

Autobiography of Louis Lingg

I beheld the light of this world on the 9th day of September, 1864, in Mannheim, Grand Duchy of Baden. In the middle ages Mannheim was a fortress, but she cast off her protective garments on the occasion of the third conquest by the French in 1678. At the present time Mannheim is, because of her prominent location as a centre of navigation and railway traffic, a flourishing city, with a population of about 65,000. The Rhine connects Mannheim with the North Sea, while the famous St. Gothard tunnel, which perforates the Alps, places here in direct railway conjunction with Switzerland and Italy.

My father, Friedrich Lingg, toiled in a lumber yard, and my mother kept a laundry, and thus they were enabled to provide for their modest wants, and the education of their children, myself and six-years' younger sister. At the age of five years I visited school, first—the so-called city or elementary school—and, later, after the general reorganization of the school system, at the time of the reunion of Germany, following the French-German war,⁹⁸ the mixed public school, so-called because children of all confessions are being admitted. Being cared for sufficiently by my parents, my earliest

youth was a happy one indeed, until a fatal accident which befell my father brought about such a change in our situation, that not very seldom want and hunger were questions in our family, and only the untiring efforts of my mother prevented their visits from becoming daily ones.

In his efforts to contribute to the wealth of his employer, a dealer, my father undertook a task which all of his fellow-slaves refused to do, to wit: he endeavored to replace a heavy log of oak which had slipped from the banks upon the frozen surface of the river Neckar, to the shore. In his zeal to accomplish the task, the treacherous icy crust gave way, and father disappeared below the ice in the waters of the river, and could be saved only after the most strenuous efforts and diligent search. This event destroyed his robust nature to such a degree that his working capacity was reduced by it very much. In consequence thereof, his noble employer saw the necessity of reducing the salary of the wage-slave, who had worked for him for twelve long years and whose health had been ruined in his zeal to further the interests of his master, and after a little while my father was discharged altogether from the employ of the lumber dealer, with the flimsy excuse that business had decreased, and that some of the hands were, therefore, superfluous. It is true, after a space of time father secured work suitable to his broken health, as a laborer in the employ of the municipal government, but the compensation for these services was so small that it sufficed hardly to satisfy his own personal living expenses.

Three years after the above described sad experience, since which period he had been in a state of stupidity, my father died. At the request of mother, the remains of father were dissected, and the physicians gave their opinion that the stupidity (or stupefaction) which had befell him had its origin in said fatal accident.

This was in the year of 1877. At this time I was thirteen and my sister seven years old, and at this age I received my first impressions of the prevailing unjust social institutions, i.e., the exploitation of men by men. The main circumstances which caused this reflection in my youthful mind were the experiences of our own family. It did

not escape my observation that the former employer of my father grew continually richer, despite the extravagant life he and his family were leading, whilst, on the other hand, my father, who had performed his respective part in creating the wealth his employer possessed, and who had sacrificed his all, which was his health, in his effort to serve his master, was cast aside like a worn-out tool which had fulfilled its mission and could now be spared.

Shortly, all the incidents which I have narrated before, implanted into my mind the seed of bitter hatred against the existing society, which feeling grew still more intense with my entrance into the industrial arena, and which has inspired me in my late agitation against capitalistic society with its barbarous and inhuman effects. The life which was allotted to us after my father's death, was only a further source to inflame my embitterment and hatred and we were, to a great extent, subjected to the freaks of our rich customers who were living in grand style, by creating debt everywhere. Sometimes, when were in need of money, my mother would send me on a tour of collections to our different customers, but I returned with empty hands and aching heart, very often with the message that Mrs. A. or B. had company, and therefore could not see me. Under such conditions I did not dare to tell mother that I was in want of clothing, and even school books which latter were conscientiously procured by her, but very often at the sacrifice of the last penny. But, in another respect, my mother would punish me severely whenever I committed the slightest offences, especially when followed by a material damage.

The natural consequence was that, instead of being possessed of genuine childlike love toward mother, I dreaded her in a certain degree, although or perhaps just because I was her confidential companion in all her griefs and sorrows, in the same ratio in which my mind became embittered toward, and probably repulsive to, all persons with whom I came in contact. This circumstance exercised also a disadvantageous influence upon my perfection, when I was given in tri-annual apprenticeship to a carpenter boss; and, as it is the custom in Germany that apprentices receive no compensation

for their work during the time they spend in learning the trade, but have to be supported by their parents, I was very much grieved that I could not aid in the support of mother, but, on the contrary, was still a burden to her. Very often mother reproached me because I had chosen the carpenter trade for the occupation of my life; she had hoped that I might secure a situation as copyist in some office, which would have had the advantage of enabling me to earn a little money from the beginning. But I stuck to my choice for various reasons. I deemed the knowledge of a distinct trade the best for me, because I was opposed to being dependent on one master, and especially because I had desire to travel, and see the world. So my mother, at last, renounced her objections, and yielded to my desire with the words: "A man's will is his heaven." After I had served my apprenticeship, which lasted from 1869 until 1882, and during which time my master had endeavored rather to make capital out of me than to interest himself in my thorough accomplishment, I took up the wanderer's staff in order that I might see the world, and to perfect the knowledge of my trade among other surroundings and deal with other people.

I first worked a short time in Strasbourg, province Alsace, and then in Fribourg, Baden, at which place I joined the working men's educational society, which organization was the remnants of the German National Working Men's Union, founded by the noted socialistic agitator Lassalle, in the year of 1863. Some branches of this organization are yet in existence, but almost exclusively in South Germany. In these clubs I received the first real information about the doctrines of socialism and communism—that is, so far as this was possible on account of this despicable exceptional laws against socialism which were enacted in 1878. At these places I profited, also, by practical communism, although it consisted only in the form of societies of consumption, or rather eating-associations. Certainly the fact that we were wage slaves, prejudiced our communistic experiment very much.

In the spring of 1883, I directed my steps to Switzerland, the splendid reputation of which country, with regard to its beautiful

landscapes and to its free institutions, had attracted my attention, and had aroused my admiration. I traveled through the major part and most beautiful portions of Switzerland on foot, and had therefore ample occasion, not only to enjoy the wondrous sceneries, but to study the life, peculiarities and customs of the people. Briefly described, I made the following traveling tours: From Basel I made my way to Bern. The road between these two points distinguishes itself only in the beginning, along the shores of the Rhine, from which region the wanderer has an aspect of the Black Forest of Baden. Leaving Bern in the rear, I traveled through those parts of the little republic, which, when beheld from the vicinity of Bern, leaves the impression upon the tourists of being even more wonderful than we can picture paradise to ourselves. The beauty of nature in this corner of the world is simply indescribable. The next village I came to was Fribourg. This village is located between a group of hills, and is cut through by the river Aar, whose waters wend their way through perhaps 120 feet high, and 200 feet wide, clefts in rocks. Romantic chain bridges allow the people to cross over the yawning abysses, with their rushing waters, from rock to rock. Next I admired the fascinating location of Lausanne, on the shores of the Geneva Lake.

From Lausanne one can overlook the city of Geneva on the beautiful lake, and also view Mont Blanc, whose top seems to reach as high as heaven. As I could obtain no work at any of these villages, I pursued my journey in a left backward direction and surmounted the Black Hills. The weather was bright, and had not been for the shady descent I would have suffered the heat very much. Having made my way over the mountains, I arrived at Thun, and thence, crossing the Thuner Lake, at Interlaken. This village lies at the foot of the Alps, with their everlasting snow, at intermissions changing with thriving meadows. This is the Eldorado of European tourists. From the top of the Brunig I enjoyed once more the whole view over the romantic upper country of Bern, and then I descended, and crossing the Vierwaldstadter Lake, went to Luzern. Next I worked my way to the mountains Pilatus and Rigi. To ascend, one

is subjected to much disagreeableness, but once on the top the pleasure of a most extraordinary view presents itself to a weary tourist, and is a more than generous compensation for his trouble. For the convenience of travelers a cog-wheel road leads up to the Rigi but as the use of this road is connected with considerable expense (the fare amounting to nine francs, or \$1.80), and as the benefits of the acquisitions of science in general mostly serve the wealthy people only, the son of the proletariat is bound to depend upon his legs in making the descent. Beyond Luzern, along the Vierwaldstadter Lake, extends the Axen road, which, in describing many curves and windings, offers various interesting sceneries. For instance, the famous Tell Plate, and vis-a-vis can be seen the Rutli, the historical nightly plotting places of the patriots of the Canton Uri Schwys and Unterwalden, who were fighting against the tyranny of Gessler.⁹⁹ In my opinion this landscape is one of the most beautiful in Switzerland, if not in whole Europe.

Zurich was the next place I visited. This city and its suburbs are also charming, being located on the shores of Lake Zurich; but as I had had occasion to admire more attractive displays of nature in Switzerland, this section did not impress me in an extraordinary manner. The same can be said of the village Winterthur and Frauenfeld. Near Aargau I ascended the flanks of the limestone containing Jura Mountains, from which point of view the half-decayed ancient castle of the Hapsburg dynasty is visible. The history of this castle aroused the thought within me that the victory in the contests between liberty-loving and for liberty-fighting people and tyrants must always ultimately be on the side of the oppressed people, as this has been the case in the struggle of the mountaineers of Switzerland against the Emperor Maximilian of Austria in the middle of the only silent deponent of ancient tyranny.

On my journey via Olten, Solothurn and Biel to Neufchatel and La Chaux-de-Fond I inspected nearly a score of ruins which were the remnants of the castle tyranny and serfdom that kept the people in slavery in past centuries. Some of these relics of barbarism rest peaceably amid fertile vineyards, to whose grapes I helped myself

whenever I longed for them, without paying tribute to the modern robbing knights, the capitalists or the vassals, the second hand "business men." Not being able to secure employment at the last mentioned place in the little republic, I returned from La Chaux-de-Fond to Bern, and at this place I enjoyed the hospitalities of several with whom I had been in personal connection and steady correspondence for some time. By this time my military duty in Germany (I ought to have reported for inspection in the "fatherland" before this) rendered my sojourn in Switzerland, according to a treaty between the two countries, illegal, and as I was too well known in Bern my stay in this place was but a brief one. I trusted my luck now for the second time, and with more success, in Zurich. After having worked here for nearly a year, I quitted this place, and worked a couple of weeks in Aargau. This was the terminating point of my career in Switzerland.

The picture which I have drawn in the foregoing account of my sojourn in Switzerland were only the bright sides of my experience. But, dear reader, you must not think that because Switzerland is a romantic and beautiful country it is also a land where grievances and miseries are unknown.

The unfavorable sides which were impressed upon me consisted of my disappointments and experiences with regard to freedom, political as well as economical. The first city where I succeeded in obtaining work was Bern. Here I joined the "General Working Men's Society," an organization which has a socialistic tendency, and has branches throughout Switzerland. Soon after my arrival in Bern, this organization split into two factions, one social democratic, and the other anarchistic, and, as at this time I was not familiar with the doctrines of socialism in such a degree as I am now, I did not know which course to take, and therefore, my participation in the labor movement was but humble.

In Luzern, the second town which furnished me with work, things were a little different. Feuds between the anarchistic and social democratic factions were on the calendar here also, and at first I was inclined neither to one nor the other. But then I took occasion to

study the matter of dispute with more zeal, and became more pronounced in my principles. The consideration of the circumstances that in Germany (the real battle ground of the German socialists being in Switzerland) the there existing exceptional laws against the socialistic movement prevented a peaceful, that is, lawful, agitation; and, secondly, that in Switzerland (toward its citizens the politically freest cultured state in the world) a peaceful social development is rendered impossible by its economical conditions, and, further, to a certain degree, also, by the illusion of a great many native born, that they are free (as in the United States) I became a social revolutionist, and shared the tactics of the anarchists. I approved of the propaganda of the deed, which was carried on very vigorously at this time, by, among others, Tellmacher and Kammerer whom I knew personally as honest and true working men—at Vienna, Frankfort, Strasbourg, etc. As the final aim of the socialistic movement at this time, I still possessed the idea of a socialistic-communistic State.

In the meantime, in the spring of 1884, the period had arrived when my stay in Switzerland was no longer possible, on account of my military duty. I had no desire to spend three of the best years of my youth in military service for the defence of throne, altar and money-bag, or even to satisfy the caprices of some crowned idiot in causing wholesale murders, commonly called wars. As the much-praised freedom of Switzerland had sunk so low that its government does not allow a German, who has evaded military service to remain within its borders, I was first expelled from the Canton Lucerne. This could by no means induce me to return to Germany, or, what would be the same thing, to walk into the barracks, and so I tried to make my living without the permission of the police, by visiting, incognito, cities like Bern, Biel, Neufchatel, La Chaux-de-Fond, Zurich, Aargau, Winterthur, St. Gallen, Frauenfeld and others, but in each instance my stay in those places lasted only so long as the police (by means of an existing law which compels all employers and boarding house keepers to report all new comers to the authorities) discovered my identity, and hunted me out of town.

This procedure did not give me much chance to participate in the labor movement to such a degree as I wished, or to the further study of the social questions; but on the other hand, it served only to strengthen my hatred against the capitalistic society, republican or monarchical in form. In Zurich, though, I succeeded, after a great deal of rambling, to keep my ground for nearly a year, this being attributable to the circumstance that this is a comparatively large town, and further, that I was as careful as possible.

In this period of party life, experiences led me to the conclusion that in a centralistic organization, with a representative system, all power and activity is concentrated in the hands of the few, thus inducing them to corruption and imperiousness, whilst the great masses are inclined to become indifferent and stupid.

In the spring of 1885 I was obliged to vacate the room which I had occupied hitherto, and by chance the police discovered that my house-boss had not reported me. I was ordered to leave the country, and, as this was the second general notice which was served upon me, the police hinted, not to be very slow about it, either, if I would prefer not to be transported over the frontier by gendarmes. Fortunately, a short time previous to this, I had received a letter from my mother, in which she informed me that she had induced my step-father (in 1885 my mother had married again) to advance to me the funds necessary to carry me to America, and, in order to forward the money to me, she requested a safe address, so I would be sure to get it. Now I intended to go unobserved to Basel on the German Swiss frontier, where I would await the money, thereby stopping on the road at Aargau for the purpose of bidding farewell to my friends, with whose assistance I had founded a socialistic section at that place. I did stop at Aargau, but, at the suggestion of my friends, did not go to Basel, but agreed to await the money from my step-father here and work in the meantime, although this was a dangerous proceeding on account of my being banished from Switzerland. At last the money arrived; however, it was just enough to pay the fare for the voyage. In Germany and Switzerland a carpenter-boss furnishes the tools for his working men, while I learned

from friends who had been in America that on the other side of the ocean the working men themselves were bound to keep their own tools. What I wanted, therefore, was enough means to buy tools on my arrival in America. I communicated my wish to my step-father and urged him to advance to me a sufficient sum of money for the purpose, but before an understanding could be reached the police detected my unlawful sojourn in Aargau, and without much ado, I started on my way to America, via Havre, France.

On a beautiful morning in the middle of July, 1885, I landed in New York, and from there came directly to Chicago. In order to procure employment I visited the buildings being constructed, and sought a position as carpenter, and immediately joined the "International Carpenters' and Joiners' Union."¹⁰⁰ When I put in my appearance at the place of action next morning my employer was quite astonished because I had no tools. Nevertheless, I started to work, the boss offering to furnish the necessary tools on condition that he should abstract 75 cents every day from my wages. Although this seemed to be a very big price for the use of an axe and saw, which were the only tools I needed for my work, I was bound to accept these terms, and when after some time my job was finished and I discharged, I was allowed to keep these two articles. How generous! Certainly my "noble boss" must have made an enormous profit on this bargain. After I had made some necessary additions to my tools, I was lucky enough to obtain employment as carpenter in a factory, which lasted till Thanksgiving Day of the same year. On this day myself and another member of the union were discharged because we had refused to fill the places of outside workers, who struck for, and later obtained, higher wages. In the meantime I had become very well known among the members of our union, and made many friends, among whom Seliger, (the false witness in the trial against anarchism),¹⁰¹ who secured work for me in the same factory in which he was employed, and who persuaded me to room and board with him. But this job did not last very long, either, and I had ample time during the winter to form an idea as to the "free institutions of this glorious country," which compel the working men to go idle and enjoy

the "free air" until some "boss" is in need of their services again.

My union had elected me as delegate to the "Central Labor Union" by this time, and being tired of my involuntary idleness, I devoted my leisure time in agitation for that body. It had long since been my opinion that in the present state of society the working classes could make no gain in the direction of improving their condition by means and ways of Trade Union, but, nevertheless, I participated in the organization of the latter, because I knew that the working men from their past and coming experiences and disappointments would soon become revolutionists. It was for the same reason that I accepted the office of organizer of the "International Carpenters and Joiners Union;" and I am proud to say that this union possesses more strength now—in spite of the general re-action of the trades union movement—than was the case at the time of its entrance into the eight-hour movement;¹⁰² which circumstance is the result of the recognition by the members that trades-unionism is only the means to further the design and not the object of its endeavor. The part I took in the organization of working men, and the fact that I held the opinion that the forces by which the workers are kept in subjugation must be retaliated by force, was sufficient for the guardians of this system of exploitation—Gary, Grinnell & Co.—to deem me a dangerous enemy to society, and one that ought to hang.

At present I am imprisoned behind iron bars, and can for pastime reflect on this "land of the free and home of the brave." Fortunately, those who still believe this land to be "free" are either fools or knaves. It is my conviction that every intelligent and upright man will admit that the United States of America are nowadays simply and purely the land of capitalistic tyranny and the home of the most brutal police despotism.

To waste words as regards our trial would be to carry water to the sea, so manifest were the machinations and hatred against us. As regards my alleged "moral guilt," which Judge Gary proclaimed in obedience to the wishes of the money aristocracy,¹⁰³ I will here ask the reader two questions: If the police had not unlawfully attacked the people at the Haymarket, would the bomb have been

thrown! If the police were not justified in violating the right of free assemblage, then would the unknown have had less desire and less right to throw the missile had I never existed!

Two factors in my history may be missing here; that relating to my boy love, and that which might shed light on my religious or non-religious views. Those who know best of my career in beautiful Switzerland have often guessed the motive of my frequent visits from Zurich to Bern. No doubt they were right in concluding that a daughter of the fabled Eve was in question.

There are many perhaps who may be curious to learn something of my non-religious convictions. Well, the population of my native city was to a great extent liberal. Not only this, but liberalism was, during the period of my school-years, nursed by the government, because of the "Kulturkampf."¹⁰⁴ So I can thank luck that our school teachers inculcated substantial knowledge instead of beliefs in something about which nobody knew anything and united learning could explain nothing. Accordingly, though used to deplore the fact, that taxes on labor prevailed, I rejoiced in the conviction that penalties and taxes on thought had ceased. I availed myself of the situation and was naturally a freethinker, a domain in which greater men than I have trod, and still greater than they will continue to walk.