagua) was the daughter of Miami chief Jean B. Richardville and had been the widow of Francis LaFontaine (Topeah), civil chief of the Miami. Shepherd, *Indiana General Assembly*, I, 230; B. J. Griswold, *The Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana: A Review of Two Centuries of Occupation of the Region about the Head of the Maumee River* (2 vols., Chicago, 1917), I, 380.

other hand it cannot be denied that Germans display an incredible stupidity in such matters and often comfort themselves with: "That's the way it is in this country." Bearing in mind poor laws, extremely defective legal procedures, and (besides dishonesty) ignorance on the part of American lawyers, nobody will think exaggerated the observation that nowhere is a trial a greater evil than in America when the contending parties are a foreigner and an American.

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