

Berlin. Potsdamersstr. 39

Dec. 15th 05.

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My dear Kelly

It is far too early for a regular Xmas letter, but I want to make the best of circumstances, viz. of an obstinate cold that confines me to my room for the present with enough leisure for letter-writing, while I shall be in a hurry later on, supposing I can go out again next week, to do some shopping.

Fortunately I am not dependant on them with regard to you, for I ordered the new book by Frenssen some time ago with the special intention of sending it to you as a Xmas gift, since you seemed to have liked his former books. He is just now the most popular author in Northern Germany, extolled by reviews as the representative of that particular and most valuable branch of our race, and I suppose that he will figure on hundreds and thousands of "Weihnachts-Tischen" this year.

I wonder what you will think of this his

new production - provided you read it at all.
When I ordered it, I expected from what the
critics said to like it as well as Linn Ulbr and
Die Drei Gebrüder and to find moreover in it
the author's personal confession of his religious
standpoint, doubly interesting as he had been
a clergyman himself and now turns against
dogmas deliberately. This movement by the
eye is quite the signature of modern theology
in Germany - apparently the majority of
earnest people are aiming at a new form of
religion, retaining Christ as the central figure
but wishing to do away with the superstructure
of dogma by which his teaching and example
has been walked in through the centuries.
That of course is likewise Treussner's point of
view, but he proceeds in a curious and rather
arbitrary manner, reminding me a little of
Renan's "Vie de Jesus" but lacking that
author's philosophical and practical power.

As to the story itself, it has little merit and is
very deficient in composition. The hero is supposed
to devote his life to the discovery of this new
faith, the real "Hilligen lei" which originally
means "holy place" and happens to be the name
of the little town in which he is born and bred.
The types of his characters and the episodes of
the story are supposed to be very true to life and
rare; they are certainly peculiar, quite different
from any other writing, but I know too little
of that particular country and set of people
to judge of their lifelikeness. Some of the traits,
especially in the young women, strike me rather
disagreeably as both indelicate and untrue -
but who knows? Our modern life has brought
forth types of thought and feeling in the "new
women" of our own social sphere that I
find ~~myself~~ equally distasteful and even
incomprehensible. Have you heard of the ~~women~~

code of morals among a certain advanced set, that
is styled as "Di Rene Ethik" -? They are by
principle opposed to wedlock, or rather entirely
in favour of free relations among the sexes, and
these ideas are decidedly spreading as present into
regions one would have thought above them. A
great many of them are authors and artists of
a certain repute and moving among the "best
society". For instance Gabriele Reuser - the
woman who did and writes rather shameless
novels - is one of the leading members of the
Berlin Lyceum - Club. By the bye, I see and
I have become members likewise, partly to
oblige Miss Smalley who came to me last year
with an introduction from your aunt, Mrs Russell
Washington. I suppose you too are a member of
the London club, and perhaps we can meet there
when I go over to England next time. I hardly
frequent the Berlin club, having little time
and less sympathy to spare for that kind of social
stuff

A2/3 825 Q-V

Dec 15 / 05

intercourse, but I hope she may reap some benefits from her membership. She sent some of her jewellery to the Arts and Crafts exhibition of the London Club and the rest to the permanent exhibition of the Berlin Club.

It seems a very long time since I last heard from you, dear Kelly, but I hope for a long letter in the Xmas holidays. We are not looking forward to Xmas this year with anything like joyfulness. For one thing the weather has been too dreary all these last weeks, nothing but fogs, darkness and rain, and so many of my friends are seriously ill. Ellen's youngest step daughter, Louisa Gairdy (do you know her?) had to undergo a very dangerous operation of cancer and will have to lie at the hospital during the best part of January. The operation is said to have been quite successful and she is recovering all right, but this kind of disease is so apt to return after a certain lapse of time!

So we shall be quite a small party on Xmas eve, only we 3 sisters, and there will not be a very gay family-gathering either when we meet with the others. Of course the children are the redeeming feature in the Götty family and they do not seem to be much affected by apprehensions. I fancy you will have your family party at Rowden as usual and that it will grow in cheerfulness as it grows in numbers. Ellen is coming next Monday, we hope, to stay over January and February.

Before the term closes there will be a kind of festivity among the students, as last year and the year before last. They generally continue various pretty little performances of their own invention, asking all their professors and examiners for a gathering in our big hall, decorated by enormous Christmas-trees. I did quite

look forward to it as the one cheerful thing amidst a rather gloomy season, but I am afraid my cold will not allow me to attend it, though I shall be even more sorry to disappoint them than for my own sake. Goodbye now, dear Nelly, I find I have nothing more to tell, though I am not quite sure that I gave you an account of my trip to the Lago Maggiore last summer and of the sad events in my aunt's family, with whom I stayed for a fortnight. If not, I will just mention that my eldest cousin went out of her mind at the time and had to be taken to an asylum at Lucin, where she still is, though slightly improving. Of course that state of things is adding to my depression. Let us hope for a better New Year, as far as I am concerned and for a thoroughly

bright one to you.

She sends her love and I beg to be remembered
to those of your sisters who remember me

Ever yours affectionately

Alex^{is} van Cotten.

P. S.

Should you see your aunt
Russell Martinian in the
Havas holidays, please give
her my compliments. How
is she?