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 Anna Mary Howitt Watts
 Excerpt
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LIFE OF DR. JUSTINUS KERNER.

CHAPTER I.

“I know him by that ample brow,
 Of sense and wit a mighty world ;
 That hair which yet defies the snow,
 In ringlets o'er his shoulders curled.

“Those classic traits, that noble mien,
 That mantle, grace in every fold,
 Suggesting that it hides within
 A form robust, of oak-like mould.”

(Lines written by Captain Medwin in 1849, underneath a Portrait of Justinus Kerner, drawn by the daughter-in-law of the latter.)

“The most prominent figure in the spiritual circle of Germany is Dr. Justinus Kerner.”—*Howitt's History of the Supernatural.*

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

THE labours of Dr. JUSTINUS KERNER in the investigation of Psychology are of so important and varied a character, that a sketch of his career cannot fail to be acceptable.

The following pages are condensed from a work which, in 1862, appeared in Germany.* Although they will not in every instance be found exclusively to refer to “spiritual experience,” they have nevertheless an important bearing upon Psychology, in so far as they detail the circumstances and describe the culture which led a most distinguished scientific man and poet to become an investigator of Animal-Magnetism, a student of the Science of Mind, and the author of a series of important works, which have become the

* “*Justinus Kerner und das Kernerhaus zu Weinsberg*,” von Aimé Reinhard. Tübingen, 1862.

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“hand-books,” more or less, of all who at the present day study Pneumatology.

Justinus Kerner was descended from a family of some importance in Carinthia. His father was an *Oberamtmann* (senior magistrate), residing in Ludwigsburg in Württemberg, and his mother the daughter of another *Amtmann*, of Lauffen-am-Neckar. *Oberamtmann* Kerner was a thoroughly educated government-official, exact in his office, and in his household full of affection for his family, loving intercourse with intellectual people, and highly esteemed both by his Prince and his fellow-citizens. The mother appears to have been of a very gentle and nervous temperament, filled with a deep love of her children, which amounted to a life-long anxiety, and from her, Kerner probably inherited his poetical temperament. Six children were born to this married pair; four sons and two daughters, all richly endowed with gifts of heart and of mind. Justinus was the youngest child; he was born at Ludwigsburg, on the 18th of September, 1786. His father being somewhat puzzled as to the choice of a name for the child, examined his family pictures, which extended back as far as the Reformation. His glance fell upon the portrait of his ancestor, Justinus Andreas, and after him the infant was called Justinus.

The first impressions which the child received of the external world, were those of splendour and festivity. Ludwigsburg, during the reign of “Duke Karl,” as he was called, was filled with a certain stately gaiety, and the house of the worthy and popular *Oberamtmann* appears to have been frequented by persons of social and intellectual distinction; amongst these we find mentioned the father of the poet Schiller.

Upon the sudden death of “Duke Karl,” young Justinus composed his first poem. In 1795 a great change occurred in the child’s life. *Oberamtmann* Kerner growing weary of the melancholy and monotony which had fallen upon Ludwigsburg after the Duke’s death, in spite of the entreaties of his friends and fellow-officials that he would remain amongst them,

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determined to remove from thence to the Abbey of Maulbronn, of which well-endowed domain he had become the bailiff.

This change of residence from the modern Ludwigsburg, with its straight, broad regular streets and avenues, its stately castle and busy town life, to the secluded valley where, surrounded by woods, vineyards and waters, lay within the enclosure of the Abbey walls, the medieval Cistercian Monastery, made naturally a deep impression on the susceptible nature of the child, and probably moulded it into certain marked forms which we shall recognise in the mature years of the Poet, Antiquarian, and Psychologist.

His education was carefully conducted during this period, the Abbey school affording excellent opportunities for the prosecution of his studies; but neither languages, geography, nor arithmetic, appear specially to have appealed to his intellect.

Nature alone absorbed his attention, and proffered him the food suited to his mental digestion. Working with his father in the garden, an intense desire for knowledge regarding the life of plants and animals awoke within him and became an unappeasable longing. The yards and gardens of the farm were gradually filled with animals, birds, insects and plants, which the young student had collected from the neighbourhood, and the life and growth of which provided him with an inexhaustible field of study. In many other directions were his keen powers of observation called forth. He is said, whilst placed by his father in a dark corner, as punishment for some boyish misdemeanour, to have discovered the principle of the *Camera Obscura*, with which, in later years, he delighted to experimentalise; and even in his childish sports to have approached the great discovery of the century—locomotion by steam. The phenomena of electricity, with which at this period he became acquainted, called forth, also, his deepest interest.

Together with this yearning after a knowledge of the kingdom of nature, awoke within him the power of poetical perception and expression. Forth from the mysterious

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twilight of the Abbey's halls and cloisters, where he was accustomed frequently to sit with his book for hours dreaming, rather than reading, would present themselves the romantic forms of long-forgotten days, coming forth into the golden light of his imagination, and evoking from the depth of his young poetical soul, the magical language of song. In these early verses, where we hear an ardent desire expressed that the writer might behold with the eyes of the body, as well as with those of the soul, visions of monks in their black and white garments, we recognise an anticipation of that belief in the reality of ghosts, which in later years became a portion of the creed of Justinus Kerner, the Seer of Weinsberg.

This charming season of self-development was not, however, destined to continue long. In order that he might receive more regular instruction, the young Justinus was removed into the house of a very strict tutor residing in the neighbourhood, where he was educated with the sons of his teacher.

French troops, however, marching from the Rhine to the frontiers of Würtemberg arrived in the town, and young Kerner was suddenly sent for home by his easily alarmed mother.

Within a short period, he was, upon the eve of his removal to a larger town, seized with a severe illness. This illness was attributed to his having out-grown his strength. It produced an extraordinary excitability of the nerves of the stomach which lasted almost an entire year. During this period he made great progress in his knowledge of the ancient languages and of natural history; but, strange to relate, he could not in botany accustom himself to the scientific classification and names of plants. He was in the habit of giving the names of his acquaintance and friends to flowers, and it is related of him, that even upon his examination at the University, he occasionally confused these self-given names with those of the Linnean system. It was at this time, that studying the metamorphoses of beetles and butterflies, the idea occurred to Kerner that as the chrysalis state exists between the grub and

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butterfly condition, a similar "middle-state" must also exist for man after death.

Throughout his illness, young Kerner, although treated according to the prescription of a physician of repute, rejected as much as possible, with an intense repugnance, the pills and mixtures ordered for him: no good results following this treatment Kerner's mother took him to Heilbronn for the advice of a very celebrated Russian doctor resident there, who prescribed a northern elixir of life, called "*Hopelpobel*," which was infallibly to cure him. The Kerner family attributed the youth's recovery to this wonderful draught, but he himself ascribed it to the celebrated magnetiser, Gmelin of Heilbronn, who meeting him one day upon the Wartberg made* several "passes" over him, after which he speedily recovered. Possibly, the excitability of the nerves of Kerner's stomach, the marked symptom of his ailment, not only rendered him peculiarly susceptible to these magnetic "passes," but in fact required magnetic treatment for its cure.

One thing is, however, certain; these "passes" given by this powerful and celebrated magnetiser awoke the magnetic life within young Justinus, and from that time forth he experienced presentiments and prophetic dreams; and out of this magnetic life proceeded his interests in, and love of the "night-side of nature," of Magnetism and Pneumatology. These dreams, which, according to his own belief, proceeded from the pit of his stomach, he was henceforth subject to throughout his life, and at times they became a perfect torment to him. It appears that his grandmother upon the father's side had, in advanced age, when she became blind, similar dreams. The first of these prophetic dreams which young Kerner experienced almost immediately after having been magnetised by Gmelin, has been preserved by him in one of his most popular works of fancy—his *Picture Book*. Amongst the figures of future friends beheld by him in this dream, was one which attracted him above all others, and in this figure

* Vide *Spiritual Magazine*, December, 1865, p. 545.

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he in course of years recognised his faithful life's companion, his beloved wife, "Rickele." And it is a noteworthy circumstance, that immediately upon his return to Maulbronn, new pupils arrived from the Abbey School of Denkendorf under the guidance of Professor Ehemann of that place—this Professor Ehemann was the father of "Rickele." This was the only time that Kerner beheld the father of his future wife—"Rickele" being an orphan when, in after years, he made her acquaintance.

About this period a great sorrow befell the Kerner family. The father died—expressing upon his death-bed deep anxiety regarding the future of his youngest son, whose education was as yet incomplete. The mother, whose means appear to have been very narrow after the death of her husband, removed with her younger children, Wilhelmine and Justinus, to Ludwigsburg, where they took up their abode in a very humble lodging. And now commenced for our future Poet-Physician experience in the school of adversity. It was suggested by one of the elder brothers, George, who had been drawn into the vortex of revolutionary excitement in Paris, and who was imbued with revolutionary ideas, that as it was good for every man to possess "a trade at his fingers' ends," it might be as well for Justinus to learn the handicraft of a carpenter; consequently with a carpenter he was placed, where he soon became very expert in the use of plane and saw, and was employed in the construction of ordinary furniture—especially, also, in the construction of *coffins*.

His brother, George, instructed him upon his last visit to his family, in another art—that of playing upon the jew's-harp, a little instrument over which Justinus attained a most marvellous power, drawing forth from it, even in his old age, the most ravishing and fairy-like strains.

The family do not, however, appear to have remained satisfied with the prospects of Justinus as a carpenter; for in 1802 we find that after he had been confirmed, a family council was held as to his future career, and it was proposed that, as the

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youth could draw, paint, and make rhymes, he should become a *confectioner*, seeing that thus already he was prepared to design and colour the sweetmeats, and also to write verses and mottoes for them! Kerner, however, thought otherwise; and through an appeal to one of his father's old friends and one of his old tutors, Professor Conz, of Tübingen, he was enabled to escape becoming a confectioner. Finally, it was arranged that he should become a merchant; and in order to commence his mercantile life, he was placed in the cloth-manufactory at Ludwigsburg.

This cloth factory was one of those fiscal experiments not uncommon in the time of the "Holy Roman Empire," and which, under the pretence of making money for the State, cost it instead a great deal. It was connected with an orphan house, a house-of-correction, and a mad-house.

Kerner already had learned to endure material privation; now he had to endure privation of the mind, heart, and soul. His first employment in the factory was to cut out linen bags, and then to sew up the cloth in them. Occasionally, as a variation in his occupation, he had to prepare pattern-cards, and to copy letters. Later came the measuring and packing of the cloth, and the marking the bales with the factory mark, to which, with his power of design, he usually added some ornament. He had also to clean out the indigo tubs, during which operation the blue dust coloured his face and hands, and even penetrated his clothes.

All these labours had to be performed amidst the degrading and unseemly gossip of the work-people with whom Justinus boarded and took his meals; whilst the screaming, cursing, and raging of the insane people confined near his chamber, robbed him of his rest at night.

The remarkable power which Kerner in later years evinced in his treatment of the insane, and the peculiar attraction which he always felt towards the subject of insanity, probably sprang from his innate genius; since we find him, whilst in the factory, visiting, through compassion, the mad people in their cells, and soothing them in a marvellous manner by his

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affectionate words, as well as by his performance upon the jew's-harp; whilst, on the contrary, he always felt a repugnance to intercourse with the criminals, from whom, in course of time, he learned the cloth-weaving.

His sole recreations during this weariful period were his Sunday's country walks, with friends older than himself, and with whom he pursued ever more ardently the study of natural history, whether in books or in the open fields; and the pursuit of poetry which he cultivated with intense devotion. He, indeed, at this period composed many volumes of verse, satirical as well as romantic in its character, all of which he destroyed in later years. He even began writing political poems in the vain hope of being condemned like Schubart to ten years' imprisonment; time to be at leisure to write poetry, though within the walls of a prison, appeared to him a perfectly heavenly life.

At length, after a two years' martyrdom, the time of his release arrived. His friends gave him no encouragement in his aspiration after a scientific career, but turning once more for assistance to his old friend at Tübingen, the excellent professor removed all difficulties from his path, by offering to receive him into his own house, and procuring for him one of the numerous scholarships of the Tübingen University.

In the autumn of 1804, on foot, and carrying his small possessions of books, and clothes upon his back, our young poet arrived one night at the gates of the little old-fashioned university town of Tübingen.

The moon was shining brightly, and the night was balmy, and feeling weary after his long day's tramp, he sat down to rest without the gates, and fell asleep. He dreamed whilst thus sleeping a singular prophetic-dream, which he has thus recorded in one of his beautiful romantic tales, entitled "The Homeless One" (*Die Heimathlosen*).

"Once," he writes; "with conscientious anxiety, I imposed upon myself the study of opinions and systems: but in order to awaken my better self, there soon appeared to me, each night for a long period, a stag with stork's feet, which placed

itself before me, and commanded me with imperious, scornful expressions to classify him according to Linnæus. Then I turned over, each time, greatly terrified in my dream, my compendiums and manuscripts, whilst the terrific monster stood before me: but still I could assign him no name. Not until I shook off from me the dust of the schools, and like a child, laid myself down in the lap of nature, did this loathsome apparition leave me.”

In this account, Kerner represents the dream as being repeated. It probably symbolised the perplexing studies awaiting him in his university career. When young Kerner awoke out of his strange sleep, he found that the soft night-breeze had wafted towards him, from an open window of the adjacent hospital, a prescription in the handwriting of the head-physician, Dr. Uhland, an uncle of the well-known poet, Ludwig Uhland. Until that moment Kerner had been undecided as to which branch of natural science he should devote himself. This prescription was received by him as a sign of guidance, and, full of fresh confidence, he entered the university-town, saying to himself, “Thou must become a physician.”

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CHAPTER II.

AT COLLEGE.

WITH Kerner's arrival at Tübingen commences a fresh chapter in his life. He was then eighteen, and remained four years at Tübingen, studying, besides his own special calling, medicine, in all its branches, various branches of natural science, classical literature, philology and *belles lettres*.

It might almost be regarded as a foreshadowing of Kerner's future career of usefulness, that the first patient confided to his exclusive care was an unfortunate poet, Frederick Hölderlin. Already become thoroughly insane, after his dismissal from the infirmary, he had been received by an excellent cabinet-maker, of the name of Zimmer, and lived in an old tower belonging to Zimmer upon the bank of the river Neckar. In this tower he dwelt above thirty years. This insane poet inhabiting his tower is strongly suggestive of a still more familiar city tower connected with Kerner's later life, in which a still more celebrated poet frequently dwelt, and upon whom also fell the night of madness—we mean the poet Lenau. It is as though, in some occult manner, this first tower had been in Kerner's life a foreshadowing of the second.

The insanity of Hölderlin was, with but rare exceptions, of an entirely harmless nature; and, although the unhappy man had but few thoroughly clear moments, intercourse was freely carried on by the students with him without danger, and indeed was even interesting. Thus once more in his youth did Kerner meet with an opportunity of familiarising himself with that mysterious malady, upon which he was destined in later life to bestow so much attention, and upon the origin of which he has thrown so much light.