

German Literature in Bessarabia 10—Christian Idler

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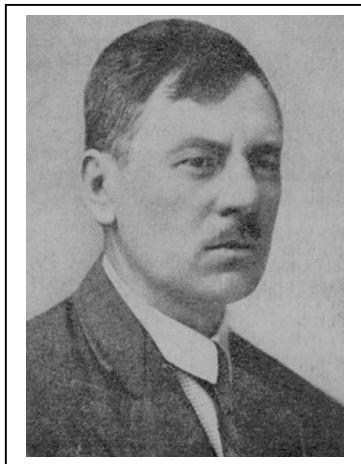
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[Translation Begins]

Christian Idler

His great-grandfather Gottlob Idler, who immigrated in 1834, came from Strümpfelbach, East Jurisdiction (*O/Amt*) Waiblingen, Kingdom of Württemberg. He himself was born on 5 March,



1893, in Lichtental as the son of a farmer. Lost his mother when he was 7 years old; at the age of 9, also his father. Entered the Werner School in 1907. At Christmas in 1912, he left and went to Moscow to take private courses in preparation for the school-leaving examination. For economic reasons, studies had to be interrupted after 1 year. 1914-1915—teacher candidate in the Jekaterinoslaw Gouvernement and temporarily in Paris and Lichtental. In the spring of 1914—Trip to the Crimea. 1915-1917—as a soldier on the Russian-Turkish Front. In 1918—married Hulda Weiß, daughter of Chr. Weiß, Paris. Children: Selma, Elfriede, Paul and Herbert. Finally, in 1918, into the teaching profession. 2 years in Beresina, 3 years in Paris, 1 year in Arzis, 5 years in Lichtental. Since 1929, in Tarutino. Here he also

worked for 3 years as an art teacher at the Girls' Secondary School.

Already in his childhood he was inspired by his fellow-countryman, the editor of the *Odessaer Zeitung*—he also wanted to become a newspaperman. During his school days—an habitual dreamer who soon makes verses, soon secretly tries again and again to represent by a drawing his teachers. First short story *At the Crossroads* (Am Kreuzwege) written in Moscow in 1913, which appeared condensed in 1922 in the *Heimatkalender*—*Sarata* under the title *Young People Land* (Jugendland). In the same year, his first poems and songs appeared in the *Volkskalender für Bessarabien*. Standing, just as Solo [Emanuel Schlechter], at the beginning of his own down-to-earth German Bessarabian poetical work, which emerged around that time. He published the following sketches and short stories in the *Deutschen Zeitung Bessarabiens* and in the German *Volkskalender*: — *The German Colonies in 1972* (Die d. Kolonien im Jahre 1972), — *The New Village Authority* (Der neue Dorfmächtige), — *Transplanted* (Verpflanzt), — *Bubi* (Bubi), — *Between Fear and Hope* (Zwischen Furcht und Hoffnung), — *Behind Devil's Mountain* (Hinter dem Teufelsberg), — *The Disagreeable Disturbance* (Die unliebsame Störung). If Idler can still be counted among these naturalistic schools, he shows himself standing on the ground of homeland art in his large, still unpublished work of fiction (*Roman*) — *Bells from the Homeland* (Glocken aus der Heimat) as a representative of the literature School of Neo-Romanticism.

Idler came to the field of art late, perhaps too late to achieve great things. Only after the war, at the age of 30, after having earned his course money for a year through reports on American newspapers, he came to, even if not an art academy, the Correspondence Course for Painting and Drawing Lessons, Berlin W. 9, Linkstraße 12. After preparing himself for a decade by means of distance learning, he appeared in 1933 in the *Deutscher Volkskalender* in cover pictures and monthly pictures for the first time with firmly established art to the public, apart from the cover of the *Deutscher Volkskalender für Bessarabien* published in 1930 and some caricatures of Solo's New Year's wishes.

In his youth, Idler also experimented in the area of drama. In 1912, since the Werner School had just begun with the theater arrangement with the performance of Russian fables and small excerpts from Russian dramas, Idler wrote the comedy *The Trial* (Der Prozeß) and, since there was no other possibility, performed it with his schoolmates in the Scherzinger house. — Again, here a modest start.

If a man loses his mother in early childhood, and even more so, if he also loses his father—it follows him all his life—this loss casts a shadow over his whole life—; the unsatisfied need of love—the longing for the deprived mother is transferred to everything—it becomes a longing for homeland, a longing for an idealized female figure, for a better ideal world, and finally the tremendous creative will of a dreamed-for world that we have on the horizon—which points to an unsatisfied longing for distant worlds. In the poem *At the Sources of the Euphrates* (An den Quellen des Euphrat) — this seeing-oneself according to the distant homeland comes to light in the most playful and tender way—in the poem *Night* (Nacht), the tremendous creative will, characteristic of Idler, in addition to aching pain of separation in desperate cycles (*Ringeln*), comes to light again in another form—such as in the little one. The short story *Bells from the Homeland* is nothing more than the sound of this eternally unsatisfied longing and the search for the homeland, for the eternally feminine and ultimately for the all too early lost mother...

So deepest suffering becomes the highest blessing and therefore only he who himself has gone through deep suffering, and has not become speechless and apathetic, can become a true poet and interpreter of human suffering on earth.

[Poetry and Stories by Christian Idler]

a) An den Quellen des Euphrat...

*Das Gräschen lauscht, wie 's Wasser rauscht
Vom Berg herab zum Tal hinab.
Der Wind, der streicht so lau und leicht
Darüber hin; kaum spür ich ihn...
Das Wasser rauscht, das Gräschen lauscht
und neigt sich g'schwind vor'm Frühlingwind,
als wär's zum Spaß, ins kühle Naß
sich flugs hinein im Sonnenschein...
Ich sitz' dabei und fühl' mich frei
in Lust und Licht; und doch auch nicht,
weil immerhin Soldat ich bin.
Das Wasser rauscht, das Gräschen lauscht.
Mich zieht es fort an jenen Ort
im Heimattal, da früher mal
im Monat Mai ich gänglich frei
am Bächlein saß, im weichen Gras,
so ganz allein im Sonnenschein...*

b) Nacht

*Am dunklen Himmel weder Mond noch Stern;
Der Jugend Morgenglanz, so fern, so fern.
Der Alltag freudlos, kalt und ohne Licht
Und, voll Verzagtheit, mir das Herz fast bricht.*

*Wo ist die Zeit, da ich begeistert war,
Da aufwärts strebt ein Jüngling wie ein Aar?
War alles nur ein eitler, leerer Wahn?
Ist wirklich alle Kraft und Zeit vertan?*

*Wenn nicht, dann noch einmal sich aufgerafft!
Der Jüngling stürmt, der Mann bedächtig schafft,
Auch wenn es kalt und dunkel um ihn her.
Begeistern sich ist leicht, doch schaffen schwer...*

a) At the Sources of the Euphrates...

The grass listens as the water rushes
from the mountain down to the valley.
The wind that blows so mild and light
in the meantime; I hardly feel it...
The water rushes, the tender grass listens
and bows rapidly before the spring wind,
as if it were for fun, into the cool wet
fluttering itself into the sunshine...
I sit there and feel free
in pleasure and light; and yet not,
because after all, I am a soldier.
The water rushes, the grass listens.
I am drawn away to that place
in the homeland valley, because once
in the month of May I completely free
sat by the brook, in the soft grass,
so all alone in the sunshine...

b) Night

In the dark sky neither moon nor star;
The early morning brightness, so far, so far.
Everyday life joyless, cold and without light
And, full of despair, my heart almost breaks.

Where is the time when I was thrilled,
A young man striving up like an eagle?
Was it all just a vain, empty delusion?
Is all energy and time really wasted?

If not, then pull yourself together again!
Youth storms, the man manages slowly,
Even if it is cold and dark around him.
To get excited is easy, but to create is hard...

c) Bubi. A Sketch

Bubi is an emerging human being of first around two years of age. Nevertheless, he finds his way in his circles of life and shows a wisdom and mastery of life for his day, like one who acquired intellect and wisdom, experience and wisdom in long detours. No one has ever taught or explained to him the wise saying: Early down and early up, extends your life—neither taught nor explained. And yet Bubi adheres strictly to it. He regularly goes to bed early and steps outside the front door at 6 o'clock in the morning to let himself, above all, be caressed by Mother (*Allmutter*) Sun and let himself be kissed and caressed completely from sleep. For some nervous and embittered adults, the mere observance of this rule of life would provide health and joy of living again.

Now Bubi sits down at the breakfast table and drinks his milk leisurely. He gives himself body and soul to this cause; no distraction — . As is well known, this is one of the most fundamental rules of the art of living, that the first requirement for success is total surrender to one's goal, business and enterprise; it is also wisely and practically written in health books that one should not read newspapers while eating, nor immediately after it, nor should one in any other way be distracted from the intake of food and its digestion, since thereby the stomach would be deprived of the blood supply necessary for this increased activity. I cannot assume, however, that said Bubi is by heredity "scientifically gifted", since it is due to neither his mother nor his father: Bubi is also still illiterate, so that the knowledge of this important rule of life cannot come to him from books. However, he obeys them and concentrates entirely on dealing with the matter that is on his agenda. And it almost seems to me that on my part the non-observance of this rule of life from childhood on would be the main motive of my general failure. But there is still one consolation left to me: It is said that Swabians usually only get the right mind at forty if they do not miss the right moment. So, when it comes to it, I want to be on guard day and night.

Meanwhile, Bubi has come to an end with his food intake. He climbs off the chair and says nicely: "Thank You" (*Dante*). — "You're welcome" (*Bitte*). He assigns great importance to external forms. This is also necessary for success in life, because otherwise it would not mean: With the hat in your hand, a person comes through the whole country. If, for example, there is no one there to answer his "thank you" with "you're welcome", then he himself says "Thank you—You're welcome." Bubi then lets the napkin be removed from his neck, his little nose (*Rüsselchen*) washed off, his play pants put on, and now goes to his day's work in full peace of mind — which is also of the greatest importance — in order to fill the long summer day.

What is particularly noteworthy and instructive also for many and some who are twenty times older, is the fact that he knows how to send himself in without grumbling, without complaining. If, for example, there is no pile of clay and no pile of sand on hand, Bubi simply builds his dams and ramparts from dust. At work itself, he is completely the master of the situation, does not allow himself to be tyrannized and upset by it, as happens to many an adult, who lets himself be rushed and chased by work until he collapses dead tired.

Furthermore, I have observed that even now, at the beginning of his third year of life, the little one all by himself regards and makes use of changes of work as recreation, a rule which I have first studied and discovered out of a thick heavy volume in the fourth year of my life.

For if Bubi is, for example, tired of sand and earthworks, he does not sit and be a slave to idleness, but he merely changes the mode of occupation and thereby uses the second kind of occupation as a recuperation from the first: he goes to the water and washes and scrubs all by himself, and immediately afterwards the well trough, well box, bucket, bowl, puppy and kitten and whatever else comes into his hands. Cleanliness is considered by him as a cardinal rule of life, which in turn could also serve as an example for some who still think awe-inspiringly about the little Bubi.

Bubi is also extremely orderly. He cleans everything up. Very special care he gives in this respect to the sewing kit of his mother, so that she often has to search for hours until she sees thimble, scissors, buttons, thread and the like again.

All keys that are left stuck on any door are pulled out and put away.

When he is finished with his clean-up work in the house, he goes into the yard to clean up there. He drags pieces of wood and stones here and there, so that he sweats a lot, and if you ask him sympathetically: — “What is Bubi doing?” — Then he responds briefly: — “He has to work a lot” — and trots on. If he can get hold of a hammer and nail box, then it is ensured that the soil gets its necessary iron content. However, Bubi is not yet a member of the agricultural association, too bad!

Bubi is a nature lover and researcher. If he gets into the garden, he is so happy about every flower that he desperately performs an Indian dance in front of it. He also carefully searches the garden for everything edible and takes care of everything that tastes good to him, weeding out and sparingly leaving all the weeds to the end.

He conducts his purely scientific research on insects and flowers, in the manner of the scholars shadowed by the doctor’s hat, so thoroughly dissecting and analyzing that nothing remains of either the insect in question or the flower. So completely scientific.

He also deals with the products of the toy industry and precision mechanics, if they come into his fingers.

In the afternoon, Bubi gets his daily light, pleasure, sunbathing and water bath. If now and then the water trickles down on him a little too fresh from the shower, he probably says unwillingly: “You nasty *Loller* [?], you, just you wait, nasty you!” But he also bears the inevitable with patience and dignity. This spring, misfortune had befallen him by falling off his gray pony, the rocking horse—after falling asleep on it, and breaking a collarbone. With stoic composure he endured his pain and moaned and sighed only now and then, so that it was only on the second or third day afterwards that the doctor was consulted, who then discovered the fracture and applied the necessary dressing. Now Bubi had for a long time only one little arm free for his abundant “work”. It was pleasing how the child sent himself into the inevitable, and I said to myself at the time: There, from this little kid (*Knirps*) you can learn how to bear the inevitable with dignity. After the bath, Bubi devotes two to three hours to sleep, after the “work” done in the morning.

After the afternoon nap, he visits or receives visits from people like him in the neighborhood. For him, the ambition is not yet the driving force to shine in company with this or that act. The only reason to move in the company of others is the instinct to imitate. He also seeks stimulation and sociability. Otherwise, in his third year of life, Bubi is still of that truly selfless objectivity against himself, which is peculiar only to very great geniuses. Just as they are able to regard themselves impartially as a third person, so also he, the little blond-curly Bubi. He speaks modestly of himself only in the third person: Bubi—he must work, Bubi—he wants to eat, Bubi—he wants to walk, and so forth. The dear, the miserable, eternal “I,” that is the root cause of all our quarrels and disagreements in almost everything we do—Bubi does not know it yet—and he is happy and content, like children in general. — “Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless ye become like children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” — Yes, yes, just think a little and you will find that there is no other possible way. So Bubi, in that he has looked for company, stepped out of the darkness into the light, from loneliness into the arena of life.

At first, nothing but joy, kindness and good peace. Soon, however, the generally valid natural law of diversity also comes into effect here in the crowd of children. Because of this law there are differences of opinion, most of all, as with adults, about mine and yours. Opinions also often differ on possibilities, means and ways to achieve this or that goal and it comes to lively debates, to quarrels and disputes and sometimes bitter fights. How then will Bubi be able to assert himself among the stronger and older in such cases, so as not to be defeated in the struggle of life from the outset?

Do not worry. He struggles through. He means like this: With the hat in the back of your neck, you can get through the whole republic. I have observed it repeatedly. If one or the other of his partners gets too close to his skin and he is now and then already on the ground, then he holds his hostile game with his short round arms and puts the bare teeth into action, and who screams and runs away with blue marks, that is not Bubi, but his initially seemingly superior opponent.

But this is a malicious, barbaric way of fighting, one will say. Maybe. However, I consider the way in which the highly civilized Europeans fight with poison gases to be much more barbaric and malicious.

When night comes with its stars, then gentle peace enters the little heart of Bubi and he looks admiringly up to the creator’s great works — “they are many, many lights!” ... and immediately afterwards Bubi asks the philosophical question: “What ignited the small lights?”

If the moon then comes out, rising from behind the mountains in the sky—then he simply wants to walk towards it, since he has not yet taken into account anything about the projected moon rocket. Yes, Bubi is fond of hiking, travelling, that also has to be said. Once he has sat down on his gray horse, he rides, boldly as an ocean plane, into the wide world, into a world of adventures—into the wonderful world of the child, which will always remain a mystery to us adults.

d) “The Night Watchmen Dream”

A short passage from the first great homeland short story of our German-Bessarabian people: *Bells from the Homeland*.

Somit wära m'r endlich soweit, daß m'r, so Gott will, bald a neua Kirch und au' neue Glocka ins Dorf kriagat. Mi' freut's. Mög der liawa Gott seinen Sega dazu schenka! Aellas weitere bleibt der Baukommissio' über. Jeder unterschreibt nu' noch d'r Gemeindespruch und ischt dann entlassa.

So we were finally at the point that we, God-willing, were soon to get a new church and also a new bell in the village. I am delighted. May dear God give his blessing to it! Everything else remains with the building committee. Everyone now signs the community decree and is then dismissed.

Etwa eine Stunde später saßen nur zwei Steppenheimer noch vor der Dorfkanzlei. An ihnen war die Reihe der Nachtwache. Auf ihre lange schlüsselförmigen Wachtspieße gebeugt, sahen sie schläfrig vor sich hin.

About an hour later, only two Steppe residents were still sitting in front of the village office. It was their turn for the night watch. Bent over their long key-shaped nightwatch food, they looked sleepily at what was before them.

Der eine war halb im Schlaf und sah im Geiste da drüben auf dem Kirchplatz, an stelle des alten Kirchleins mit dem verwitterten Strohdach und Storchennest, eine neue große prächtige mit ragendem Turme sich zum nächtlichen Himmel erheben. Aus lauter Silber, Gold und Glas war sie von unsichtbaren Wesen plötzlich aufgeführt worden. Vom Monde kamen über weiche silbergraue Wolkenschäfchen viele leichtbeschwingte Engelein dahergewallt und flogen sich haschend durch die hohen Schalllöcher und auf einmal: Bim! Bam! Bum! Fingen die großen neuen Glocken an zu läuten, daß es immerfort ihm um die Ohren brummte und summt.

One was half asleep and saw in the spirit over there on the church square, in place of the old little church with the weathered thatched roof and stork's nest, a new large magnificent [thing] with a projected tower rising to the night sky. Made of silver, gold and glass, it had suddenly been produced by invisible beings. From the moon, many light-winged angels came over soft silver gray cloud sheep and flew their way through the tall [bell-tower] sound-holes and suddenly: Bim! Bam! Bum! The big new bells began to ring so that there was a constantly rumbling and vibrating in his ears.

Tack! Flog ihm da etwas an den Kappenschild und er fuhr jäh zurück. — Auch so, 'n Brummkäfer isch's gwe'—murmelt er.

Tack! Something flew onto the shield of his cap and he pulled back abruptly. — I guess it must have been a humming beetle—he murmurs.

Der andere fragte: "Horch amol, Hannes, wia denkscht, wer'ne se au' a mol dia große neue Glocka auf den hoha Turm 'nufkriaga?"

The other asked: "Listen carefully, Hannes, what do you think, will they be able to get the big new bells up onto the tall tower?"

Des kann i dir au net saga, Jakob. Do driüwer werd sich wohl no' a mancher müsse Kopfzerbrecha macha von uns.

That I cannot tell you, Jakob. Over there, there must certainly be many brain-racking things to be made by us.

Aber wölla m'r uns net a bisle umlega. I bin arg schläfrig. D'r ganza Dag im Heumache, dort werd m'r müde.

But how about us laying down for a little bit. I am terribly tired. Spent the whole day making hay, it makes a person tired.

I au.

Me, too.

Bald waren in dem in blankem Mondschein schlafenden Dorfe auch die Nachtwächter eingeschlafen.

Soon, in the sleeping village, in bright moonlight, the night watchmen were also fast asleep.

Die sommernächtliche reiche Sternwelt zog unbegafft und unbehelligt ihre breite Himmelstraße dahin.

The summer-night, rich star world moved unnoticed and undisturbed along its wide sky path.

Nur die Grillen geigten und zirpten ihr eintönig Lied: Wir, wir wir, als ob nur sie allein noch auf der Welt gewesen wären.

Only the crickets fiddled and chirped their monotonous song: We, we we, as if they were the only ones still on the earth.

[Translation Ends]