

Remembering a Great Teacher

Henry Regnery

"He proved to be a born teacher. He quickly took it upon himself to educate the naïve, unsophisticated Midwesterner who had fallen into his hands, having sensed...some promise in that person being worth the effort....To have had such a friend was a great privilege."

THE MAN WHOM I regard as the teacher who had the most decisive and lasting influence on the course of my life was not, officially, a teacher at all but rather a warm friend and a persuasive guide. At the time we met, Hermann Schnitzler, an art historian from Germany, was doing graduate work at Harvard's Fogg Museum on an exchange program, and I was an undergraduate studying mathematics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From our first acquaintance, and throughout our long friendship, he was to give depth and direction to my rather haphazard educational efforts.

A Rhinelander, Schnitzler was of medium height and rather well filled out—he liked to eat and enjoyed Mosel wine, which he knew something about. Bespectacled and deliberate in speech, his English having a slight accent, fluent in French and Italian, he was gracious and outgoing. He was born in 1905 in Monschau, a beautiful, old town east of the Belgian border, some 40 kilometers south of Aachen. It had been founded in the Middle Ages, according to local tradition, by a returning Crusader. Located on a small river which was especially suitable for washing wool, Monschau attracted wool producers. Spinning and weaving were its principal occupations for many years. At one time it produced veils for Turkish women.

Members of his family had lived for generations in Monschau and Schnitzler's father, like his father before him, was a successful producer of woolen goods. Because there was no local secondary school, Schnitzler had been sent to the gymnasium in Aachen, where he lived with relatives. He was always proud that part of his education had been in the city of Charlemagne, who is much revered by the Germans as *Karl der Grosse*. Whenever the shrine of Charlemagne, one of the great relics of the Middle Ages in the cathedral of Aachen, is moved, Schnitzler told me, as it was during the last war to protect it from air raids, there is a formal inspection to make sure it is still intact. When such a ceremony took place after the last war, Schnitzler, as an expert in such matters, was asked to attend. It was a dreadfully hot and humid day, he said, not a breath of air stirring, and finally, as though Charlemagne himself had had enough, there was a great angry clap of thunder.

Continuing his education, Schnitzler had gone on to study in Berlin, Munich, and, for his doctorate, at the University of Bonn. Earlier, while a student at the University of Berlin in the 1920s, he told me, he received a telegram one day from his father, containing a single word, "*Pleite*," meaning "bankrupt," his father having gone under during the devastat-

ing inflation that had followed World War I.

To adjust himself to his new situation, Schnitzler, as many Germans have done under such circumstances, not the least of them Goethe, went off to Italy. On the train he got into a conversation with a fellow countryman who, as it turns out, was in the travel business. They got on well together and by the end of their journey, Schnitzler's new friend offered him a job conducting groups of German tourists to Italy. This provided him with the means to continue his studies.

He had hoped to become a concert pianist, but developed problems with his fingers. Although not sufficiently serious to prevent him from becoming an accomplished pianist, this condition made it impossible for him to pursue music as a professional career. He accordingly changed his field of study to the history of art and completed his doctorate at the University of Bonn under the much respected professor Paul Clemen. Because it was not possible in 1932 to find a suitable job in Germany, he managed to get an invitation for a year or two at the Fogg Museum at Harvard.

I was twenty-two-years old when I first met Hermann Schnitzler and our backgrounds could hardly have been more different. I had come from the Middle West, growing up in Hinsdale, a prosperous suburb of Chicago with a history, at that time, of less than a century. When I started school, Hinsdale still had many of the characteristics of a village, with two blacksmiths, a harness maker, and a wood-working shop. It was surrounded by woods, open fields, and farms.

The schools were not outstanding but I recall that, in the early grades, the stories we read came largely from Greek and Germanic mythology, which stimulated the interest and imagination of a boy. A teacher, going from school to school on foot, came several times a

week to teach us the notes of the scale and the rudiments of music. The high school I attended was rather small and not especially distinguished, but the director of school music was a good musician and teacher and I have him to thank for introducing me to what became an important aspect of my life. There was also an English teacher, during my last year, who greatly stimulated my interest in literature. Moreover, my father, a successful businessman, self-educated, had read widely as a young man, accumulating an excellent collection of books. Growing up I went through much of Dickens, Stevenson, and Twain. Later, while in high school, I also read much of Thomas Hardy.

After finishing high school in 1929, I went on to Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago to study engineering. It was, it will be remembered, the age of the engineer. I stayed there for two years, worked hard and did well, standing second in my class, but decided that engineering, and the whole world of technology, was not what I really wanted. An English teacher, the old-fashioned, serious teacher rather characteristic of the American college in those days, had urged me as part of his course to read and write a paper on *The Education of Henry Adams*. This book made a deep impression, which is still with me. That summer I pressed on to read Adams's *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* and the two volumes of his American history.

Another professor, detecting some talent in his field on my part, urged me to transfer to MIT and undertake the serious study of mathematics. This I did, but a year or two convinced me that I did not have the incentive or the talent to become a mathematician. But there were other courses that stirred my interest. Once again I was greatly influenced by an English professor who suggested that I read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels* in Thomas Carlyle's

beautiful translation, my knowledge of German being then inadequate. If I remember correctly, Goethe's advice to a young man was to follow his own inclinations, which at that age was exactly what I wanted to hear.

While attending MIT I met a German exchange student from Berlin who lived in the same dormitory I did. He was a good pianist, and since I myself played the cello, on Sunday mornings we would often play together. One day he suggested that he bring over a friend whom he thought I would enjoy meeting. That was my introduction to Hermann Schnitzler. He proved to be a born teacher. He quickly took it upon himself to educate the naïve, unsophisticated Midwesterner who had fallen into his hands, having sensed, it would seem, some promise in that person being worth the effort. He soon began a drastic educational program to make up for the deficiencies he observed in my previous training. We went through the Boston museums together, the Fine Arts, the Fogg, the Gardner, examining their treasures and what specifically distinguished them as great art. We also went to recitals and concerts, those of the Boston Symphony, among others.

My extracurricular education was wonderfully enriching, sharing Schnitzler's observations as a well-trained art historian and his musicianship. He was an accomplished pianist—I remember the passion with which he played Schumann's *Carnaval*. He was also at the time going through a Wagner-Richard Strauss period, which gave me the opportunity to hear piano arrangements of *Meistersinger*, *Tristan*, *Rosenkavalier* and much more. He also gave me books to read, among them Thomas Mann's *Tonto Kröger*, which he insisted I read in German, for me a slow process at that stage in my development. And we talked. Schnitzler was a great talker.

Such a stimulating time, coming upon my three years of hard going in math-

ematics and all that went with it, years rewarded with a degree and the realization that I was not destined to become a mathematician, was an intoxicating experience. Mindful of Goethe's admonition that a young man should follow his own inclinations, and inspired by my reading of Henry Adams, I tried to follow, as best I could in my limited way, in Adams's footsteps, which meant study at a German university. Schnitzler suggested that I go to Bonn for a year or two where he had studied, and this is what I eventually did.

II

I arrived in Germany in August 1934. I had no idea what to expect, and was fully prepared to find a country in a state of turmoil following the Roehm purge, when Hitler had a number of his close associates murdered for allegedly conspiring against him. I was relieved to find that all was outwardly calm and orderly.

Since my friend Schnitzler was then working in Koblenz, an old city at the confluence of the Mosel and the Rhine which had once been a fortified Roman town, I went directly there. He had suggested that I spend a month or two with him before the start of the university term, which would give me a chance to begin the arduous task of learning German and to see something of the country.

By this time Schnitzler had found a job making an inventory, as it was called, of the artistic monuments in the area around Koblenz. He was living in a large, comfortable Victorian house on a quiet street not far from the Rhine. The house belonged to a lady who took in roomers and he had found a room there for me also.

Schnitzler's assigned task was to catalogue any works of artistic or historic importance that he might find in the various villages and towns around Koblenz. For me, fresh from the prairies of the Midwest, it was a rewarding experience to follow along after a trained

historian tracking down the significant works of art in an area whose history went back to Caesar. It became a pleasant, intensely interesting time for me and an idyllic, if perhaps unrealistic, introduction to Germany. We spent our days measuring churches and taking pictures of sculpture, old houses, castles, and monasteries. The late summer and early fall were sunny and warm, the countryside lush, the grapes in the vineyards beginning to ripen. To an impressionable young man it all seemed incredibly beautiful and romantic.

Schnitzler, thorough scholar that he was, made a significant discovery at this time. He found a beautiful thirteenth-century figure of Saint Martin, high on the wall of a nineteenth-century church. Through careful research he traced its origin from the great Romanesque cathedral in Mainz. This find subsequently became famous as the "*Bassenheimer Reiter*."

We made innumerable tours of the countryside. I particularly remember a pleasant day exploring the ruins of one of the great medieval castles on the Rhine, Burg Rheinfels, a few kilometers south of Koblenz on the west bank of the river. It had been destroyed, as were many of the castles thereabouts, by the French army in the seventeenth century, but the ruins were of great interest and wonderfully picturesque. In its time it must have been a formidable place, occupying as it did a strategic situation dominating the Rhine valley.

One summer day Schnitzler suggested that we walk to Bad Ems, several kilometers east of Koblenz on the Lahn. We crossed the Rhine on the old pontoon bridge (since replaced by a great iron structure), went up the route past the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, enjoying a fine view of the Rhine Valley and of Koblenz, and then followed quiet back roads to Ems. The countryside was well cultivated and orderly, there were fruit

trees along the roadside, and the farmers were bringing in their crops, using wagons drawn by horses, oxen, or cows. It all reminded me of the description of a similar countryside in Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*.

An associate of Schnitzler went with us. He happened to be a member of the Nazi party and a Stormtrooper as well. In fact, he was a mild, scholarly, totally idealistic young man who was later to give up all political activity in disillusionment. But at that time he saw Hitler as the great hope for his country. Schnitzler, on the other hand, took a dim view of Hitler and all his works. They argued about it, but were firm friends and never became angry. On this occasion, at lunch, Schnitzler's associate ordered milk instead of beer. Turning to me in apparent disgust, Schnitzler said, "You can see what these people are doing to this country." Later, as we sat on a grassy hilltop, admiring the landscape stretched out before us, the Stormtrooper turned to me and said, "But if weren't for Hitler, you wouldn't have been able to come to Germany at all, because we would have been in the midst of a civil war." To which Schnitzler replied, "Yes, of course, because *he* would have started it."

A week or two later, Schnitzler suggested that we make a trip to Trier, some 150 kilometers west of Koblenz on the Mosel. It would be difficult to find a more suitable place for a young man from the Middle West to encounter the depth and variety of European culture. Caesar, we remember, had conquered the country west of the Rhine in 57 B.C. It did not take long for the Romans, great city builders that they were, to recognize the potential of the area of which Trier was to become the center as the site for a city. Whether they appreciated the fine wine that the Mosel hills would produce is not known, but they no doubt had an eye for such possibilities. In any case, the Roman city of Trier, which was given the proud name

of *Augusta Treverorum*, was founded in 14 B.C. With its favorable location on the Mosel in a fertile valley where the roads from Paris—one through Rheims, the other through Lyons—converged and offered convenient access to the fortified Roman cities on the Rhine from Cologne to Strasbourg, Trier was to grow rapidly.

It was Henry Adams, if I am not mistaken, who expressed the opinion that the age that saw the building of the great cathedrals marked the high point of European civilization. I have been privileged to visit many of the great European cathedrals—Notre Dame, Chartres, and Strasbourg in France; Salisbury, Wells, and Canterbury in England; Freiburg, Cologne, Munich, and Ulm in Germany—to mention only a few of the great achievements of the cathedral builders. But of all the cathedrals I have had the opportunity to visit, none made a deeper impression on me than the cathedral at Trier. Every style of church architecture is represented, from Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, to Baroque, all of them combined into a wonderfully coherent structure. Approaching the cathedral from the marketplace, one encounters the west façade, said to be one of the finest examples of eleventh-century architecture. It is 50 meters wide with two square towers surrounding the circular apse in the center. It is a classic example of eleventh-century architecture and gives the clear impression that the builders knew where they stood and believed in what they were doing.

After all this inspiring and instructive introduction to the Old World, the time came when it was necessary to get down to my work. Schnitzler had recommended the University of Bonn, where Nietzsche had studied, a great university, beautifully situated on the Rhine a few kilometers below Cologne, and the birthplace of Beethoven. By this time I had given up any idea of engineering or mathematics

and had decided that economics would be my field.

In October I registered for classes and found a room in a large, airy house in a pleasant section of Bonn, which was then still a quiet university town. My landlady, I soon discovered, was a direct descendant of a prominent, cultivated Bonn family that had befriended Beethoven and had played an important role in his life—a fact of which she was inordinately proud.

During the two years I spent in Germany, I heard all the music I could. The Cologne opera house, built around 1900 in Art Nouveau style, was not beautiful, but performances were of the highest quality. Besides performances of *Figaro*, I heard *Rosenkavalier*, *Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Freischütz*, among others.

In spring came the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, where one year I heard, besides much Beethoven, Bach's *Art of the Fugue*, played by the organist of the thirteenth-century Church of Saint Thomas in Leipzig. I went to Munich a number of times and particularly remember a performance of the Schubert "Trout Quintet" in the Renaissance court of the Royal Palace, the piano part performed by Elly Ney, and *Don Giovanni* in the eighteenth-century Cuvillies Theater conducted by Richard Strauss.

But the purest music I heard while in Germany was the singing of Gregorian chants by the monks of Maria Laach. I went there a number of times with my friend Schnitzler and later with other friends from the University. It is a beautiful, most impressive place, a twelfth-century Romanesque church on a strangely somber, isolated lake in the Eifel hills west of the Rhine. We would always go at least part of the way on foot, which seemed the appropriate way to approach such a place, and would spend the night at a small hotel near the monastery, coming back for more music the next day. The singing and the liturgy of the Mass in

that lovely, austere church were of unforgettable purity and dignity.

I was not the only one to benefit from Schnitzler's tutelage. As a student at the University of Munich and also in Bonn, he had become the leader of a group of students who looked to him for guidance and stimulation. Several remained friends for years afterwards, some of whom I came to know. One of them came from a family of landowners in Silesia. He invited Schnitzler to spend the Christmas holidays with his family. This was at the time of my first Christmas in Germany, 1934—and Hermann asked if I could be included in the invitation, to which the family kindly agreed. Schnitzler's friend, like him, was a student of the history of art, his particular interest being the German Romantic painters of whom Caspar-David Friedrich is probably the best known. He was to become the subject of an attractive book by Schnitzler's friend.

The family included three brothers, including the oldest, the art historian; one was preparing to take over the farm, and the youngest was being trained as a chemist. The father of the family had been a captain in the German army and was killed in World War I. The farm was managed by the mother, whom I came to know as a kind and outgoing lady who presided over her family and managed the farm with complete assurance and competence. She was a remarkable person whom my wife came to know well during the years after the war and admired as much as I did.

On the trip from Bonn to Silesia we used the opportunity to spend a few days in Dresden, which was still one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. During our stay we visited the art gallery, saw and admired its great treasures, including the Raphael Sistine Madonna and the great collection of Rubens. We were fortunate enough to hear a performance of one of the Strauss operas in the Opera House where most of the great works of

Richard Strauss had had their first performance, including *Rosenkavalier*.

We then traveled on to Silesia. We were met at the station by an open carriage drawn by two handsome horses, with a coachman on the box—no self-respecting Silesian landowner at that time, we were told, would have had a car. Not long after we arrived we were taken to the barn to see the stock, among which was an old mule with the letters USA branded on one side—a prisoner of war, apparently, which was spending his declining years on a Silesian farm. On Christmas Eve the farmhands came in to greet the lady of the house, who had a special word and gift for each. There was much singing and visiting, a Christmas service in the village church, and a goose for Christmas dinner and the traditional carp at New Year's Eve.

It was a great privilege for an American student to be invited to spend the holidays on a Silesian farm, all the more so when one considers that the life and traditions it represented—the well-cultivated and productive farms, the orderly villages and ancient towns—no longer exist, the entire German population of some three million having been driven out at the end of the war under the terms of Allied agreements.

Aside from such excursions and experiences, studies, of course, commanded most of my attention. While I was registered in the faculty of economics, the first semester was devoted largely to learning German. At that time there were a number of foreign students at Bonn, since the University offered an excellent course in German for them. Attendance brought most of us foreigners together on a regular basis and a number, mostly British and American, formed a little club. We bowled in the relaxed German fashion that seemed to consist largely of drinking beer to congratulate one another for a particularly lucky strike. We made bicycle trips and in the spring

several of us took the train to Trier, rented boats, and for several days paddled down the Mosel.

We also studied, of course, several of us managing to earn degrees, and I learned to speak and write quite presentable German. Even as foreign students, we were well aware of the Hitler regime, but it seemed far removed from us, and the University, so far as we could tell, remained intact and largely unaffected—still a center of disinterested scholarship. Although the ugly business of anti-Semitism had started at that time, life on the whole seemed quite normal. The cities were clean and orderly, much more so than those we came from. We were always courteously treated by professors and fellow students, and most of the people, indeed, nearly all I knew, were either indifferent to National Socialism or strongly opposed to it.

In the summer of 1936 I parted from my friend Schnitzler and the stimulating, privileged existence I had been leading. I came back home to a land of depression and drought, the Middle West looking particularly raw, flat, uninteresting, and the whole country itself seeming terribly dull and matter-of-fact.

III

Having made a start with economics, I thought I had better go on with it and in the fall I entered the Graduate School at Harvard. By far the most distinguished man in the Department of Economics at that time was Joseph Schumpeter, who was a product of the Austrian School, from which have come some of the outstanding and far-seeing economists of the century, among them Böhm-Bawerk, Menger, Mises, and Hayek.

Schumpeter gave the basic course in economic history in the Graduate School. There were not more than twenty-five students in his lecture course and to be one of them was a great privilege. He was not only a fine scholar but a consummate

lecturer. No narrow, academic economist, he was a broadly educated and cultivated man who viewed the world with a certain amused detachment, but saw it as a whole, and the limited place of economic considerations within it.

He had the quality which I think is an essential element of the true conservative, of being able to view the present in the long perspective of history, of seeing the present not as the end product or purpose of history, but as a link between the long past and the limitless future. One day in class there was some discussion of the relative productivity and therefore the desirability of various economic systems, and whether capitalism is more or less productive than socialism, to which Schumpeter remarked, "It all depends on what you want. If I had a choice, I would take the society that produced the cathedral at Chartres."

After three semesters at Harvard I had completed the course requirements for a Ph.D. and passed the general examination, which entitled me to an M.A. To get my doctorate I would have had to write a thesis, but since I had no intention of going into college teaching, I saw no reason to do it. In any case, I felt that it was about time I got out into the world and did something.

It was a confusing decade in which to start out to make one's way, with a world about to destroy itself by total war, and with the difficult decisions and the privations such conflict brings. Events in Germany had in the meanwhile gone from bad to worse and my friend Schnitzler was, I could only hope, somehow surviving. For myself, out of a variety of experiences, I was slowly coming to the idea of becoming a publisher.

In the first letter I received after the war from Schnitzler, which an American soldier had kindly forwarded to me, I learned he had become the director of the Schnüttgen Museum in Cologne, which contained one of the most impor-

tant collections of medieval art in Europe. During the war he had supervised the transfer of its treasures to a castle, Schloss Alfter, outside the city. After the war, he and his family moved to Alfter as had a number of others, including several prominent artists. Under Schnitzler's guidance, and with the help of others who were attracted to Alfter, it became a lively place, with lectures in the castle, recitals, book reviews, exhibitions, and discussions. The museum was to remain at the castle until a new building had been readied for it, the original museum, a former monastery, having been destroyed by Allied bombing.

In that first letter he strongly urged me to read a book written in German by Max Picard, a Swiss writer, with the title *Hitler in Our Selves*. This book, he said, would help to explain the catastrophe that had overtaken European civilization. I immediately wrote to the Swiss publisher, Eugen Rentsch in Zurich, asking for an option on American publication rights and a reading copy. I read the book at once and made up my mind that this would be on our first publication list.

Picard, who was a wise man, felt that the German catastrophe should be taken as a warning of what could happen to every modern society. He described the various features of modern life that were manifestations of its sickness, among them its discontinuity and fragmentation, its emptiness, destructiveness, materialism, and its lack of faith in a higher order. Modern man, he said, regards the environment not as the circumstance in which we live out our lives, but as enemy territory to be conquered and occupied; language, not as a gift of God to discover and to communicate truth, but as a means of propaganda to influence other people.

Having determined to go into publishing and to have the Picard book among my first efforts, I decided to go to Europe early in 1949, armed with letters of introduction and hopeful of meeting Picard

and his publisher, among others. After a pleasant meeting with Dr. Rentsch and his wife, who was as much a part of the publishing firm as he, I took the train to Tessin, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland where Picard had made his home since the early 1920s.

Dr. Picard was waiting for me in the station at Caslano. I had no difficulty distinguishing him in the small crowd of people waiting for the train. How he looked on that sunny fall day remains fixed in my memory. He gave the impression, as he stood there, of being immovable, rooted to the spot. He was rather short, solidly built, with a fringe of white hair around an otherwise bald head, intensely blue eyes, and a broad, ruddy, expressive face with strongly marked features. But there always seemed to me to be a distinct look of sadness in his eyes. He was most cordial and friendly but also reserved. We talked as we walked to his house; there was no barrier between us to be overcome and no need of small talk to establish a friendship. I felt that I had always known him and on future visits it seemed that there had been no break, that we simply took up where we left off, without interruption.

Max Picard came from a Jewish family that had lived in Switzerland for generations, but he himself was born in Baden, at the southern end of the Black Forest, in 1888. He studied medicine at Heidelberg, very successfully, it seemed, but gave up medical practice because, he said, its orientation had become too mechanistic, positivistic, Darwinistic. He moved to Tessin in the early 1920s for the sake of his wife's health, stayed on after her early death, and spent the rest of his life there. He was eventually converted to Catholicism, but he was more than either Christian or Jew; he was both, and above all a complete person. He was a wise man, had a deeply felt faith, and understood and appreciated, as few others do, the great works of the past. In a

letter to André Gide, Rilke called Picard "the most unpretentious, purest man I know." He was not a systematic philosopher, but a critical thinker—a critic of modern civilization and all that goes with it.

I am proud to say that Max Picard's *Hitler in Our Selves* was among the first that I published, for all the difficulties it involved, and that it was my friend Schnitzler who was responsible for calling my attention to his work.

IV

Looking back over the many years that have passed, I have tried to recall those times when, as a young man from the Middle West, seeking an education, I had the good fortune to encounter an older European, already advanced in learning, who was kind enough to share his Old

World culture with me. This involved not only his taste and talent in art and music, but also a profound appreciation of the intellectual facets of life. This friendship, which began in America, was to be further enriched, as I have recounted here, by time spent together in Germany. Despite the darkness that descended on Europe, despite the ravages of war and their aftermath, the culture and character that my friend Hermann Schnitzler represented not only survived but also were preserved, mostly through efforts of men like himself. He was a great friend and a great teacher who helped me to appreciate what the human spirit is capable of achieving, as well as helping to give direction and purpose to my life. To have had such a friend was a great privilege, for which I have every reason to be grateful.