

German Short Stories of the Early Nineteenth Century  
**Franz von Gaudy (1800-1840)**

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**The Loud Lament of Modern Men**

I boldly place my loud lament of modern men by the side of Jean Paul's secret one;<sup>1</sup> indeed, I go so far as to maintain that my Nenia<sup>2</sup> will resonate in a far greater number of manly hearts than that of blessed Richter, because not only spouses and lovers, as is the case with him, but the entire male sex – there are exceptions, of course – is visited and tormented by the Egyptian plague about which I shall raise my loud complaints.

To be precise, I am talking about barbers.

Two cases are conceivable to my mind: either the barber comes, or he does not come, and the one is almost as bad as the other. We shall however begin with the less ruinous case, the second one.

So the Satanic beard-dresser does not appear at the appointed hour. It is a long time since I commanded the shoe-blacker and the errand girl, the cadre of my standing army, to march out to capture the missing man and drag him before my unbarbered head-quarter. I have instructed my right wing, the invalid, to move along the right-hand side, and my left

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Richter (1763-1825), writer of humorous works, *Das heimliche Klaglied der jetzigen Männer* [The Secret Lament of Modern Men], 1801.

<sup>2</sup> Dirge or funeral ode, from the name of the Greek goddess of funerary lamentation.

wing, the maid, to move along the left-hand side, in order to outmanoeuvre the enemy and fall upon his flanks. Both wings return, their wings drooping, out of breath and with their mission unaccomplished. Although they executed my strategic dispositions precisely, and patrolled the broken terrain of the brandy-shops and the beer-houses with the utmost meticulousness, why, they even stormed the archenemy's fortified camp, the barber's room – they have not found him. Wounds to several faces, still bleeding or staunched with light sponge-tourniquets, testified to the irruptions of the day and the indefatigable activity of his spahis – “but Devil could we lay hands on him” – concludes the relation.

I cannot possibly be satisfied with this first, failed expedition. The hairs on my chin have sprouted the length of a finger since the day before yesterday, and the hour of the court-session will strike any moment.

I therefore transform my two ministering spirits into boar-hound and blood-hound, and set them once again on the trail of the fresh drops of blood which my noble game – such is the name given in hunting language to the boar, on account of its fangs or tusks – has struck from its customers, to catch it at last. In this way, in days of yore, were malefactors in Scotland tracked down by hounds specially trained for that purpose, and Bruce only just managed to disappoint his keen-nosed pursuers by wading through a stream. I further train them so that whoever first gives tongue on the right trail, or sees the huntable game, should lure his second over with a loud, huntsmanlike “Tally-ho!” so they can both seize the fleet-footed fugitive and blow the mort.

After half an hour is passed in truly hellish agonies of anticipation,

my two barber-whippers-in return, covered in sweat<sup>3</sup> and with tongues hanging far out, but, for a second time, without a bag. Apparently, the boarhound has not run like this since the Battle of Austerlitz, and the bloodhound has not felt such utter exhaustion since the last Reformation Ball.

I had intended to prepare the long-deferred defence of a coiner this morning. And everything got off to a good enough start. The coffee made by the ancillary turned out exceptionally well, while the second vehicle for the easy delivery of my thoughts, my pipe, draws superbly. I have already made so much progress in my written defence as to prove: the gravest crime committed by the accused was the minting of better money than the sovereign, a *delictum* which is to be met with only the most extraordinary punishment, that is, with a reward – then the fateful hour strikes when the barber customarily comes, and the entire machinery of my speech grinds to a halt. At first I rack my brains, where on earth can the Shaving Angel be, why does he not come on the stroke of the bell *today*? I hurriedly run through the sequence of possibilities which might just sugarcoat the beardmower's failure to materialise – and with that, my train of logical thought goes to the Devil. All the legal provisions to be applied have been sponged clean off the slate of my memory, and I no longer have even the Ten Commandments off by heart. Instead of my coiner's crime, which I have to exculpate, and his distress, I think only of my own, which lies nearer, and can only draw up in my mind the defence I shall have to conduct for myself when I walk into the courtroom without the stranger's, masked as a Swiss

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<sup>3</sup> Gaudy here adds: "which is not to be taken here in the hunting sense," for "schweißbedeckt" can also mean "covered in blood" when referring to the chase.

man in his 60s, and expose myself to the mockery of the councillors and my colleagues. But my distress reaches its peak after I have sent out my two catchpoles. I calculate from the watch which lies before me the number of minutes my bloodhounds could need to get on the heels of the sufficiently signaled and well-known culprit. Every pull of my host, the druggist's doorbell – and today, because it is market-day, there is a veritable storm being rung – makes me start convulsively, for in every one I see the announcement of the desired shaving-blade. However, it is not the barber, but only the hour of the session which approaches. I cannot write a single line, I run up and down in the room like a madman, and by means of the unchristian curses with which I seek to pass the time and drive away anger, I give my morality an incurable blow.

Ha! The barber's pouch, green with hope, waves over from the distance. A whole spring blossoms towards me from this sight. It's him! He is coming towards the house! Thank you, kind Providence, for this man! –

Death and damnation! He's slipping into my neighbour's house! Be calm, be calm, impatient heart of man, the neighbour can't take an eternity to be shaved. – Yes, he has been dispatched, the beard-scraper notices me and, greeting me up from the street, doffs his red, student-like cap under which he likes to cut a figure as a *studiosus medicinae* after putting down his strop – he enters the house – I can hear him already on the stairs.

But how shall I receive him?

If I pour out the full bowl of richly-deserved, long-nourished wrath over the rascal, then I risk his giving me an insolent answer, whereupon I

shall have no choice but to throw him out the door, and so I remain completely unshaven. Or the spawn of Hell temporarily bites back his malice and insidiously gives me a cut with the knife, so I shall have to walk into the courtroom with a thickly-plastered face, shall be regarded as a brawler and quarrel-picker by the President, shall be utterly unfit to be seen by ladies, and consequently today's ball has gone to the wind. – All of my limbs are trembling so badly with anger in any case that I shall almost have to concede the young man a middling cut. – The best course is for me to punish him through withering disdain, through biting derision. Let it be so. – With a sardonic, or rather a truly Mephistophelian smile, I address him: “Why, you are here really early today, my dear man, extraordinarily early!” – “Tell me about it,” the beast counters, as happy as a sandboy. “Well, next time I'll come later!” – Oh! It could drive one up the wall!

So the barber has arrived. And now the Second Station of the Cross for men begins, their second ordeal to become cacique, the second act of this lament.

A thousand times already have I made the futile attempt to persuade my facial-hair-liberator to first strop his knife, or whip up a lather, and only then request me to sit on the condemned-man's chair to patiently give my throat up to the mercy of his executioner's sword. All my words were spoken to the winds: before I have realised what is happening, the towel hangs from my neck according to rule, and my face is full of lather, and I dare not even look up while my tormenting spirit, with all the ease and contentment in the world, chooses his knife, strops it, and tests it on torn-out hair, or cheerfully splashes in the foam-basin like a duck in a pond.

And all this while a half-dozen minutes of my time go without thought to the Devil, and not a soul indemnifies me for the loss.

Jean Paul has observed that the most intelligent men never cut more ridiculous faces than while being shaved; I add to this, never more humble, more resigned. The barber may, in the most literal sense of the words, tweak the most intractable, pigheaded and mulish men by the nose with impunity – they are as little likely to say a dicky-bird as the most refractory galley-slaves when the iron-ring, the cravat, is fettered round their neck for their transportation. I would advise women to learn the art of shaving in order to make their conjugal-devils equally tame and patient, if these will only suffer themselves to sit still. But they are unlikely to do anything of the kind.

Now at any moment I may try, as far as it is possible, to unload and render harmless the spring-guns of coughs and sneezes by snorting and clearing my throat in advance: but who will guarantee me that I shall not, during the relation of some tragic catastrophe of recent occurrence – for my barber also has the bad habit of sweetening his work by giving a report on the news of the day and transplants novelties from house to house as bees do male pollen to female calyxes – who will guarantee me, I ask, that I shall not give a convulsive start while listening to a tale of a murder, and, running in suicidal manner into the cutting edge, be decapitated from the front like noblemen in Spain who killed their opponent in a duel, in honourable distinction from robbers and murderers? Who will guarantee me that? The young barber himself least of all. The fiend will no doubt even be delighted to add a new contribution to the records of his *chambre*

*ardente*, to have got the very latest piece of news through my involuntary suicide, and he will carry it hot from the press to his neighbour and around the town. – My habitually deprecating each and every narration before the soaping usually has just as little effect as my scolding him for it when the danger is past. As a rule, I am left with no choice but to hermetically seal my ears with cotton. Every sensible man will in any case likely put away golden watches, rings, and moneybags, before he lets the Redcloak<sup>4</sup> come at him, so as not to excite any pernicious longings, as surely as during a severe thunderstorm.

The barber now tightly clamps my nose between his thumb and forefinger and begins, as an engraver, to work his copperplate – that is, my face – with his scraping-iron, leaving the shaded parts, the side-whiskers, black, and smoothing and thinning the places on which light is to fall. The freshly sprouting rhizomes, on the other hand, he mows down without mercy – however, the tears which flow down to mingle with soap-lather are not for their loss, but rather from the severe pain which the blunt razor-pallasch<sup>5</sup> causes me. If my Angel of Death is in a compassionate mood, then “the lovely moistness of my eyes” may well soften him on occasion and he will reach for the sharper scythe – but most times he hard-heartedly ignores my barely suppressed sighs and sabres merrily away.

This feeling of physical suffering is joined by a mental one: namely, the fear that the barbaric barber’s sanguinary hand will not respect the bold

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<sup>4</sup> “Rothmäntler,” also a designation for a Croatian soldier in the Austrian army, particularly in the wars against the French Republic and the first French Empire.

<sup>5</sup> A broadsword used by heavy cavalry.

sweeps which my side-whiskers make from the tips of my ears to my mouth, but could rather, carried away by a desire for mighty deeds, rout this *bataillon sacré*<sup>6</sup> as well. And if he trims just  $\frac{1}{128}$  of an inch too much off the right side, then the beautiful symmetry of the arbours of my beard is lost. If he notices this disharmony, then he looks to restore it, and that at the cost of the left cheek; and in his anxiety, he cuts too low once again. Only an equally strong shaving off of the right side-whisker can, in his opinion, restore the balance. And so he trims now on the left, now on the right, shaves off now on this side, now on that one, like the monkey judge with the cheese he was to divide out,<sup>7</sup> until I have been deprived, in the twinkling of an eye, of my side-whiskers, the envy of my colleagues, which I have pulled at, which have brought me joy, for months.

These are the main points – not to speak of the millions of smaller ones – of my bill of indictment against barbers. But before which Bench am I to plead them? Which police system is powerful enough to put a stop to the outrages they constantly perpetrate with impunity, new day after new day, over which I and millions of men with me raise our voices in pitiful lament?

Only a few strictly orthodox Jews and those fortunate ones who know how to shave themselves have no need to join in my jeremiad. Lucky them!

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<sup>6</sup> The “Sacred Band” of Thebes, an elite fighting force comprising 150 pairs of male lovers formed in 378 B.C.

<sup>7</sup> Aesop’s Fable of ‘The Two Cats and the Monkey’ or ‘The Litigious Cats.’

## Speech at the Grave of the Musketeer Gottfried Gröbel

*Dear Listeners! Attention!*

I, Achaz Fridolin von Friedenshold, Captain and Commander of the highly praiseworthy 73rd Infantry Regiment, will and shall now, at the coffin of our deceased comrade, the musketeer Gottfried Gröbel – was that not his name, Sergeant?

“Yes, Captain!”

So – at the coffin of our deceased comrade, the musketeer Gottfried Gröbel, make a short and suitable speech before the Company under my command. – In the absence of the teaching profession, as the venerable preacher of our garrison has ridden out on the hunt today, I, a member of the military profession, shall take on his function. And I shall do so as well as any man jack! For now, when everything is required of an officer; now, when he must be able to survey an area and measure a pair of linen trousers, when he must be able to calculate the slope of a mountain and the  $\frac{2}{6}$  army bread, to which the Departed was entitled, and **with** which he absconded from me – now, I say, it can be required with equal justification that the officer also be capable of making a funeral address. And as we have all, often enough, delivered wedding speeches off the cuff, and, what is more, in the dark, to great effect, why not a funeral oration for once? – Besides, the Major instructed me to do this – and that is the most compelling reason. What our superior tells us to do, must be done! If he wants to ride me – I let myself be saddled; if he orders me to build steam engines – then I shall obey. Isn't that right, Sergeant?

“Yes, Captain!”

Well then. – So, to return to my topic and pay my last respects to the defunct musketeer, I shall divide this speech into three sections, in which

the First: talks about the real, or at least conceivable, merits of the Departed

the Second: treats generally of the happy situation of the common soldier, and

the Third: of the usefulness of the soldier in peacetime.

What has been said heretofore may serve as exordium.

So first of all, let me elucidate the real, or, at any rate, quite possible merits of the deceased musketeer Gottfried Gröbel! – A broad field for the flowery eloquence of a Boudaloue, Flechier, Massillon, of a Bossuet!<sup>8</sup> A field all the broader, as the named orators would have had absolute freedom, in the present case, to give free rein to their imagination and to be able, at the expense of the insignificant truth, to trumpet the praise of the rather obscure Departed! A subject all the more rewarding because nobody would have criticised or refuted their *Oraisons Funèbres*, for nobody, they themselves least of all, knew the dead man! – But, is it not the same for me? Do I not enjoy the same advantage? I too knew him only a little or not at all, and that little only from the particulars, which I now propose to read out. – Sergeant, the particulars!

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<sup>8</sup> All famous French preachers: Louis Bourdaloue (1632-1704), Jesuit priest; Esprit Flechier (1632-1710), Bishop of Nîmes; Jean-Baptiste Massillon (1663-1742), Bishop of Clermont; and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), Bishop of Meaux.

“Yes, Captain! –”

So listen, dear, subordinate Company: Name: Gottfried Gröbel.  
Place of Birth: Lower-Floriansdorf near Deckelstadt. Denomination:  
Protestant. Age: 21 years, 4 months. Length of service: 1 year, 7 months.  
Record of Punishments: 8 days Strict Detention on suspicion of theft.  
Remarks: None.

But little material, dear, money-spinning Company, is presented by this biographical sketch of the Deceased; few points of support on which to set an oratorical monument to his pale shell. But the thinking man does not scorn even this little; and like the historian, to whom just as little, and probably even less, is given about the lives of mighty princes, and who nevertheless compiles weighty volumes about their actual or at least conceivable merits, he clothes the skinny skeleton with the shining adornment of eloquence, so that the flabbergasted listener supposes he beholds the glorifying halo already about the head of the ex-musket-bearer, and tweaks his nose to check if he is waking or dreaming! – I do not say, as some outdated poet – who has rightly fallen into disrepute long since – said of his hero: “He lived, took a wife, and died!”<sup>9</sup> – Our immortalised Gröbel will not be so lightly brushed aside. Listen:

Gottfried Gröbel, the legitimate or illegitimate son of an honest, upstanding day-labourer, bordar, cotter, cottager, or some scoundrel of that ilk, saw the light of day in rural quiet and seclusion in the small village of Lower-Floriansdorf. Without cares, without sorrow, far from the pompous

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<sup>9</sup> Christian Furchtegott Gellert (1715-69), in his poem ‘Der Greis’ (The Ancient).

bustle of the world and its deceitful lustre, far from parades and academic disputations, from congresses and *Déjeuners dansants*,<sup>10</sup> the earliest days of his childhood flowed quietly along like a brook over silver sand. –

Sergeant, was that not finely said?

“Yes, Captain!”

But just as the brook soon pours its water into the muddy duckpond, and then sets the mighty mill-gearing in motion, so was the Departed very soon snatched from the innocent dream of childhood to plunge into the mire of practical life, and, as an active citizen of the state, to step up and be stepped on. He entered the university of the village in the sixth year of his life, and in the short days of winter – for in summer, our student had to herd geese – in the short space of time which lay between the beforementioned sixth and the fourteenth years of his life, in this time which flowed swiftly into the Sea of Eternity with beatings and kneelings on peas, taking horses to water and stealing apples, he came so far, by means of a lively perceptiveness and penetrating mental powers directed to practical purposes, as to be able to comprehend the beautifully substantive line of the Our Father, “Give us our daily bread!” and commit it to memory, and he learnt, moreover, to paint his three crosses in place of his name in the most exquisite manner. A distinct possibility, when one considers how often his heterogeneous occupations snatched him from the embraces of the Pierian Sisters.<sup>11</sup>

A new phase of his life began with his fourteenth year: he was

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<sup>10</sup> Luncheons taken in the afternoon with or followed by dancing.

<sup>11</sup> The Pierides, here meaning: The Muses.

confirmed. With an enormous bouquet in his buttonhole, wearing the newly galashed boots of his worthy father, envied by many a village oaf, gaped at by the frieze-skirted nymphs of the parish fields, he edified the community with his reverential silence, worthy of a Trappist, at every question the pastor asked him. The pedantic servant of the Lord would have liked to subject him to a new course, a new examination, but he was forced to confirm him on account of his stature, which later won him an honourable place as an actual member of the first rank of my Company. Now Gottlieb could walk defiantly into the tavern with a long pipe and tassels on it embroidered with pearls, could drink his schnaps as well as an old man, could join in thrashings and be thrashed, could creep towards the upper and the lower maidservants and be shut up in the doghole – in short, he was a made man and enjoyed all the privileges of a citizen of the state. – All of this through the magic formula of confirmation. Now let anyone deny the powerful influence of religion on the people if they can! – But let, dear listeners, a Chaulieu or a Gessner, a Thomson or a Johann Heinrich Voss<sup>12</sup> describe for you the rural joys and sorrows of our too-soon-deceased comrade – I have better things to do. With impatience I overlook five years in the life of a farmhand, and hurry to that glorious point in time when the Departed was snatched from the arms of his sobbing family by the call into the Temple of Fame, by the voice of the Provincial Assembly; where he was raised from the private class to the rank of an officer of the

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<sup>12</sup> Guillaume Amfrye de Chaulieu (1639-1720), French poet; Salomon Gessner (1730-1788), Swiss painter and poet famous for his pastoral *Idylls*; James Thomson (1700-1748), Scottish poet, author of *The Seasons*; Johann Heinrich Voss (1751-1826), German poet known primarily for his translations of Homer.

state, he exchanged the linen toga for the sagum,<sup>13</sup> the dungfork for the musket, in a word: when he became a soldier.

“Forget, there, gentle pleas and dulcet cries,

Where swords and lances flash before your eyes”<sup>14</sup>

sang the conscripted recruit, and accompanied by the blessings and the rough kiss of his unbarbered father, moistened by the tears of his Anna Marie, and with a well-stuffed knapsack, he marched into the beforementioned Temple of Fame, whose divinity he swore, in a loudly audible voice – after the various sub-sub-divisions of mild, medium, and strict detention and their modifications had been explained to him – to serve truly and honestly on water and on land, by day and by night.

Now, reverent listeners, now comes the moment when the encomiast may leave the mist-shrouded realm of legend and draw from the pure spring of self-experience. From that point on, as you know, the Deceased lived and moved before my eyes and those of his Corporal. Every day I caught sight of him, every day I greeted him at drill and at roll-call – Oh, I feel as if I can see him still! – Sergeant, did Gröbel not have read hair?

“Yes, Captain!”

Quite right. – O glorified Redhead, around whose head a brilliant halo shone, barely concealed by his shako, even during his lifetime – look down upon us from your celestial barracks and rejoice in the just

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<sup>13</sup> A Roman soldier’s cloak.

<sup>14</sup> From the aria ‘Non più andrai’ in Mozart’s *Le nozze de Figaro* [The Marriage of Figaro], in which Cherubino, the amorous teenage page, has to join the army.

recognition of your worth! – It required only a few months, only a few digs to the ribs, to train you, you good man, into a complete soldier! You did, it was true, frequently confuse left and right, but you quickly mastered the “About turn!” and gave the most splendid hopes of your good conduct in the event of a campaign breaking out! Should I extol it, should I censure it, his quickly acquired knack of eating army bread? Oh! it was a blessed presentiment which made you recite the line, “Give us our daily bread” so reverently in your childhood years: it has become yours, the besought bread, the finest – bread from the Prince! and almost daily! Yes, you were the man “who never ate his bread in tears!” of whom Goethe sings.<sup>15</sup> You were and remained in the happiest apathy of the true philosopher, even the hundredth or thousandth time you practised parade-step, even the hundredth of thousandth time you polished your leathers! Your mind resolutely remained in its harmonic equilibrium, which nothing could bring to falter! *You never thought!* O superb, unique soldier! What praise could possibly be equal to this? What higher praise could be conceived? – No, it is exhaustive! – Oh certainly, dear, glorified One, you could have made it to actual Lance Corporal, possibly even higher – if inexorable Death had not drummed your funeral march and prematurely snatched you way from the Temple of Posthumous Fame and a grieving world! –

But Patroclus had to die too and he was more than you!<sup>16</sup> – Sergeant, was that not finely said?

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<sup>15</sup> The harpist’s song, “Wer nie sein Brot mit Thränen aß,” in the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship), 1795.

<sup>16</sup> Homer’s *Iliad*, Book 21, said by Achilles to Prince Lycaon.

“Yes, Captain!”

Touched to the heart, and covering with the cloak of Christian love the bothersome event which brought down upon the deceased the beforementioned eight days’ detention, I stride to the second part of my speech, to let drop a few fitting, insistent words in your doubting ears: ‘On the truly happy situation of the common soldier,’ at the grave of Musketeer Gröbel, who was taken away from this happiness all too soon.

Is further proof needed, dear Company, is further proof of your happiness needed, I ask, than a mere glance at me and you? than a glance at the tenderest harmony, the mutual love, the most moving sacrifices which we bring one another? I do what I must, you, what I want – and if you don’t do it, you’ll catch Hell. – Every day we peregrinate to the parade-ground together, and only the sick are so unfortunate as not to be able to accompany us on our pilgrimages. Yes, we are one heart and one soul; we are comrades, closely tied by the bonds of uniform, of orders, of rules! O Musketeers, I cannot live without you – because then I would lose my Captain’s salary! – Will that rascal, the drummer, stand still! Sergeant, he shall do extra duty!

“Yes, Captain!”

Musketeers, I love you like my brothers, and so I address you informally! – does that not make all of you happy? – Only with my heart do I touch hearts! – You happy men! Praise your sovereign, and your good fortune, that blows have been abolished and may now land only incognito! Praise my mercy and your good fortune that I let you sleep on comfortable palliasses every night instead of on sharp-edged laths! Praise your good

fortune and my enlightened way of thinking, free from prejudice, which makes me call you Comrades and never, or only exceptionally, oafs, louts, etc.! No, I call you Comrades! – “There lies deep meaning oft in childish play,” says the poet,<sup>17</sup> probably with reference to us. Consider all this carefully – I do believe it is beginning to rain, Sergeant?

“Yes, Captain!”

That would be a damned to-do, I have my new sash on. Don’t be impatient, gravedigger, I’m almost finished. You point to your bald spot, if you may put on your cap? No, friend, that won’t do. Why don’t you wear a hairpiece, as I have done since my nineteenth year? –

Now, where was I? – Oh yes, the extraordinary, indeed, truly ridiculous humanity with which you are treated. – Soldiers, how could you repay all this? But that is not all! The Prince – not the Fatherland, that would sound demagogic – the Prince feeds you with the beforementioned pumpernickel, he most graciously ensures daily movement, he allows you, you veritable barons! the right to run around from the Reveille to the Tattoo, he - - Devil take me, Sergeant, it’s raining hard. – Well, I’ll conclude my speech, all the more readily as you miserable curs can’t answer my question how you are to repay all these favours, and because, regarding the third part of my speech, ‘On the usefulness of the soldier in peacetime,’ I cannot find anything of importance to say.

So quickly throw a handful of earth on the deceased’s coffin. And now: “March, home!” –

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<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Thekla. Eine Geisterstimme* [Thekla. The Voice of a Spirit] c.1802.