

Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

A German Girl in America - K 2075

Bender, Auguste

[S.l.], [1893?]

Chapter I

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-376942](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-376942)



A German Girl in America.
by
Augusta Bender.

Chapter I.

"My dear little friend tells me a great many nice things about you", said Mrs. Bittersweet, folding the letter and putting it upon the little table between the parlor windows. Then she lazily dropped upon the green sofa and invited the bashful looking girl to take an easy chair.

"You make quite a good impression, indeed," she continued, surveying the gracefully rounded figure with a scrutinising glance. "Your toilet, however, needs to be looked after, especially that shawl of yours. Why, nobody but old cooks and housekeepers wear Scotch plaid's now. The fashion has passed away years ago, and Philadelphia differs from New-York in many

points, especially in dress. Here everybody knows everybody - between Koch and Pine Streets, I mean, where the best and oldest families live. And it is into these families, if I understand the purport of this letter, that I am now to introduce you as a German teacher. Let us then, first of all, begin with your head-gear. Will you put your bonnet upon that music-stand and move a little toward the light, please! -

"But what was I going to say just now? Ah, yes! Bonnets here are not worn so large as yours, and rather turned down, especially by such young and rosy checked persons as you are, my little dove. We older women can be more daring in this respect. I myself wear a round hat - it is upon the piano, there--"

"The one with the red and blue feathers?" asked the young stranger in a tone of naïve astonishment.

k

"Precisely! the other belongs to my little daughter Minnie, whose acquaintance you will soon make, my Franklin! But once more to return to your toilet - your bow is much too light for you, too much of a baby - blue. Brown or grey would be more becoming to you; for here you ought to wear nothing but quaker colors."

"Is that also a quaker color?" the maiden asked with unconscious irony, pointing to the lady's scarlet and red silk dress trimmed with sky-blue.

"Not exactly, Miss Elsa, if you will permit me to call you so -" and the lady did not seem the least disconcerted by so much directness and simplicity - "with me it is quite another thing. I have been known here these last fifteen years, or so, and therefore can do a great many things which a little foreign maiden with such raven-

k

black eyes could not allow herself. Oh are they
green, those eyes of yours? Indeed, quite as
puzzling as the color of your hair - golden
gleams where the light falls on it, reddish
rather than chestnut - brown. People might
take you for a mermaid, dear, if you had not
this open, candid expression on your face. But
do not look so sorrowful and ^{do not} cast down your
eyes, as you cannot help having these striking
contrasts of color in your face and hair. All
we can do is to subdue them a little by art -
the art of the dressmaker and milliner."

After this lengthy delivery Mrs. Bittersweet
drew nearer the bewildered girl and tapping her
lightly on the shoulder, she once more resumed:

"I do not wish to make you sad, my
Dear Franklin, but only to give you instruc-
tions as your country-woman, in how
to win the good will of the Americans,

K

which, for a self-supporting woman, is of the utmost importance - until she finds the right sort of a husband, of course, which is only a question of time with you. There is, for example -- "

"Oh pray, Mrs. Bittersweet!" the girl interrupted in a beseeching tone, extending her hands deprecatingly. But the lady did not allow herself to be so easily thrown off her track, nor did her delicacy of feeling prompt her to be less plain spoken, although she could not help noticing the great confusion and deep blushes of her protégée.

"But perhaps you already have a lover in Germany," she continued, "or is it some fellow traveller who has laid siege to and captured your heart - No? Indeed not? Why, that is a misfortune to be easily remedied at your time of life; I think. It is true, I

[Faint, illegible handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

[Faint, illegible handwriting on the right edge of the page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]

myself was engaged at seventeen, but twenty one is not old, although it would be better for you if you could play and sing well - for there is nothing in the world so captivating as a good voice well trained, such as I once had. Indeed it is not even now so broken and worn out as the news-papers have represented it to be, and if I had not always had a little trouble here," and she pointed to her chest, "I might have become something more than an admired amateur."

Here the widow was interrupted by a violent attack of coughing, and when it was over she leaned back, exhausted, for a few seconds and closed her eyes.

Elsa gazed at her with pity and astonishment. It now became apparent to her that, in spite of her rapid talk and gestures, Mrs. Bittersweet was much older than she at first

K

[Faint, illegible handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

[Faint, illegible handwriting on the right edge of the page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]

appeared to the inexperienced eye of the German girl, and that her black curly hair and her florid cheeks betokened rather of art than of nature.

Mrs. Bittersweet, after having rested a little, seemed to recover. She mechanically adjusted the little curls and frizzles on her forehead, opened her eyes, and after heaving a deep sigh she continued:

"You must certainly be hungry, my dear Miss Elsa, but we shall have supper very soon, that is if Anna is not late to-day, or in bad humor. I wonder where Minnie is staying so long! The mad-cap cannot remain quietly at home for an hour or two. - But here she comes at last! Come in, come in, my child! Here is a young lady who has come all the way from Germany."

The "child," a head taller than her mother, emerged from the corridor.

K

[Faint, illegible handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

[Faint, illegible handwriting visible on the edge of the adjacent page.]

"What do I care for Germany?" she said with affected contempt, throwing her little brown felt-hat on an easy chair. "They know nothing of style over there. - No German I ever saw, was stylish, and never will be, I am sure! And you certainly would be like them, Mama, if you had not come here when you were a babe in your mother's arms."

The widow tittered at this compliment and complacently rubbed her ring-laden fingers.

"You must not carry your pert jokes too far, dear Minnie!" Thus saying, Mrs. Bitter sweet rose and stepped to the piano.

"My name is not Minnie, but Eugenie - the name of her who is to me still Empress of France and the most beautiful woman in Europe," the "child" replied, her dark eyes flashing with indignation.

"All right, Eugenie! All right, my little

K

[Faint, illegible handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

[Faint, illegible handwriting on the adjacent page.]

Daughter!" and the widow heaved a comical sigh. "But what will Miss Heller think of a girl of thirteen carrying on in such a manner!"

"Fifteen and a half," Minnie-Eugenie exclaimed defiantly. "Do you think that denying my age makes you look younger, or that young Mr. Allen comes on your account?"

"I shaw, Minnie — Eugenie, I meant to say — —"

"Never mind, Mama! You know I have no objection whatever to your being made love to by old Mr. Cornelius."

Mrs. Bittersweet colored a little and struck a few chords.

"Old Mr. Cornelius? ha, ha! A man of fifteen criticising one's age! — Why, Mr. Cornelius is only in his prime! as you soon may judge for yourself, my dear Miss Elsa! For Lisa has asked me especially

K

[Faint, illegible handwriting visible through the paper]

[Faint, illegible handwriting on the right edge of the page]

to introduce you into his family. "

"Is he a teacher?" Elsa asked, trying to feign an interest, she did not in the least feel.

"Teacher? No! He is the speaker of a philosophical-religious society, of which I am a member, although I do not understand him half the time. Nevertheless he is a very interesting man indeed, and being cautioned, I hope you will not let him steal your heart."

"By a man of -- of --"

"Forty-five years of age, at least!" Minnie Eugene broke in maliciously.

Elsa, with a smile, that crossed her serious face like a sunbeam, turned towards Mrs. Bittersweet, to thank her for her good will at all events. The widow's face assumed a thoughtful expression, as if she were deliberating whether it were not, after all, a foolish thing to give to herself and her maturing daughter

a rival possessed of such dangerous attractions. But her mood soon changed again and she returned to the subject of Mr. Cornelius.

"Never mind this mad-cap," she said. "Men do not grow old as rapidly as we poor women do; and Mr. Cornelius has been so very unfortunate in—ah!—him!—affairs of the heart and that sort of thing, that no one who knows what his experiences have been, can fail to pity and admire him. Yes, pity him for having wasted such a great heart upon—him! But come up stairs and let us look at your little room. You will not find the price of four dollars too high, I hope; and board you can get in the neighborhood for five dollars a week. But we can talk that over gradually, dear."

In saying she linked her arm in that of Edsa, who, half dazed, did not know what

to make of all she had heard and seen within the last half hour, especially in regard to Minnie-Eugenie who, just then, had taken off her little boots and, tossing them over Elsa's head into the back parlor, turned on her heels and told her mother to bring down her slippers.

Chapter II.

Half an hour later Elsa, in a dejected mood, was sitting in her little bed-room two flights up, looking out upon a timber yard surrounded by high glaring brick walls. So far as she could see in the twilight all the houses were of the same monotonous brown-red color which, since her arrival in Philadelphia, had so jarred upon her keen sense of beauty.

"Oh, that Lisha were here!" she sighed despondently. Then she rose as if trying to stifle her sobs by a courageous decision and,