

Karl-Ludwig Sand

by

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On the 22nd of March, 1819, about nine o'clock in the morning, a young man, some twenty-three or twenty-four years old, wearing the dress of a German student, which consists of a short frock-coat with silk braiding, tight trousers, and high boots, paused upon a little eminence that stands upon the road between Kaiserthal and Mannheim, at about three-quarters of the distance from the former town, and commands a view of the latter. Mannheim is seen rising calm and smiling amid gardens which once were ramparts, and which now surround and embrace it like a girdle of foliage and flowers. Having reached this spot, he lifted his cap, above the peak of which were embroidered three interlaced oak leaves in silver, and uncovering his brow, stood bareheaded for a moment to feel the fresh air that rose from the valley of the Neckar. At first sight his irregular features produced a strange impression; but before long the pallor of his face, deeply marked by smallpox, the infinite gentleness of his eyes, and the elegant framework of his long and flowing black hair, which grew in an admirable curve around a broad, high forehead, attracted towards him that emotion of sad sympathy to which we yield without inquiring its reason or dreaming of resistance. Though it was still early, he seemed already to have come some distance, for his boots were covered with dust; but no doubt he was nearing his destination, for, letting his cap drop, and hooking into his belt his long pipe, that inseparable companion of the German Borsch, he drew from his pocket a little note-book, and wrote in it with a pencil: "Left Wanheim at five in the morning, came in sight of Mannheim at a quarter-past nine." Then putting his note-book back into his pocket, he stood motionless for a moment, his lips moving as though in mental prayer, picked up his hat, and walked on again with a firm step towards Mannheim.

This young Student was Karl-Ludwig Sand, who was coming from Jena, by way of Frankfort and Darmstadt, in order to assassinate Kotzebue.

Now, as we are about to set before our readers one of those terrible actions for the true appreciation of which the conscience is the sole judge, they must allow us to make them fully acquainted with him whom kings regarded as an assassin, judges as a fanatic, and the youth of Germany as a hero. Charles Louis Sand was born on the 5th of October, 1795, at Wonsiedel, in the Fichtel Wald; he was the youngest son of Godfrey Christopher Sand, first president and councillor of justice to the King of Prussia, and of Dorothea Jane Wilhelmina Schapf, his wife. Besides two elder brothers, George, who entered upon a commercial career at St. Gall, and Fritz, who was an advocate in the Berlin court of appeal, he had an elder sister named Caroline, and a younger sister called Julia.

While still in the cradle he had been attacked by smallpox of the most malignant type. The virus having spread through all his body, laid bare his ribs, and almost ate away his skull. For several months he lay between life and death; but life at last gained the upper

hand. He remained weak and sickly, however, up to his seventh year, at which time a brain fever attacked him; and again put his life in danger. As a compensation, however, this fever, when it left him, seemed to carry away with it all vestiges of his former illness. From that moment his health and strength came into existence; but during these two long illnesses his education had remained very backward, and it was not until the age of eight that he could begin his elementary studies; moreover, his physical sufferings having retarded his intellectual development, he needed to work twice as hard as others to reach the same result.

Seeing the efforts that young Sand made, even while still quite a child, to conquer the defects of his organisation, Professor Salfranck, a learned and distinguished man, rector of the Hof gymnasium [college], conceived such an affection for him, that when, at a later time, he was appointed director of the gymnasium at Ratisbon, he could not part from his pupil, and took him with him. In this town, and at the age of eleven years, he gave the first proof of his courage and humanity. One day, when he was walking with some young friends, he heard cries for help, and ran in that direction: a little boy, eight or nine years old, had just fallen into a pond. Sand immediately, without regarding his best clothes, of which, however, he was very proud, sprang into the water, and, after unheard-of efforts for a child of his age, succeeded in bringing the drowning boy to land.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, Sand, who had become more active, skilful, and determined than many of his elders, often amused himself by giving battle to the lads of the town and of the neighbouring villages. The theatre of these childish conflicts, which in their pale innocence reflected the great battles that were at that time steeping Germany in blood, was generally a plain extending from the town of Wonsiedel to the mountain of St. Catherine, which had ruins at its top, and amid the ruins a tower in excellent preservation. Sand, who was one of the most eager fighters, seeing that his side had several times been defeated on account of its numerical inferiority, resolved, in order to make up for this drawback, to fortify the tower of St. Catherine, and to retire into it at the next battle if its issue proved unfavourable to him. He communicated this plan to his companions, who received it with enthusiasm. A week was spent, accordingly, in collecting all possible weapons of defence in the tower and in repairing its doors and stairs. These preparations were made so secretly that the army of the enemy had no knowledge of them.

Sunday came: the holidays were the days of battle. Whether because the boys were ashamed of having been beaten last time, or for some other reason, the band to which Sand belonged was even weaker than usual. Sure, however, of a means of retreat, he accepted battle, notwithstanding. The struggle was not a long one; the one party was too weak in numbers to make a prolonged resistance, and began to retire in the best order that could be maintained to St. Catherine's tower, which was reached before much damage had been felt. Having arrived there, some of the combatants ascended to the ramparts, and while the others defended themselves at the foot of the wall, began to shower stones and pebbles upon the conquerors. The latter, surprised at the new method of defence which was now for the first time adopted, retreated a little; the rest of the defenders took advantage of the moment to retire into the fortress and shut the

door. Great was the astonishment on the part of the besiegers: they had always seen that door broken down, and lo! all at once it was presenting to them a barrier which preserved the besieged from their blows. Three or four went off to find instruments with which to break it down and meanwhile the rest of the attacking force kept the garrison blockaded.

At the end of half an hour the messengers returned not only with levers and picks, but also with a considerable reinforcement composed of lads from the village to which they had been to fetch tools.

Then began the assault: Sand and his companions defended themselves desperately; but it was soon evident that, unless help came, the garrison would be forced to capitulate. It was proposed that they should draw lots, and that one of the besieged should be chosen, who in spite of the danger should leave the tower, make his way as best he might through the enemy's army, and go to summon the other lads of Wonsiedel, who had faint-heartedly remained at home. The tale of the peril in which their Comrades actually were, the disgrace of a surrender, which would fall upon all of them, would no doubt overcome their indolence and induce them to make a diversion that would allow the garrison to attempt sortie. This suggestion was adopted; but instead of leaving the decision to chance, Sand proposed himself as the messenger. As everybody knew his courage, his skill, and his lightness of foot, the proposition was unanimously accepted, and the new Decius prepared to execute his act of devotion. The deed was not free from danger: there were but two means of egress, one by way of the door, which would lead to the fugitive's falling immediately into the hands of the enemy; the other by jumping from a rampart so high that the enemy had not set a guard there. Sand without a moment's hesitation went to the rampart, where, always religious, even in his childish pleasures, he made a short prayer; then, without fear, without hesitation, with a confidence that was almost superhuman, he sprang to the ground: the distance was twenty-two feet. Sand flew instantly to Wonsiedel, and reached it, although the enemy had despatched their best runners in pursuit. Then the garrison, seeing the success of their enterprise, took fresh courage, and united their efforts against the besiegers, hoping everything from Sand's eloquence, which gave him a great influence over his young companions. And, indeed, in half an hour he was seen reappearing at the head of some thirty boys of his own age, armed with slings and crossbows. The besiegers, on the point of being attacked before and behind, recognised the disadvantage of their position and retreated. The victory remained with Sand's party, and all the honours of the day were his.

We have related this anecdote in detail, that our readers may understand from the character of the child what was that of the man. Besides, we shall see him develop, always calm and superior amid small events as amid large ones.

About the same time Sand escaped almost miraculously from two dangers. One day a hod full of plaster fell from a scaffold and broke at his feet. Another day the Prince of Coburg, who during the King of Prussia's stay at the baths of Alexander, was living in the house of Sand's parents, was galloping home with four horses when he came

suddenly upon young Karl in a gateway; he could not escape either on the right or the left, without running the risk of being crushed between the wall and the wheels, and the coachman could not, when going at such a pace, hold in his horses: Sand flung himself on his face, and the carriage passed over him without his receiving so much as a single scratch either from the horses or the wheels. From that moment many people regarded him as predestined, and said that the hand of God was upon him.

Meanwhile political events were developing themselves around the boy, and their seriousness made him a man before the age of manhood. Napoleon weighed upon Germany like another Sennacherib. Staps had tried to play the part of Mutius Scaevola, and had died a martyr. Sand was at Hof at that time, and was a student of the gymnasium of which his good tutor Salfranck was the head. He learned that the man whom he regarded as the antichrist was to come and review the troops in that town; he left it at once and went home to his parents, who asked him for what reason he had left the gymnasium.

"Because I could not have been in the same town with Napoleon," he answered, "without trying to kill him, and I do not feel my hand strong enough for that yet."

This happened in 1809; Sand was fourteen years old. Peace, which was signed on the 15th of October, gave Germany some respite, and allowed the young fanatic to resume his studies without being distracted by political considerations; but in 1811 he was occupied by them again, when he learned that the gymnasium was to be dissolved and its place taken by a primary school. To this the rector Salfranck was appointed as a teacher, but instead of the thousand florins which his former appointment brought him, the new one was worth only five hundred. Karl could not remain in a primary school where he could not continue his education; he wrote to his mother to announce this event and to tell her with what equanimity the old German philosopher had borne it. Here is the answer of Sand's mother; it will serve to show the character of the woman whose mighty heart never belied itself in the midst of the severest suffering; the answer bears the stamp of that German mysticism of which we have no idea in France:--

"MY DEAR KARL,--You could not have given me a more grievous piece of news than that of the event which has just fallen upon your tutor and father by adoption; nevertheless, terrible though it may be, do not doubt that he will resign himself to it, in order to give to the virtue of his pupils a great example of that submission which every subject owes to the king whom God has set over him. Furthermore, be well assured that in this world there is no other upright and well calculated policy than that which grows out of the old precept, 'Honour God, be just and fear not.' And reflect also that when injustice against the worthy becomes crying, the public voice makes itself heard, and uplifts those who are cast down.

"But if, contrary to all probability, this did not happen,--if God should impose this sublime probation upon the virtue of our friend, if the world were to disown him and Providence were to become to that, degree his debtor,--yet in that case there are, believe me, supreme compensations: all the things and all the events that occur around us and that

act upon us are but machines set in motion by a Higher Hand, so as to complete our education for a higher world, in which alone we shall take our true place. Apply yourself, therefore, my dear child, to watch over yourself unceasingly and always, so that you may not take great and fine isolated actions for real virtue, and may be ready every moment to do all that your duty may require of you. Fundamentally nothing is great, you see, and nothing small, when things are, looked at apart from one another, and it is only the putting of things together that produces the unity of evil or of good.

"Moreover, God only sends the trial to the heart where He has put strength, and the manner in which you tell me that your master has borne the misfortune that has befallen him is a fresh proof of this great and eternal truth. You must form yourself upon him, my dear child, and if you are obliged to leave Hof for Bamberg you must resign yourself to it courageously. Man has three educations: that which he receives from his parents, that which circumstances impose upon him, and lastly that which he gives himself; if that misfortune should occur, pray to God that you may yourself worthily complete that last education, the most important of all.

"I will give you as an example the life and conduct of my father, of whom you have not heard very much, for he died before you were born, but whose mind and likeness are reproduced in you only among all your brothers and sisters. The disastrous fire which reduced his native town to ashes destroyed his fortune and that of his relatives; grief at having lost everything--for the fire broke out in the next house to his--cost his father his life; and while his mother, who for six years had been stretched on a bed of pain, where horrible convulsions held her fast, supported her three little girls by the needlework that she did in the intervals of suffering, he went as a mere clerk into one of the leading mercantile houses of Augsburg, where his lively and yet even temper made him welcome; there he learned a calling, for which, however, he was not naturally adapted, and came back to the home of his birth with a pure and stainless heart, in order to be the support of his mother and his sisters.

"A man can do much when he wishes to do much: join your efforts to my prayers, and leave the rest in the hands of God."

The prediction of this Puritan woman was fulfilled: a little time afterwards rector Salfranck was appointed professor at Richebourg, whither Sand followed him; it was there that the events of 1813 found him. In the month of March he wrote to his mother:--

"I can scarcely, dear mother, express to you how calm and happy I begin to feel since I am permitted to believe in the enfranchisement of my country, of which I hear on every side as being so near at hand,--of that country which, in my faith in God, I see beforehand free and mighty, that country for whose happiness I would undergo the greatest sufferings, and even death. Take strength for this crisis. If by chance it should reach our good province, lift your eyes to the Almighty, then carry them back to beautiful rich nature. The goodness of God which preserved and protected so many men during the disastrous Thirty Years' War can do and will do now what it could and did then. As for me, I believe and hope."

Leipzig came to justify Sand's presentiments; then the year 1814 arrived, and he thought Germany free.

On the 10th of December in the same year he left Richebourg with this certificate from his master:--

"Karl Sand belongs to the small number of those elect young men who are distinguished at once by the gifts of the mind and the faculties of the soul; in application and work he surpasses all his fellow- students, and this fact explains his rapid progress in all the philosophical and philological sciences; in mathematics only there are still some further studies which he might pursue. The most affectionate wishes of his teacher follow him on his departure.

"J. A. KEYN,
"Rector, and master of the first class.
"Richebourg, Sept. 15, 1814"

But it was really the parents of Sand, and in particular his mother, who had prepared the fertile soil in which his teachers had sowed the seeds of learning; Sand knew this well, for at the moment of setting out for the university of Tubingen, where he was about to complete the theological studies necessary for becoming a pastor, as he desired to do, he wrote to them:--

"I confess that, like all my brothers and sisters, I owe to you that beautiful and great part of my education which I have seen to be lacking to most of those around me. Heaven alone can reward you by a conviction of having so nobly and grandly fulfilled your parental duties, amid many others."

After having paid a visit to his brother at St. Gall, Sand reached Tubingen, to which he had been principally attracted by the reputation of Eschenmayer; he spent that winter quietly, and no other incident befell than his admission into an association of Burschen, called the Teutonic; then came the year of 1815, and with it the terrible news that Napoleon had landed in the Gulf of Juan. Immediately all the youth of Germany able to bear arms gathered once more around the banners of 1813 and 1814. Sand followed the general example; but the action, which in others was an effect of enthusiasm, was in him the result of calm and deliberate resolution. He wrote to Wonsiedel on this occasion:--

"April 22, 1813

"MY DEAR PARENTS,--Until now you have found me submissive to your parental lessons and to the advice of my excellent masters; until now I have made efforts to render myself worthy of the education that God has sent me through you, and have applied myself to become capable of spreading the word of the Lord through my native land; and for this reason I can to-day declare to you sincerely the decision that I have taken, assured that as tender and affectionate parents you will calm yourselves, and as

German parents and patriots you will rather praise my resolution than seek to turn me from it.

"The country calls once more for help, and this time the call is addressed to me, too, for now I have courage and strength. It cast me a great inward struggle, believe me, to abstain when in 1813 she gave her first cry, and only the conviction held me back that thousands of others were then fighting and conquering for Germany, while I had to live far from the peaceful calling to which I was destined. Now it is a question of preserving our newly re-established liberty, which in so many places has already brought in so rich a harvest. The all-powerful and merciful Lord reserves for us this great trial, which will certainly be the last; it is for us, therefore, to show that we are worthy of the supreme gift which He has given us, and capable of upholding it with strength and firmness.

"The danger of the country has never been so great as it is now, that is why, among the youth of Germany, the strong should support the wavering, that all may rise together. Our brave brothers in the north are already assembling from all parts under their banners; the State of Wurtemberg is, proclaiming a general levy, and volunteers are coming in from every quarter, asking to die for their country. I consider it my duty, too, to fight for my country and for all the dear ones whom I love. If I were not profoundly convinced of this truth, I should not communicate my resolution to you; but my family is one that has a really German heart, and that would consider me as a coward and an unworthy son if I did not follow this impulse. I certainly feel the greatness of the sacrifice; it costs me something, believe me, to leave my beautiful studies and go to put myself under the orders of vulgar, uneducated people, but this only increases my courage in going to secure the liberty of my brothers; moreover, when once that liberty is secured, if God deigns to allow, I will return to carry them His word.

"I take leave, therefore, for a time of you, my most worthy parents, of my brothers, my sisters, and all who are dear to me. As, after mature deliberation, it seems the most suitable thing for me to serve with the Bavarians. I shall get myself enrolled, for as long as the war may last, with a company of that nation. Farewell, then; live happily; far away from you as I shall be, I shall follow your pious exhortations. In this new track I shall still I hope, remain pure before God, and I shall always try to walk in the path that rises above the things of earth and leads to those of heaven, and perhaps in this career the bliss of saving some souls from their fall may be reserved for me.

"Your dear image will always be about me; I will always have the Lord before my eyes and in my heart, so that I may endure joyfully the pains and fatigues of this holy war. Include me in your Prayers; God will send you the hope of better times to help you in bearing the unhappy time in which we now are. We cannot see one another again soon, unless we conquer; and if we should be conquered (which God forbid!), then my last wish, which I pray you, I conjure you, to fulfil, my last and supreme wish would be that you, my dear and deserving German relatives, should leave an enslaved country for some other not yet under the yoke.

"But why should we thus sadden one another's hearts? Is not our cause just and holy, and is not God just and holy? How then should we not be victors? You see that sometimes I doubt, so, in your letters, which I am impatiently expecting, have pity on me and do not alarm my soul, far in any case we shall meet again in another country, and that one will always be free and happy.

"I am, until death, your dutiful and grateful son,

"KARL SAND."

These two lines of Korner's were written as a postscript:--

"Perchance above our foeman lying dead
We may behold the star of liberty."

With this farewell to his parents, and with Korner's poems on his lips, Sand gave up his books, and on the 10th of May we find him in arms among the volunteer chasseurs enrolled under the command of Major Falkenhausen, who was at that time at Mannheim; here he found his second brother, who had preceded him, and they underwent all their drill together.

Though Sand was not accustomed to great bodily fatigues, he endured those of the campaign with surprising strength, refusing all the alleviations that his superiors tried to offer him; for he would allow no one to outdo him in the trouble that he took for the good of the country. On the march he invariably shared: anything that he possessed fraternally with his comrades, helping those who were weaker than himself to carry their burdens, and, at once priest and soldier, sustaining them by his words when he was powerless to do anything more.

On the 18th of June, at eight o'clock in the evening, he arrived upon the field of battle at Waterloo, On the 14th of July he entered Paris.

On the 18th of December, 1815, Karl Sand and his brother were back at Wonsiedel, to the great joy of their family. He spent the Christmas holidays and the end of the year with them, but his ardour for his new vacation did not allow him to remain longer, and on the 7th of January he reached Erlangen. Then, to make up for lost time, he resolved to subject his day to fixed and uniform rules, and to write down every evening what he had done since the morning. It is by the help of this journal that we are able to follow the young enthusiast, not only in all the actions of his life, but also in all the thoughts of his mind and all the hesitations of his conscience. In it we find his whole self, simple to naivete, enthusiastic to madness, gentle even to weakness towards others, severe even to asceticism towards himself. One of his great griefs was the expense that his education occasioned to his parents, and every useless and costly pleasure left a remorse in his heart. Thus, on the 9th of February 1816, he wrote:--

"I meant to go and visit my parents. Accordingly I went to the 'Commers-haus', and there I was much amused. N. and T. began upon me with the everlasting jokes about Wonsiedel; that went on until eleven o'clock. But afterwards N. and T. began to torment me to go to the wine-shop; I refused as long as I could. But as, at last, they seemed to think that it was from contempt of them that I would not go and drink a glass of Rhine wine with them, I did not dare resist longer. Unfortunately, they did not stop at Braunberger; and while my glass was still half full, N. ordered a bottle of champagne. When the first had disappeared, T. ordered a second; then, even before this second battle was drunk, both of them ordered a third in my name and in spite of me. I returned home quite giddy, and threw myself on the sofa, where I slept for about an hour, and only went to bed afterwards.

"Thus passed this shameful day, in which I have not thought enough of my kind and worthy parents, who are leading a poor and hard life, and in which I suffered myself to be led away by the example of people who have money into spending four florins--an expenditure which was useless, and which would have kept the whole family for two days. Pardon me, my God, pardon me, I beseech Thee, and receive the vow that I make never to fall into the same fault again. In future I will live even more abstemiously than I usually do, so as to repair the fatal traces in my poor cash-box of my extravagance, and not to be obliged to ask money of my mother before the day when she thinks of sending me some herself."

Then, at the very time when the poor young man reproaches himself as if with a crime with having spent four florins, one of his cousins, a widow, dies and leaves three orphan children. He runs immediately to carry the first consolations to the unhappy little creatures, entreats his mother to take charge of the youngest, and overjoyed at her answer, thanks her thus:--

"Far the very keen joy that you have given me by your letter, and for the very dear tone in which your soul speaks to me, bless you, O my mother! As I might have hoped and been sure, you have taken little Julius, and that fills me afresh with the deepest gratitude towards you, the rather that, in my constant trust in your goodness, I had already in her lifetime given our good little cousin the promise that you are fulfilling for me after her death."

About March, Sand, though he did not fall ill, had an indisposition that obliged him to go and take the waters; his mother happened at the time to be at the ironworks of Redwitz, some twelve or fifteen miles from Wonsiedel, where the mineral springs are found. Sand established himself there with his mother, and notwithstanding his desire to avoid interrupting his work, the time taken up by baths, by invitations to dinners, and even by the walks which his health required, disturbed the regularity of his usual existence and awakened his remorse. Thus we find these lines written in his journal for April 13th:

"Life, without some high aim towards which all thoughts and actions tend, is an empty desert: my day yesterday is a proof of this; I spent it with my own people, and that, of course, was a great pleasure to me; but how did I spend it? In continual eating, so that

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