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Terry H. Pickett

The Unseasonable Democrat: K.A. Varnhagen von Ense (1785 – 1858)

BOUVIER

MODERN GERMAN STUDIES
editor: Peter Heller
associate editor and editor of „The McMaster Colloquium on German Literature“: Hans H. Schulte
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volume 14

The Unseasonable Democrat: Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (1785 – 1858)

by Terry H. Pickett

1985

Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann · Bonn

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My researches in the Federal Republic of Germany were supported during three consecutive summers by the University Research Grants Committee of the University of Alabama, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Two Fulbright exchanges enabled me to spend extended periods in Germany. Dr. Dorothea Kuhn and other staff members at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv and the Cotta-Archiv in Marbach provided a hospitable environment for work through two summers. The cooperation and assistance provided by the staff at the Jagiellonian University Library, Archive Department, Cracow, during the fall of 1981 enabled me to inspect the relevant documents in the Varnhagen Collection deposited there.

Dr. Konrad Feilchenfeldt of the University of Munich proved always eager to assist from the store of his erudition, and other colleagues (Richard Porter, Marshall Winokur, Ed Frost, Janko Emedi, and Mark McCulloh) gave me the benefit of skills that I lack in order that I might take the full measure of Varnhagen's achievement. I would also like to acknowledge the debt that I owe Heinrich Meyer for interesting me in Varnhagen and his circle, in the first place. Professor Mary G. Porter offered helpful and patient editorial advice during the writing and rewriting of the manuscript, and Peter Heller's steady editorial hand enabled me to put the narrative into final form.

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CIP-Kurztitelaufnahme der Deutschen Bibliothek
PICKETT, TERRY H.:
The unseasonable democrat: Karl August Varnhagen von Ense: (1785—1858) / by Terry H. Pickett. —
Bonn: Bouvier, 1985.
(Modern German studies; Vol. 14)

ISB N 3-416-01883-4

NE: GT

ISS N 0170-3013

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Was sich schreiben läßt, ist so wenig. Und doch sind diese papiernen Fluten, geschrieben und gedruckt, die stärksten Wogen der Zeit, und es ist kein dünkelhafter Wahn, wenn wir in dem Privatverkehr der Erleuchteten die stärksten äußern Kräfte deutlich entspringen zu sehn vermeinen.

—Varnhagen writing to Troxler.

Der Briefwechsel zwischen Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler und Karl August Varnhagen von Ense. 1815-1858. ed. Dr. Iduna Bekke (Aarau, 1953), 160.

****

Ostersonntag, den 15. April 1838.
Warum ich so vieles jetzt Anstößiges oder Mißfällige in den Briefen Rahel's nicht unterdrückt habe, und manches noch Bedenklichere nicht vertilge, sondern aufbewahre? — Weil ich die Zukunft und solche Leser im Auge habe, die nicht in der Beschränkung unserer Tagesmeinungen stehen und denen andere Gesichtspunkte gelten werden.

Tagebücher, I, 87-88.

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INTRODUCTION

Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (1785-1858) has a persona that has resisted clear classification in the annals of German literary history. Although we no longer share the prejudices underlying the Wilhelmenian distortions of Varnhagen's qualities and contributions, he remains for us a difficult figure to grasp because he was so prolific, because much of his work was published anonymously in the face of repression and censorship, so that his real meaning most often must be inferred, and because the primary materials are difficult of access where they have been preserved.[1] Nevertheless, when all these factors have been discounted, there remains some ambiguity reflecting a fundamental ambivalence in his character. There is at bottom an aspect of his social and political understanding that generated paradox.

It is the programmatic and essentially ideological intent in most of his writing that has aroused new interest in Varnhagen. In the German Democratic Republic Varnhagen is being resurrected as a textbook example of a bourgeois liberal who shifted gradually to the left as the failure of democratic reforms in Germany became obvious.[2] Western scholars tend to see in him the tough-minded and cosmopolitan liberal valued today in parliamentary democracy.[3] East German critics fail to remark that Varnhagen expressed proto-socialist views rather early in life; in the West, the full measure of his radical views on private property has not yet been taken, for Varnhagen thought he recognized in the institution of private property the source of social and political conflict.

It is the purpose of this study to render a comprehensive portrait of Varnhagen, both as man and writer, to show how he developed and just how his extensive correspondence, his salon, his journalism, and his many and other various activities were dimensions of a single vision. For Varnhagen was no ordinary man.

He had been born in Düsseldorf of old Rhenish descent. His grandfather and father had chosen the profession of medicine, but there had also been talk in the family of a noble lineage. Caught up in the excitement of the French Revolution, Varnhagen's father led a restless life in pursuit of a just society. It was the revolutionary zeal of the father that remained the most abiding influence on Varnhagen's life. His father's quest became his crusade.

After an initial miscarried attempt at poetry during the first decade of the 19th century, Varnhagen turned to the writing of journalistic history and political commentary. It was as a commentator and historian of sorts that he would make his mark. His pen earned him a relatively secure position in the Prussian state service which enabled him to tie an important and permanent knot in his life by marrying Rahel Levin in 1815.

Together with Rahel, a woman who enjoyed considerable local fame as a salonière in Berlin, Varnhagen was able to cultivate a wide and exceptional circle of acquaintanceship which he cemented with epistolary labor. The web of his contacts stretched across Europe and included Americans as well. Varnhagen's network of friendship and acquaintance served the same purpose as his prolific journalism, his biographies, and his editorial work. Even the great and final labor he expended during the last two decades of his life upon the archives of

holographs he had collected — *Zeitdokumente* of importance to the period — was just another facet of his coherent effort on behalf of his vision of history. His work was governed by an embracing view of his world and what it *should* become.

To say that Varnhagen's vision was focused upon society is merely to emphasize that he recognized meaning, significance, and value as being created in the matrix of human relationships. History is significant because it is society in transformation, the dynamic movement of which — as Varnhagen saw it — is benevolent: an ascending profile of emancipation and improvement. His own role within the context he viewed as that of a minor but militant catalyst that assists in activating the process.

Varnhagen's history is not to be understood in any parochial sense. In Strasbourg and among the emigrés in Hamburg he had learned to speak fluent French. Through his father he was an admirer of French civilization, and the scope of his mind and sympathies made him a truly cosmopolitan and tolerant individual whose loyalties were hardly confined by national borders. Admiring and respecting the achievements of diverse peoples, Varnhagen was convinced that the historical process draws nourishment from cultural traditions that transcend any particular time or place. It was on these terms that he understood Hegel, and that is why he could join Eduard Gans as an enthusiastic co-founder and contributing editor of the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*.[4]

Seen from the vantage point of an age in which change is recognized in everything, Varnhagen is something of an anomaly. Neither his faith in the fundamental values underpinning his vision nor his commitment to propagating them changed during his lifetime. He was steadfast but not inflexible. His steadfastness was indeed achieved in spite of weaknesses of character, a volatile and irritable temperament, deep insecurities, and overwhelming setbacks in matters of career and fortune. In Varnhagen steadfastness does not mean static or petrified form.

During the first part of Varnhagen's adult life, he joined what he perceived as a liberal offensive. There seemed to be great promise of a new order in Europe. After his removal from a diplomatic post in the Duchy of Baden in 1819, however, the climate changed profoundly. Henceforth, Varnhagen had to deal with increasing repression and censorship. He was not alone in believing that the process of individual enfranchisement and political emancipation had been arrested. It was during these years that he had to wrestle with the question of what had happened to benign history in the face of present oppression.

Varnhagen was a man psychologically suited for the opposition. In his father he had the prime example of a man who continued to function in the face of a political and social order with which he was out of tune. Varnhagen was at home as an advocate of minority opinion, and he had the inner assurance of his convictions, so that outward failure often impressed him as a confirmation rather than a denial of the truth of his position. His role as radical within the body politic and as natural adversary of the status quo came as naturally to him as did his part as Rahel's devoted friend and husband.

During the 1830s, when he suffered a combined spiritual, intellectual, and finally, personal loss with the deaths of Goethe, Hegel, and Rahel, Varnhagen's

vision and his understanding of his mission matured. The deaths of these paragons left him with a strong sense of desolation. He began to perceive himself as a survivor in an age that no longer comprehended the aspirations and values of his own generation. Previously he had written with the intent of edifying and educating a contemporary generation of readers. He had been an active participant in current discourse on social and political matters. After Rahel's death his attention shifted. He became less interested in contemporary audiences. A devaluation of the present took place in his mind. He came to feel that the present had become estranged from history, and his work aimed increasingly at a future readership rather than a current one.

Varnhagen's oppositional mentality had always inclined him to speak to an audience that was, at least, in potential sympathy with his views. His current audience always consisted of those initiated into a certain way of viewing events, the German word *Gesinnungsgenossen* capturing the essence of those who share a certain set of attitudes. Thus did he aim both in terms of living and of future readers at those who somehow transcended present prejudices in their own view of the world. Such a reductive approach to readership surely contains Romanticist tendencies and is quite different from the generalizing and simplifying impulses of the Enlightenment.[5]

Among the most successful and abiding programmatic vehicles Varnhagen created as writer and editor was the memorial work entitled *Rahel. Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde* (1834). The book appeared within months after Rahel's death. It is composed of excerpts from her correspondence and diary entries. Collecting these documents and publishing them was not a new idea with Varnhagen, though Rahel had never viewed such publication altogether favorably. Yet none of Varnhagen's previous creations had been so effective in propagating the views and attitudes so important to his way of understanding the world. The Rahel book was also an example of the editorial virtues Varnhagen had long preached. While others destroyed or suppressed posthumous papers out of piety or fear, he had been an avid collector of holographs and insisted that respect for the reality of the past and faith in the future required that artifacts (documents) be preserved in their entirety, even if they offended the sensibilities of the present.[6]

Rahel left its mark upon literary history and imprinted upon Varnhagen's image the label of uxorious husband. It created in Rahel a literary phenomenon that has inspired a cult that continues to the present and is evident in numerous little editions that seek to condense the original book. At the same time, Varnhagen's editorial work was remarkable for the politicization of Rahel's writing that she never intended. High-placed officials fumed and suspected Varnhagen of subversive activity, but he, because of his role as a bereaved husband, escaped, as usual, any punitive action.

Critics have long insisted that Varnhagen was by nature in sympathy with the Enlightenment in order to characterize what they perceived as his moderate political position and to stress that he was not a Romanticist. In fact, Varnhagen comes much closer to the Romanticist position than one would expect, and *Rahel* surely makes that clear. The work established a literary persona that insists on its innocence in relation to a corrupt and hostile world. Rahel's prose

is a sustained lament, the cry of an individual determined to break out of suffocatingly confining circumstances. Her anguish is generated by a pessimism Varnhagen shared — and here is the essential difference between such a Romanticist and the children of the Enlightenment — that individual emancipation could ever be achieved within the limits of social reality.

The justification for radical or revolutionary activity is inherent in the view that current reality has become estranged from history. Radical pressure is necessary to get reality back on target. It is within the context of Varnhagen's progressive disenchantment with his world that his keen interest in revolutionaries and radical causes continued throughout his life. His *Tagebücher* reveal that he sympathized with the anarchist Bakunin and followed his career closely. At the same time, Varnhagen does not deserve the disparaging comment often quoted from Engels: "That fellow is nevertheless an utter and cowardly rascal..."[7]

Varnhagen had always, as he had written Cotta in 1831, viewed himself as a better counselor than a man of action.[8] He was also an old man by the late 1840s, his energy sapped and in no condition to play a vital role.

The pervading sense of ambivalence in so much of Varnhagen's works can best be approached by looking at his autobiographical memoirs, the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. It is in that narrative that the impact of Varnhagen's duplicity is strongest. Things are not what they seem. Aside from his self-consciously ornamental style with which he initially seeks to distract the reader, there are two levels of action.

First of all, there is the brilliant spectacle of the European elite gathered on its sundry stages: met in literary circles, in bivouac, at spas, and in the antechambers of government. The image of a harmonious community is irrepressible and misleading, for, underneath the glitter, there is rampant social conflict and war. The tantalizing effect of Varnhagen's writing is due to the tension between the two poles of select harmony and general unrest and suffering.

It was no accident that a late generation of readers should have thought of Varnhagen as a conciliatory elder statesman in the realm of letters. It was precisely that pose he cultivated as his public persona because it was necessary to his functioning as intermediary to history and interpreter of events. He did not like the limelight and preferred to remain in the background as sponsor or agent for other writers. How distrubing it must have been for these same readers to discover in his posthumous publications that there had been a mind utterly out of sympathy with its age and the established order. There was the additional enigma that surrounded the question of Varnhagen's true allegiance. Everybody knows that most spies serve existing governments, whereas he was pledged to a Europe he believed would eventually inherit and transform the future. It was the invisible realm of history that was his nation.

How could such a radical agent of espionage have existed within the body politic undetected, going about his business, collecting documents and securing them against destruction for future students and readers? He even subsisted in large part on a pension from the Prussian government! The truth is, he had been early detected, and his political views had cost him an active career in diplomacy (a mishap he only briefly regretted). Varnhagen's was not an extraordinarily

singular point of view, after all, within the context of his own generation and was shared by others, some of whom were eminently more capable of systematic articulation, as witnessed in Hegel.

Varnhagen's uniqueness lies in the fact that he contrived to carry his views into a new era in which political exigency and social propriety urged restraint if not modification. In order to survive and continue working, he also devised techniques so subtle that very few readers really were aware of his intentions. It was a method of persuasion by suggestion in which he would begin with the most harmless premise and then gradually change the narrative perspective while, at the same time, denying that he was doing it.

By the 1840s an entire generation that had shared Varnhagen's views was either vanished or silent. Their ideological offspring no longer occupied public office and were spread abroad or in hiding. The paragons of the past had been neutralized and converted into cultural monuments by historians increasingly interested in nationalizing the record. Yet, Varnhagen reserved one more round of ammunition in his arsenal which he entrusted to his niece, Ludmilla Assing, to fire.

In 1860, Ludmilla published the correspondence between Alexander von Humboldt and Varnhagen. Many of these epistles were hardly more than billets between two men living in the same city, but the frank discussion of the weaknesses of the King by Humboldt, who had been privileged to live in close proximity to the royal household for years, shocked the public. Ludmilla was forced into a lifelong exile in Italy where she continued to publish her uncle's works, letters, and papers. In her work she called Germany to the dock again and again. It was evident that Varnhagen believed the conspiracy to have been perpetrated not by him but by his age against the benevolent process of history. Germany stood accused, and it revenged itself upon Varnhagen by first maligning him and then, as the century drew to a close, all but forgetting him.

1. EARLY TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Varnhagen's memoir of his childhood was published during his lifetime in both the periodical press and in his popular *Denkwürdigkeiten*. In his recounting of the story, he does not choose to go too deeply into the agonies of his life, for his narrative focus is upon Germany. He also occasionally misrepresents or omits facts and his part in events. The record is, nevertheless, reasonably accurate and begins with a portrayal of his family background. He was born in Düsseldorf on the Rhine one year after his sister, Rosa Maria, on February 21, 1785. His father was a physician with a comfortable practice, and the family lived in a house near the river. After an initial period—which struck Varnhagen years later as a kind of idyll—the family moved to Strasbourg where his father hoped to pursue a career as a lecturer at the famous university. Varnhagen was never again to experience the security he felt in Düsseldorf.

The Revolution soon reached Strasbourg and the university was shut down. Events had intruded upon his father's hopes for a university career and made it necessary for him to seek his fortune elsewhere. There seems to have been a deeper ambivalence in the relationship between his parents as well. There are certain signals, such as Varnhagen being baptized Catholic while his sister became a Protestant. At any rate, Varnhagen found himself accompanying his father on what turned out to be a restless, four year quest. His mother and sister remained behind with his maternal grandfather in Strasbourg. They would not be reunited until 1796.

Varnhagen's father was unable to establish himself in medicine so easily. He apparently tried to find acceptance in several different locations and even returned briefly to Düsseldorf. The child was placed a short time in a school but otherwise depended upon his father for erratic instruction. Most of the time, Varnhagen was left alone in different boarding houses. He was not permitted to play with children his own age because his father was afraid that exposure to local dialects would contaminate his standard German. He consequently became the detached observer watching others play games while he sat in the window of a boarding house room.

The father had hardly been in Hamburg two years when his premature death in 1799 left the fourteen year old Varnhagen penniless and destroyed his family's hopes that they could resume a normal life in that port city. Varnhagen's strong tendency to politicize every event in his life is evident in his autobiographical relation of his father's death. During the last weeks, he had disagreed with his father's tendency to alter his optimistic view of the Revolution. Instead of emancipation, the elder Varnhagen came to believe, it had brought Germany a new conqueror.

A family friend secured Varnhagen a place at the Pepiniere, a Prussian cadet school in Berlin that trained medics for military service. Varnhagen did not like the military discipline but found himself more interested in the liberal arts component of the curriculum. He was especially drawn to his philosophy teacher, a Kantian named Kiesewetter.[1] In his memoirs he reports that he was charged with insubordination and left the school in defiance. Time might have edited his account, however, for there is evidence that Varnhagen's benefactor had

withdrawn his financial support, forcing the boy from school. Whatever the actual cause, Varnhagen was no longer at school in 1803. He became violently ill at that point and was nursed to health by a philosophical physician named Johann Benjamin Erhard, whose writings he would later edit and publish.

The eighteen year old was also helped by his old philosophy teacher, Kiesewetter, who procured a tutor's job for him with the family of a textile manufacturer named Cohen. The job saved him from destitution and, in fact, transported him into the graceful world of the aspiring bourgeoisie in Berlin. Varnhagen was treated as an equal and allowed to socialize with the people who came to the Cohen household for conversation and cultural activities. He was deeply influenced by Rousseau's ideas at the time and therefore inclined to leave the two Cohen children very much to their own reading and education. It was surely a pedagogical approach that had the added benefit of providing the teacher as well with leisure for reading.

It was also during the time he was with the Cohen family that Varnhagen joined the second wave of Romanticists living and working in Berlin. Following in the steps of the Schlegel brothers were aspiring young poets and writers who offered each other criticism and encouragement. Adelbert von Chamisso was a lieutenant at the time, and he and Varnhagen spent many long evenings together while Chamisso was on guard duty. Chamisso, born a French nobleman, had fled to Prussia with his family and lived as an emigré, first as a page in the royal household and then as an ensign in the army. He was tall, lean, and socially somewhat awkward when Varnhagen first met him, quite engrossed in mastering the poetic idiom in German, while earning money for himself on the side with his talent for copper plate engraving.

Chamisso and Varnhagen soon found their company expanded to include others who shared their interests in literature. Several of these young men later achieved a certain status in their chosen fields, and they maintained contact with one another. There was, for instance, David Koreff, who became a very successful physician of fashion in Paris and later the personal surgeon of the Prussian chancellor, Hardenberg. Franz Theremin was the scion of a prominent Huguenot family in Berlin and destined to become a pastor to that French-speaking community. Baron de la Motte-Fouqué was a romancier already on his way to popularity, and A. F. Bernhardi was the genial and corpulent brother-in-law of Ludwig Tieck and the oldest of the group. Finally, there was Varnhagen's own dearest friend and personal discovery, Wilhelm Neumann.

Neumann had been a clerk in the Cohen factory when Varnhagen had drawn him out of his lethargy and fanned his interest in literary matters. Altogether the group decided that their little circle was the product of destiny. They formed a secret society to solidify their friendship, cast gold rings with the secret Greek letters which they wore, and chose the name of the North Polar Star Society because the four points of the star referred to the four sciences. They very likely had the Polar star idea from their hero and cultural model August Wilhelm Schlegel, who had mentioned it earlier in a lecture.[2] Soon they had also conceived the idea of publishing an anthology of their work. Years later, Chamisso wrote with a condescension one reserves for one's youth that "we became

brothers, and, in this manner, the project of the *Almanac of the Muses for the Year 1804* had its premature conception."[3]

It is probably true that, as Chamisso later claimed, much of the cost for the first anthology was borne by him from his meager earnings as an engraver. The *Almanac,* soon referred to by the group as the "green almanac" because of its green covers, received very little public attention on its appearance. Bernhardi wrote a favorable review on November 5, 1803 in which he especially praised Chamisso's efforts in mastering the poetic idiom of German.[4]

The group had an early triumph when they convinced Fichte to contribute some of his work to their volumes. Ludwig Robert was clearly the star among all these contemporaries, however, for he was a published and performed dramatist and poet. Something of a celebrity, Robert was also the brother of Rahel, the woman Varnhagen would eventually marry. Though the almanac to which they all contributed was a rather common device at the time among writing circles who could afford to publish them, the "green almanac" was distinguished from most Romanticist efforts of a similar nature because of its classical orientation. Schlegel and others had preferred to idealize the medieval age in their writings. Such a difference is here worthy of note in the light of Varnhagen's continuing preference for supra-national cultural models. The Middle Ages remained for him a dark age of tyranny and brutality.

The "green almanac" was followed by three others, one each year, and considering the dearth of useful material produced by the clique, it was remarkable that they managed to publish so many volumes. The project lacked financial support. It was dependent upon the resourcefulness of the members of the group. The most resourceful was Varnhagen himself. He was tireless in his organizational activities. He encouraged and badgered his fellows into writing and, when he failed in this, he went out and recruited other contributors. What came out of the *Almanac* was, nevertheless, disheartening for him. Chamisso proved to be the only contributor who showed true poetic development and aroused any critical interest whatever.

Varnhagen's own poetry is largely an exercise in technique, as he noted later in life; yet, even that is clouded by a lack of clarity. He obviously did not know his mind at that stage of his life, and his confusion is evident in what he wrote. As it became apparent that he would not achieve any remarkable poetic growth, Varnhagen began to despair of his vocation and became irascible and touchy. One emotion he does convey in his poems, however, is his intense sense of being excluded from anything of value. Once again we see the child looking out a window at the world beyond him:

> I cannot drink nectar with the immortals,
> Olympus' fields are closed to me...

Even the little clique in which the homeless boy had found a temporary home would soon dissolve under assault by the force of events. Varnhagen's employer, Cohen, suffered bankruptcy in the growing economic chaos of the times and fled Berlin to escape his creditors. Chamisso was called to active service as the wars moved into Germany and was suffering acute qualms of con-

science as the prospect that he might be fighting against France became more immediate.

Without any visible means of support, Varnhagen might once again have been thrown into desperation had not another friend come to his rescue. This time that friend was Marianne Saaling, a young woman to whom he would eventually propose (with disastrous effect), who intervened. She found him another position as tutor, this time in the home of the Hertz family in Hamburg. When Varnhagen turned back to Hamburg to live in the affluent banking family, his initiation into the world of German Jewry was assured and a lifelong pattern of association with members of the Jewish community was set.

In Hamburg he found himself once again welcomed by a family perhaps pleased with the opportunities he brought with him. A German tutor in a Jewish household meant that the children might have a further chance at integration into the larger community. One of the primary tools for such integration that Varnhagen brought with him was his command of literate German. It was the burning hope and aspiration of many upwardly mobile and prosperous Jewish parents at the time to effect a social integration for their children that had been denied them. Varnhagen was, at any rate, both surprised and enormously pleased to find himself once again treated as an equal or even a felicitous addition to a happy family fold.

The elder Hertz was senior partner in the family banking firm and already considered old. He had married a second time rather late in life, and Varnhagen was to tutor his two children by Fanny Bacher. His adult children were already partners in the banking house, but they apparently displayed only a benevolent interest in the father's second family. Fanny had come from poverty into a marriage she could have viewed only as a kind of salvation. Her union to old Jakob was affectionate but without passion, and the entrance of the youthful, tall, and blond Varnhagen was a circumstance ripe with romantic potential.

It was not long before Fanny developed an attachment to Varnhagen that was (to Varnhagen's marvel) encouraged by other members of the family. They viewed him with cool realism as a possible marriage alliance for Fanny after the death of their father. Their generosity extended to plans for helping Varnhagen prepare to enter the university so that he could learn a real profession. He had not been too long among the Hertz family when the brothers came upon an old cache of gold coins during a housecleaning. They placed this money at the tutor's disposal on the condition that he prepare himself for university study.

After struggling at first alone with the Greek that he would need to be admitted to university study, Varnhagen finally resorted to a rather radical mode of assistance. With the encouragement of a school principal, he attended a local preparatory school and sat in the classroom with pupils several years his junior. It was not long before he had convinced Wilhelm Neumann to leave Berlin and join him, and they both worked hard on their Latin and Greek during the fall and winter of 1805-1806.

In the meantime, the second "green almanac" had appeared. It met with some rather devastating criticism from Caroline Schelling who reviewed it with heavy sarcasm:

> Here there are countless sonnets to philosophers (Fichte), poets (Goethe, Tieck), authors writing to each other, to imagined things, from elements to elements, addressing the time of day and the seasons, colors and tones..., They have even been able to elevate themselves to write of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin...

Taken as a whole, Caroline finds the work to be characterized by what she terms a "decisive monotony."[5]

None of this had much inhibitive effect on Varnhagen. He and Neumann used their leisure during the summer of 1806—just as the Holy Roman Empire was in the process of total collapse—to prepare one more edition of their "green almanac." They hoped against hope to make their splash in the world of literary fashion. When the work did at last appear, according to Varnhagen, it contained the most "horrid printing errors" and, for all practical purposes, it was "dead to the world." Even their hope that some of the controversial aspects of the poems would stir at least a mild ban on the part of the censor was disappointed. Nobody noticed. The almanac was received by the world with a "gravelike silence."[6]

Varnhagen enjoyed a minor triumph during that period that kept up his morale. In joining Bernhardi in an attack upon the literary critic Garlieb Merkel, Varnhagen showed once again the political tendencies of his point of view. Merkel was known for his venomous attacks upon writers associated with the Romanticist or new literature. He called both Tieck and Goethe, for instance, "night's abortion." His was a cultural approach, however, and had nothing consciously to do with politics. In the introduction Varnhagen wrote for *Testimonia Auctorum de Merkelio* (1806), Merkel is branded an enemy of positive political tendencies. Varnhagen points to what he describes as Merkel's "ludicrous enthusiasm" for the cause of human liberty, while the critic was actually operating as an obstacle to progressive currents in Germany's national literature.

If Varnhagen and Bernardi published the book anonymously in order to escape any official action against them, it did not prevent their enjoying a certain fame. The literary community in Germany was relatively small and homogenous, and rumor carried word and identity almost more rapidly than fact could manage.

The fall semester of 1806 saw Neumann and Varnhagen matriculating at the University of Halle, an institution situated on the plains southwest of Berlin. The light towards which they were immediately drawn at Halle was Friedrich August Wolf, an extraordinary teacher who had singlehandedly made the study of literature and philology respectable again. Wolf cultivated a small cadre of select students who gathered at his home for seminars on current literature. The atmosphere was casual and the discussion governed by mutual self-respect. Wolf made his students feel more like colleagues than underlings, and that was just the kind of atmosphere Varnhagen found most congenial.

Varnhagen was somewhat older than the usual student of the time at twenty-one. He had, furthermore, spent most of his life in the company of adults. He dragged Neumann about with him and was soon invited to join the most literate

clique at Halle where he met the Danish natural philospher, Henrich Steffens, and the Romanticist theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. It was indeed Schleiermacher's remark about Varnhagen's "courtly ignorance" that cast a shadow upon this youthful conquest of Halle society.[7] He also accorded the latest edition of the *Almanac* the ironic praise that it showed "limited" talent.

The *Almanac* had appeared in 1807 dressed in somewhat different clothing. Publishers had turned it down flatly in Berlin, but Varnhagen was never discouraged. He and Neumann set to work, added a verse play by Varnhagen entitled *Benigna,* and then sold the manuscript to a Hamburg publisher as *Erzählungen und Spiele (Tales and Plays).* What they had been unable to give away or even subsidize in print, they had finally sold for a fee!

The second semester at Halle saw the need in Germany growing as the Prussian army marched to a humiliating defeat at the hands of Napoleon at the Battle of Jena. The Prussian state system was thoroughly demolished, and Prussia survived due to a historical quirk. Economic chaos reigned throughout the realm, and Henrich Steffens wrote that the "apathy was wonderful, both among the students at Halle and among the literary friends in Berlin. They would not believe that danger existed until it was close upon them."[8] Varnhagen continued to be, in the meantime, insulated by the Hertz gold.

Varnhagen's reaction to the crushing defeat at Jena was hardly that of a Prussian patriot. He viewed it as a blow for freedom, a strike at the heart of one of the most autocratic states in Europe. He was yet very far from perceiving in Prussia the future hope for representative government in Germany. Napoleon seemed less than the strong arm of freedom, however, when he summarily shut down the University shortly after the French occupation of the town. After that there was little else for Varnhagen to do but pack his bags and follow everyone to Berlin.

Varnhagen shared quarters for some time with his friend, Franz Theremin, but rivalry over a woman developed between them and he had eventually to find another place. Varnhagen was already in Berlin when the French vanguard reached the capital. His interest continued to be detached, for he did not identify himself with the fate of Prussia. He and Neumann were much more interested in the latest literary event, the publication of Jean Paul Richter's newest novel, *Flegeljahre (Wild Oats),* than in the political upheavals taking place around them.

Jean Paul's story captured the imagination of the two friends, for it dealt with twins who sought to give their relationship lasting substance by writing a novel together. Here was again the idea of the *Almanac,* or the production of literary artifacts designed to memorialize an association of friends or fellow sympathizers. The notion of artifact or document as a visible and concrete sign of relationship would always fascinate Varnhagen and was surely behind his strong archival propensities. He and Neumann thus decided that they, too, would write a multi-author novel. The initial idea was for each to rotate in writing an alternate chapter until the story grew into proper book form. They were soon calling the project the *Doppelroman,* and Varnhagen dashed off his first contribution without hesitation.

Neumann was not the rapid worker that Varnhagen would always be. He loathed the labor of writing and had to be prodded. His reluctance to do his share of the work finally led Varnhagen to look further afield for other contributors. At the moment, Varnhagen had set the tone of the story and had given it a name, *Versuche und Hindernisse Karls (Trials and Tribulations of Karl,* 1808), a title that reflected both in the name of the protagonist and in the suggestion of his agony the autobiographical intention of the author.

Karl is a kind of autobiographical parody of Varnhagen, a character with qualities and faults reminiscent of Varnhagen's own but exaggerated and more intense. Karl is also, at the same time, a parody of the type of Romantic hero popular among current readers of that period. His raging egotism leads to murder before the first chapter is finished. Varnhagen's self-knowledge expresses itself in a kind of self-mockery and reflects a habit of devaluation of his own person and character that often overtook him during his life with debilitating effect. He saw himself with cruel clarity and was unable to temper his perception with the softening edge of forgiveness or to cloud his vision with illusions.

Neumann's much gentler nature did not permit the same kind of negative insights and autobiographical cruelty. His contribution was sheer fabrication, and not very enthusiastic, at that. The *Doppelroman* likely would have never been finished had not Varnhagen gone out with his usual organizing energy and convinced Bernhardi, Chamisso, and Baron de la Motte-Fouqué to make contributions. It was Fouqúe's rapid and fluent pen that finally put the finishing strokes upon the story, imprinting his own swashbuckling style upon the narrative; but the wonderful parodies in the narrative of Goethe's great character, Wilhelm Meister, and the novelist Jean Paul, are very likely all Varnhagen's work.

Wilhelm Meister enters the narrative as a fellow traveler. He burlesques himself and speaks of his creator, Goethe, with considerable dissatisfaction, remarking that he would have done a better job with the material at hand and saying that he would avoid visiting Weimar and go to see Schiller at Jena instead. Jean Paul appears as a loveable and awkward character who parodies the style of his novels in his conversation. Writing in his memoirs years later, Varnhagen recalls stopping by Bayreuth to visit with Jean Paul and then telling him about the satire. The great author kindly commented that, if the thing worked, then it was enough. Effective art is its own justification.

Varnhagen was supposed to be studying medicine during this period. It was his expressed intent to become a physician, and the Hertz brothers were supporting him on that basis. His medical ambitions notwithstanding, he was not inhibited in his literary pursuits. Varnhagen went even further than that. It was while he was registered as a student at the Charity Hospital that he sought out and met the celebrated Rahel Levin, an extraordinary woman some fourteen years his senior, who had reigned as hostess to Prince Louis Ferdinand and other notables in her salon just before the turn of the century.

Rahel was known for her penetrating wit, her intellectual range, and her urbanity. She seemed confident of her own superiority and gifts and offered Varnhagen a glimpse into the golden age of Romanticism now vanished in the upheavals of the French Revolution. In her he thought he had found what he

always sought: a proximity to significant experience. It was a characteristic mode of behavior for him, for he never was really secure in his own ability; he, therefore, was attracted to other beings who seemed truly contiguous with events and intellectual enterprises of significance. Eternally the outsider, Varnhagen enjoyed the company of those who inhabited history. Rahel was to become, in her own fashion, pivotal in his life.

2. RAHEL

Varnhagen was tall, broad-shouldered, somewhat pie-faced, and of blonde complexion at the age of twenty-one. Set in his roundish face were gray eyes that sometimes showed a glint of peevish malice but could also smile with the fullness of his mischievous humor. His struggles to moderate himself, control his impulsiveness, and especially the petulant streak of which his friends complained, had made him suspicious of spontaneous behavior. In public he was correct and wore a formal air that protected him from outbursts he would later regret. Frankness he considered to be a liability in himself, and he was wary of confidences unless he knew very well the company he was in.

Rahel was very different. She was thirty-six at the time, short, tending to plumpness yet of delicate stature. Her decisive manner and the force of her opinions, given freely, were characteristics for which she was known, respected, and, perhaps, occasionally ridiculed. She was full of her *Dachstubenwahrheiten,* as she called them, dispensing rapid-fire judgments about everything and everybody without heeding others. Her command of the quick-witted response, the *bon mot,* as well as razor-witted repartee had once made her a local celebrity. Members of the upper classes found her straight talk unaccustomed but charming. Rahel elevated her candid manner to an existential mode, evidence of her authenticity. If a person could not be frank then he could not be genuine; that person in her mind was something less than a *Mensch,* in other words, something less than real.

It was an unlikely liaison, but others prepared Varnhagen to be charmed by her. Schleiermacher had told him before he ever saw her that she was the ideal woman: one having sensibility and feeling, yet direct and honest, too. Others raved about her to him, and, when he finally met her, he was entranced. Varnhagen was not the first man Rahel had known, however, for she had at least three serious romances with German and foreign noblemen before his arrival; yet, all her glory had failed to attract a single viable marital partner. However charming these aristocrats had found her manner, their fascination was never sustained all the way to the altar. Rahel had remained unmarried, dependent upon the impatient support of her brothers after her father died, and increasingly dissatisfied with her lot.

Varnhagen was not aware when the affair began that Rahel was determined that she should become the most important single relationship in his adult life. His mind was also on other matters, on the *Doppelroman,* not altogether strange to medicine and the thought of Fanny in Hamburg, though only vaguely. He was busy with so many things. Rahel was not distracted. She left her family home and took an apartment in the village of Charlottenburg outside the city walls. In that quiet settlement, accessible by walkways and canals, there was sufficient room and privacy for rendezvous and tête-à-tête encounters through which courtship could proceed without much interruption.

Varnhagen could not have known what awaited him. In the first place, Rahel protested often and vehemently that marriage was far from her mind, that she was indeed opposed in principle to it. But in order to make her relationship to him special from the very start, she refused to call him Karl, as had everybody

else, and chose his middle name, August, instead. It was another signal that she was to be different. Varnhagen's own consciousness of his immaturity made him an apt and malleable student for an older, more experienced person who enjoyed dominating. The role of mentor had always appealed to Rahel. If Varnhagen later recalled his romance with Rahel as blissful, a kind of idyll, it was actually quite explosive. The mixture of their two very different personalities was combustible enough. A strong-willed woman on one side, and a precocious and petulant youth on the other—Varnhagen had never been known to be submissive or passive, his assertiveness was often the characteristic his friends most complained about in their letters to one another. It was, therefore, no small achievement to keep him in some reasonable check.

Rahel's strategy was to convince Varnhagen that he could not really do without her, that she was much too valuable to him. She argued that she was perfectly suited, by virtue of her great talent and insight, to give him the guidance he desperately needed in order to realize his potential.

Varnhagen was ripe for such a relationship. He had staked so much upon his love of literature; yet, he had enough critical sense to realize that he had no future as a poet or writer of fiction. These gates to achievement were shut to him, and he was otherwise vulnerable. Having neither connection nor resources, except the tenuous gold he drew from Hamburg, he was at the mercy of circumstance. Time was on his side, of course, for he was young, but youth is seldom aware of its natural advantages. Then here he had found this woman who was admittedly superior and interested in him, who served as mentor, lover, and mother in turn. It was irresistible. Rahel did not find it easy to disengage him from his literary projects and his friends. The cultural distractions of Berlin constantly proved the most dangerous rival she had, and she determined to get him away from the capital city and have him apply himself in order to finish his medical studies once for all. Varnhagen knew as well that he needed to get away from Berlin and to some provincial university, if he ever hoped to be able to earn a living in a profession. That is how the couple decided upon Tübingen, a little university in Swabia, a very long way from Prussia and Berlin.

While he was courting Rahel in Berlin, Fanny Hertz was having an affair of her own—with Chamisso. Varnhagen's poetic friend had gone to Hamburg more than once to visit Varnhagen's sister, Rosa Maria, but Fanny's attraction had proven greater. Fanny also had gone secretly to Potsdam to meet Chamisso there, and the liaison produced a son. Rumor attributed the child as often to Varnhagen as to Chamisso, but the generous Hertz family accepted it as one of their own.[1]

The correspondence Varnhagen and Rahel exchanged remains and reveals that the idyll Varnhagen later recalled was actually full of bickering and disagreement. Rahel usually assumes a chiding posture; Varnhagen is often penitent. We see them urging, reprimanding, regretting, but seldom expressing a sense of harmony and agreement. She would complain that she could not tolerate it if he did not moderate his overly assertive behavior so that he could "harmonize" with her.[2] Harmonizing apparently meant that he should generally agree with her. Finally, he did.

Varnhagen did leave Berlin and go to Tübingen. Arrived there he seemed as tentative in his view of the future and as hesitant about his ability to assume the initiative in his own life as ever. "I don't seem to be at all capable of a vast and intense passion that colors every act and every moment," he writes apologetically.[3] On the other hand, he rallies and defends himself by noting that he is capable of deep and loyal affections. He admits that a certain restraint and consideration may be appropriate and, in fact, is the basis for civilized conduct. In an age that encouraged unleashed egotism, it is not surprising to see such notions put defensively.

Rahel would have none of it. "I cannot check myself graciously," she answers. She requires nothing but "freedom," but she goes on to insist that he is the one who must change to accommodate her. It is she, so she writes, "who knows alone just how much our lives can become one."[4]

There were times when she simply threw up her hands, declaring that Varnhagen was not her August but that fake, Karl Varnhagen, guilty of the worst sin in her vocabulary: namely, of not being "genuine." In other words, she claims that he lacks sincerity. And it was just this charge of insincerity that gnawed at Varnhagen because he was much aware of his efforts to moderate and polish himself to an acceptable level even at the cost of a certain spontaneity. He was guilty of the very thing she charged him for, and he knew it better than anyone else.

In seeking out a place in which he would be isolated and far from urban distractions, Varnhagen had succeeded all too well. Tübingen was a sleepy, provincial little town, a small, medieval place of crooked, narrow streets and alleys, with buildings in various stages of decrepitude. Varnhagen complained that not a single plank in a single floor in a single building was level. Instead of pegs people simply used nails to hang their clothes upon. The streets were empty at dusk and a heavy evening torpor settled over everything just about the time society had begun to gather in Berlin. Even the beverage, according to Varnhagen, promoted sluggishness. Whereas in Berlin people consumed invigorating tea, in Swabia they drank wine.

The last straw for Varnhagen seemed to be the dialect spoken in the vicinity. Having acquired his father's prejudice against anything but a correct and standard German, Varnhagen found Swabian to be homely, rustic, and an idiom of the ignorant; he could not appreciate the melodious language nor the picturesque phrases which abound in that variety of German. Neither did he have an eye for the landscape around the town: the snug and hilly space with its little meadows and knots of houses tucked away in their own private space which gives Swabia its charm.

Rahel had from the very start been keenly aware of the risk she had taken in urging her young lover to go so far from her. In Berlin he might never have become proper husband material, but in Swabia he was quite outside the sphere of her effective influence. What Rahel did was write letters, for that was the next best thing to being present. It was also something she did very well, and it was during his sojourn in Tubingen that Varnhagen began to realize how gifted Rahel really was with language.

"Don't leave me lightly," she wrote to him, "for you'd lose a world in me. Never, never would you find again a more various and refined life combined with this deep and earnest faithfulness, this security and dimension..."[5] Rahel's insecurity took hold once again of her rhetoric. She was, she wrote, overcome by a "monstrous fear...my nerves and the great convolutions of my heart, the violent vacillations of my whole soul dissolve everything into fear and become terror, as I wake..."[6] In a distress that grew, no doubt, as she moved upon the pulse of her own language, she gave full vent to her doubts:

> Oh Varnhagen! What fear! I see how horrible it is with writing and with this separation! I would like to write down everything, but then one wouldn't have time for living! Soon one writes nothing and we are lost to one another. Oh, dearest friend, with what fear do I feel that: here in Leipzig, alone. What foolishness, what madness of fate coming from me that you are in Dresden, and I am willingly here at home. Must one always provide so for the future? I would be no more expensive were I with you now...:no, I must leave off and don't really know why. Only with effort do I remind myself that you want to continue your studies, and that I am not supposed to be along: and that plan had been made—let us admit it—for our separation and *not* for our being once again reunited.[7]

When Varnhagen received this last letter, he had not even reached Tübingen but was en route and had stopped in Dresden to view the famous art galleries there. Her distress was so genuine that he took a detour by Leipzig, where Rahel was visiting with relatives, in order to calm her fears. It was at such times, in crisis, that Varnhagen always seemed the more mature of the two.

After seeing Rahel once more, Varnhagen stopped in Bayreuth to visit Jean Paul. It is an incident he recorded later in his *Denkwürdigkeiten*. No sooner had he arrived in Tübingen than he went to make the acquaintance of the famous publisher, Cotta, who would rise to be the greatest of the German publishers and a pioneer in the new periodical industry then arising. Varnhagen's connection with Cotta would prove very useful to him in the coming years and provide him with outlets for his writing. Yet, even at Cotta's Varnhagen found reason to be shocked at the uncouthness and simplicity of life in Swabia. In spite of his affluence, the publisher lived in cramped quarters above his book store.

During his time in the little university town, Varnhagen made the acquaintance of the brightest of the young literary stars. There was the eccentric and romantic Justinus Kerner, who was then working on a dissertation concerning the hearing faculties of animals. Kerner's room was like a zoo. The gentle and corpulent medical student and poet would sit calmly working at his desk while birds roosted in his hair and cats scampered over him after squirrels. He entertained his friends with ghost stories that undoubtedly influenced Varnhagen to try his hand at writing similar fiction of his own.[8]

Very early in the evening, after everybody else had gone to bed, Varnhagen was left to his own resources. While Swabia slept, he re-read Rahel's letters. She had sent him correspondence from the successful decade of her life as well, and he began to view the letters as literary documents or artifacts of a more brilliant

epoch. Personal correspondence, personal notes, and private writing began to take on a significance in his mind that would affect and guide him in his career. They were for Varnhagen documents with potential historical dimension, an important record of significant human experience.

Rahel's letters were eminently suited to play a role as historical documents. She was her own heroine. Viewing herself as a kind of natural force, full of sincerity and therefore authentic, Rahel created a paradigm of the bourgeois view of experience: private innocence versus public corruption. It was not just that Rahel's private view corresponded to a social perspective; in order for Varnhagen to work with it, to function as editor, he had to give his own, intuitive assent to her view as well. Rahel's self-perception involved her being the paragon of certain qualities; Varnhagen began to play the role of her agent, her advocate, at times her promoter and priest. He would crusade, not merely on her behalf, but on behalf of her historical mission. It was during this period that he began to excerpt critical remarks she made about Goethe's works with an aim at publishing them in one of Cotta's journals.

Word must have reached Hamburg about his relationship with Rahel. The gold from the Hertz family was no longer forthcoming, and the stream of their generosity had narrowed to a trickle. Varnhagen decided that a trip to Hamburg was politic and expedient; but when he considered such a journey, his mind was not made up. He had not really made a commitment to Rahel and considered the possibility that he might settle into a medical practice in Hamburg and marry Fanny. Rahel was once again dangerously close to losing him.

Before leaving Tübingen, he took stock of what he had accomplished there. He notes that he had "periodically done intensive work in medicine," he had "read all of Livius," and he had written "a couple of novellas, many essays, and innumerable letters."[9] It was the year 1809.

There is no explanation for his subsequent sudden decision to quit Hamburg toward the middle of April, abandoning all hope of further subsidies from the Hertz family in order to join Rahel in Berlin. At this juncture the young man suddenly decided to stop being a victim of history. He was determined to throw himself into the maelstrom of events. If revolution and war had prevented his gaining a foothold in life, he would simply become a part of the great upheavals. His view of France had also undergone a change, and he viewed her role as one of conqueror rather than bringer of liberty. Fighting on the side of a German power became an acceptable alternative to him, for it would be struggling for a better future for Germany.

1. Varnhagen von Ense in 1839.

3. SOLDIER AND JOURNALIST

It was not so much that Varnhagen had experienced a change of heart. He had just come to the conclusion that Napoleon was more interested in his own power than in extending the benefits of the Revolution to the German people. Consequently, when Archduke Charles of Austria won a surprise victory over the French Emperor at Aspern in late June, 1809 and issued a call to all patriotic Germans, Varnhagen felt that he had discovered, at last, a state that would adequately represent the interests of the German nation. He would be disappointed in due course, but that did not darken the enthusiasm of the moment.

Security must have been lax during that period, for Varnhagen's coachman unloaded him early one morning directly in front of the Archduke's headquarters. He had penetrated to the very heart of the Austrian encampment without being stopped once. Within a day or so he had secured a commission as an ensign in a unit commanded by a daring young imperial count named Bentheim whose gallantry under fire had earned him a recent battlefield promotion to colonel. Using his last penny to equip and uniform himself, Varnhagen reported for duty just in time to go through a baptism of fire at the Battle of Wagram on July 5 and 6, 1809.

One morning after a severe summer thunderstorm, the Austrians discovered that their advantage had melted. Napoleon's army had slipped across the Danube under cover of the noise of the rain and thunder and was arrayed for battle. It was not Napoleon's habit to wait for his opponent to move. Varnhagen's own later account of the fighting is typical of first-person battle accounts; its decisive quality is bewilderment.

At the time there were as many battle casualties after one had been wounded and removed from the field to a medical tent as under fire. When Varnhagen was taken from the field with a serious wound in his thigh, he almost died from exposure and then was threatened by a field physician who was determined to amputate his leg. Having survived these hazards, he found his brief convalescence interrupted when he was captured by the French and exchanged for French prisoners only after being held in Vienna.

Being held prisoner in Vienna can only be applied very loosely to the state in which Varnhagen lived there during the period he was captive. He was put on his honor and quartered at first with a wealthy merchant. During that period he was forced to wear his uniform because he lacked funds to purchase civilian clothing. The civilian population looked upon him as something of a patriotic hero because they interpreted his wearing the Austrian uniform as an act of patriotic defiance to French occupying forces. Because of this Varnhagen enjoyed a kind of minor celebrity and received invitations to frequent several salons in the city.

Caroline Pichler, a Viennese authoress, pictures Varnhagen on meeting him at one of these social occasions:

> As I entered the room...I quickly caught sight of a man in complete uniform and learned that he was known as a writer, a highly literate person and exceptional Prussian...who, like so many of his com-

> patriots, had taken Austrian service and participated in the recent campaign...At the time, Varnhagen was a young man; he had not become famous as yet through his own writing and the brilliant writing of his wife; but even then his conversation was very lively and knowledgeable, and his eminent talent for describing character could be observed above all in his ability to cut things out in paper...[1]

Varnhagen's talent for taking scissors and paper and sculpturing intricate landscapes and other scenes was talked about by many who knew him. While purchasing a pair of good scissors, he also ran into his friend from Tübingen, Justinus Kerner, and they spent several happy days together in the great Austrian capital.

After the interlude in Vienna, Varnhagen got the unpleasant news that he had been exchanged with the French and would be able to return to his unit which had since been removed to Hungary. He quickly learned that peacetime garrison duty was deadly dull, especially in the remote countryside to which the Austrian forces had been removed under the terms of the treaty. His fellow officers did little else but play cards and drink, and the local Hungarian gentry Varnhagen found to be hardly more cultivated than prosperous farmers in the vicinity of Berlin.

There was some respite for him when his commander, Count Bentheim, returned from recuperative leave. Bentheim had sustained wounds at Wagram which continued to trouble him. In the meantime, the two men found some comfort in each other's company. Bentheim had enjoyed a genteel education and was conversant with French authors. He enjoyed engaging in the cultivated banter of his class, and Varnhagen felt that was a considerable improvement over the cursing and drinking bouts of his fellow officers. Still, he was very far from being satisfied with the life of a soldier.

It was at this point that Bentheim suffered a serious relapse and lay suffering for days from an extremely high fever. Varnhagen mustered all his medical knowedge and nursed his commander. When the young colonel finally recovered, he credited Varnhagen with having saved his life. From that day on Varnhagen was more than just another officer under Bentheim's command. The Count could hardly become his friend in any sense that required equality, but he accepted Varnhagen as a kind of private secretary and confidant.

Varnhagen's new relationship to Bentheim relieved him of the hateful routine of garrison life, as well as the dull company of his peers. His constant exposure to the nobleman was in itself an education for the son of a middle class physician. Varnhagen now gained insight into the customs and habits of the highest level of society in Central Europe.

Probably it was also during this time that Varnhagen conceived the idea of resurrecting an old family tale about the Varnhagens having descended from nobility. Bentheim sent Varnhagen on a personal mission to the Bentheim family seat at Steinfurt in the district of Munster in order to appeal to his elder brother for help in paying his debts. While there, Varnhagen had access to the library. Thumbing through old books, he later claimed he found a record of the old family "von Ense, genannt Varnhagen," from which Varnhagen's family

had long contended in private that they descended. After the trip to Steinfurt, Ensign Varnhagen became Varnhagen von Ense. The addition became the pseudonym under which he gained literary fame.

There was, indeed, talk during Varnhagen's life of his presumption of nobility. Many of his friends knew him, after all, as simply Varnhagen. His right to bear the predicate of nobility "von" and the additional surname "Ense" was challenged in 1826. This led to an embarrassing episode and to Varnhagen's official ennoblement. Varnhagen himself made different statements about his nobility and finally argued vehemently that an officer's patent in the Austrian army constituted, at the time, a kind of *de facto* ennoblement. The wearing of a noble predicate permitted him to argue against the establishment of a house of lords in Germany from a peculiar position of strength later on; it was certainly never a liability when he was defying the established order.

Bentheim despised garrison duty as much as did Varnhagen and sought every excuse possible to be out of it. He decided, for instance, that he and Varnhagen would spend the carnival season in Venice. When Varnhagen sat down to explain their plans to Rahel, who was lonely and impatient in Berlin, he also included an interesting portrait of his benefactor, Bentheim:

> He is handsome, gracious, unaffected, knows little and enjoys learning, though without assuming any serious scholarly effort. He is flexible and sensible to the highest degree, and an audacious youthfulness belongs to his blood, though his head also leads him to admire the severity of established age and productive sternness. He speaks French marvelously, some Italian, and German without any inclination to speak it better...He is proud and haughty, but only to the lowly. Never has there been a nobleman who insulted me less with his nobility.[2]

However, such was the ordinary stuff of a count of the realm at the time, and Rahel knew there was not much to gain by serving a great lord without great resources. Varnhagen had yet to learn that. He went along to Vienna with Bentheim where the two young men intended to wait for money from Bentheim's brother. The money never arrived, but Ensign Varnhagen made the best of the social life in the city while they were there.

At first he went along with Bentheim to exalted gatherings, but soon his feeling of being excluded or treated as Bentheim's servant led him to seek other company. He now made his regular appearances at salons and gatherings of the upper bourgeoisie and ennobled bankiers in town. There he once again cultivated the company of Jewish women.

The idyll in Vienna hardly lasted the month; the year was early 1810 when Varnhagen and his commander found themselves in new billets in Prague where Bentheim had been assigned quarters in an empty palace. There was not so much as a chair to sit upon in all the vacant elegance of the place, but it was better than living down among the other officers, as far as Varnhagen was concerned. What Varnhagen shared with his commander was his poverty. Bentheim

continued to be hounded by his creditors, and he began an affair with an actress in the local municipal theater.

Varnhagen's financial condition was desperate. In that age an officer did not earn a living. He was supposed to be subsidized from home during peace and to take booty to augment his wages during war. Varnhagen did not earn enough to cover the cost of postage, and so he began to supplement his income with his pen, bombarding Cotta with submissions for his *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände,* a journal that specialized in cultural affairs and avoided politics.

Cotta was in the market for good writers, and he paid them very well. Varnhagen translated aphorisms by Vauvenargues, did a piece on the minor art of cutting figures out of paper, and completed his first biographical sketch of a German writer, K. P. Moritz, the author of the early psychological novel, *Anton Reiser.* The same month the aphorisms appeared, Varnhagen also published with a preface of his own a translation of Talleyrand's "Advantages to be derived from Colonies under present conditions." It was a speech Talleyrand had delivered to the French Academy in 1797, and Varnhagen's German version appeared in the *Archiv für Geographie, Staats- und Kriegskunst (Archives for Geography, History, Statecraft and Military Science).* This publication illustrates a device Varnhagen would often use during his writing career in which he would promote otherwise subversive ideas by simply editing the statements of somebody else.

Who would have listened to a mere ensign in the Austrian army? In the guise of editor Varnhagen could present the view that "a free constitution necessarily promotes a striving for the improvement of humanity; an arbitrary constitution necessarily promotes from within and without the interests of the rulers..." Yet what was said publicly in France in 1797 was still anathema to official Germany in 1811, and Varnhagen could have hardly made such statements without having been challenged. At the same time, he could add to Talleyrand's rhetoric his view that "it is not the wisdom but rather the oppression of European governments that has peopled the New World." The established order in Germany, according to this editor, was especially culpable, and Germans had only been able to participate in the great colonial adventures at the expense of their linguistic and national indentity. It was, in short, the political order in Germany that had obstructed national destiny.

Varnhagen's message was repeated in his biographical sketch of Moritz as well. For there he argued that the retarded political order in Germany contributed to the failure of this writer to achieve true literary stature. In the absence of a genuine national community, literature cannot flourish:

> Germany has a wealth of writers who, with singular spirit, emerge from the empire of art and science without being able really to say to which of these provinces they belong. They wander about and what they touch takes on new form..., what they create is not just poem, or history, or science but more really a creation related to all three. Because their intention usually exceeds the limits of that form, it is necessary...to investigate their larger activities and to remark the human being in them in order to see the what and how of their achievement...

Such a one is Goethe, and Varnhagen's interest in that German phenomenon received another thrust about that time. On September 11, 1811 he wrote Cotta that he had "a little book about Goethe, more edited than written; which is actually excerpts from letters..."[3] These letters were, in fact, those Rahel had sent him while he was in Tübingen, and it was with this suggestion that Varnhagen's long involvement as critic and interpreter of Goethe began.

Cotta's reaction to Varnhagen's suggestion was cautious. He first asked Goethe's own opinion of the project. When Goethe responded somewhat negatively, Cotta printed only one installment of these "fragments relating to Goethe" in the *Morgenblatt.* For his part Varnhagen was developing the skills that today might belong to a literary agent. He hounded Cotta for years about continuing the series. It was not until 1823, however, that Varnhagen finally located a willing publisher (Dümmler in Berlin) who published the collection of Goethe commentary. Cotta was quite as stubborn as he.[4]

During the last months before leaving Prague, Varnhagen had inclined toward realism in literature. The humorous piece entitled "Conversations at Tea," for instance, was an attack upon the escapist romances of Caroline Fouqué, the wife of Baron de la Motte-Fouqué. Realistic treatment of themes, Varnhagen argued, was morally superior to any other because it came to grips with the inequities that actually exist and had, therefore, a direct effect upon events by promoting reform. Responsible fiction was realistic fiction. Not even female writers were exempt. At the same time, Varnhagen managed a jab at chauvinist critics who regarded female authors with distaste.[5]

Varnhagen never functioned merely as a critic. He felt the need to practise what he preached. His own venture into an area of fiction that can only be described as a kind of proto-realism can be found in his long story, "Reiz and Liebe" (Fascination and Love), the portrait of a milieu capturing the aura of Vienna during the days Varnhagen knew it as a prisoner-of-war.

Rahel had continued to be very displeased with the turn of events that had sent Varnhagen into the Austrian service. Her letters had become one great lament. She raged when she heard about his sojourns in Vienna and his trips to Bentheim's brother in Steinfurt. In Berlin she was increasingly at the mercy of her brothers. A serious recession had made it necessary for them to curtail her income. As her standard of living eroded, her sense of failure and desperation increased. Her father had died leaving her share of the business under the control of her brothers, and she had lost her mother during the preceding severe winter.

Insecurity had always been a signal part of her personality, though Rahel had usually managed an audacious outward manner. As adverse events converged upon her, the expressions in her letters began to border on megalomania. She had never spared a word in praising her own considerable talents, but now she wrote Varnhagen that she was the "cornerstone in the structure of humanity."[6] Varnhagen's epistolary response was to appear not to be having too much fun. He presented his situation in the worst light. He described himself as being

under the press of dire necessity. Was he not in the army? What choice did he have? It was not exactly the most comfortable situation in the world.

In the meantime, Bentheim had become restless again. His creditors were making his life miserable, and the Count decided that, since his elder brother refused to give him any relief, he would go to Paris and appeal to his father for assistance. The year was 1810. It was the high water mark of Napoleon's power, and a glamorous array of people were drawn to the center of France. Going to Paris was a chance of a lifetime for Varnhagen, and he had no intention of missing the opportunity no matter what Rahel wrote.

After having some difficulty getting a passport, Varnhagen joined his commander on the journey. In Paris he managed to sit at table with Metternich and to get into other Austrian embassy functions. He also met Baron Tettenborn, who would recruit him into a Cossack regiment under a Russian banner in 1813. Tagging along with Bentheim, Varnhagen was even present at an audience with Napoleon. The experience gave him material for his essays for years to come.

Back in Berlin Rahel was fuming. "You've caused me to lose money, time, quarters, comforts of all kinds since I've known you," she raged. "I still suffer for it!"[7] When he received such barrages from her, it was his habit to wait and let matters rest before answering. She gave him no respite, however, and the next thing she wrote was of her plans to meet him at a spa: "Let's experiment for a year. Leave your Bentheim for ten days..." in order to meet her for a rendezvous. She also hinted that she was spending a great deal of time with Alexander von der Marwitz, a young Prussian Junker of poetic temperament whom Varnhagen knew from Halle.

Varnhagen did finally join Rahel at Teplitz, using money she had sent him to make the journey. Their time together there in June 1811 was satisfactory for both of them. They spent time with Ludwig van Beethoven and discussed writing a libretto for an opera he was planning. Nothing came of the project, unfortunately for Varnhagen, though he contacted the great composer four years later when he was once again in Vienna.[8]

Another less felicitous acquaintance made in Teplitz was the Romantic poet, Clemens Brentano, who apparently insulted Rahel. He was known to have a somewhat unpredictable and abrasive manner, and Varnhagen did not like him, at first. Brentano went to Prague and looked Varnhagen up, however, then proceeding to court his favor. Varnhagen later wrote that:

> Brentano's friendliness soon became a heartfelt confidence and warm attachment. Gradually, he employed an uninhibited openness to tell me of all his relationships...I soon believed I had misjudged him, and I thought that I must forgive the strange and insulting exterior because of his central core.[9]

When Rahel heard that Varnhagen was spending time with Brentano, she wrote, "I ask you, in God's name, how am I supposed to take it, tell me, the fact that you are seeing Clemens Brentano every day?"[10] After Brentano wrote

her a mocking letter which has since been lost, the episode came to a mildly violent end. Rahel was infuriated and especially irritated at the idea that Varnhagen had even seen an early version of the insulting letter before Brentano mailed it. "I didn't think there was such nastiness except in bad books," she raged. "He speaks to me of a raging desire for my death...and, tell me, where does he get the idea that I am so anxious to be unhappy? He wishes me starvation...You must have completely lost your wits to have allowed him to send that letter!...Thus do you allow me to be insulted!"[11]

If Brentano had indulged in parodying Rahel's plaintive nature, she suspected that Varnhagen had somehow encouraged it. He had, after all, been the recipient of her letters. He knew how much she had lamented and complained.

Varnhagen was stung. He knew that Rahel's complaints grew out of her deteriorating situation. Her own health had been declining, and her loss of income had effectively led to her social isolation. Writing to Pauline Wiesel, for instance, she noted that she hardly had enough money to pay heating fuel. Without resources to hire a body guard it was impossible for ladies to venture out at night in unlit Berlin. Street lamps were not a feature in those days, and movement at night was dangerous. In addition to everything else, she had nearly died of lung infection during the hard winter of 1810.

In defense of himself Varnhagen wrote that "Brentano doesn't think to this hour that he has done anything to offend you. He still thinks of visiting you in Berlin, believing that he has actually rolled about at your feet like a good-natured puppy."[12] In fact, Brentano did visit Rahel, and they corresponded somewhat and maintained a cool cordiality. Before leaving Prague Varnhagen took the offender and boxed his ears one evening. He also confiscated a drama Brentano was working on at the time and kept it to assure, as he told him, his good behavior.

By early 1812 Varnhagen was thoroughly fed up with his life in the Austrian service. There was no hope of Bentheim's situation improving, and, to make matters worse, it looked as though Austria might be drawn into Napoleon's camp as an ally. Varnhagen wanted no part of that, and the boring routine of military duty was stifling to him. Rahel continued to chide and urge him to abandon his commission and to come to Berlin to be with her. Weary of her constant remonstrances, Varnhagen finally penned a strong letter in answer to her most recent insistence that he was reprehensible as man and lover:

> ...I am devoted to you, I honor you more every day; but I can keep away from you voluntarily, if I see I am worth nothing to you. In your judgment of me there is also a mixture of injustice, and I see how I offend you. The hours of despair I experienced because of it are my punishment — but don't think me weak; I have enough wanton courage to survive...Our correspondence no longer gives me any pleasure. You evoke the dark points from the past again and again; you exhaust them like witches that need to be exorcised unnecessari-

> ly. We'll never be at peace this way! Do you foolishly believe that I could not tell you a thousand things worth blaming you for, though I had rather be silent than to hurt you? You are eternally uncertain of me, and it is not always my fault. From now on I mean to attend to my business...As if you were not in the world. And when I come to Berlin, it shall be as if I didn't know you were there, or that the sun shines...[13]

Varnhagen's letter was effective. He did manage to secure a leave and later a discharge from Austrian service, and he proceeded to Berlin via Teplitz. When he arrived in the city, one of the coldest winters of the century was about to descend upon the whole of the continent. During the late autumn he spent his time paying his respects to various eminences he hoped might help him to some position in the state service. Varnhagen actually still had his eye on some minor bureaucratic post, but it was no opportune time for job hunting.

During those bleak months Varnhagen very likely moved into Rahel's quarters and shared her increasing impoverishment with her and her faithful maid, Dora. He was penniless himself, and the memory of the autumn and winter was so painful to him that, years later when he began to write his memoirs, he was unable to grapple with his experiences during that period.

After months of fruitless socializing and maintaining a brave exterior, showing himself at gatherings, waiting in antechambers, and tirelessly making contacts, he was finally granted an interview with the Prussian chancellor, Count Hardenberg. Napoleon was having a difficult time in Russia. His enemies were beginning to mobilize a resistance to his rule, and young patriots were once again in demand. It was because of these circumstances that Hardenberg promised Varnhagen an army commission.

In the months of confusion and turmoil that followed, Hardenberg removed the Prussian government to be closer to the front. Varnhagen remained in Berlin, though his reasons are unclear. He might have been following instructions to wait until a propitious moment to take up his commission. Whatever the reason, he was still in the city when the Russian vanguard arrived. The commander of the cavalry was his acquaintance from Paris, the one-time Austrian attaché at the Schwarzenberg embassy, Baron Tettenborn. Riding with Tettenborn was another of Varnhagen's comrades-at-arms, the dashing soldier Ernst von Pfuel. Through Pfuel Varnhagen was offered a commission in the Imperial Russian service.

Before assuming his commission as a captain in Russian service, Varnhagen hurried to ask Hardenberg's release from his Prussian commitments. He was given more than he had expected. Hardenberg promised to count his Russian service as if he had served in the Prussian army. Russian and Prussian interests were so closely identified at the moment that the Chancellor could make such an offer. He was probably not loathe to have one of his own men serving in the Russian vanguard, either, though it is very unlikely, as has been suggested by some, that Varnhagen might actually have served as a Prussian spy. Such an arrangement would have risked too much had the Russians discovered it.[14]

By going to Hardenberg, Varnhagen had missed being in attendance when Tettenborn "liberated" the North German port of Hamburg from French occupation. In fact, the French had pulled out temporarily to await further developments, and the Cossack advance that far west did not fit into Allied plans. There is no doubt that Tettenborn replenished his depleted personal finances by liberating the thriving center of trade. Taking a city in those days was a sure way to repair a damaged pocketbook.

When Tettenborn had arrived at the city gates, there had been some controversy among the citizens themselves as to whether he should be welcomed. The captain of the citizen's guard, J. W. von Hess, had tried to block the entry and joined with the city fathers, fearing that a gracious welcome would endanger them with the French when they returned, as they felt they surely would. The patrician city fathers wanted Tettenborn to declare martial law, so that it would be clear that they had been forced to permit the Russian entrance. Tettenborn did not want to look like a conqueror, for he wanted to mobilize the German population in the Allied cause. If he could provoke open insurrection against the French, he had justified his venture.

Tettenborn finally threatened Hess with force if he did not allow the Russian troops to enter the city in triumph. Immediately on his arrival, the Senate made him an honorary citizen with a purse of 5000 Louisd'or, a royal sum of money. He also was given a supplement of another 500 Louisd'or to distribute among his men, and we can assume that Varnhagen got his share. Tettenborn's extravagant style of life did nothing to dissuade those who spread rumors about his dubious purpose in coming to the city. A Hanoverian diplomat reported that there was "daily a dejeuner à la fourchette for 30 or 40 persons," including "oysters and champagne."[15]

Varnhagen was detailed, as soon as he arrived, to take command of the public information media in the city. His charge was to turn the newspapers to Allied purpose by supporting insurrection throughout the countryside. A Hanseatic brigade was organized but did not prove very successful, and Varnhagen founded the *Deutscher Beobachter (German Observer),* a publication that would have a life of several years as a medium for patriotic and nationalistic propaganda.

A scandal soon broke out surrounding the collection of funds in the city to support the Hanseatic legion. A former Prussian official, an obscure opportunist named Osswald, left town with the money. An investigation proved fruitless, and Tettenborn seems not to have been very concerned. After the wars Varnhagen returned to Hamburg to argue before the city senate that his commander had not actually been involved in the theft.[16]

Fear that the Russian force would not be adequate to hold the city proved accurate. Tettenborn presided over his "liberation" for a span of some two-and-a-half months. During that period the large French force held back voluntarily in order to await developments in the Eastern theater. Having entered the city in March, Tettenborn found it necessary to withdraw under heavy French fire in May. The withdrawal left Varnhagen especially bitter with their Danish allies, who had not helped in the resistance but withdrawn themselves out of range.

Tettenborn's forces moved then to join the main Allied forces at Boizenburg, a considerable distance away. The summer of 1813 was quiet and, during the armistice that followed, Varnhagen had the leisure to write his first eye-witness account of the campaign. He made his debut in the area of historical journalism with the publication of his *Geschichte der hamburgischen Begebenheiten während des Frühjahrs 1813 (History of the Events in Hamburg During the Year 1813).* The work appeared with a misleading London imprint and won its author considerable recognition. It was translated into French and was doubtless one of the reasons Varnhagen was given a post with the Prussian delegation at the Congress of Vienna.

Varnhagen's history was not meant to be objective history. The tract is a reportage written from the viewpoint of a participant. As narrator Varnhagen is anxious to present his commander as a liberator of Germany rather than a mere Allied (and Russian) commander. The work is, therefore, intentionally partisan and attempts to demonstrate a historical significance in the events *because* Hamburg remained an isolated and unique example of failure rather than a successful example of the kind of general mobilization they had sought among the German populace:

> The history of those days...appeared at first likely to repeat itself in an uprising in other towns and districts of Germany; then there was a very real hope and prospect that these events would deserve attention only as part of the general effort. Since, however, the struggles of this city have remained without parallel, and it alone has been burdened by fate tragic enough to stir the sympathy of our contemporaries — since then, her history stands complete and gains thereby, in a comprehensive view, its own independent significance(3).

Hamburg was, in other words, what *should* have happened in North Germany, and the liberation of the city becomes a unique historical moment viewed from that vantage point. As a kind of apology for what was not achieved, the book is also designed to encourage insurrection elsewhere, and it was important to get it published as quickly as possible in order to have an influence upon events.

The importance of the work to Varnhagen went beyond the occupational advantages it gave him somewhat later in securing a post with Hardenberg. It also provided a new generic outlet for his talent, a vehicle through which he could give adequate expression to his experience. In journalistic and political commentary he discovered his metier. Such writing gave him free vent to employ his analytical as well as his narrational abilities.

The termination of the armistice in August, 1813 brought Varnhagen yet another opportunity. Tettenborn's Cossacks resumed their sallies into enemy territory, disrupting communications and on reconnaissance missions. Varnhagen had excellent access to captured information of both strategic and personal interest, and he used it in a new propaganda offensive. On September 23, 1813, the first issue of his field newspaper *Zeitung aus dem Feldlager (Newspaper from the Bivouac)* was distributed gratis at the marketplace in the

town of Lüneburg. The contents were designed to boost the morale of the civilian population and to encourage them to support the Allied war effort against the French.

As a member of the Russian contingent, Varnhagen was not subject to the constraints of strict censorship that were imposed in other European armies. He could thus indulge in a polemic against the French that was unbridled for the period and foreshadowed modern war propaganda. The invective was occasionally so successful that French commanders seethed for years to come. The governor of Hamburg after Tettenborn's liberation, Dirk van Hagendorp, was so outraged at one article that he defended himself in his memoirs against Varnhagen's charges which appeared in print as follows:

> One of Davout's executioners, by the name of Hagendorp, released as governor of Hamburg an outrageous decree in which he pontificates to the populace on how they should act in case of an attack on the city. In an attempt to frighten the people, he reveals how great is his own fear...This miserable man carries his impertinence so far that he would seize the women, as soon as they gathered in groups of four, and have them whipped with canes. He himself was, of course, accustomed to having his own wife gallivant with Russians in Berlin where she finally died of the results...[17]

In an age which had not yet adopted the tactics of mass mobilization and unscrupulous manipulation of public opinion on a large scale, such barbed writing was not common.

Varnhagen's propagandistic work proved later not to have been entirely to his advantage. His consistent attempts to vilify Denmark because of what he considered Danish betrayal during the withdrawal from Hamburg resulted in closing Copenhagen to him as a possible diplomatic assignment when he was hard pressed in 1819 and thereafter. Varnhagen's lack of sympathy for Denmark might also have reflected his sympathy for Bernadotte who, as the new prince of Sweden, found his interests conflicting with his Scandinavian sister state.

It is not clear exactly why Bernadotte should have been so attractive a figure for Varnhagen. In issue number 3 on September 27, 1813 in his newspaper, however, Varnhagen lambasts Denmark for aggression against Sweden by land and sea. It is perhaps, the question of nationality felt by Germans living under Danish sovereignty that bothered him the most. In an item he called "Where is Hamburg," for instance, he develops the idea of Germanhood. The idea is that local allegiance and identity should transcend place: Hamburg exists wherever its citizens carry on the struggle against French hegemony.

The concept of German nationhood, though clearly the primary theme of all his journalistic writings of this period, including his two book-length histories, can only be viewed against the background of his private doubts about the future of Germany. If Varnhagen's public writing was partisan and aimed at promoting the Allied cause, privately he was not at all sure that a clear will could be generated within the German-speaking community sufficient to realize nationhood. When Bentheim had dispatched him to Steinfurt to urge his

brother to pay his debts, Varnhagen had witnessed such dissension in Kassel that he despaired of Germany's future. A society so fragmented into disparate groups and classes might never be able to constitute a cohesive nation, he felt, for the historic divisions presented enormous obstacles to national unity and cooperation.

During the following months of 1813-14 Varnhagen saw enough of combat to last a lifetime. He was not wounded again and survived Tettenborn's audacious venture into enemy territory for the purpose of taking Bremen. It was in Bremen that Varnhagen came into the position of a small fortune in gold when Tettenborn gave him charge of auctioning off the contents of the local post office. It was that money that would cushion him after the wars when he was cautiously shopping about for a viable option in employment.

After the great struggle to liberate Europe from French hegemony, Varnhagen was shocked to find that Napoleon should abdicate so suddenly. He had written that

> ...it appears that the work for a constitution has been placed lower in priority than military matters...Since this war has never appeared to me to be the primary matter, I hardly hope that it will be brought to an easy victory for the Allies; such a development could cause the arrogance from above to ignore and betray the power from below: a simple drive to Paris and occupation of France unmet by resistance could prove all too easily to be the crippling blow to a hope for constitutional government to which the German people are entitled. I hope that I am wrong.[18]

His fear that Napoleon's removal from the scene would give the German princes free reign to crush the liberal movement was indeed a realistic assessment of the situation.

Varnhagen wrote Rahel that, though the German princes spoke with the rhetoric of 1797, he suspected that they would quickly abandon anything inconvenient to their exercise of power as soon as it was expedient to do so. Varnhagen was on the scene in Paris when the Bourbons reassumed the throne of that country on May 4, 1814, and he reported on the experience in an essay published in 1818. His consternation at the event is apparent:

> The French were now freed of the oppressive ruler, new hopes for the Fatherland became active, the future could be better; but events forced their way too quickly and too variously to allow a free development of a nobler sentiment. Hearts were scarcely released from constraints when once again frightening signs of destructive elements filled the air. The French people had long ago left the ranks of their former kings, a quarter of a century had cut clean all connections with them, and a generation...had placed itself between the people and their former rulers; a new condition existed in which even the old could only reestablish itself on a new foundation...[19]

Varnhagen spared nothing but caution in combating the forces of the Restoration. "True nobility can only exist in personal achievement," he insisted,"the human being is son of his deeds."

Even when writing of the Bourbon restoration, he managed to shift swiftly to German affairs, claiming that there was an historical contract between prince and people in which a *Verfassung,* or constitution should be simply an articulation of an implicit agreement. The people were entitled to such a document, however, and it would prove beneficial both to ruler and subject.

In the meantime, Rahel had done valuable service among the sick, the destitute, and the wounded in Prague. She was exhausted but had a sense of accomplishment, as well as having made something of a reputation for her generous work. That Varnhagen continued to remain in Paris baffled and irritated her and she wrote him so:

> I would be in genuine despair if you had to stay in Paris any longer, for I sit here — sick and anguished enough — and wait for you to come and get me. But I see that God is going to allow me to die a waiting and vacillating death and *no other*...Just come! to wait longer will *kill me*.[20]

Varnhagen had remained in Paris at first because he, like so many ambitious young men at the time, was seeking a post in the postwar scramble for jobs. In order to secure employment it was simply necessary to use every contact, enlist every device at one's disposal. As long as the grandees were in Paris, Paris was the place to be if one hoped to work. After so many of them departed for England, however, he became seriously ill. The rigors of combat had taken a toll upon his constitution. For awhile he could not get away. Once he recovered, however, he hurried to join Rahel in their "happy valley" at Teplitz from which he was soon writing to his publisher, Cotta,

> I am working on a history of the campaigns in which I participated as eye-witness, namely against Davout, in Bremen and in Denmark... This will be a continuation of the history...published by Perthes. I require 50 Friedrichd'or for the work. It will be ready by the end of August.[21]

Cotta did publish the work that Varnhagen wrote during the second pleasant sojourn in Teplitz. It appeared in 1815 as *Die Geschichte der Kriegszüge des General Tettenborns während der Jahre 1813-14 (The History of the Campaigns of General Tettenborn During the Years 1813-14).* In Varnhagen's introduction he challenges Sallust's theory that history is made by a few exceptional men. Though that sometimes may be true, Varnhagen felt, there were such times as the recent conflicts in which no single individual dominated the action. Such moments in history may be viewed as corporate efforts in which the achievements are the result of a concerted enterprise on the part of many individuals.

There is a single presence, however, that dominates the action of Varnhagen's narrative: Napoleon. He is hardly a character except that his control of events grows out of the diffuseness of Allied purpose. It was not Varnhagen's narrative intention to glorify Napoleon. He hoped instead to make his own commander, Baron Tettenborn, look effective. In fact, the opposite effect is accomplished, for, in following the relatively random movements of that minor cavalry leader, Varnhagen shows how rampant confusion was among the inferior units held loosely under Allied control.

Tettenborn emerges from Varnhagen's narrative as an insignificant officer who was unable to fit into the strategic picture during the campaigns in France. His audacity in the north of Germany was successful because nothing strategic was at stake and concerted action with a larger command was not crucial. In France Tettenborn is totally lost to the larger picture and usually in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was surely not the picture Varnhagen sought to create but was a measure of his amateurism as a historian of military activity. The work, nevertheless, gained him sufficient fame to assure him a place with Hardenberg in the Prussian state service. It was the position in the Chancellor's entourage which finally provided him with the security he needed to marry Rahel.

4. AMONG THE DIPLOMATS

It was a surprise to almost everybody that a newly created attaché with a future should marry a Jewess some fourteen years his senior. Such a match was not designed to do a man's career much good. Rahel had neither wealth nor beauty, and the age difference was enough to lift more than one eyebrow. He was twenty-nine. She was forty-two. The snippy condescension with which Rahel had to contend is probably characterized in a comment by Caroline von Humboldt that she could have "laughed out loud" when she read what her husband had written about "little" Rahel having become "the wife of a diplomat and excellency."[1]

Varnhagen had seen beyond the appearances accessible to public opinion. He knew Rahel and, with all her faults, recognized her value. Pretty she was not, and she knew it herself, as she wrote:

> I have no grace; not even the amount of understanding that enables one to recognize it; in addition to lacking beauty, I have no inner grace. I believe that and have for a long time...But I don't understand why I am this way, for I often find that I have innocence, versatility, and liveliness. ...Still, it's been decided that I am disgusting...I am plainer than ugly. That's how I am in everything.[2]

In spite of all her liabilities, her age, lack of fortune, and her Jewishness, Rahel finally had a husband. She was liberated from dependence upon her brothers, and, insofar as she was christened and married to an ethnic German, she escaped the confines of her Jewish ethnicity.

Before being given permanent status with the Prussian state, Varnhagen had to serve an apprenticeship with the legation at the Congress of Vienna. There Hardenberg employed him as something of an information officer. Varnhagen hoped privately that he would be able to do an eye-witness history of the Congress similar to that which he had written for the late wars and that his peripheral function would give him the insight he needed. Unfortunately, he discovered that an information officer can seldom become historian to the event he has been hired to serve.

The first obstruction for the hopeful historian who is a press secretary is the nature of his job. He is the very last person permitted into the councils where actual policy is made. His function is to stand in the corridors and intercept the public. In dispensing information he is supposed to promote a certain "official" view of proceedings and is, therefore, not given complete access to the facts. His superiors only allow him to discover the version they wish the public to know, so that he can speak with authority without really having any.

Varnhagen's other two "histories" had suffered from the same problems. However, while Varnhagen may have lacked a professional soldier's grasp of operations and a commander's overview of the battlefield necessary for truly accurate reporting, the fact that he was an eye-witness and combatant enabled him to capture something of the experience of battle. His writing is valuable especially when he reverts to reporting the action he witnessed first hand.

He was not a combatant in the political proceedings at Vienna, which occurred on a very high level indeed, and his personal experience was irrelevant. He had no sense of what was involved in sitting on deliberative councils, but he could render a colorful picture of the peripheral activities, social gatherings, and festivities. Anything external to the deliberations at which the decisions were made could be captured by a good reporter, but the essence, the heart of the negotiation process lay outside his scope.

Varnhagen's realization that he could not accomplish what he had hoped to do at Vienna became an insight into the limitations of the kind of subjective history he naturally favored. Instead of leading him to develop his skill at objective and researched history, however, it simply solidified his interest in the kind of reporting that was to his taste: eye-witness reports.

It was not likely that eye-witness reporting and a view of history from a private perspective would always be met with approval among readers and the cultural arbiters of the 19th century. Much of Varnhagen's future life would, nevertheless, be spent promoting the kind of first-hand reporting he speaks of here. Generations not inclined to admit publicly that an unsavory or intimate side of life exists also were not receptive to Varnhagen's arguments. The posthumous controversy created in the wake of Ludmilla's publishing Varnhagen's private papers would rage for a generation around precisely that problem.

The largest task given Varnhagen at the Congress was the defense of Prussian interests in annexing Saxony. Since the Saxon king had been a willing ally of Napoleon's throughout the period, many Germans felt there was justice in viewing the little sister state as conquered territory. In *Deutsche Ansicht der Vereinigung Sachsens mit Preussen (A German View on Uniting Saxony with Prussia)* Varnhagen preferred to plead the case another way.

Since the movement of history would make any former order passé, Varnhagen wrote (striking a blow simultaneously at the dogma of the Restoration), it would be nonsense to consider the former king of Saxony as having any claim to his kingdom. What the times require, in Varnhagen's opinion, is a viable state power capable of representing the interests of the German people. A population living under a minor state government like Saxony, powerless among nations, really has no hope for self-determination.

Varnhagen felt he had struck another blow in the cause of liberal German nationalism. However, he might also have reflected that his argument was actually being used as a tool in the aggrandizement of Prussian power. There was also an Allied consensus on the matter of Germany that precluded any settlement which permitted a united greater German state. The chief advocate of a greater Germany, Baron vom Stein, and his party were destined to failure. The question of a united and parliamentary Germany was not even a factor under consideration except in the minds of men like Varnhagen who, in promoting the interests of Prussia, were seriously miscalculating the potential there for internal reform when they placed their hopes for a nationalistic future in that autocratic state. As far as the negotiating powers were concerned, the primary consideration in the Saxon question was whether adding the little territory to Prussia would jeopardize the balance of power.

Ironically enough for Varnhagen, the tract he wrote in the employ of Prussia was not permitted for distribution in that state.[3] Protesting an action that curtailed the effect of his work, Varnhagen expressed his views on the freedom of the press: 'Newspapers are the real platforms for public opinion in our time; the majority...develop their knowledge and opinions...solely from them.''[4] The idea that public opinion was the greatest potential force within a state was not an opinion held exclusively by Varnhagen. Hardenberg and other Prussian leaders had expressed the same idea. Seen in its proper perspective, however, their view was actually that public opinion was simply another device in the game of power.

When Napoleon escaped Elba and appeared once again on the continent, Varnhagen was detailed to accompany Hardenberg to the scene of the action. When he landed in Paris again after Waterloo, he found the city much changed and the heady and exuberant atmosphere of 1810 no longer present. Rather was it a demoralized Paris, the center of defeated France to which Varnhagen returned.

It was in Paris that Varnhagen began to complain how victory would be purchased at the expense of liberal hopes for Germany's future. The rhetoric of Restoration was already an indicator of how developments would tend. Varnhagen actually witnessed the return of the old ruling house of France, and his disillusionment grew apace. To make matters worse, Rahel refused to meet him in Paris and continued to remain in Frankfurt am Main despite the fact that he had written her, as she told Pauline Wiesel, a whole ''novel of heart-rending letters'' begging her to join him.

In fact, Rahel was enjoying herself in Frankfurt, where much of Germany's elite had gathered to await further developments. It was in that city that she had finally achieved her lifelong desire of meeting Goethe. He had visited her in her apartment, and she wrote: ''Goethe came...that is my patent of nobility.'' It was the place for a self-appointed reporter of history to be. Many of the dignitaries and officials in the city were gathered for the inter-German parliament that would be convened there.

In Frankfurt, Varnhagen made a contact with the publisher, Varrentrapp, who agreed to publish a volume of his collected poetry. Varnhagen had published his first volume of poetry two years before, including most of his war poems.[5] Though he was not adverse to publishing such work, he did not have a very high opinion of it. Writing to his Swiss friend, Troxler, he remarked the impending publication of his short fiction with Cotta's publishing house and commented that it was all ''Juvenilia of which I am not quite ashamed...''[6] Varnhagen was doing what so many writers get into the habit of doing. He was finishing up a stage of his development and, by getting it between hardback covers, putting it behind him.

It was in the volume published by Cotta of his short fiction that Varnhagen included the story, ''Reiz and Liebe'' (Fascination and Love), and the ghost stories that dated from his Tübingen period. These stories would have been the caliber one might expect from a popular magazine today.

There was never a time in his life when Varnhagen's industry waned. He had already begun the voluminous correspondence which was to contribute so

significantly to his posthumous reputation. Through letters he entered into sundry connection with half of intellectual Europe. He also began to exercise his biographical skills once again by turning out sketches for the publisher Brockhaus, who placed them in a series entitled *Zeitgenossen (Contemporaries),* a 19th century equivalent of magazines devoted to celebrity sketches so popular today, which require chiefly superficial praise of the subject.

In developing skills designed to satisfy the enormous appetite of his contemporaries for biographical information, Varnhagen revealed a preference for peripheral historic figures. A sketch of Tettenborn was at the top of his list of priorities. Then, he moved on to do character studies of other men he had known. As an eye-witness reporter of history, Varnhagen was naturally busy with the task of historicizing his own experience. Any person who came within the field of his vision, no matter how apparently insignificant, was of potential public interest. In his letters to his Leipzig publisher, he takes a strong stand in favor of subjective history, declaring that "the history of current affairs does not permit neutrality, for life cannot be neutral."[7]

Meanwhile, he was waiting in Frankfurt for assignment with the Prussian civil service. It was during that period and in that city that he observed renascent antisemitism. In the wake of Napoleon's utter defeat, the gains of civil rights made during and following the French Revolution were being eroded. After Varnhagen received his commission as chargé d'affaires at the ducal court at Baden in the town of Karlsruhe, he continued to encounter evidence of prejudice against Jews.

At Karlsruhe he found out how inconvenient it was for a rising young diplomat to have a Jewish wife. This was not the most felicitous beginning. Nonetheless, that first appointment of his at Karlsruhe exceeded his wildest hope for his own future. Quite recently he would have been satisfied with a minor, and even clerical appointment in the civil service. Yet, Hardenberg had made him an emissary with a salary six times the amount he had thought adequate to meet his needs.

Baden had been one of the petty German courts German patriots had planned to use in their strategy of restructuring Germany. In Paris Ernst von Pfuel and others had schemed to use the smaller, South German states as models and little stages upon which all of Germany should see its future shape. Their hope was not unrealistic, for the Grand Duchy of Baden, the Kingdom of Württemberg and Bavaria's status as kingdom could all be attributed to Napoleon. He had created the little principality in which Varnhagen was accredited out of disparate historic elements. It stood to reason, then, that the reigning dukes had a stake in the future, not the past.

The Duke and his most able minister, Baron Reitzenstein, had managed to generate a centralized and rationalized government after the French model, sweeping away the vested interest of sundry groups, especially the remnants of the feudal aristocracy. Constitutional reform was next on the agenda, and it was this process men like Varnhagen hoped to influence for the sake of a future Germany.

Yet Baden, though lovely, was, in fact, a rather backward area and included undeveloped and relatively primitive regions such as the Black Forest. The ancient family of the counts of Zähringen had been elevated to the ducal throne; but they proved to be riddled by disease and, after an initially productive period, sapped of vigor. When Varnhagen arrived in Karlsruhe, a town recently constructed as the ducal seat, he found the reigning family already threatened with extinction. The problem was that other powers were already waiting in the wings ready and eager to dismantle the state. Bavaria had historic claims to Palatinate territories integrated into Baden; her other neighbors would have been equally happy to aggrandize their own territories at Baden's expense. Without the Zähringen family, the raison d'être of the duchy would vanish. The lovely new Neo-classic structure of the palace that was the ornament of the region provided shelter for a governmental system many felt would not outlive the decade.[8]

As a committed liberal with profound democratic sympathies, Varnhagen had a stake in Baden's continuing existence. If the Zähringen dynasty was secure on the throne, work on a constitutional and representative form of government could be completed. A representative assembly, it was generally agreed, would be called into being, and all of Germany would witness the effectiveness of such a government.

As a Prussian emissary Varnhagen's job was not to promote the development of constitutional government but to see to his own government's interests. From the very start there was a serious conflict between his office as chargé d'affaires for Prussia and his activities in support of Baden's viability as a state. Only by coincidence did these two quite different activities appear to complement one another. Finally, his continued devotion to the cause of representative government would conflict with his duties as a Prussian official.

By chance, Varnhagen's commander, General Tettenborn, accepted a commission in Baden's army and established homes in several places within the territory of the Duchy. His liberation of Hamburg had made him a wealthy man, and the General lived generously, holding open house in Mainz. Tettenborn was interested in Baden's viability, too, though for different reasons, and he and Varnhagen joined forces to resolve the dilemma that was threatening its existence.

The simplest answer to the questions raised by the possible extinction of the dynasty in Baden was to legitimize an illegitimate line. All that was needed was a cabinet order declaring the children of a brother's mistress true heirs to the duchy. Yet, fixing his signature to such a document seemed an overwhelming task for the syphillitic reigning duke. He had fallen into a lethargy out of which he could seldom be roused. Moreover, he might well have had serious qualms about creating new dukes out of bastards. Nevertheless, after a period of intrigue behind the scenes, Varnhagen and Tettenborn reached their goal.

Varnhagen's position at the court in Karlsruhe was that of a junior official. He was actually attached to the embassy in Stuttgart, the capital of the neighboring Kingdom of Württemberg, and directly under the supervision of the accredited emissary there. The chain of command required that he submit his dispatches to Stuttgart. Varnhagen did no such thing. He very early made a habit of sending his dispatches directly to the foreign office in Berlin. He also generally acted on his own initiative without consulting his superior, who was a

competent if mediocre diplomat. To make the situation even more explosive, he never hid the contempt he felt for his superior's lack of imagination.

Varnhagen's behavior was audacious and contrary to diplomatic procedure. He seized opportunities without consulting either Stuttgart or Berlin and then attempted in his dispatches — which the foreign minister later called masterful works — to explain and even to teach his superiors the wisdom of his actions. Such a young man, whom both enemy and friend regarded as brilliant and very promising, was obviously headed either for a remarkable career or a catastrophe.

Inside Baden Varnhagen had set to work to eliminate his greatest enemy, Prime Minister von Hacke, who had banned Rahel from being presented at court and kept Varnhagen away for months after his arrival in town. The Duke was finally persuaded to replace Herr von Hacke, and Varnhagen took revenge on the man years later when he described him as being:

> Swollen to a mass of formless flesh which extended into a heavy, hanging belly....He revealed by his appearance that he was more glutton than gourmet...and with coarse candour demonstrated this tendency by carrying on state business in the kitchen...[9]

Varnhagen's gift for vicious satire remained with him most of his life, in spite of his struggle to tame the element of malice. It would come to the fore especially when he was under stress or suffered slight. His comment on Hacke's removal from office was laconic: "He will never experience want so long as he wields the cooking spoon like some do the sword or pen, never allowing it to rest."[10]

The days in Baden were ripe with crisis. Bavaria began to mass troops on Baden's borders when the Duke's second ailing child died. In the face of these ominous troop movements, Varnhagen and Tettenborn published an exchange between the Duke and his brother-in-law, the King of Bavaria. The correspondence was a stroke of genius; for it threw suspicious light upon Bavarian intentions — and no burgher liked the idea of one brother taking advantage of another's misfortune. Varnhagen's apprenticeship during the wars in the craft of propaganda proved once again useful.

The new Prime Minister was more careful to cultivate the young attaché. He also managed to secure the survival of the duchy by breaking down and weeping in the presence of the impressionable Czar Alexander at Aachen in 1817, when the Allied powers were deliberating on the question of the Duchy's continued existence. At that point, the government could seriously approach the problem of creating a representative assembly and designing a constitution.

The task of drafting the constitution was accomplished within the government itself. Though Baden's constitution was the first and the most liberal to appear in Germany, its publication taking place in 1818, it was a product of princely graciousness and in no way reflected the true constitution of the society. It was, in this fashion, very much a German phenomenon: a prescriptive

document handed down from above and pointing the way in which the body politic should develop. In one respect, it was the culmination of a process that began with Napoleon's *Vernunftstaat,* or government of reason and enlightened values, which itself had been established through a coercive integration of motley territories under one central administration. The classes which had generated representative government in England, for instance, were hardly in evidence within the duchy.

Shortly after the constitution was instituted, the diseased Duke died and was succeeded by his plodding and middle-aged brother, Ludwig, who had spent most of his adult life either in the Prussian military service or in private retreat. Here was an extraordinary opportunity for Varnhagen and for Prussia. Duke Ludwig's most cherished desire was to become a Prussian general, a rank he had never achieved on his own merit. Berlin lost no time in granting the new sovereign his wish. Ludwig appeared at table in the full regalia of a Prussian general (much to the chagrin of his own military staff), and Varnhagen was given a very special status among the diplomatic corps at Karlsruhe. Ludwig's gratitude was, some suggested, out of proportion. He also granted the junior diplomat the coveted Grand Cross of the Order of the Lion.

Varnhagen's star was rising fast. He seemed destined for great office. Even his disgruntled superior in Stuttgart was cautious about chastizing him. One does not argue with success. Under this brilliant surface, however, darker clouds were gathering. The diplomatic dispatches yield a more troubled professional relationship with Berlin. Varnhagen was apparently considered brilliant but brash. His dispatches became preachy as the representative assembly was put into place. He also had seriously violated protocol when he remained behind at Baden- Baden after the Duke and the entire court had left the spa to avoid the company of the King of Bavaria. There was another instance in which he had made a private trip to Stuttgart where he had visited with the King of Württemberg without first checking with his superior there. His relationship with that king resulted in an offer of employment with Wurttemberg which he used in an attempt to get a promotion from Berlin.

Varnhagen's antics had not gone without warning. In addition to the official censure from Berlin for staying behind in Baden-Baden, Varnhagen had a "momento mori" from his friend Staegemann, who was well-placed in the government and in a good position to know how matters were disposed. Every sign indicated caution on Varnhagen's part, if he cared to save his career in the Prussian service. Yet, he did not restrain himself but actually became seriously involved with the constitutional opposition party that was gradually forming in response to certain governmental projects and acts.

Varnhagen's position in Berlin was made even more insecure — and Staegemann might have been thinking of that — because his chief benefactor, the chancellor, Hardenberg, was himself fighting a losing battle to maintain his power. Once Hardenberg was removed, there was no advocate and supporter of liberalism present who could stem the rising tide of conservatism.

When the Prince of Prussia appeared in Karlsruhe one hot day to witness parliamentary debates, Varnhagen was deeply troubled. The debates were stor-

my, the assembly was scorching hot, the weather was unseasonably humid, and it was hardly a spectacle designed to please a prince. The opposition consisted of men who would indeed soon define their mission as one of loosely organized but stubborn resistance to the government and anything it hoped to implement. Varnhagen must have known that, by the end of that day, the signs boded no good for his career.

The unfortunate development in which German liberals began in opposition to the government and ended in opposition to the system helped to rob the assembly of any effective voice in government. Varnhagen was, however, in basic sympathy with that point-of-view and, therefore, encouraged the notion that radical change was both inevitable and desirable. He fully expected revolution to explode before the end of the decade and said so in many of his letters to friends and fellow sympathizers. Thus might his lack of caution in regard to the exigencies of his diplomatic career be explained by the intensity with which he both longed for and believed in revolution. He ignored Staegemann's warning and all the signs of both the increasing displeasure in Berlin and the local Duke's irritation.

Through every crisis Varnhagen continued to write. He published numerous articles declaring how well matters were going in Baden's new assembly and playing down the controversial side of parliamentary debate and confrontation.[11] During the period of his tenure in office at Karlsruhe, he published 204 articles in Cotta's great liberal newspaper, the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung,* alone. Most of his work was political and in open support of constitutional government. Though Varnhagen published without a byline as a matter of course, it was surely known that he was working for Cotta. Many could doubtless guess his identity when reading the material, for his style is distinctive and his whereabouts was known.

As it became apparent that the opposition was hardening into an anti-government party, the Duke became increasingly irritated with those who encouraged it. He felt betrayed by an envoy whom he had rewarded with high honor and permitted special favors. It was actually on the official request of the government of Baden that Varnhagen was recalled from his post on July 22, 1819.

Varnhagen's former superior, the emissary to the neighboring kingdom of Württemberg, arrived unannounced at his front door one morning and handed him the orders. Varnhagen struggled to maintain a steady countenance. Küster had every reason to hold a grudge against Varnhagen, but he was not a malicious man. Instead of confiscating his former inferior's papers, he left Varnhagen to himself and went away. It was Küster's generous neglect of his duty that probably saved Varnhagen, for it gave him time to get rid of incriminating documents and letters that might have made his association with the local opposition clear.

Varnhagen's change of status was abrupt and profound. He was *persona non grata* in the duchy in which he had been so richly rewarded. He did not leave the territory immediately, however, even though he was under orders to proceed to Holland and await further instructions. Rather did he first write and then join Rahel in Baden-Baden where she was taking a cure. Her reaction was simple.

She wrote that she had told him it would come to that, if he continued to ignore the signs. Staegemann advised Varnhagen to come to Berlin to defend himself in person against the charges that were rumored. It was not until October, however, that he set out for the Prussian capital, after he had received orders appointing him envoy to the United States of America.

Varnhagen was determined not to go to America. Rahel did not feel she could make such a journey, and he believed that he would be yielding unnecessarily if he allowed himself to be removed so easily from the German scene. His role as one of the first casualties in the moves after the Karlsbad Decrees pleased him, for it made him a kind of liberal martyr. It was in that guise that he presented himself to many of his friends in his letters to them.

When he arrived in Berlin, Varnhagen assumed a vehement, even indignant role as the unjustly accused servant. He appeared at the foreign office much to the dismay of Count Bernstorff and kept that grandee in his office during the course of a stormy interview that lasted several hours. The meeting became so loud and violent that an under-secretary (the future foreign minister Ancillon, who would eventually relieve Varnhagen of half of his salary) looked in just to be sure that Bernstorff was not being murdered. Varnhagen described the interview in a letter to his friend, Oelsner, in Paris:

> As soon as I arrived, I went to Bernstorff, who received me coldly. I had a three hour interview with him—or rather a three hour quarrel. He blamed me not for having misused my office, as he specifically stated, but for definite errors of behavior in certain matters in Karlsruhe. He gave me credit, at the same time, for having great talent, and he praised my diplomatic dispatches as a *non plus ultra* in elegance, acuteness, and power of description. What I lack, he added, was integrity. I had deliberately misled the government through my favorable reports about the question of parliamentary proceedings in Baden....I cried out that it was not true...[12]

There was no hard evidence against Varnhagen. Members of the government were not unkindly disposed to him. Bernstorff did not know, at the same time, just what to do with him. Word had gotten out. Metternich had expressed himself against any further inner-German assignment for Varnhagen, and now the young diplomat had refused his appointment to the United States. It was also characteristic of the man that Bernstorff's compliments about the style of his dispatches meant more to him than the comments that impinged upon his integrity. Varnhagen measured himself in terms of his writing.

The situation was nevertheless quite serious. Removal from a post was a grave blot upon a man's record. Varnhagen was, in fact, finished as a diplomat. His meteoric rise in the state service had come to an abrupt end. He would spend the next two years in considerable anxiety about his status and future with the Prussian government. His official capacity remained highly ambiguous, and he was even deprived of his salary for months. The fact that he was "on disposition" simply meant that he was being held in reserve, pending further developments. Once again he found himself removed to the antechambers of government and

power—an existence that would become permanent. Yet, there was a difference in the final solution and regulation of his case: he retained a pension and thereby was assured the subsistence necessary to devote himself to his studies and writing.

In many respects, and surely in regard to his writing, Varnhagen's recall from his post was a kind of blessing in disguise. After the initial months of suspense, he settled into a life that was not uncomfortable, a life that permitted him considerable leisure. It was the kind of existence he had longed for during earlier years when he had aspired to nothing more than an obscure clerical post that would not have taken up too much of his writing time.

5. THE MAN OF LETTERS

If Varnhagen was considered for a post in the "free city" of Cracow, it was only briefly and nothing came of it. Once again, the opposition of Austria blocked any serious consideration he might have been given.[1] Varnhagen kept his private despondency hidden behind his usual sociable demeanor, and he made it a point to be seen often at gatherings. As the months dragged into years, he was very careful not to do or say anything that might provide his enemies ammunition. As the conservative party consolidated itself in power, it became impossible for liberals to maintain themselves in office without drastically modifying their position or simply remaining silent. Writing to Cotta, Varnhagen cautioned him not to use the mails, for "every word could be used against" him.[2]

There were times during this period when Varnhagen was so depressed that even his friends could not cheer him. When Chamisso and Wilhelm Neumann suggested they take up their old multi-author project again, he was not enthusiastic.[3] It was during that time that he was approached by conservatives, who hoped to persuade him to join them. It was hinted that, were he to desert Hardenberg and the liberal party at court, his career might be rejuvenated. Varnhagen refused.

Between 1819 and 1823 Varnhagen showed not only great restraint in his personal behavior, he also curbed the ideological slant of his writing, taking greater pains in disguising his intent in his work. His tactics succeeded, at least, in persuading Count Bernstorff, the foreign minister and his superior, that he was not a dangerous radical or threat to the government. Bernstorff came to believe that Varnhagen had been unjustly treated, and he restored him at half salary and began to give him occasional writing to do within the foreign office. His duties included writing dispatches and interdepartmental memos, but his status continued to remain ambiguous. Instead of a full salary, he was paid an additional subsidy for his services out of discretionary funds

It was not until September 23, 1823 that Varnhagen was informed that he could not expect another diplomatic post. His laconic comment on the information was: "That's alright, too" *(auch gut)*. His work at the ministry would continue until 1834 when he was retired for good by a new foreign minister, Ancillon, who had never liked him. His subsidy was reasonably secure during Bernstorff's tenure, however, and he was even dispatched in 1829 to the court of Hesse-Kassel to mediate in a somewhat sordid family feud among members of the ruling house there.[4]

Notwithstanding Varnhagen's usual serious attitude towards any official duties he was given, his job was anything but demanding and, by modern standards, not at all regular. The odd chores he did for the foreign office were simply bureaucracy's way of dealing with the problem of an effective official who, because of political reasons, was not employable. Though critics after Varnhagen's death felt that much of his bitterness had grown out of his professional frustration, he was quite happy with the state of affairs because it left him relatively independent and free to write.

Neither Varnhagen nor Rahel had ever any compulsion for conspicuous consumption or display. Their interests were largely intellectual and required little

more than books. The two servants they kept were hardly a luxury for people of their class; their apartment was modest, and their entertaining consisted largely in the same gatherings they had always entertained in which weak tea and cookies were served. The integrity of Varnhagen's domestic happiness was assured in the continuing mutual respect and affection which he and his wife shared for one another.

When Varnhagen was away on rare journeys from Berlin, he sincerely missed Rahel. During a visit to Hamburg in 1823 when he was with his sister and mother, he wrote: "Where you are not, there it is strange to me, and I ask myself a hundred times a day: is it true that I left you voluntarily."[5] With the basic commodities, books, their two faithful servants, Dora and Ganzmann, and a wide circle of friends, the decade after his recall was something of an idyll for Varnhagen.

Eminently sociable as both Rahel and Varnhagen were, it was not long before they were making their modest apartment a gathering center in Berlin. Weaving a fabric of contact was second nature to them, and Rahel was given an opportunity to bloom a second time in her life as salonière. Their gatherings took place in the afternoon or early evening and included many people with peripheral roles in government.

The society that gathered at the Varnhagens' during the 1820s was not as exalted as that which had come to Rahel's *Dachstube* two decades before; yet, it was distinguished after its own fashion. Varnhagen was himself something of an anomaly in official and officious Berlin. He was an official without a post and possessed a civil service rank without any observable duties. His situation was ambiguous in a society in which status and security depended upon clear lines to office and power. There was moreover a general knowledge that he had fallen somehow from promising heights because of an affair that had never been satisfactorily explained.

Among those who shared the afternoon gatherings were young and ambitious men, including academicians such as Leopold Ranke, or literary figures such as the Swiss, Gottfried Keller. There were also genuinely close friends like the university professor, Eduard Gans, whom Varnhagen had joined in 1827 in founding the Hegelian journal, *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*. There were also high noblemen like Fürst Pückler-Muskau, a well-known playboy and writer.

The individualistic character of these gatherings should never, however, belie the underlying consensus of opinion shared by those who regularly attended. These were quiet forums in opposition to the ideology prevalent in the larger society. It was an oppositional core within the body politic, and nobody perceived this more clearly than Leopold Ranke, who stopped attending once he had become successful in his career.[6]

Within the scant Biedermeier furnishings, high ceilings, and rather large rooms, the company would gather, then break up into conversational groups until every one coalesced upon some spontaneously urgent topic. The lights were dim candlelight, the colors dark, and the decor faintly done after what they imagined were antique motifs. Rahel moved about often from group to group capturing the essence of a discussion and focusing it. Varnhagen was cautious

with newcomers and unleased his most passionate feelings about issues only when he was among those he knew very well and trusted.

The salon the Varnhagens maintained in Berlin during that decade after 1820 meant quite different things to each of them. For Rahel gatherings in her home were a mode of existence and of importance in and for themselves. Varnhagen politicized them, as he did everything else, and for him they were opportunities for extending his network of contacts and maintaining a kind of radical core within the larger body politic. Though he appeared on the surface to be conciliatory, Varnhagen actually experienced life as open confrontation from the very start. His attitude was militant, and he had gone from five years in combat to infighting for constitutional and representative government in Baden.

In either conflict Varnhagen had been wounded. At Wagram he had sustained a wound in his thigh and survived. In Baden he had been wounded professionally. He recovered from the latter wound because he had resources his enemies did not quite understand. His pen was his sword. Letters and articles were missiles. His literary and social activities were different "fronts" upon which he warred, and it was largely in terms of confrontation that he understood his function as a literary person, an intellectual, and a critic. As private, as guarded as Varnhagen often seemed to the casual visitor (especially the non-liberal one), there was little that was purely private in his life. Everything he did took on meaning, as far as he himself was concerned, in a political sense. He was a servant of history.

The front of greatest risk to him was that of periodical literature, but there it was also that he had the most to gain for his cause. Only through the growing periodical medium could he gain such rapid access to a large readership. It was the perfect vehicle for teaching new values to the German public, and, therefore, Varnhagen responded to the challenge by drawing upon the full range of his considerable resources.

Clothing himself in anonymity, employing false datelines in places he could not possibly have been, dispatching articles from "Paris" or other places distant from Berlin, he worked even during those months when he was determined to convince Bernstorff that he was no dangerous radical. It is largely because Cotta kept a publisher's guide to his *Allgemeine* that the extent of Varnhagen's journalistic activity can be gauged. He also founded the *Deutscher Beobachter* in Hamburg, as we have already noted, and was involved in the establishment of a short-lived journal in the Kingdom of Württemberg as well, called the *Tribüne*. During this period his favorite themes are the freedom of press and its importance to good government, the potential evils of a bicameral assembly in perpetuating the privileges of the nobility, and the crucial importance of a written constitution in safeguarding the rights of citizens.

He also wrote — with increasing caution — in support of a Germany united under the Prussian house of Hohenzollern. His idea was that the Hohenzollern would be republican monarchs along lines that paralleled the British model. Like so many of his generation, he half-heartedly believed that it was only realistic to establish representative government in Germany by destroying the power of the nobility and turning the monarchy into a largely representative institution without real power.

Assuming at the outset, as Varnhagen always did, that European history was moving inexorably to the establishment of a democratic order throughout Europe, he felt that it was really a matter of mapping out the possible paths upon which these developments would move and urging them onward. It was a mere matter of time. In the meantime, his job was to urge, to inform, and to promote. The notion that his assumptions might not correspond to the true nature of long term events never occurred to him. Nor did he think that he would see the day when a new generation would have changed its mind about the ideal course history should take.

Yet, Varnhagen's entire posture was heavily influenced by his guarded and insecure nature. He was a moderate person uncertain of his own strength of character and increasingly worried about the limits of his good health. Somehow, at the same time, he inclined to great tolerance of views divergent from his own, so long as they did not violate certain fundamental principles. Like many people who live fully in the world and are sensitive to its realities, Varnhagen knew there were those who would oppose what he perceived as desirable and progressive tendencies. He was willing to accept any number of transitional or intermediary developments along the road to democracy and enfranchisement if they did not seem malign to the progress of history.

Varnhagen was indeed not uncomfortable with failure, and he preferred a certain obscurity and liked the role of the "gray eminence" working behind the scenes rather than being on center stage. Fighting the lost but noble cause appealed to his personality, and he was compensated by his inner assurance that the lost but noble cause would ultimately prove the triumphant one. In such fashion was he profoundly informed by the essence of those assumptions that constitute that revolution of consciousness now identified as being Romanticist, for he was animated by the notion that life is made meaningful by a larger historical scheme that has nothing to do with Christian concepts of salvation.

The new valuative assumptions no longer astonished Varnhagen. He accepted the notion of Romantic salvation which is conceived as History moving to a state in which Humankind or the Individual (thus the 19th century penchant for capitalizing such collectives) progresses as arbiter of its own destiny. Anything obstructing this emancipatory movement towards higher freedom and fulfilled individuality is evil or, at the very least, misguided and wrong. Varnhagen belonged, in other words, to the second generation of Romanticists. Rahel incorporated the struggles of the earlier generation in her own private agony. The rapture of the first generation, too, had given way to a more generalized clarity. In Varnhagen's version, it was not the individual soul but society that provided the stage for the hard fight for purity and harmony.

Since Varnhagen's attitudes were so clearly circumscribed by the values fully developed during the Romantic Age, he possessed a moral certitude that sustained him in failure. He did not depend upon a sense of his own worthiness and was, as we have seen, not unusually secure as a human being. It was the integrity of his world view that established him firmly and gave him confidence. In Rahel's candid sincerity he saw, for instance, the freedom the individual had apparently gained to range both past and present in search of meaning and value. History is the primary realm of moral exploration, and, in such a quest, one has

only dishonesty to fear. Dishonesty compromises a quest because it is the clothing of self-interest; and self-interest is determined by the limiting factors of birth and temporal location which the Romanticist believed one must shed in pursuit of fulfillment very much like some creatures shed their shells or skins to reach higher form.

Varnhagen believed in the reality of transformation — but he gradually lost faith in its ability to influence the contemporary world. Transformation would be for him a thing of the future, relegated to history, a change he would not live to witness. An ambivalence is evident at the heart of his style: its ornamental propriety, its ambulating prose, the euphemistic tendency of his description and judgments. Had he been an Englishman, he would likely be viewed today as a proto-Victorian, for Varnhagen sensed the inadequacies of the Romantic configuration. He was profoundly aware of the ambiguities inhabiting the terrain of desire with its destructive wilfullness. All the more did he share the Victorian's keen interest in conduct motivated by an elevated idealism, as well as the Victorian distaste for the earthier facets of life.

Varnhagen and Rahel carried out a constant search for kindred spirits among the living and the dead. It was thus that they came to the writings of Johannes Scheffler, a 17th century mystic who wrote under the pseudonym of Angelus Silesius. Scheffler's work of spiritual aphorisms known as the *Cherubinic Wanderer* especially suited Varnhagen. In 1822 he published the first edition of this work that had appeared in a century. It appeared under the title of *Geistreiche Sinn- und Schlußreime aus dem Cherubinischen Wandersmann des Angelus Silesius (Ingenious Symbolical and Aphoristic Rhymes from the Cherubinic Wanderer of Angelus Silesius).* Surely, Scheffler's subjective viewpoint and his focus upon the divine potential of the ego was akin to the most irresistible predilections of Romanticism, and, specifically, of Varnhagen's own liberal perception of history.

In his editing and publishing the Scheffler work, Varnhagen's subtlety should once more be remarked. He propagates a fundamental attitude towards reality at bottom subversive but, at the same time, beyond the reach of the authorities. Not only was Scheffler long dead, but his subject matter could hardly have been related by any censor to current political affairs in Prussia. The device of publishing authors with compatible and revolutionary attitudes could not have been more shrewdly used.

The following year Varnhagen's continuing interest in Goethe produced a collection of friendly Goethe criticism entitled *Goethe in den Zeugnissen der Mitlebenden (Goethe in the Testimony of his Contemporaries).* It is possible that Varnhagen may have intended this work as a memorial to the Weimar savant and poet had he not survived a very serious illness the previous year. It was also thought that the work was an answer to Wolfgang Menzel, the vociferous anti-Goethe critic.

Varnhagen's relationship to Goethe and his work plays an important part in his development.[7] The *Testimony* represents the culmination of a project Varnhagen began in 1811 when he conceived the idea of publishing excerpts from Rahel's letters that dealt with Goethe and his works. The volume is an early example of what has since become the critical companion to Goethe studies.

Despite the relative insecurity of Varnhagen's position during the productive years of the 1820s in Berlin after his recall from Karlsruhe and his subsequent refusal of the mission to the United States, several factors were working in his favor. First of all, Varnhagen had, through his discreet public behavior, convinced important people that he was not really dangerous. Bernstorff and others believed that Metternich had exaggerated the threat posed by such men to the security of conservative interests. There was also a natural resentment towards Austrian interference in Prussian affairs apparent; but most important, Prussia had entered a process of rationalization in the state service. The modern civil service was fast emerging with its protective apparatus of review and tenure, and it was no longer a simple matter of arbitrary decision to dismiss a public official out of hand. It had become necessary in such matters to resort to formal procedures and documentation.

With the publication of the first volume of the *Biographische Denkmale (Biographical Monuments)* in 1824, Varnhagen was launched upon an almost unbroken triumphant chain of publications. Nor was it his aptitude for journalistic conspiracy that contributed to this success. The biographies have nothing overtly conspiratorial about them. Rather they relate the stories of Germans who, in one fashion or another, achieved notoriety or fame. The theme is one of individuality seeking fulfillment by hook or crook. Varnhagen did not need to subsume his biographical intent to his ideological program. As in the Silesius work, the message is always implicit.

Varnhagen's interest in biography dates back at least to the essay on Karl Phillip Moritz that appeared in the days before his stay in Vienna. Another incentive to write in the genre was the enormous market that existed in Europe during the early 19th century. The demand for biographies was so great that publishers could simply not muster either sufficient material or the authors to satisfy it. The competition for authors was very keen and the rewards for such writing were attractive.[8] Varnhagen was quite successful in negotiating with his publishers, though it is difficult to estimate with any accuracy how much he added thereby to his income.

In such fiction as "Fascination and Love," Varnhagen showed himself especially interested in portraying subjects who lived and worked outside the world of conventional morality. The coquette Eugenie in the story is an actress. The narrator's interest in her promiscuous and flirtatious nature sustains the narrative, bringing it to a resolution in which he finally recognizes the emptiness of such a life. The character who defies the norm of established power and privilege, who goes outside society, to some extent, appears again and again in Varnhagen's work. In the first volume of his biographical series, however, he focuses upon the public consequences of his subject's unconventional activities rather than on the inner man.

The three biographical essays in volume one, which appeared in 1824, are fast-paced narratives. The protagonist in each essay is a German of either eminent or notorious reputation who sought and achieved fame outside the homeland. Varnhagen is again commenting, as he did in his foreward to the translation to Talleyrand's speech on colonies, on how Germany had failed to

provide sufficient opportunity for native talent. The first essay on Count Wilhelm Lippe expresses his concern clearly.:

> A predisposition for larger action is richly present here: yet, such impulses are quickly opposed on every side by circumstance, reducing them finally to a petty level and setting for them more narrow limits than their inner calling would appear to warrant.[9]

It was a subject Varnhagen felt personally affected by, and he never missed an opportunity to deal with it in his writings.

The tragic limitations confining men of German nationality is not a theme altogether successfully applied to the three individuals Varnhagen considers in his first biographical monument. Though these men sought their careers in the service of foreign powers or abroad in adventure, they do not really fit the mould of restrictive nationality. Count Lippe was born in London; apparently, he was more fluent in English than in German, having lived in England until adolescence. Count Matthias von der Schulenburg grew up in Germany but served Poland as well as Venice and had a sister living in London as the favorite mistress of George of England. Finally, Theodor von Neuhof is a signal example of the international character of the European nobility in the 18th century. Born of Westphalian stock, this adventurer grew up at the court of the Duchess of Orleans. As an adult he spent a good part of his life in and out of French service and was involved in the uprisings of Corsicans against their Genoan overlords.

Despite an inappropriateness in choice of subject for Varnhagen's nationalist message, the idea conveyed struck a resonant chord in his readers. As late as 1850 Varnhagen had to write a letter to refute the idea that he had used his "pen primarily for the glorification of great Germans in foreign countries..."[10] The correspondent had evidently asked him to write a biography of the German hero of the American Revolution, Baron von Steuben, on the grounds that he had made a career depicting just such foreign careers of his countrymen.

In the second volume of the *Monuments,* Varnhagen portrayed the lives of two military men. These warriors did not make their careers abroad, however. Georg Derfflinger, a commoner and a tailor's apprentice, rose during the Thirty Years War to become one of the most distinguished commanders under the Prince-Elector of Brandenburg. Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau was credited with having forged the Prussian infantry into the precise military instrument it was under Friedrich II, called the Great.

It was with a touch of subtle irony that Varnhagen dedicated his *Monuments* to the Crown Prince of Prussia. The substance of the work is subversive. The biographical accounts deal with a commoner turned general and a prince who defies mother and the Empire to marry a commoner whom he cherished and loved until her death. Similarly, Count Lippe, in the preceding volume, had insisted on commissioning commoners on the basis of merit rather than requiring noble lineage. Such features were hardly designed to please conservatives.

However, Varnhagen's writing is not to be reduced to simple propaganda. He is able to render convincing portraits of figures that are not always pleasant. In

the case of Prince Leopold, for instance, he takes, a violent, crude, and tyrannical man and prince and suggests his human dimension without either suppressing or excusing the reprehensible qualities of his character.

Leopold counted for much in the Prussian pantheon of heroes, and stories about him were legion. He was much like Lippe in his obsession with the artifacts of military life, the pedantic observance of drill ritual, and military discipline. Had he been anything but a member of the high nobility, he would likely have had to pay the price very early in life for a precipitate murder of an innocent man. He was also censured more than once for wantonly subjecting his men to slaughter on the battlefield.

With sure stroke Varnhagen shows the pathetic side of such a nature as Leopold's. There is his childish and sentimental devotion to his commoner wife and his children. There is also the slavish limitation of a personality dominated by ignorance and utter lack of personal discipline. When his beloved wife dies, Leopold bursts into the tent of his son and cries out in agony: "Moritz, the devil's taken your mother!" Varnhagen remarks how pitiful such an individual must ultimately be who can only resort to a single idiom to express all his experience and feelings.

The character of the blustering and violent military simpleton is used effectively in the larger biographical work on Marshall Blücher. He was an untamed and undisciplined creature as well whose brutal and rugged nature destined him for service in the armies of that day. With virtually no formal education, hardly able to write, crude of tongue, but cool under fire, Blücher and Dessau seem to have epitomized a type of European soldier. Again it is in Blücher's unpredictable outbursts of sentiment and affection, in the sheer spontaneity of his occasional generosity that Varnhagen rounds out the portrait. It is through such devices that Varnhagen manages to create a picture of a man rather than a monster.

Like all the other biographies, the story of Blücher begins by recounting briefly his early life and the formation of his character. After that the narrative moves quickly into the maelstrom of events. Narrative tension is generated by subjecting the indurate personality to the crucible of stressful event. The uncompromising stubbornness of these protagonists often contributes to disaster, or near disaster. Blücher is dismissed from the service because of his insubordination, forced at an important moment in his career to retire to the life of a country squire, and his career seems, to all practical purposes, to have drawn to a close. His eventual reactivation follows not because he has in any fashion moderated himself but because a turn of outward events has made his king indifferent to any quality but his battlefield acumen.

Derfflinger, Schulenburg, and Lippe are placed in situations as well in which they must stand — sometimes repeatedly — against overwhelming odds. Their adverse extremity is often so great that not even a hopeful reader could see any possibility of survival. Lippe commands an army of Portugese who themselves do not believe they can withstand a Spanish advance. Schulenburg defends a weak island against a massive Turkish onslaught. Derfflinger spends much of his career in the midst of desperate straits. The circumstances make for a strong and adventurous brew, and Varnhagen's narratives at this period exhibit

something of the rapid fire suspense of a good tale. The question created in the reader's mind is simply: can he survive this, and if so, how?

Except for Schulenburg and Lippe, the private lives of these men appear mismanaged and chaotic. Blücher is a compulsive gambler; Theodor von Neuhof a confidence man. No consideration keeps them from indulging their vices. Dessau is a tyrant and murderer. It is an assembly of men ruled by odd passions, men who do not, in any normal sense, have a private life. Their common focus is upon public achievement, fame, and fortune. Blücher is obsessed with victory and a hatred for Napoleon, Theodor with the idea of being king, and Lippe and Dessau with the mechanics of military science. Schulenburg and Derfflinger simply thrive at the center of battle, that human activity aimed at the dissolution of social groups — pragmatic nihilists they surely were!

The *Monuments* offer us the subversive spectacle of the unroyal king, the barbaric and violent hero, and vicious butcher as general, a count who insists on a kind of rudimentary constitution and self-government in his petty county; finally, there are three Germans who must turn to foreign climes for adventure and glory. Without being preachy Varnhagen never fails to point to these lessons, though his art is such that it seems his very narrative is insisting upon their truth.

Not all Varnhagen's *Monuments* display the lives of generals. In the fourth volume he turns to the lives of three German poets of the 17th and 18th centuries. Each of these figures is highly educated and attached, in some capacity, to a German court. The first essay deals with the relatively brief life of one of the most important of the 17th century poets, Paul Fleming *(Flemming* is Varnhagen's spelling).

Apparently lacking sufficient biographical material to construct a convincing narrative, Varnhagen resorts to an eye-witness account of a strangely impractical diplomatic and trade mission in which the poet was a minor participant. Dispatched to Russia by the Duke of Holstein, the mission hoped to proceed to Turkey via Russia in order to open new channels of commerce.[11] However, the relation of these events reveals virtually nothing about Fleming and his personality. The sketch is one of Varnhagen's least satisfactory biographies.

Varnhagen must have sensed this. He was aware of the problematic nature of any biographical enterprise. In one of his letters of 1820 he observes: "A human being doesn't permit himself to be comprehended as a complete and individual creature. The idea is annihilated as it arises..." He goes on to expand his speculation, and it is upon the background of the following comment that one can better understand Varnhagen's faith in utopian systems such as Saint-Simonism, Fourierism, and socialist thought in general: "Man has true being," he writes, "only in the whole of humanity; everything presses him to integration."[12]

Integration can be carried too far in biography, however, and Varnhagen's most signal failure occurred when he attempted to integrate his biographical subject too completely into a larger enterprise in which he took part. In order to enhance the Fleming narrative, he focuses upon the diplomatic mission, and he considers the poems Fleming wrote along the way. There is a poem commemorating Fleming's first glimpse of Moscow, for instance; but these poems

reveal little about their author except homesickness, awe, and the excitement he felt at viewing new and exotic places.

The second essay deals with the poet, Friedrich von Canitz. The portrait of this good-natured and worldly cavalier is executed in the author's most successful manner. It shows a man who does not change but who, in the dynamic relationship between his steady equilibrium and the press of external events, proves interesting. Neither Canitz nor the following figure, Johann von Besser, is placed in the extremis which the military commanders had faced as a matter of course, but the crises with which they contend are real enough to try a normal constitution and to generate reader interest and suspense.

In fact, Canitz and Besser both are confronted with the worst horror a courtier can imagine: they fall out of grace with their prince. Varnhagen had his own personal experience to build upon, and it surely helped to enhance his account. Canitz survives the ordeal well enough, faltering only momentarily before his balance is restored. Besser is the one subject of Varnhagen's who, though a man of considerable physical courage and prowess, succumbs to misfortune and collapses.

In order to save Besser from simply becoming a weak and despicable character, Varnhagen resorts again to a device he used with Blücher and Prince Leopold. He presents him in moments of generosity, loyalty, and affection. He also portrays the unscrupulous opportunism in which Besser indulges and his final turn to misanthropy after his fall.

The three essays are unified by a shared theme. Each of these poets is working toward rejuvenating German letters. Literature itself is treated as something quite vital to the cultural health of the nation, and Varnhagen's message was surely recognizable to a generation fresh from French domination and the Napoleonic era. The problems of developing modes of expression capable of containing the national experience were often addressed during Varnhagen's early years. There was also the parallel concern that Germans during the 1820s had for developing adequate political forms for the same purpose.

Both Fleming and Besser were of common origin, and Varnhagen also stresses the fact that Canitz frequently preferred the company of exceptional commoners. If commoners could occupy office, frequent court, and excel in diplomatic parley, then what was the ultra- conservative establishment of 1826 making such a fuss about? Ironically enough, in the same year Varnhagen's own self-appointed noble predicate was challenged after he signed his name on a roster of visitors to the state library one day. The affair caused him considerable embarrassment but ended in his legal ennoblement.

One of the poison darts Varnhagen managed in his narrative came from the depths of his heart and was aimed at the foolishness of diplomatic ceremony. He relates how Besser, as emissary to the English court, becomes involved in a comic quarrel over precedence. In order to step first up to the king, he took the Italian ambassador by the seat of the pants and set him forcibly behind himself. So much for diplomacy, Varnhagen comments, for such petty concerns are central to its business.

It was in the final volume of the *Monuments* published in 1830 that Varnhagen managed to expand and intensify his implied critique of the current *status*

quo in Prussia. The subject of the thick volume is Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Pietist movement at Herrnhut. In Zinzendorf Varnhagen found a highborn character who could not have been more alien to the *Standesdenken* of his peers. Pledged to the tradition of Johannes Scheffler, Zinzendorf believed that sincerity was a requisite part of authentic belief in the individual's relationship with God. Faith depended upon a heart honestly given in thorough devotion to Jesus Christ within a communion in which all souls were equal. Thus did Zinzendorf defy the conventions of his class while the sincerity of his motives remained unassailable.

Zinzendorf's lands and manor became a refuge for those persecuted for religious beliefs. Many pietistic Austrians flocked to him from nearby Bohemia and other Austrian territories. Communities founded at Herrnhut soon took on a decidedly republican flavor, and they were thrown into conflict with both church and secular authorities. In the meantime, Zinzendorf seriously violated the precepts of his rank by regarding his fellow communicants as brothers regardless of their social origin.

Varnhagen makes the most of his material. The reader is given strong doses of Zinzendorf's consistent contempt for the atmosphere of the court and a life of power and privilege. A life of piety is made interesting because Varnhagen exploits the dramatic potential in the Count's defiance of the world. The compelling dramatic action in the narrative turns first upon the question whether Zinzendorf will successfully defy his class; then the struggle is broadened as his defiance threatens to become opposed to the world in general. The reader is easily caught up in the question of Zinzendorf's survival. Arrayed against the institutions of his age one wonders if he will succeed in maintaining the integrity of his beliefs.

But Varnhagen was too shrewd a writer to rely entirely upon the old scheme in which a single honest hero is pitted against a corrupt world. He adds depth to the narrative by exploring the internal dynamics of the community as it developed under Zinzendorf's guiding hand. One is permitted also to see how the Count himself grows and matures in judgment and managerial ability. Zinzendorf's integrity, his patience, and his considerable administrative talents are developed.

If he had sat down and written a passionate tract, Varnhagen could not have written a more convincing argument for a democratic order than *Zinzendorf*. At the same time, Zinzendorf's portrait shows another trait consistent with all Varnhagen's subjects. From start to finish he is pictured as being true to himself. Only once does he seem to falter and indulge a dubious act. In order to escape any possible measure on the part of the authorities early in his career, Zinzendorf withdraws from his lands and leaves Saxony temporarily. Varnhagen argues mildly that the Count hoped thereby to save himself that he might act on behalf of the refugees in the future. It was not, he felt, an act of cowardice.

It is clear that Varnhagen identified with the steadfastness of such characters. He could view himself as something of Johann von Besser's opposite. Whereas that court poet had even suffered a loss of his poetic abilities after his fall from grace and banishment from court, Varnhagen had actually flourished after his

dismissal. His literary talents began to mature rapidly after his recall in 1819, and he made a reputation during the years immediately following his return from Karlsruhe.

The initial period of anxiety about his fate was over after 1823 when Bernstorff took him under his wing and permitted him to work on individual projects within the foreign office. Anxiety had not been completely routed from the field of his experience, unfortunately. Varnhagen had enemies. The problematic nature of his position surely was disturbing to some who felt that, as an unreconstructed liberal, he deserved worse. In 1825 he had actually been promoted, and who was to say that he might not be once more swept into office and power? Yet, for those who waited for an opportunity to do him damage, Varnhagen was vulnerable enough.

He wore, in the first place, a noble predicate to which he was not legally entitled. It was a blatant act that might have been tolerated in more liberal times. It was not as though Varnhagen had arrived in Berlin after the Congress of Vienna a stranger and newcomer. He had been there before when he had been simply *Varnhagen,* without any aristocratic embellishment. Some memories are very long for such detail.

The opportunity came to his enemies when he signed himself in routinely at the archives as "Varnhagen von Ense." A librarian reported the discrepancy, an investigation was initiated, and he was asked to account for himself.[13] Varnhagen was forced to pay for the convenience of his self-ennoblement. The writer had used his aristocratic name for sixteen years, always in the service of an anti-establishment doctrine, for he knew that a single nobleman who holds his nobility in contempt is worth a hundred intelligent commoners doing the same.

Varnhagen first resorted to the shock tactics which seemed natural to him in times of stress. He went to Prince Wittgenstein and other high officials with his feathers ruffled, declaring his indignation at such an affront to his ancient name. Any demand that an individual account for his nobility was like a destabilizing arrow fired at the heart of the *status quo,* for, as Wittgenstein himself noted, many an old name would find it difficult to document its claim to noble status. It was, in other words, in the interest of those in power to hush things up as best they could.

After several attempts it became apparent that Varnhagen could not establish a legitimate connection to the old and long since extinct family of the "von Ense, genannt Varnhagen," though it is very likely that he did descend from an illegitimate line. Illegitimate descent would not, at any rate, have entitled him to armiger status had he been able to prove it. The upshot of the affair was that the king preferred to grant rather than confirm nobility and Varnhagen was granted a patent of arms and legally changed into Herr Varnhagen von Ense for his "past services." The process cost him a tidy sum which he later managed to convince Bernstorff to pay out of discretionary funds at the foreign office. The whole affair was kept quiet and no public announcement was made.

In one sense, the attempt to humiliate him had backfired, and the presumed aristocrat was turned into a real one. The arch-enemy of artistocratic privilege was now registered with the Royal College of Arms. By that time, Varnhagen had long ago convinced himself that wearing the "von Ense" had been his good

and ancient right all along and that the entire affair had been blatant harrassment.[14]

1826 was a busy year for him. He achieved legal nobility, published his biography of Field Marshall Blücher, and began moving with Rahel into more commodious rooms. He also refused an official appointment as editor of the state newspaper. It was the very job he had urged Hardenberg to create for him in 1815, but the times had changed. Hardenberg was gone and with him all hope for liberals. Varnhagen knew that he would not have been able to reconcile with his own conscience what he would have to write and could permit to be written.[15]

Varnhagen was no longer a writer seeking an outlet for his production. He was publishing regularly and had for years. His friend, Eduard Gans, who was up for appointment to the faculty at the University of Berlin, had also asked him to join in founding a journal that would promote the teachings of the Hegelian school of philosophy. Gans had come to Varnhagen after recruiting the help of Varnhagen's friend and publisher, Cotta. Hegel had himself been skeptical of the project, but Varnhagen was enthusiastic. His assistance was highly valued, for, as Gans wrote, Varnhagen was a person "who, in matters of tact, finesse of presentation, and clean effectiveness of style, does not have his equal in Germany, and who, because of his integrity, his sense of quality...and his assiduous enthusiasms, will elevate any undertaking in which he is involved..."[16]

What Varnhagen recognized was another opportunity to establish an outlet for his work over which he could indeed have some editorial control. He was to be a contributing editor to the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik.* Rahel encouraged the project as well (Gans saw her as "a gifted, rhapsodical, and incisive woman") and urged both men to go ahead.

A meeting was held on July 23, 1826 at Hegel's house, and the Society for Scientific Criticism was founded and divided into three divisions: philosophy, with Gans as chief, natural science, and historical-philological studies (to which Varnhagen contributed). A general secretary was created to manage the business affairs, and the guidelines for the journal were agreed upon. With the *Jahrbücher* an especially fruitful period was initiated for Varnhagen's work as critic and book reviewer. During the next few years he would, through his work for the journal, elevate the book review to an important vehicle for social and political commentary.

The Society was not established without controversy. Though Varnhagen had every reason not to feel warmly towards Schleiermacher, he urged his admittance to the organization. Hegel opposed Schleiermacher bitterly, and he and Varnhagen had more than one disagreement on the subject at the meetings. The matter was finally dropped, and the two men continued to maintain cordial relations until Hegel's death.

Varnhagen's feelings about Hegel were very mixed. He recognized Hegel's enormous importance and agreed generally with his ideas. He was also profoundly impressed by the philosopher's personality. The ambivalence is evident, however, in a note Varnhagen made on Hegel's attitude towards the elimination of trees along a boulevard in Berlin (Hegel thought it better that they all be cut

down — an opinion designed to infuriate Varnhagen). The philosopher possessed, according to our subject, a "barbaric bad taste and lacked any aesthetic sensibility..."[17]

In another note after Hegel's death, written on July 4, 1844, Varnhagen refers to a story told him by Professor Leo about Hegel's illegitimate son. Having married a wealthy woman in Nuremberg, Hegel was presented with a son by a tailor's widow with whom he had had an affair. The presence of the child in his household caused his wife a great deal of anxiety and trouble.

At the same time, Varnhagen had dedicated the volume of writings he edited by the physician-philosopher Erhard to Hegel in 1830 as a tribute. Throughout his life he continued to dream of Hegel and noted in his diary notations the deep impression these dreams had upon him each time they occurred.[18] In the meantime, Varnhagen surely also did his share to bring the Hegelian journal a position of eminence and reputation.

In decorous style and carefully formulated judgments, one finds in Varnhagen's book reviews a sense of disinterested analysis and carefully considered judgment. It was precisely what the founders had sought to effect. Varnhagen deals ably with such topics as the significance of the French Revolution, the blossoming of Russian literature, and especially questions of constitutional interest. He repeatedly defends and promotes the cause of subjective history, memoirs, and the publication of private correspondence.

Before the decade of the 1820s had run its course, Varnhagen had firmly established himself as a leading intellectual figure in Germany. He owed his unique position to his contributions to the genre of biography as well as to his work as critic and reviewer. His most singular characteristic was his peripheral role in Society and his function as social commentator with inside information, or an informed perspective.

On the personal side, Varnhagen and Rahel had established a very successful marriage. They both lived the kind of life they preferred — a sociable and literary life. Varnhagen's beloved sister, Rosa Maria, had married a physician, David Assing (whom Varnhagen had known in Vienna and urged to meet her in Hamburg), a devoted husband and good provider. With Rahel drawing upon the resources of somebody else's pocketbook, her relationship with her brothers and their families also improved. Only the loss of his mother clouded Varnhagen's horizon at the end of the decade.

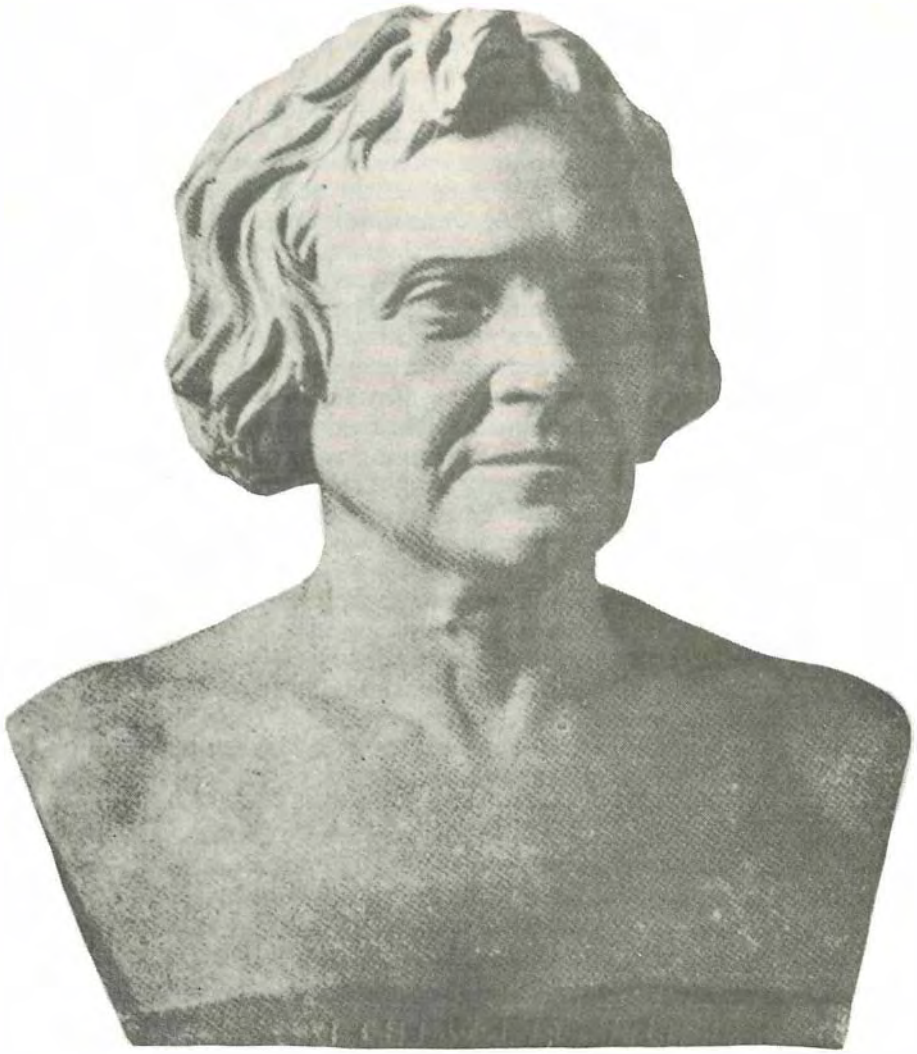
Among the loyal friends Varnhagen made during that first decade in Berlin after his recall from Karlsruhe, Eduard Gans and Heinrich Heine are, perhaps, the most important. Gans was Varnhagen's closest friend. An exceptional man in every sense, he also possessed the broad sympathies and tolerance that always appealed to Varnhagen. When Gans died in 1838 Varnhagen was thrown into deep depression. During the funeral procession he had to be supported in order not to faint. Gans was a frequent visitor in the Varnhagen household, a good conversationalist and sociable person. His university career was distinguished, and his somewhat premature death was felt to have cut short the abiding accomplishments which had been expected of him.

Though Varnhagen's friendship with Heinrich Heine tended to be a relationship between older benefactor and son or pupil, the two men established an

abiding loyalty and mutual respect during the years when Heine attended the Varnhagen gatherings. Varnhagen helped to promote Heine's works by writing reviews for the *Jahrbücher* and other journals. Heine, for his part, served as Varnhagen's personal reporter on events in Paris after he left Germany to live in the French capital. It was probably through Heine that he first heard about the Saint-Simonist movement that began to influence him so mightily at the end of the decade.[19]

Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, erstwhile world traveler, playboy, and landscape architect, also became Varnhagen's lifelong friend during those years. Acting in his capacity as literary agent and intermediary, Varnhagen served Pückler in much the same way he did Heine. By publishing reviews of Pückler's *Briefe eines Verstorbenen (Letters from a Dead Man)* and his other works, Varnhagen promoted him as a writer. Pückler countered the rumors about Varnhagen's parvenu status by suggesting that his family was allied to Varnhagen's by ancient ties. These two men shared a view of the world unclouded by prejudice and characterized by cosmopolitanism and political liberalism. They both became interested in the social utopian ideas emanating from Paris. Pückler's friendship continued after Varnhagen's death; he left his papers in the care of Varnhagen's niece, Ludmilla Assing, who published a biography of Pückler, as well as some of his correspondence.

It was in 1828 and 1829 that Rahel's chronic ailments became more grave. By the end of the decade her health was deteriorating rapidly; she was approaching sixty. Varnhagen was reaching the height of his power as a social critic and political commentator. He was forty-five in 1830, quite established as a man to be reckoned with on the literary horizon, a highly valued contributing editor, an eminent journalist, a *Geheimer Legationsrat* still working at the foreign office, who had indeed carried out a diplomatic mission the year before, and a familiar figure on the local scene in Berlin.



2. A bust of Varnhagen which stood in the Varnhagen Room of the Prussian State Library. Elisabeth Ney modelled the bust during the period from August 5, 1856 - March 17, 1857. Varnhagen was 72 years of age at the time, and the bust was considered an excellent likeness.

6. THE REDEMPTIVE FORCE OF HISTORY

Rahel seems to have suffered from angina pectoris during the last four years of her life. Varnhagen's description of her final illness recounts the chest pains and shortness of breath characteristic of the disease. She was attended to the end by their maid, Dora, and Rahel turned increasingly to her ancient faith. Her strength and will to life were gradually eroded by both the strain of the physical pain she endured but also by news of the deaths of Hegel, Goethe, and, finally, her beloved brother, the writer Ludwig Robert, and his beautiful young wife. Robert and his wife died during the cholera epidemic.

Rahel died on May 7, 1833 and was buried a week later in the cemetery of the Church of the Trinity on the edge of the city at one of the gates. With her passing Varnhagen faced what he believed to be the closing of an important chapter in the history of Western civilization. Both he and Rahel had shared their discovery of socialist teachings in the Saint Simonian movement and in Charles Fourier's writings during those last four or five years, and they had been in agreement about the significance these new ideas would have for the future. After 1833 Varnhagen began to view his role not only as preserver of the twin heritage of the Enlightenment — personal liberty and rationality — but as advocate of a new and changed vision.

It was in collective action that Varnhagen increasingly thought he saw the answer to the paradoxes of individual freedom and responsibility. Alone human beings are beset by selfishness and victims of inherited attitudes. The only escape from the sordid and unproductive limits of egotism is to commit oneself to acting on behalf of a larger cause. The Wars of Liberation against Napoleon remained for Varnhagen an example of how collective action could redeem the blind selfishness of individual acts.

Varnhagen had inherited the optimistic view of human nature from the generation of his father. He shared, at the same time, his wife's attitude that we have come to identify as peculiarly Romanticist: namely, the view that consciousness can or, at least, should set the individual free from the accumulations of culture and tradition. The latter view is, in fact, dependent upon the former, but Romantic pessimism results from a certain doubt that the Enlightenment assumption is valid. Rahel had resolved her doubt to some extent by recognizing in her own uncorrupt and authentic nature a representative human being. Varnhagen was unable to follow his wife's example because he was much too aware of his own shortcomings. He knew that consciousness alone did not liberate, and that is why social utopian schemes had appeal for him. It removed the responsibility for purification to an ideal realm. First, society would be reconstructed; then, people could become good. Varnhagen was then free to spend his time propagating, in good conscience, the notion of social reconstruction.

It would be a mistake, however, to equate Varnhagen's work with that of other social utopians. He was much more aware of the complexities of the issue than, for instance, his young American friend, the Fourierist Albert Brisbane. He sympathized with Brisbane and continued his epistolary relationship with him after the New Yorker had become well known as Fourier's apostle in North

America. He encouraged others who insisted on the necessity of a radical reconstitution of Western civilization, but he knew as well that Rahel had been right. Consciousness needed first to be reconstituted before radical social change could transpire. If Varnhagen ever erred, it was never on the side of oversimplification. He did not possess the reductionist tendencies of the revolutionary or the dogmatic man of action.

Following Rahel's death, Varnhagen worked at white heat to produce a work that became the sensation of the decade. *Rahel. Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde (Rahel. A Book of Commemoration for her Friends)* appeared in 1834 in a privately printed edition. Varnhagen distributed the book gratis to friends and acquaintances and made it otherwise clear that his intention was to make Rahel's point of view accessible to fellow sympathizers. He also retained a parenthetic "in manuscript" on the title page to emphasize the intimacy of the documents and to convey the private and personal nature of his gesture as both editor and memorializing friend.

It was precisely that mixture of the public and private that had such wide appeal in Europe. In the guise of pious editor and friend Varnhagen was actually promoting a new consciousness, and everybody knew it. The success of the book went far beyond anything he had envisioned. Its appeal was due not only to the luxury it afforded the reader of vicarious participation in the expression of subversive ideas. There was also the revealing glimpse it provided into a private and since vanished society.

Varnhagen released an expanded, two volume version for commercial sales the following year. The first essential cult version appeared at the same time in which the contents of *Rahel* was anthologized and dedicated to the "most cultivated of the female gender." It has since been followed by numerous imitations, often published in smaller, gift form, and composed of excerpts from the original.[1]

The success of *Rahel* gave Varnhagen the singular role of Rahel's protégé and sponsor. It was a public role he performed with dignity and grace, but it also made him vulnerable to interpretations that presented him as Rahel's puppet. Varnhagen seems not to have been bothered by such commentary or insensitive to it. He is, to some extent, responsible for the view that he was a kind of creation of his wife's, for he gave her credit for much that was uniquely his own.

There are two levels of authorial intent in the book, the first being Rahel's own in conceiving and writing the letters and fragments Varnhagen included in the collection. She knew the people to whom she was writing, and there is therefore an assumption of sympathy on her part that gives the work all the flavor of an esoteric vehicle. Here I am, she says; one can either accept her on her own terms and be authentic, or one can fail to understand and be excluded from the company that shares her insights. Her intent is to initiate the reader into the mysteries of her own attitudes and feelings. There is also an authority and excitement in her prose that reflects her confidence that she is revealing a new and exciting manner of perception.

There is a real question as to whether Varnhagen remains true to Rahel's original intent in publishing her work. In addressing a larger commercial edition to her friends, however, he does, at least, attempt to preserve some scrap of her

own aim in writing in the first place. His act of publication is, at the same time, a politicizing of her writing that she never intended.

What Rahel was really doing when she wrote was attempting to convince others that she was somebody worth knowing, perhaps even marrying. That is not to say that she did not act sincerely in expressing her views on life and society. She was simply, as Albert Brisbane discovered when introducing her to Fourier's writings, primarily interested in existential and not political solutions to problems she perceived as being her own. She focused almost exclusively upon those problems she felt touched her.[2]

Rahel is necessarily a coherent and compelling work, albeit one that raises the question whether its rhetorical force is the result of Varnhagen's editorial skills or of Rahel's own ability to make a brilliant literary response to the dilemmas she faced in life. Her fragments and letters were literary displays in the tradition of her age. She was showing off. Still, a self-conscious irony reverberates in her epistles because she knew that her readers both expected and respected such display. Her marvelous aphoristic gifts were, after all, assets that she put to good account. She became something of a celebrity among the upper set in Berlin during her young adulthood, and *Rahel* remains a mine of quotable phrase.

Rahel comments on everything, from marriage to politics, and her opinions are never conventional:

On Women —"What can a poor human being do about the fact that she is also female?" "Just in order to assure that a bad girl can't act stupidly should a good one be limited?"

On Truth —"Nothing disgusts me more than to have to disguise myself..."'

On Age — "If it's true that I'm old, it is equally true that I have brought my youth with me into age."

On Love —"Tenderness is the wit of love." "Everyone loves alone, just as one prays alone."

On Being Natural —"Why shouldn't I be natural? I know of nothing better and more diverse to affect."

The watchword for Rahel is spontaneity, naturalness: conventions are derided as unnecessary limitations. The excerpts, however, are pure Varnhagen in their constant insistence that personal ability and achievement are the only genuine standards to measure an individual's worth. The state, established society, traditional institutions are viewed at best as threatening intrusions upon the private sphere of the individual. Charity is itself a personal and private act.

Varnhagen knew very well what he was doing. He had perceived a facet of Rahel that lent itself to political purposes. She had been conscious of sharing her frustrations with other people — but these others had been her friends, not anonymous readers. She saw herself as a representative sufferer, but only within her circle. It was not so much mankind for which Rahel suffered; rather she saw herself as representative of the exceptional individual hemmed in by mediocrity. Once monumentalized between the covers of a book, her writing provided a rallying point for the literate and ambitious middle classes.

Rahel had important ramifications for Varnhagen's further career as a writer because it furnished him with a privotal figure around which he could create a

world of literary substance that was also consistent with his own social views. In this Varnhagian version of life the scenes he creates are peopled largely by men and women like himself. They are socially flexible and politically progressive. Tolerance is, among them, as high a value as urbanity. Such a world Varnhagen began to construct around *Rahel,* and it might be not only his last but his most enduring edifice; surely it was one that made present to a prodigal generation qualities he felt they no longer acknowledged.

In *Rahel* he argued strongly once again against the widespread attitudes which considered it an indiscretion to publish private documents. Varnhagen knew that letters written in Rahel's generation were not conceived as exclusively private documents, in the first place, but were meant to be read aloud to others. A letter had the same function as a small town newspaper today: it conveyed news. Her mode of correspondence was born in the context of a society in which the public media had not yet matured.

There was more to the business than the question of publication of letters. Varnhagen argued more than once that the widespread tampering with documents and the common practice of burning a person's papers after his death constitutes an act of barbarity that robs the future of relevant historical material. The doctrines of dignity and discretion entitled an editor at the time, for instance, in the accepted modes of the day to suppress any material he thought might detract from his subject's public character. Candour was not held in high esteem. With *Rahel* Varnhagen countered these prevailing attitudes. He preserved the idiosyncracies of her orthography and style. He did not suppress even those adverse comments about himself that occurred, and he preserved in large part what he excerpted in its original form.

The question is not whether Rahel wrote what is printed in *Rahel,* but whether the compelling form of the work is due more to her or to Varnhagen's editorial choice of material. Driven as she was to break through the social structures in order to achieve integration into the mainstream of German society, her letters surely are compelling in a manner no ordinary literary artifice can be; there is an urgency in her prose as it moves from insight to insight, and its authority infects the reader with excitement. But the question remains whether Rahel or Varnhagen created the juxtaposition of exhilaration and lament so admired in the late Biedermeier world, a world known in Anglo-America as the Victorian Age. One cannot yet say with any certainty.

One thing is certain. Without Rahel's ability to write expressively, there would have been no material. Had not Varnhagen assumed editorial responsibility for her papers, at the same time, Rahel's literary existence would have probably been reduced to that of an obscure footnote in specialized works on salon life in Berlin at the turn of the century.

Much earlier Varnhagen had perceived how the real historic stature of a subject may become irrelevant once writings were collected and monumentalized between the covers of a book. In a very real sense, a new creature is born in the publication of the papers, and the persona that emerges assumes a significance for readers that does not need to be connected to any factual or historical importance she or he enjoyed while alive. Moreover, the publication of private or

personal writings can also be a political act, as we have seen in much of Varnhagen's editorial activity.

It was in *Galerie von Bildnissen aus Rahel's Umgang und Briefwechsel (Gallery of Portraits from Rahel's Circle and Correspondence)* published in 1836 that Varnhagen began the work of recreating a milieu around Rahel. It was to be Rahel's world — in literary form. By resurrecting her circle of friends, acquaintances, and correspondents, the ideas and values of her generation would receive new life and gain impact on a new era. He included excerpts from her correspondence and prefaced each set of letters with a biographical sketch of the correspondent.

The *Gallery* did not go without criticism in spite of the fact that the 19th century showed a high tolerance for biographical material on otherwise obscure figures. Karl Gutzkow, for instance, was not an unfriendly critic, yet he could not understand how Varnhagen could justify the expense of writing and printing the jottings of, as he put it, a species of person of which Europe was already far too full: petty courtiers, squires, society figures, and others such as had fallen into a well-deserved obscurity.[3] Varnhagen had anticipated Gutzkow's objections in 1830 when he had published the writings of a relatively obscure Berlin philosopher-physician and friend, Erhard, who had been a man of liberal thought, a Kantian, and one who had achieved some local prominence:

> Not only the life and works of masters of the first order may stand as examples of...writing, but writers of the second and third class will also command a growing interest among readers...[4]

It is Varnhagen's view of history as an ethical process through which the individual achieves moral definition that determines his attitude towards the preservation and publication of documents. In publishing two volumes of correspondence and miscellaneous writings with his co-editor, Theodor Mundt, Varnhagen argues forcefully that it is as much the associations and circle as the individual that makes the publication of his private papers important. This was certainly true in the case of the work at hand, coming from the pen of Goethe's good friend, K. L. von Knebel.

Varnhagen employs the same argument in his very earliest work, the account of the Napoleonic campaigns in which he took part as a captain in the Russian cavalry. Historical events are set into motion, he wrote then, not so much through the individual effort of a heroic person but rather by the corporate effort of many people working together. History is, in other words, a corporate event that contributes in some typifying fashion to a transcendent process, a development that is not dependent upon any isolated or localized circumstance for its continuance.[5]

His remarks on the significance of the liberation of Hamburg in his first work dwells upon the same point. The "liberation" of that city by Tettenborn served no purpose and was a very dubious maneuver that Varnhagen's commander executed without Allied approval. Tettenborn failed signally in his professed purpose of mobilizing the German population against Napoleon, and many be-

lieved at the time and later that he had occupied the city in order to enrich himself. Yet, Varnhagen, as battlefield reporter and later as historian of the event, insisted that the significance of the liberation lay in its historical service as a model for what *should* have happened in Northern Germany. The important thing was not the facts but just how the circumstances could be fit into that transcendent and eminently ethical historical process that was not bound or hemmed in by parochial circumstance.[6]

Another incidental effect of Varnhagen's work in historicizing Rahel and her circle was his own emergence as a kind of historical figure who still happened to be flesh and blood: a historical persona in his own right. As a result, Varnhagen became the subject of historical works written to evaluate the literary scene. One of the earliest of these treatments is Heinrich Laube's positive account of his benefactor's contributions.

Laube had been one of the many young men whom Varnhagen had encouraged and helped over the years, and the portrait he gives of his older friend is one of a man of ancient nobility and unblemished integrity and courage.[7] Two years later Gustav Kühne published another evaluation that praises Varnhagen's admirable and unerring sense of style while regretting that he had not been more aggressive in supporting democratic causes. Like Laube, Kühne assessed Varnhagen's work and called him one of the finest and most humane of critics.[8] Such an opinion of Varnhagen was typical during his lifetime; the vitriolic attacks against him came after his death.

Though Varnhagen came to be regarded as the best example of German liberalism, his real sympathies were, as we have already noted, much more complex and would not have suited a strictly liberal program. It is especially evident in his diaries or *Tagebücher* published posthumously that his view of history after 1836 was not what it appeared to be to those who lacked access either to his private papers or behind-the-scene remarks. Varnhagen was increasingly persuaded that it was not history that had been thrown off the track, but that the present had become estranged from history.

It is in the passionate and candid language of his essentially private notes that Varnhagen reveals the intense emotional nature of his response to events. It was not history but contemporary Prussia, Germany, and Europe that had to be put back on target. Varnhagen's sense of urgency accounts for his keen interest in the fate of radicals, as well as for his clandestine support of revolutionaries.[9]

It would be a mistake to assume that it was only towards the end of his life that he had become convinced that only radical pressure could put Germany back on target with history. His correspondence is full of references to the necessity and expectation of revolution. In two position papers written in 1811, Varnhagen also remarked how the modern mind tends to overlook the potential for non-coercive political forms. The modern state employs an apparatus of coercion as a matter of course, ignoring the potential of more cooperative devices.[10] Varnhagen would later find these ideas reechoed in the Saint-Simonist doctrines.

It is no wonder that a mind pregnant with such ideas should have been excited by news from Paris of new movements which incorporated them in a social program. In the late 1820s Varnhagen heard of the Saint-Simonists from Heine and

others. The American, Albert Brisbane, came to Berlin looking for converts to his new faith in Fourier's teachings and found them at the Varnhagens' apartment. He was soon writing to Rahel that "vos sentiments est une gage precieux pour moi..."[11]

Brisbane had carried the Saint-Simonian newspaper, the *Globe,* to Berlin's coffee houses and left his collection of socialist books with Varnhagen before being forced by the police to leave the city. Varnhagen in turn lent the works to Pückler.[12] The seed was planted, and Varnhagen published a series of articles in 1832 on Saint Simonism. The articles appeared in Cotta's *Allgemeine,* and Varnhagen disguised himself in anonymity and used a dateline, "From the Rhine," where he could not have been.

In his article Varnhagen argues that Saint Simonism cannot threaten established institutions. Far from being contrary to Christian teachings, the doctrine, he claims, revives true Christianity with its concerns for charity and social responsibility. Aspects of the doctrine that conflict with Christian teaching, he asserts, are simply immature facets that will eventually be resolved; these latter statements being particularly directed at Saint Simonian views on marriage.

Varnhagen's introductory articles were an apology for the Saint Simonists. In subsequent installments he moves boldly to attack liberalism as an inadequate ideology that is "seldom free of militant patriotism." Events have shown — particularly in the French example — that liberal reforms once established continue to serve the special interests of a ruling clique. Hegemony is, in other words, the goal of liberal politics just as it had always been the goal of other systems in Europe; it therefore fails, according to Varnhagen, to respond to the new needs and realities emerging in European society.

As Varnhagen saw it, Europe was witnessing in 1832 the emergence of a transnational European order in which coercion would be removed. He thought that the rapidly developing international transportation system, the railroads, would make national boundaries irrelevant. In order to base the new order on cooperation, however, private property would have to be eliminated. In the dynamic relationships that are part of property he agreed with the Saint Simonists in recognizing the origins of the game of power and coercion. A system based upon private property generates, in his mind, the desire to accumulate assets; coercion is then introduced in order to maintain an inequitable distribution of that property that had resulted from the struggle to accumulate. The *status quo* can only be maintained at the expense of those who have been deprived of a fair share of property.

In the Saint Simonian doctrine Varnhagen thought he had finally discovered a means of breaking out of the historical cycle of oppression. These possibilities sometimes carried him beyond the bounds of his usual caution. At one point, he apparently even discussed the budding socialist movement with his former chief in the foreign office, Count Bernstorff, who, as Varnhagen tells us, remarked that the movement was the wave of the future.[13] At another point, Varnhagen argued so adamantly for the monastic life of which social utopians so fondly spoke that he irritated his hosts, the Russian couple then residing in Berlin, the Frolovs, who thought he was being arch-Catholic in speaking for the return of

the obsolete medieval institution. The Saint Simonist allusion did not register with them.[14] Varnhagen also declared that

> The power and abundance of ideas that are combined so wonderfully in a solid and dynamic whole in Saint Simonism have such effect and drive that heart and soul almost succumb to their force. Everything is changed, transformed, the whole world and all its relations. Political practice hitherto prevailing has become a poor trifle, all the little concerns and struggles are erased. I have gone about many days in extreme intellectual agitation and have spent frightening nights. Even now I feel myself deeply moved, not in equilibrium with that which I comprehend and hope to digest.[15]

Varnhagen's old friend, Oelsner, lived in Paris until his death in 1829, and when Heine moved there in 1831, Varnhagen continued to have a close and loyal friend on the scene who kept him informed about developments. Rahel would share the *Globe* with her friends, and Prince Pückler went so far as to remark in his book *Tutti Frutti* (which Varnhagen reviewed) that Saint Simon's doctrine "must be realized." Rahel, however, countered the claims that Saint Simonism was a kind of religion by arguing that "...a religion cannot be deducted; it must be revealed as law or established through miracle...otherwise it is a teaching."[16]

The socialist currents had grown in response to the counter-revolutionary efforts of European governments in and out of Germany which were escalating their efforts to suppress opposition after 1820. In his promotion of Saint Simonism and other notions for radical reform, Varnhagen was at pains to downplay the political significance of the movement. He disguised his own activity after 1833 in the Rahel cult, but he was also instrumental in urging a more serious consideration of Goethe's achievement. The mainspring of his work continued to be his profound belief that unchained human nature is a creative force in the balance of history.

Varnhagen's interest in Goethe pre-dates his association with Rahel. The reader will recall how the young writer parodied the character of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister in the *Doppelroman.* Rahel was a lifelong disciple of the poet, and discussions with her were surely behind some of Varnhagen's insights into Goethe's significance. In 1821 he published an article that suggested that *Wilhelm Meister* contained an implicit criticism of the European *status quo.* The theme was expanded in an essay Varnhagen wrote for the memorial issue of Goethe's journal, *Kunst und Alterthum (On Art and Antiquity.)*[17] In this masterly treatment, entitled "Im Sinne der Wanderer," Varnhagen includes not only *Wilhelm Meister* but also *Faust* in his estimation of Goethe's works as being proto-realistic masterpieces with profound bearing upon actual social conditions.

"Goethe's entire body of writing," Varnhagen writes in 1832, "is a composite picture of global derangement in a world fallen into discord." It was indeed, according to Varnhagen, as a member of the German middle classes that Goethe had come to his insights, for he had actually experienced discrimination and exclusion in his own life. At the very heart of his argument, Varnhagen's

prose strikes the modern reader as lacking lucidity; the circumlocation apparent in the following sample will give the reader a sense of how Varnhagen responded to the circumstances of his time:

> For it is the disunity and dissolution of the old forms of life that, being long sick and destructive, would like to chain the fresh forms of life to their demise. The new forms developing but yet without sanction have become in their eternal legitimation unmistakably tangled with a temporal attempt at usurping them — and it is this material that imaginative prose must deal with if it does not want to renounce life.[18]

Literature has, in other words, a social mission in portraying actual conditions in society in order to expose inequities and to have an impact upon the world. Goethe's own position on this interpretation, it should be noted, remained ambiguous.

Varnhagen did, in fact, have the opportunity to bring the matter up with Goethe. It was the kind of chance few critics either have or want. While sending him a copy of Pückler's newest work, Varnhagen comments on his observations. Though Goethe did not respond and died soon after, he had discussed the socialist movement in a letter to another friend, remarking "intelligent people are in the forefront of the sect (Saint Simonism) and recognize the deficiencies of our times and even understand how to present desirable alternatives..."[19]

After Goethe's death Varnhagen was less willing than ever to restrain himself in propagating his interpretation of the great poet's legacy. In a review of Goethe's autobiography, Varnhagen writes that both the poet's life and works constitute a concrete social statement with profound political implications.[20] In the meantime, he had begun to push hard to realize his vision of founding an international Goethe society. When his engagement with Marianne Saaling collapsed in 1834, he went to Weimar alone to convince the current reigning duke of Weimar to support his project. Though he met with no success, the seed was planted and would eventually bear fruit.

Metternich was not, for his part, fooled by the notion of a Goethe society. In a letter to his Prussian colleague, Prince Wittgenstein, who had also suspected Varnhagen's ideological tendencies, the Austrian chancellor wrote:

> Varnhagen is an ideologue, and I especially note the association with the Goethe cult that I recognize in Rahel's survivor and to which the new literature is pledged in a way that defies the old poet.

Metternich had obviously not changed his opinion of Varnhagen since he stood in the way of his reappointment to a diplomatic post in 1820. His insight into the personality and character of Varnhagen's true sympathies reached, perhaps, as far back as 1810. While Varnhagen was in Paris with Bentheim he had sat at table with the then Count and, according to his own report, had defended the idea of a free press with some vehemence. The company had received his eloquence with shock, and Bentheim had later cautioned him to moderate his din-

ner conversation. It is from that date that Metternich regarded Varnhagen as one of the "shrewdest and most resourceful of revolutionaries."[21]

Metternich's attitude was not unknown to Varnhagen. Bernstorff had cited the Austrian chancellor's opposition to his reassignment in 1823. In a letter to Tettenborn that year, Varnhagen had complained that Metternich was persecuting him: "what have I done to Prince Metternich that he should persecute me so? Has he any reason to complain about me personally?" He went on to blame Metternich's enmity upon some "slanderous defamations" undertaken to destroy him.[22]

Despite the profound political tendencies in Varnhagen's own makeup, he had difficulty comprehending the nature of a practical politician who acts exclusively and consistently in accordance with certain ideological aims embodied finally in state policy. He wanted to understand Metternich's opposition to his career as the result of a personal hostility, and he continued to believe that, could he merely explain his real feelings to the Prince, all might be put in order again.

Varnhagen's naiveté actually led him in 1836 to write Metternich a personal letter defending a group of writers known collectively as the Young Germans. The Chancellor must have smiled grimly when receiving this epistle and reading that his correspondent believed that the state should dismantle its apparatus of suppression precisely because "literature has always been an element of opposition that falls into conflict with the state, the church, and morals..."[23] Suppression is, Varnhagen goes on to assert, a useless tool because it cannot stamp out a tendency that lies in the very nature of literature. Furthermore, he insists that men moderate themselves with age. The revolutionary youth becomes in maturity a pillar of society.

Just to show how completely he had misunderstood his position vis-à-vis the Chancellor, Varnhagen goes on to advocate the idea of a Goethe society to him. His argument would only have confirmed Metternich's view that such a society would provide a rallying point for subversive elements, for Varnhagen calls it a springboard for all the "better striving" in the nation. He could hardly have been more candid about its purpose as a vehicle for radical change.

It is remarkable to find the retired Privy Legation Councillor Varnhagen writing to the Chancellor of Austria to defend in terms of the new social movement the work of writers whom Metternich sought, for that very reason, to suppress. If one wonders how Varnhagen could have been either so indifferent or so ignorant, the answer might lie in the characteristic political innocence of Varnhagen's class and generation which even some experience in government had not really changed.

Sincerity was the essence of the German intellectual of middle-class background. Rahel had made it her leitmotiv — openness, frankness, fearless honesty. The only time Varnhagen came within the periphery of political action, during his tenure in Baden, he was destroyed by his refusal to recognize the realities of power and its naked logic. The savage determination to maintain a grip on political control was simply alien to his experience. He perceived the world in terms of the habits of his own class: it *should* be a forum in which individuals could express their views without becoming personally assailable. Life

itself was a kind of conversational or debating arena.

Varnhagen's temperament and social origins precluded his becoming an effective player in the political area. He had acted in defiance of expediency in spite of all the warning signals in Baden. In Berlin he might have easily maneuvered his way into the ascendant party in the Prussian government, but he refused. He either rejected it outright or disqualified himself every time he had an opportunity to reenter public life. Though it took a heavy psychic toll upon him, he continued in the same manner throughout his life. In 1831 he complained to Cotta that he had trouble mustering enough energy to write a single word in the face of the forces combined against him.[24] Tettenborn he wrote that "...my health hinders me in all my work."[25]

Still, the conciliatory bent, the inability to compromise certain principles which appears to contradict it, the impotence in the face of events, these are not traits that are merely personal. They extend to some extent to entire generations of liberal and democratic Germans. The failure of the liberal movement after 1848 was at least in part due to similar attitudes dominating the middle classes.

During the next few years after Rahel's death Varnhagen turned out several volumes of collected papers, including correspondence, of people who themselves were not figures of primary importance to history. His strategy was to appeal in his role as editor to current sympathies, noting piously that the work was a memorial to the deceased. After the initial pious and eulogistic statements, he would switch to an acutely critical stance, frequently defending an objective and comprehensive documentation for the sake of historical veracity:

> ...publishing personal memoirs and correspondence usually seems to us Germans to be a suspicious undertaking: our smalltown timidity is afraid to present itself in other than festive dress, though the best and worthiest part of our lives is thereby neglected.[26]

As Varnhagen discovered that he was reasonably secure from official intervention or reprisal so long as he wore the guise of editor and memorialist, he became more direct in his approach. His preliminary remarks in the introductions to his editions became increasingly polemic. In an edition of the works of his old friend, Bernhardi, for which he wrote the introduction, he commented that:

> A mature sensibility and patriotic conscience does not strive to memorialize our fathers by petrifying the pictures of their lives or honoring their character in benumbed views, but rather by drawing new incentive for true progress from them, courage and a sense of perspective from their achievements.[27]

He had nevertheless had some moments of trepidation, such as the incident in 1835 when he was called on the carpet in the foreign office to explain his involvement in the founding of the journal, the *Deutsche Revue*. Bernstorff's successor, Ancillon, had no love for Varnhagen and had struck the subsidy former-

ly paid him, retiring him permanently from the service in 1833. He also had once refused to grant permission for Varnhagen to leave Berlin on a three month visit to Vienna.

Just how Varnhagen's governmental relationship inhibited his writing is difficult to say. He certainly continued his journalistic work at a remarkably prolific level, contributing 213 articles between 1830 and 1849 to one journal alone — Cotta's Augsburg *Allgemeine.* The year after Rahel's death he not only issued the commemorative edition of her writings, he was preparing *Gallery,* already discussed here, and in 1836 an edition of the writings of his old, dear friend, Wilhelm Neumann, was published.

In the late 1820s Varnhagen had also begun to publish in another genre: the autobiographical essay. His work appeared from time to time in the periodical press, but by 1837 he had devised a new kind of vehicle that would no longer depend upon periodicals or newspapers. It was that year that the first volume of the *Denkwürdigkeiten und vermischte Schriften* appeared.

Denkwürdigkeiten as used in German had traditionally been a vehicle for reminiscence in which the events recounted carried more significance than personal or autobiographical details about the author. Referring literally to things "worthy of note," these works belong to a genre that had never thrived in Germany, though there had been signal exceptions. What Varnhagen made of his "matters worthy of note and miscellaneous writing" was a kind of prototype of the modern digest. He includes in these volumes reprints of his stories, poems, and reviews, his translations from the Russian, and his autobiographical essays. It included a potpourri of writings from the work of others as well.

The *Denkwürdigkeiten* appeared at irregular intervals until 1846, and, in 1859, Ludmilla published a final volume. In the course of this period, Varnhagen carried his autobiographical narrative up to his recall from the diplomatic post in Karlsruhe in 1819.

The piecemeal effect of the autobiography must have had a very different impact at the time than is possible today with the entire narrative available in a single volume or two volumes.[28] Readers could not have perceived it as a coherent work. It is, nevertheless, Varnhagen's style which makes the initial impression upon the reader now as then.

Varnhagen draws attention to his style through the conscious use of antiquated language and complex relative clauses that create an effect like a Byzantine maze in which qualifiers generate a sense of pervasive ambivalence. Ambivalence is therefore the unsteady reality, a kind of elegantly distorted glass through which one must seek the substance of the work.

Through the glass of Varnhagen's elaborate style, the reader moves beyond the spectacle upon which he seems to focus. It is the world of glitter, pomp, and power. One moves among the ruling classes of Europe, encountering them at work in government, at war, but also at leisure while attending the fashionable cures they sought. A mirage of community is created, for these people seem to know and recognize one another. They participate in civilized forms, appear to share certain basic attitudes and values. One feels that here is a dazzling record of life at the top — almost.

The scene dissipates into aether and beyond that another level of action

gradually emerges upon the reader's consciousness. Behind the circumstance of privilege and power exist social conflict, deprivation, inequity, insecurity, and war. The elegant community of the European elite soon takes on the character of a mirage stretched across a thin fabric that cannot hide the real action beyond it — but which pretends that there is no other depth in this narrative reality. A tantalizing tension is generated through the contrast between this overt spectacle and the nether world behind its screen.

In an autobiography the author is also, after all, the subject. Karl Varnhagen's self-portrait glimmers through at several levels, only to retreat again into obscurity. He is never quite what he seems to be. Noble, he is bourgeois; a soldier he lambasts war; a man of integrity, he intrigues; moving like a parvenu among the great of the world, he is an iconoclast and democrat. He emerges here and there a moment, giving a promise of clarifying his true relationship to the characters and events in the narrative; yet, he dissolves again at a turn of events. It is only long after the first reading that the reader realizes the strange pretension of the work. Varnhagen's name remains indelibly fixed to the age, but he played no important role in any of the events he recorded. He was always lurking on the periphery, hiding at the edge of things.

Varnhagen was a nobody at the very crescent of his political career. He was an official really too minor to count for much, and his position after 1819 was, as we have noted, ambiguous to the extreme. Yet, he made out of its ambiguity a virtue and out of its obscurity a kind of fame or notoriety. The complex threads he spun as journalist, writer, friend, benefactor, and intermediary made him a factor to be reckoned with in spite of the facts. He was able to do for himself what he also did for his wife: out of modest circumstance was created a significant and convincing persona.

When Varnhagen turns to his own memoirs, he works like a photographer who focuses upon the external facets of his world. Between himself and the reader he interposes the mechanism of his stately prose. Attention is drawn to the style through his use of elaborate phrasing and qualifiers. There is also another important level of interference that blocks any clear access to the private, autobiographical core of the narrative which the modern reader is no longer aware of; for Varnhagen placed the essays at random in the periodical press and thereby diffused the impact they might otherwise have had when gathered into a single book.

The Varnhagen who emerges in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* is an initiate, a man on the inside who is privy to vital events and who moves among people who also are involved. His identity is achieved without the author insisting on his role. A sense of Varnhagen's being attached somehow to the events and persons grows naturally out of his narrative association with the things related.

The fictive Varnhagen begins as a precocious child, but that precocity is necessary in order for the author to relate so much about larger events of which a child would ordinarily be ignorant. If little Karl Varnhagen is something of a vehicle, the true subject is Germany. There is never penetration into the private spaces of the author. The tantalizing character of the self- portrait is precisely in the author's reluctance to reveal himself. He proceeds anecdotally — as if he

himself were only familiar with his life in so far as it was associated with external events.

The real charm of the work lies in the incongruence between Varnhagen's ornamental style and the perceptive and unconventional insights that explode the stately parade of his relation. Under the mask of officious dignity lurk the clear and unprejudiced corridors of a strong and original mind. He creates the stylistic veneer his age demanded without compromising the internal integrity of his own singular point of view. On the surface, he seems to be announcing that he is the child of his own time and place. The reader can proceed, he assures us, without risk. Soon the narrative territory grows less familiar, however, and the reader is confronted with unconventional attitudes.

An example of Varnhagen's technique can be found in the discussion of his genealogy that introduces the narrative. His family abandoned their nobility, he writes, when they found the pursuit of medicine and knowledge more rewarding. The statement is made innocently enough, it seems, but Varnhagen does not stop there. Genealogy, he argues, should not be used as a kind of mythic legitimation of the subject; rather it is a useful tool of social history.

The countercurrents in the narrative continue. Just as his family chooses a "higher" calling that brings them to reject institutionalized privilege and prestige, there is an implicit resistance to public celebrity throughout the narrative while the author zeroes in upon those who play a part in history, however minor, with the sure instinct of a social climber — or a reporter.

It is ironic that the popularity of his *Denkwürdigkeiten* fixed Varnhagen in the minds of his later contemporaries as a conciliatory elder statesman in the realm of letters. He was viewed increasingly as a nobleman who identified with bourgeois aspirations and values. Some of the magic of celebrity adhered to his own person, and he became for many one of those half- mythical creatures who inhabit exalted spheres. It was that pose which Varnhagen had cultivated, to some extent, because it was necessary to his role as intermediary to history and interpreter of events. It was a part of his pose as the reporter with inside knowledge of life at the top.

It must not have been easy for readers accustomed to thinking of him in his statesman garb to discover in his posthumous papers a person who had been so dissatisfied with things as they were. If readers thought that they had known who he was, both as writer and man, they found that his actual sympathies had been out of tune with the times. The commentaries of the time indicate that many felt betrayed or, at least, fooled. Varnhagen was viewed as deceitful. He had deliberately misled his countrymen.

This study has sought to view the problem from the perspective of distance. One no longer shares either the timidity or sense of betrayal of that generation of readers. Varnhagen had no intention of misleading his countrymen, only the government and those who represented it. If he was devious it was because the circumstances required it; yet, for those sensitive to his point of view, it was quite clear that his over insistence that the world was peaceful and his own intentions benign was lodged for the purpose of confusing the governmental arbiters of public opinion. What he actually recounts is another story. In his memoirs it is a record of desperation and violence — public violence and

dishonesty. Still, no character is invested with evil. They are all merely insensitive. Insensitive to the urgency of the need around them, concerned with power, full of arrogant bad temper (as is Napoleon in his single overt appearance), or even well- meaning like Metternich usually is when Varnhagen mentions him. The rich poses of these figures in the foreground, nevertheless, only contribute to the disturbing quality of the paradoxes.

Varnhagen gives us an empty and pedantic glitter, a spectacle in which unctuous parvenus and arrogantly mindless grandseigneurs consume the meager resources of a nation. He never openly admits to these paradoxes, however, the tension set up depends upon the reader's full knowledge of events and what they mean. If the reader knew and knows what was really happening, then he can recognize the illusory quality of the tightknit community established at one level of the narrative.

The truth is that, while he was constructing the symmetrical fiction of his autobiography, Varnhagen was passionately convinced that history would require more than persuasion to be brought back to its proper course. Shortly before the insurrections of 1848, he had issued a volume he entitled *Karl Müller's Leben aund kleine Schriften (Karl Mueller's life and Incidental Writings).* The book appeared in 1847 and contained a long, biographical essay by Varnhagen in which he describes boldly the hopes of his own liberal generation that Mueller represents, outlining as well the frustrating circumstances that limited them.

Mueller had been a gifted and eager youth, one of those exemplary young liberals who had fought against the French occupation and been carried away on the wave of nationalism that was a response to the French hegemony under Napoleon. Though Varnhagen's career bore a certain resemblance to Mueller's, he was at pains to show the excesses of such a position. He portrays, for instance, the ludicrous extremes to which Mueller went as a junior official to expunge from the German language all French influences. It is in Mueller that Varnhagen captures best the manner in which talent and enthusiasm can be misdirected or deflected as soon as a person is given a minor civil service post. An equally valid example of the same problem can be found in Varnhagen's biography of *Hans von Held. Ein preussisches Karakterbild (Portrayal of a Prussian Character),* 1845.

Held was inflamed by the belief that merit is the measure of a man, that political liberty should be the standard for government, but he was also burdened with an irrational loyalty to his prince. He was audacious and petty, expansive and narrow-minded. The alternating rhythms of exhilaration and freedom with constrictive curbs upon initiative are the actors in the narrative. Held is bludgeoned into his corner, and his public career ends very much as had Mueller's — or Varnhagen's. There is the deadend of a minor bureaucratic post where the personality is unmanned and reduced to an absurd routine.

Varnhagen did indeed continue to write biographies during the last twenty-five years of his life, and his consummate skill at writing a fast-paced adventure narrative is demonstrated again and again. In addition to celebrating generals, he also published *Leben der Königin Sophie Charlotte (Life of Queen Sophie Charlotte)* in 1837. Here is a work that certainly falls into the category of a mir-

ror for princes, and he relates the events and acts of the Queen's life with outright sympathy and admiration.

Varnhagen finished the biography of Sophie Charlotte in six weeks and enjoyed the composition. It was a departure from his usual themes of military courage and private despair. Sophie Charlotte's enlightened views make her a most appealing royal character, and her erudition and tolerance are in sharp contrast to the empty pomp of her husband's court.

In all these genres Varnhagen seems to have been carrying out a kind of reconnaissance to history. What his publications accomplished was surely consistent with his intent and purpose, for readers were confronted with a cosmopolitan perspective in all its undiminished vigor. Whatever the topic or the mode, the message was the same. The benevolent process of history would ultimately rescue creative and conscious mankind into a golden age of harmonious community.

7. A WEB OF FRIENDSHIP AND CONNECTION

After Rahel's death Varnhagen no longer opened his apartment to the afternoon gatherings that his wife had organized and dominated. He sought the company of his equals at the homes and apartments of friends and acquaintances. At home he lived in the company of Rahel's faithful maid, Dora, and his valet and butler, Ganzmann. A dog, Bello, was added at some point to the household. Varnhagen was accompanied on his daily strolls through the *Tiergarten* by his servants and the canine friend who captured an increasing part of his affection as the lonely years passed.

Varnhagen was by no means a confirmed widower, for all his abiding love for Rahel. He was engaged to Marianne Saaling, a very old friend who had procured him his tutorial job with the Hertz family in Hamburg years before, and a wedding scheduled for the spring of 1834. He had even made arrangements for a wedding trip to Weimar, the town where Goethe had lived and where he hoped to promote the idea of an international Goethe society.

As the date of the wedding approached, Marianne was beset by "nameless fears," as she wrote Varnhagen. The tension mounted until, on May 7, she informed him that she had spent the previous night talking with Rahel and asking her to accept her as her "child." Marianne's guilt at marrying the husband of an old friend was complicated by a neurotic fear of sexual contact. On May 21 she accused Varnhagen of "beastly and uncivilized" behavior. He had attempted to take affectionate liberties with her, and it became clear to her that she could not tolerate the thought of physical contact that was even mildly sexual in nature.

Varnhagen had snatched up his cane and hat and left the apartment in a huff. After several days of painful self-recrimination, he decided that a marriage with a person who demanded that he agree not to have sex with her would simply not work. He must have realized that Marianne's horror of a physical relationship went far beyond anything personal, for he recovered his good humor and worked out an amicable agreement by which they terminated the engagement. Marianne had borrowed a considerable sum of money from him which she could apparently not repay, but that matter was, after some difficulty, somehow resolved. Both Varnhagen and Marianne remained friends, saw each other regularly in Berlin society, and corresponded occasionally. She never married.[1]

When Varnhagen took his wedding trip alone to Weimar, he was introduced to local society there by Goethe's daughter-in-law, Ottilie, and promptly associated by rumor with the romantic young Jenny von Pappenheim, an illegitimate daughter of Jerome Bonaparte. Jenny was much younger than Varnhagen and admired him chiefly as the husband of the sensitive and, by that time, famous Rahel.[2]

Back in Berlin he found Henriette Solmar's afternoon and evening gatherings helped to fill the vacuum. Miss Solmar was, like Marianne and Rahel, a woman of Jewish extraction who had Germanized her name. Like Marianne, too, she never married. There is strong evidence, however, that she had at least one serious romance — with Albert Brisbane.[3]

Varnhagen was also very close friends with the Mendelssohn family in its

several branches. It was, for instance, a serious loss to him when Rebeka Mendelssohn and her husband, the eminent mathematician, Dirichlet, left Berlin to take an appointment at the University in Göttingen. His connection with the family included something of a romance with Jette Mendelssohn during his sojourns in Paris where she operated a girls school during the first decade and a half of the century.[4]

He was often at the gatherings in the apartment of a Russian couple, the Frolovs, where he met many Russians and first developed an interest in learning the Russian language. Though Varnhagen was not so warmly appreciated and liked at the Frolovs' as he was at Miss Solmar's and the Mendelssohns', he found the company and conversation among the Russians and other foreigners stimulating.

Varnhagen had, of course, contact with Russians very early in his life, having ridden in a Russian unit during the war. He had also known many Russian diplomats during his career in Baden. His contacts had always remained somewhat superficial, in the sense that he understood very little of their native culture and usually conversed with them in French. The Russians who came to Berlin to study philosophy and gather at the Frolov place were a different breed. They were profoundly patriotic and concerned with the latest developments in their own literature.

Varnhagen soon engaged one of the young men, a certain Neverov, to tutor him in Russian. His teacher was living a marginal existence in the city and would eventually take a teaching position in Riga. On June 19, 1838 Varnhagen noted in his diary that he was "very attracted to the language." His enthusiasm was sustained throughout the difficult process of mastering the grammar, and he could write in a letter dated October 28, 1846: "I have never experienced in my mature years a purer intellectual joy than in the learning of Russian..." Very late in life the facility had not faded, and he was able to entertain himself when he could no longer sustain a day of reading because of bad eyesight by reciting Pushkin from memory.[5]

Alexander von Humboldt had given Varnhagen his first edition of Pushkin's poetry in late 1838. Soon thereafter Varnhagen began to oppose with some vehemence the notion that the Russian poet was just another of Byron's imitators. His activity on behalf of Pushkin led to the publication in the *Jahrbücher* of a three part review of Pushkin's works which remains a milestone in the reception of Russian literature in Germany. Varnhagen argued that Pushkin was not just another imitator of Byron but an important poet in his own right.

The most immediate incentive for Varnhagen's concern with the new era in Russian letters was provided by the activity of Varnhagen's younger friend, Heinrich Koenig, who had published *Literarische Bilder aus Rußland (Literary Pictures From Russia)* in 1837, a book that did the groundbreaking work of opening up vistas of the Russian situation to the German reader. It is likely that an anonymous article that appeared at the time and can be traced to Varnhagen's pen was actually a paraphrase of information gathered from Koenig and Neverov. The essay, bearing a St. Petersburg dateline, gives the reader a superficial summary of developments on the literary scene in Russia.[6]

Varnhagen's non-doctrinaire approach to issues is evident once again in his

essays on Russian literature. He denies the liberal idea that the development of a culture and literature must correspond to the level of political sophistication in a given society. The fact that Russia was politically backward did not, he argued, necessarily mean that the literature and language of that country were primitive. "The Russian language, " Varnhagen wrote, "the richest and most powerful among the Slavic family, may confidently compare itself with the most cultivated in contemporary Europe."

Pushkin's literary achievement, Varnhagen insisted, heralds a new political epoch in Russia as well as a literary and cultural revolution: Russia can only proceed to a more liberal society after experiencing Pushkin; and the order of society must change to accomodate the new higher level of literature. In this way, Varnhagen turned around the idea that cultural sophistication follows in the wake of political liberalization.

Among Varnhagen's critical judgments that have stood the test of time is his estimation of *Boris Gudunov,* at the time largely regarded as a closet drama, which he thought was meant to be performed. After dealing with Pushkin Varnhagen went on to deal critically with Lermontov and Gogol, citing them both as very promising writers and especially noting Gogol's unique talent.

Varnhagen also tried his hand rather successfully at translating from Russian. He completed three works, one of them a section from Lermontov's *A Hero of our Time.* He published these translations in periodicals first and then reprinted them in his *Denkwürdigkeiten.* When young writers interested in Russian studies as a special area began to appear during this period, he ceased to continue this kind of work, feeling that they could do a more thorough job than he.[7]

Varnhagen continued to read Russian and kept up his correspondence with several Russians, including Neverov, his former teacher, Alexander Turgenev, a relative of the poet and himself a Decembrist and historian, and Mel'gunov, a writer whose story he had once translated. Some of these letters have been preserved in the Varnhagen Collection, and one gathers in reading them how these young Russians regarded Varnhagen with a mixture of admiration and gratitude for his having taken their language and literature so seriously.[8] At least two poems were dedicated to Varnhagen by Russian poets, as well.

Varnhagen's work in Russian helped to generate a new wave of interest in Russian studies. Later on, he was also given credit for transforming Bakunin from a starry-eyed Hegelian into an activist revolutionary.[9] They first met when the young man visited Varnhagen at Kissingen on October 1, 1840. After 1842 Bakunin left Berlin and did not return until the explosive year of 1848 when he introduced Varnhagen to his new aims and views. Their friendship became more intense after that time. When Bakunin disappeared into the labyrinth of internment that carried him mysteriously from Saxony to Siberia, Varnhagen frequently expressed his deeply emotional concern for Bakunin's fate. On June 4, 1856, when the long suspense over the Russian's fate was resolved, he wrote: "today my morning began with a cry of joy! Bakunin, brave Bakunin has been pardoned by the Russian Czar."[10]

Varnhagen's American contacts also tended to inhabit the political left. Albert Brisbane has been mentioned previously in the narrative as an early sup-

porter of the Saint Simonian movement in Paris. He later would become the chief apostle of Fourier in the United States, leading a very successful but ephemeral offensive of his own. One of his best known acts was the conversion of the Brook Farm experiment in New England into a Fourier-style philanstery.[11] Brisbane and Varnhagen kept in touch, at any rate, for years, and their correspondence is an important document in the history of socialist experiments in Europe and the United States.[12]

Varnhagen's abiding interest in Brisbane comes under the category of his general encouragement of reform movements. He cultivated his English contacts with more specifically practical reasons in mind. He hoped through them to have an influence — however indirect — upon Central European affairs. A man like Richard Monckton Milnes was, for instance, a member of parliament who was also active as a political writer in the periodical press. There is indeed evidence that Milnes wrote political articles based on information provided him by Varnhagen, drawing conclusions which could only have been presented in veiled form in Germany.[13]

Varnhagen's long epistolary friendship with Thomas Carlyle continued even after the two men discovered during Carlyle's first visit to Berlin that they did not find each other congenial company. Varnhagen was somewhat shocked at Carlyle's brusk manner and his halting German. Carlyle thought that Varnhagen was a bit too dandified for a scholarly writer. The two continued to write and to help each other in a number of ways. Varnhagen provided Carlyle with much information for his works, especially the volume of Frederick the Great of Prussia. He also continued to be quite interested in the Carlyle household and career, though the Scotsman tended increasingly to develop in political directions not at all agreeable to him. His chief informant was a German emigré living as a governess in London who was acquainted with Carlyle's wife and often visited the family in Chelsea.[14]

George Henry Lewes was a precocious Englishman, the son of actors and a writer determined to make his mark, when he met Varnhagen during a visit to Berlin in 1836. Lewes is best known for his connection with Marian Evans. He is given a great deal of credit for encouraging her to write fiction under the pseudonym of George Eliot. He also became a literary figure in his own right and was a versatile writer who worked successfully in several genres. In the area of German studies, however, he is best known for his biography of Goethe.

Lewes used his connection to Varnhagen in a frequently blatant manner, milking him for favors and information. Varnhagen tutored him, in the first place, in German idealist philosophy and helped him on his way to writing a popular philosophical survey that gave Lewes some measure of financial independence. More important to Varnhagen, however, was Lewes's proposed intention of writing a biography of Goethe.

Lewes thought about the work on Goethe over a long period of time and even seems to have dropped the idea altogether for a time. Varnhagen furnished him with bibliographies, advice, and encouragement. When the Englishman did manage to complete the work — still considered something of a milestone in Goethe studies — Varnhagen was disappointed. Lewes did not give Goethe the political dimension Varnhagen would have liked. Hinting at the shortcomings

he felt he perceived in the work, Varnhagen attributed them to the fact that Lewes was not German. In his private notes, however, Varnhagen was more blunt. He declares in a handwritten sketch on Lewes that the biography lacked "thoroughness" and was "very much overvalued."[15]

Varnhagen's English acquaintance was by no means dominated by political interest. During the summer of 1836 he met Charlotte Williams Wynn while sailing on a Rhine steamer. Charlotte apparently approached him, as she later apologized, "bold as a lion," asking him to help her with her German. German women of the educated classes were permitted to be more assertive than their English counterparts, and Charlotte, by her own testimony, virtually changed personality when in Germany and found it to her liking. She was twenty-nine at the time and the eldest daughter of the eminent parliamentarian, Charles Watkins Williams Wynn, a descendant of the Dukes of Somerset.

The Williams Wynn family were Welsh gentry. Charlotte's uncle was a baronet and one of the richest men in the kingdom. She belonged, in other words, to the English elite and possessed both the self-assurance and the notions of her class. When their flirtation continued in the form of an exchange of letters, she urged Varnhagen to visit her at the family seat in Wales where she said he would return to good health and also be converted to conservatism. She obviously neither understood Varnhagen nor the political constellations in Germany.

Charlotte's exalted connections did not leave Varnhagen unimpressed. He was already in his early fifties when they first met, but he was intrigued enough with her to meet the family twice more during the next four years when they would take their annual vacation at a fashionable German spa. As his private notes and their letters reveal, the relationship developed rapidly into a full-blown romance. Charlotte cultivated him and encouraged romantic feelings towards her. He toyed with the idea of proposing to her, but he could never quite convince himself that such a marriage could be possible.

Charlotte's sister, Sidney, also played a role in cooling Varnhagen's ardor, for she wrote him: "Papa imagines that all Prussians of family have some title, why have you not one?" She then continued to urge him to re-enter government service in order to secure a respectable position.

The fact that Varnhagen actually tinkered with Sidney's suggestion and considered making attempts at gaining reinstatement at the foreign office demonstrates how serious he was about Charlotte. In the end, he could not bring himself to take steps in that direction, and Charlotte's other sister, Mary, remarked that, "If he had the Embassy to London" their father just might consider such a match, though he would otherwise not have his daughter married outside England or permanently in Berlin.

The romance actually reached a climax during a reunion in 1838 when Varnhagen's unpublished diary entries show that they were together a great deal alone — an unusual circumstance in that age and somewhat puzzling, since it ordinarily would only have occurred had a family been in agreement with a prospective marriage. Varnhagen was joyfully surprised and confused, at the same time, to find that he had such access to Charlotte. The episode was soon over, nevertheless, and Varnhagen ended the affair with an elegaic remark: "For me

it is over! Not just Charlotte — that's not the case; rather just for me it's over... My time is passed..." He adds: "When I really reflect and comprehend, I wish Charlotte much more happiness than I can bring her..."[16]

Charlotte lived, in fact, a rather decorous life suitable to her station and era. Her concerns tended increasingly to be religious. She must have known and appreciated something of Varnhagen's iconoclastic side, for she herself was known to argue long and well. Her lack of real insight into German society did not equip her to understand the extent to which his democratic views were laid bare in the posthumous publications, however, and she was very disturbed at Ludmilla's publication of her uncle's papers. G. E. Lewes could not have endeared himself with Varnhagen when he wrote that he had met her in London one evening and found her "old maidish." She was, to Varnhagen, the very essence of high-born elegance and grace.

Varnhagen was not destined to continue his lonely life for much longer. On February 24, 1840, he registered his dismay at the death of his beloved sister, Rosa Maria, noting that he was having difficulty comprehending that she was gone. His attachment to her had always been evident. He had dedicated poems to her in the 1815 edition of his poetry, and it was through him that she had been provided a husband. For her part, she had responded to Varnhagen with something like loyalty and even adoration. It was his experience in the larger world that gave her access to the stimulating life she craved. In a poem addressed to him on February 21, 1806, Rosa wrote:

> Destiny gave me only very little,
> My heart is deprived of the highest experience,
> And my young life ebbs out in dark night
> Though I burn with inward passion;
> Still, as compensation a brother
> Was given me like few have known...[17]

Varnhagen had once portrayed Rosa's virtues so vividly to David Assur (later Assing) while the two were in Vienna, that the physician had gone to Hamburg to see for himself. As a result, he had become her devoted husband. The couple had two daughters, Ludmilla and Ottilie, who became anything but loving sisters. When their father was unable to recover from his wife's death and died himself two years later, he left these daughters with the single possibility of turning to their uncle in Berlin for help. Varnhagen was their only refuge.

In 1842 the storm broke upon Varnhagen's pacific, bachelor existence. Ottilie and Ludmilla came to live with him. The next few weeks were full of explosive scenes. Ottilie proved to be the trouble-maker. She had a violent temper and was prone to tantrums. Once she left the house without a coat after a monumental scene. It was in the dead of winter, and she was found in the Tiergarten trying to stab herself.

Varnhagen must have felt considerable relief when Ottilie finally left his household and Berlin in order to emigrate to America where she made a career in New York as a journalist. She later returned to Europe and died eventually in France, but she never really reestablished contact with either her uncle or her

sister. It was Ludmilla who remained to provide Varnhagen with the companionship he needed.

Ludmilla shared her uncle's interests. She was an intellectual person with a talent for drawing. Using her artistic gifts, she lined the walls with sketches of the people who came to visit. She also assumed the role of hostess and resurrected Varnhagen's salon gatherings. She might have lacked Rahel's brilliant wit, but she was effective enough at political and other discourse, and she was patient. There was, nevertheless, an angularity about Ludmilla that kept her from ever becoming a desirable or truly popular hostess and woman. She was not sweet in any conventional sense. She had her opinions, and she maintained them sometimes with a determination that would later give her enemies ammunition when they defamed her as a "masculine" nature.

During the next fifteen years Varnhagen could not have asked for a more loyal and devoted pupil and friend than he found in his niece. She accompanied him everywhere. Ludmilla was also competent in managing the household; she acted as Varnhagen's private secretary, as well; and under his guidance she began to write for publication.

Ludmilla's first completed work, a biography of her friend, the Countess Ahlefeldt, was the occasion for Varnhagen's falling out with his English friend, G. H. Lewes. Having done Lewes many favors, Varnhagen sent him a copy of Ludmilla's book with the suggestion that he might review it for the British press. Lewes allowed a considerable time to elapse, then declined to review the work on the grounds that it would fall into conservative hands and provide them with ammunition to fire away at the libertarian life style. Though Lewes's assessment of the climate in England was accurate, Varnhagen was deeply offended.[18]

He was very protective of Ludmilla. When she developed a romantic interest in Gottfried Keller, he helped her by taking her on a trip to Zurich to visit the Swiss author. Keller had once frequented Varnhagen's gatherings during his long sojourn in Berlin. He did not respond to Ludmilla's affection, however.[19]

When Varnhagen died in 1858, leaving his niece his large archives and private papers she undertook an editorial labor that continued through the remainder of her life. Her extensive work as Varnhagen's editor has never been adequately studied; yet, considering the impact and importance of the stream of books she issued from Varnhagen's "Nachlaß," such a study of her editorial achievement is clearly overdue and now once again possible.

Ludmilla suffered exile and social ostracization after the appearance of the Varnhagen-Humboldt correspondence, for, as has already been mentioned in the introduction, the frank manner of the discussion between the two men shocked the establishment in Prussia. Both Humboldt and Varnhagen were liberal-minded men, and the former's proximity to the royal household made it inevitable that many of their comments related to the persons of the royal family, who did not appear in a positive light. Pückler intervened at one point on Ludmilla's behalf, but even a prince could not save her from arrest after she began to publish the *Tagebücher* (diaries). She left Berlin to avoid arrest and spent the remainder of her life in Italy, largely in Florence. Except for a brief and unhappy marriage to an adventurer, Ludmilla lived out her life in comfortable circumstances.

Many people felt that she had violated a trust in publishing much of Varnhagen's most controversial materials prematurely. Ludmilla maintained, however, that she had been charged by her uncle to begin work immediately. It does not seem unreasonable that she understood far better than others what Varnhagen had expected of her, and the discomfort she caused the Prussian establishment would have satisfied him. Though he inevitably counseled caution and a pragmatic, step-by-step approach to reform, he had grown increasingly disgruntled with events in Berlin in particular and Germany in general. His hate for reactionary parties is well documented in both his published and unpublished writings. From the time of his earliest essays directed against the establishment of upper-houses within a representative assembly, his writings had been directed against every manifestation of the old order in Europe.

Unquestionably, Varnhagen's sympathies lay with radical views. His open support of Saint Simonism heavily colored his interpretation of the late Goethe, inspired his friendship with Brisbane and led him finally to a revolutionary stance in his support of Bakunin and others. Constructive change meant simply radical change to him — a change at the roots of society, a fundamental restructuring of the European order which would not accomodate even the interests of the bourgeoisie.

There was, at the same time, a conciliatory and compromising element in his nature which enabled him to publish, during the upheavals and turmoil of 1848, a tract urging the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.[20] It was during that period that he also frequently registered his dismay that democrats were not acting more prudently in consolidating their gains on one level before attempting to proceed any further with reforms and political changes. It was one of those moments in his life when he proved again that he was capable, when given the opportunity, of becoming an articulate spokesman for reformist pragmatism.

His most conciliatory moment never compromised his deep belief that radical change and even revolution would ultimately be required before an equitable social order could be established on European soil. As late as July 20, 1854, he noted that everything pointed to a revolution that would engulf all of Europe.[21] He compared the idea of revolution with early nascent Christianity, putting its opposition into the same category with the Inquisition.[22] Anybody against a revolutionary movement was acting destructively, intruding upon the ultimately benign historical process.

Varnhagen's faith in the victory of a new and more equitable European order was never shaken by setbacks. He had long before integrated into his total view a Hegelian faith in history as an ineluctable movement towards revelation. He even felt he knew the character that revelation would take. It would be the unveiling of a vision of liberty balanced by commitment to the common good, an age in which one could achieve mature independence with a social conscience. The revolution which would make such a state possible would come when it was least expected, he believed, when the opposition had gone to sleep at the wheel.[23]

Ludmilla did not falsify her uncle, as Charlotte Wynn suggested. She knew him best. She knew how strongly he reacted to the political views professed by

other people and how he really judged them by these views.[24] His changing attitude towards the vivacious and courageous Bettina von Arnim is an example of how a person's political position can work as a barometer in gauging Varnhagen's response to others.

Bettina was the sister of Clemens Bretano, with whom Varnhagen had had an early altercation in Prague. She married the Romanticist, Achim von Arnim, and came to Berlin as a young woman. During those first years, she was perceived as an unpredictable rival of Rahel's, a socially ambitious woman who held her own salon. During that period Varnhagen felt that Bettina was an essentially frivolous individual. His impression was strengthened by her account of a relationship she had with Goethe as an adolescent. His view changed entirely, however, when Bettina began during the 1840s to publish works increasingly radical, urging massive social reforms and taking the part of the new proletariat that was developing as Prussia industrialized.

Though Bettina's mercurial spontaneity still sometimes alienated Varnhagen, he began to view her as "the real heroine of these times, the only true and free voice."[25] It was because of his new perception that he agreed to help her in the overwhelming task of editing her husband's works — a task that earned him little more than trouble and blame.

3. A photograph of Varnhagen shortly before his death.

8. VARNHAGEN'S POSTHUMOUS REPUTATION

Though the first wave of protest against Ludmilla's publications of her uncle's unpublished work insisted that she had violated his testament, those among his friends and enemies who really understood him knew him better. Nothing would have been more to his taste than, as he himself once put it, exploding a powder keg under the German establishment.[1]

What scandalized German society, or, at least, the German establishment, was the openly democratic interpretation of events and personalities of the recent past apparent first in Varnhagen's correspondence with Alexander von Humboldt and subsequently in the so-called diaries and numerous other volumes. For the first time, the German reader was confronted with Varnhagen's privately expressed vehemence, his passionately held opinions, his exclamatory indignation at acts and events that foiled what he considered best for Europe and Germany.

The archive from which Ludmilla drew her material had evolved over the years. Varnhagen's interest in original documents was evident as early as 1813, but it was after 1836 that his collecting became systematic. He became determined to portray in his collection a vital era in history. His requests to his correspondents and friends for holographs became urgent and persistent. He gathered material everywhere he could and filed it in single folders, tying it with a ribbon, then depositing it in larger boxes with related information. Over the years he also undertook to preface as many of these documents as possible with a commentary on the people involved. His remarks were often brief and sometimes caustic and frequently informed by first-hand observations, wherever possible.

It was much later, after Hitler came to power, that Varnhagen's notations interested Nazi officials. They proved to be a source for tracking down Germans with Jewish connections. As a genealogical record the Nazis thought so highly of these notes that they removed the entire collection to an abbey in Silesia to preserve them from Allied bombing raids. The collection fell into the hands of the Polish army at the end of the war. It was loaded into trucks which vanished in the direction of Cracow. For years its whereabouts was unknown, but recently the collection has once again become available in the Jagiellonian University Library in that city.

Ludmilla took the archives and the manuscript collection with her to Italy when she was forced into exile and left them to the Royal Library in Berlin only after her death. In the meantime, contemporary German readers were accustomed to oppositional statements being kept to a hardly audible whisper. The strident tone in much of the writing Ludmilla published shocked even those who were not unkindly disposed to Varnhagen. Hermann Grimm expressed the bewilderment of many who were not Varnhagen's enemies when he wrote, "I don't believe anyone would challenge the truth of most things Varnhagen relates; at the same time, no one who had experienced these things would admit that his representation gives the truth in its best sense."[2]

Rudolf Haym, an influential critic and scholar of the period, managed a postmortem of Varnhagen that was devastating enough to affect public opinion for

years to come. He used the diaries as his point of departure for a biographical essay of Varnhagen that appeared in the widely read *Prussian Annals.* Haym maligned his subject throughout the work and concluded that the essence of his career could be summed up in Varnhagen's lack of integrity; he went so far as to write that Varnhagen was, in fact, a symptom of a widespread malaise or sickness.[3]

Haym's view of Varnhagen is echoed down the years in the writings of other Germans, especially those of nationalistic persuasion and conservative bent. Heinrich von Treitschke brands him a malicious gossip-monger in his once widely read history of the 19th century. Josef Nadler, in his *Berliner Romantik* (1921), considered him a "busy show-off and contact seeker..." Ernst Alker dismisses him as an upstart in his literary history of the 19th century.

An unfavorable view of Varnhagen can also be found in writers who are not conservative or nationalistic. Hannah Arendt is surely not to be reckoned in the company of Haym and Treitschke, yet, in her biography of Rahel, she portrays Varnhagen as a decidedly negative character. A more positive view of Varnhagen might have made it difficult for her to have developed her thesis that Rahel never successfully broke out of her Jewish ethnicity. Had the marriage been portrayed as successful, Rahel's Jewish problem would not have dominated her personality as much as Arendt would like to have the reader believe.[4]

Philip Glander comes closest to explaining the problematic nature of Varnhagen's posthumous reputation in Germany when he compares the national climate there with that of England. Speaking of Varnhagen's friend, R. Monckton Milnes, Glander writes:

> They both possessed an uncanny sense of history being made in the daily life around them, a capacity more often found in Milnes' countrymen than in Varnhagen's. In fact, Varnhagen was nearly unique among Germans. Much of the misunderstanding he encountered during his lifetime and which caused his reputation to suffer after his death can be traced to a national inability to see in his work the record of history.[5]

A negative view of Varnhagen was so widespread in Germany, existing in many respects at a visceral level among people who had never consulted the primary sources, that it influenced the first scholarly treatment of his career undertaken in his century. In 1925 Carl Misch departed from his own careful evidence in his thesis, *Varnhagen von Ense in Beruf und Politik (Varnhagen von Ense's Life in Government and Politics),* to resort to Haym's idea that "dubious" integrity was the key to his life and works.

It was not until 1970 that a more objective study was completed by the Swiss Germanist, Konrad Feilchenfeldt, in his work *Varnhagen als Historiker (Varnhagen as Historian).* Feilchenfeldt presents Varnhagen as a man existentially pledged to a liberal-progressive interpretation of history. If that be vanity, it is hardly a petty sort!

Klaus F. Gille followed in Feilchenfeldt's footsteps, prefacing an edition of

Varnhagen's critical essays with a balanced biographical essay that appeared in 1977. Gille weighs Varnhagen's critical achievement and remarks its extraordinary character. His work is, at the same time, deliberately limited to Varnhagen as an essayistic writer. In addition to the work of Feilchenfeldt and Gille, my own studies have attempted to set the record straight, demonstrating not only Varnhagen's exceptional achievements but the consistency of his character and personal integrity. A clearer perception of Varnhagen is now emerging because of these contributions.[6]

The distortion of Varnhagen's reputation after his death was not inevitably malign, however, as evidenced by Joachim Schondorff's selection of him as a representative of old Prussian aristocracy. Schondorff puts Varnhagen down as an equal with his Austrian "counterpart" Prince Schwarzenberg and uses both these men as noble witnesses to the demise of the ancien regime in Germany. Varnhagen — the bourgeois son of physicians, the usurper of a predicate of nobility — would have been both amused and flattered to find himself in company with a prince.[7]

It is ironical that Varnhagen is rarely treated objectively in the many Rahel books that have appeared since the original was published. If the editors mention him at all, he usually appears as a doting and rather servile creature living in the shadow of the great woman. Arendt carried these tendencies to an extreme, making of him a wooden marionette.

From the brew created both by the posthumous enemies of Varnhagen's ideology and by Rahel's admirers has come an entirely negative view of the man and writer. We have inherited a pathetic and somewhat shady persona, a person indulging in petty gossip, fawning over his wife, an opportunist who was piqued when his career was terminated prematurely, a womanish fellow — for that was the 19th century term for a man who was too flexible and broad-minded, a character lacking in the proper, masculine rigidity. The residue of this image still influences the public perception of Varnhagen, as I discovered over a twelve year period in which I have traveled extensively in Germany in order to study the man and his works.

Casual comment taken from people who know something of the 19th century suggests that the very mention of Varnhagen's name provokes a negative reaction. An American Germanist recently declared, on being asked what he thought of him, that he knew him to have been a "Tropf," adding later that he really knew very little about Varnhagen. Traveling on a train in East Germany, I was told by a school principal that Varnhagen was not worthy of study, that he was a very questionable character. The examples could be multiplied many times over, and it is not surprising that, for all the hundreds of streets in Berlin named for literary and cultural figures, not a single street bears Varnhagen's name.

Scattered positive assessments include Jeffrey Sammons' portrait in his biography of *Heinrich Heine.* Moreover, Varnhagen had some ideological progeny who have defended him. Such was Heinrich Koenig who wrote an appreciative essay on him shortly after his death.[8] H. H. Houben also recalled his service to leftist writers during the 1830s in a study on the Young German Movement.[9] Such commentary did not stem the tide nor stay the overriding impres-

sion that Varnhagen was somehow a factor of which German letters could not be proud. The author hopes that this study will help to redress the record.

FOOTNOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

[1]Deborah Hertz, "The Varnhagen Collection is in Krakow," *The American Archivist* 44 (1981) No. 3, 223-228. A survey of Varnhagen's posthumous reputation and how it fared over the years can be found in my article, "Varnhagen von Ense and His Mistaken Identity," *GL&L* XXVII (1974) no 3, 179-187.

[2]Dieter Bähtz, "Der 'rothe' Varnhagen. Tagebücher als politische Zeitchronik," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*. Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle XXVII (1978) Heft 2, 79-84.

[3]Carl Misch was the first 20th Century scholar to approach Varnhagen objectively. His otherwise thorough study, *Varnhagen von Ense in Beruf und Politik* (Stuttgart, 1925) is somewhat marred by conclusions in which Misch ignores his evidence, falling back on cliches about Varnhagen's "weak" character.

[4]Eduard Gans, *Rückblicke auf Personen und Zustände* (Berlin, 1836), 231-232. The circumstances surrounding the founding of the *Jahrbücher* have most recently been discussed in Fritz Schlawe's "Die Berliner Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* XI (1959) Heft 3 240-258.

[5]Varnhagen's role in the second generation of the Romantic movement in Berlin is discussed in chapter 1. Varnhagen's own account can be found in early chapters of his *Denkwürdigkeiten*. Helmut Rogge has done an exhaustive study of one aspect of the activities of the clique in his *Der Doppelroman der Berliner Romantik* (Leipzig, 1926), 2 vols. The second volume includes the text of the *Versuche und Hindernisse Karls*.

[6]"Persönliche Denkwürdigkeiten und vertraulich Briefe als Lebensbilder öffentlich auszustellen, kommt uns Deutschen noch meistentheils bedenklich vor: unsre kleinstädtische Aegnstlichkeit fürchtet sich, anders als feierlich aufzutreten, obgleich unser bestes und würdigstes Leben dann verborgen bleibt..." *Galerie von Bildnissen aus Rahel's Umgang und Briefwechsel,* ed. Varnhagen von Ense (Leipzig, 1836), Erster Theil, VII-VIII.

[7]*Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Werke* (Berlin, 1974), vol 30: #116, 27. November 1861: "Der Kerl ist aber doch ein ganz schäbig feiger Lauskerl gewesen..." (202).

[8]Varnhagen's letters to Cotta, deposited in the Cotta-Archiv, Marbach am Neckar, FRG.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 1

[1]Varnhagen wrote of Kiesewetter (1766-1819): "Einer der eifrigsten, treusten, wirksamsten Jünger Kant's, durch seine Stellung in Berlin und seine Verbindung mit dem Hofe von grössern Einfluss. Er war Lehrer der beiden Schwestern des Königs Friedrich Wilhelm III, der nachherigen Königin der Niederlande und der der Kurfürstin von Hessen, der Brüder des Königs, Heinrichs und Wilhelms, der Brüder der Königin Luise, des nachherigen Grossherzogs Georg und des Herzogs Karl von Mecklenburg, dann der Königin Luise selbst. Die Mitglieder der Kriegsschule besuchten seine Vorlesungen, die Zöglinge der Pepiniere, viele angesehene Herren und Damen in der Stadt." (Handwritten note in the Varnhagen-Collection, Jagiellonian University Library, Cracow).

[2]The idea of the North Polar Star and the other symbols came to David Koreff presumably through A. W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst,* ed. J. Minor (=*Deutsche Literatur Denkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts,* Band 17-19, Teil 2,)Heilbronn, 1884, 47.

[3]Ludwig Geiger, *Aus Chamissos Frühzeit — Ungedruckte Briefe nebst Studien* (Berlin, 1905), 2-3.

[4]*Zeitung für die elegante Welt,* November 5, 1803.

[5]C. Schelling, *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung,* Nr 107, May 6, in: Erich Frank, "Rezensionen von Ca:oline," *Rezensionen über schöne Literatur von Schelling und Caroline in der Neuen Jenaischen Zeitung (=Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften,* Band III), 1912, 24-28.

[6]Friedrich Römer, *Varnhagen als Romantiker,* Berlin Dissertation (1934), and F. Römer, "Varnhagen von Ense: Ein Lebensbild," *Geistige Arbeit* II (1935), Nr 10, 12.

[7]David Mendel (pseudonym August Neander) apparently reported Schleiermacher's remark to Varnhagen.

[8]Henrich Steffens, *The Story of My Career,* translated by William L. Gage (Boston, 1863), 148-149.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 2

[1]H. W. Hertz, "Wilhelm Ludwig Hertz, ein Sohn des Dichters Adelbert von Chamisso," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Buchwesens* (1970), 269-308.

[2]Rahel Varnhagen, *Briefwechsel mit August Varnhagen von Ense* (Munich, 1967), 9. The edition cited here, edited by Friedhelm Kemp, is more easily accessible than either the original or facsimile editions.

[3]*Ibid.,* 12-14.

[4]*Ibid.,* 15.

[5]*Ibid.,* 10.

[6]*Ibid.,* 23-24.

[7]*Ibid.,* 37.

[8]Varnhagen published his ghost stories in his *Deutsche Erzählungen* (1815). "Das warnende Gespenst" is the most signal example.

[9]Varnhagen, "Scheidewege. Tübingen 1808. 1809," *Der Freihafen* (1838) Heft 1, 29-30. Later published in the *Denkwürdigkeiten.*

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

[1]Caroline Pichler, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben* (Vienna, 1844), I, 173.

[2]Rahel Varnhagen, *Briefwechsel mit August Varnhagen von Ense,* ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Munich, 1967), 122.

[3]Cotta letters from Varnhagen, Cotta-Archiv, Deutsches-Literatur-Archiv, Marbach am Neckar.

[4]The book, *Goethe in den Zeugnissen der Mitlebenden. Beilage zu allen Ausgaben von Goethe's Werken* (Berlin, 1823), will be discussed later.

[5]"Ein Gespräch beym Theetische," *Karl August Varnhagen von Ense. Literaturkritiken,* ed. Klaus F. Gille (Tübingen, 1977), 1-3.

[6]Rahel Varnhagen, *Briefwechsel,* 127.

[7]*Ibid.*, 146.

[8]A. C. Kalischer, "Beethoven und der Varnhagen-Rahel'sche Kreis," *Der Bär. Illustrierte Berliner Wochenschrift* XIV (1887/1888), 8-10, 22-24, 48-50.

[9]*Clemens Brentano Werke,* ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Munich, 1966), IV, 63.

[10]*Briefwechsel mit Varnhagen,* 174.

[11]K. A. Varnhagen von Ense, *Biographische Portraits* (1871: facsimile, 1971), 63.

[12]*Brentanos Werke,* IV, 932-933.

[13]*Briefwechsel mit Varnhagen,* 185-187.

[14]August Fournier, ed., *Die Geheimpolizei auf dem Wiener Kongress. Eine Auswahl aus ihren Papieren* (Leipzig, 1913), 423. Carl Misch, *Varnhagen von Ense in Beruf und Politik,* 144.

[15]Ludwig Freiherr von Ompteda, *Notizen eines deutschen Diplomaten. 1804-1813* (Berlin, 1935), 91. Varnhagen later contended that Tettenborn had not demanded the gift from the city, noting in his diary on November 5, 1857: "Falsch ist es, daß Tettenborn ein Geschenk von der Stadt gefordert hätte, seine Adjutanten, unter Ihnen der Rittmeister von Lachmann thaten es ohne sein Wissen, angereizt von Hamburgern selbst..." *Tagebücher,* XIV, 128-129.

[16]Varnhagen wrote and published the following defense of Tettenborn: *Der Kriegsrath Osswald und dessen Veruntreuung der freiwilligen Beiträge für die Hanseatische Legion wahrhaft dargestellt* (Hamburg, 1814).

[17]*Zeitung aus dem Feldlager,* nr 13, 11. December 1813. Deposited in the Universitäts-Bibliothek, Bremen.

[18]Varnhagen writing to Cotta, June 30, 1815. Cotta-Archiv.

[19]"Die Rückkehr der Bourbons. Bruchstück zur Geschichte unserer Zeit," *Überlieferung zur Geschichte unserer Zeit,* Januar bis Juni (1818), 131.

[20]*Briefwechsel mit Varnhagen,* 284.

[21]Letter no. 21, Cotta-Archiv.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4

[1]*Wilhelm und Caroline von Humboldt in ihren Briefen von 1812-1815* (Osnabrück, 1968), Band IV, 405.

[2]Ludwig Geiger, "Eine Selbstschilderung der Rahel," *Zeitung des Judentums* 81 (1917), nr 52, 622.

[3]Paul Czygan, *Zur Geschichte der Tagesliteratur während der Freiheitskriege,* Band I, Aktenstücke, Zweite Abteilung (Leipzig, 1910), 157-158.

[4]*Ibid.,* 187-189.

[5]Varnhagen's first thin volume of poetry was entitled *Gedichte während des Feldzuges 1813* (Friedrichsstadt, no date).

[6]*Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler und Varnhagen von Ense. 1815-1858.,* ed. Dr. Iduna Bekke (Aarau, 1953), 85. Varnhagen's volume of short stories appeared as *Deutsche Erzählungen* (1815).

[7]"Ein unveröffentlichter Brief von K. A. Varnhagen von Ense an F. A. Brockhaus," ed. John Hennig, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 47 (1965), Heft 3, 356.

[8]A thorough discussion of the circumstances may be found in Lothar Gall, *Der Liberalismus als regierende Partei. Das Großherzogtum Baden zwischen Restauration und Reichsgründung (Wiesbaden, 1968), 1. Kapitel, 1-57.*

[9]*Denkwürdigkeiten,* IX (Leipzig, 1859), 30-31.

[10]Hermann Haering, "Varnhagen und seine diplomatischen Berichte. Karlsruhe 1816-1819," *Zeitschrift des Oberrheins* N.F. 36 (1920), 69.

[11]Nr 172, *Allgemeine Zeitung* contains one of many such examples. Numbers of this journal are kept on deposit in the Cotta Archiv, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar.

[12]*Briefwechsel zwischen Varnhagen von Ense und Oelsner nebst Briefen von Rahel,* ed. Ludmilla Assing (Stuttgart, 1865), I, 297-298.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 5

[1]Carl Misch includes a complete apparatus of explanation and reference to these matters in *Varnhagen von Ense in Beruf und Politik* (Stuttgart, 1925).

[2]*Briefe an Cotta. Das Zeitalter der Restauration,* ed. Herbert Schiller (Stuttgart, 1927), II, 25: Varnhagen also writes, "In meinen persönlichen Angelegenheiten steht alles ganz gut, sofern dies bei dem allgemeinen Zustande möglich ist; mir ist kein Vorwurf gemacht bei diesem Augenblick..." His state of mind is evident, however, when he continues: "Leider kann ich für die Wendung der Ereignisse und für die Zukunft insbesondere von Deutschland nicht ohne Sorge und Kummer sein, es sind furchtbare Kräfte in Kampf, die wohl sobald nicht loslassen..."

[3]Letter number 11, Nachlaß Chamisso, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek Berlin, GDR, 13. Dezember 1852. "Ihrer Einwendung in Betreff der Zeitangabe auf den zur Fortsetzung des sogenannten Doppelromans bestimmten Blättern kann ich die bestimmte Versicherung entgegensetzen, daß im Jahr 1819 und 1820 ernstlich an jene Fortsetzung gedacht worden...Die beiden Freunde kamen auf den Einfall, es wäre hübsch dieses Wiederzusammensein durch Wiederaufnahme des abgebrochenen Scherzbuches zu feiern. Sie fanden den Einfall köstlich...Mir lag aber solcher Scherz nicht so nahe, meine Verhältnisse standen in einer bedenklichen Krisis, ich hatte die Bestimmung nach Washington erhalten, die ich nicht annehmen wollte, und konnte jeden Augenblick gezwungen sein, zwar nicht dorthin zu reisen, aber doch Berlin zu verlassen." Furthermore NR 127, Cotta-correspondence, Cotta-Archiv,24. Februar 1821: "Meine persönlichen Verhältnisse sind ganz leidlich; besonders in pekuniären Hinsicht. Von Nordamerika ist nicht mehr die Rede; sie ging einen Augenblick für mich nach Konstantinopel, allein nur einen Augenblick; ich möchte jetzt Deutschland nicht gern verlassen."

[4]Joachim Kühn, "Varnhagen von Enses Sendung nach Kassel und Bonn (1829)," *Hessenland XXVII (1914), 97-99, 113-115, 133-135, 148-149, 166-168.*

[5]*Varnhagen und Rahel. Briefwechsel* (1874; facsimile, Bern, 1973), Band 6, 47.

[6]Theodor Weidemann, "Leopold von Ranke und Varnhagen von Ense vor Rankes italienischer Reise," *Deutsche Revue,* XXI (1897), Band 3, 197-109; Weidemann, "Leopold von Ranke und Varnhagen von Ense nach der Heimkehr Rankes aus Italien," *Deutsche Revue* (1901), August, 211-225, 352-365. Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago, 1977), 82-87.

[7]Philip Glander includes a chapter on Varnhagen's relation with Goethe in his dissertation, *K.A. Varnhagen von Ense: Man of Letters, 1833-1858* (Dissertation: Wisconsin, 1961).

[8]Cotta was known to pay his authors handsomely; the popularity of biographies was a phenomenon that extended beyond Germany and is also discussed in English studies.

[9]"Graf Wilhem zur Lippe," *Biographische Denkmale* (Berlin, 1824).

[10]Acession 234, Landesarchiv Berlin: Berlin, 21.9.1850.

[11]Adam Olearius, "Neue orientalische Reisebeschreibung," *Deutsche National-Litteratur,* ed. Joseph Kürschner, Band 28, 229-278.

[12]A partial photographic copy of the letters is in possession of the author and taken from the Varnhagen-Collection in Cracow, dated April 30, 1820: "Der Mensch läßt sich als einzelnes, abgeschlossenes Wesen gar nicht fassen; die Vorstellung vernichtet sich, indem sie entstehen soll. Wir können nicht im geringsten andeuten, was wir in uns und was angeeignet in uns ist. Um Gott hier aus dem Spiele zu lassen, so sagen wir nur Natur, Welt, Geschichte, in grossen und kleinen Beziehungen, haben so viel zu uns zusammengeschlossen, dass, wenn sie ihre Beiträge zurückziehen, unsre Selbstheit arg gefährdet scheint. Fürchten auch um deshalb die Menschen das Sterben so sehr?

Der Mensch hat wahres Dasein nur im Ganzen der Menschheit, alles drängt ihn zur Vereinigung, alles zeigt seinen Zusammenhang...

[13]An earlier request for books dated 5 Mai 1808 and signed "K. A. Varnhagen, Studious. medicin," is, for example, on deposit in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, ex act bibl, acc Darmst. 1912, 1.

[14]Varnhagen argues interestingly that his forefathers dropped their predicate of nobility when they earned the *more important* titles of the gelehrter Beruf. He further claims that he took up the predicate in 1809 because his commission in the Austrian Army gave it vocational significance once again (Rep 100, Haus-Ministerium II Lit. V Nr 3, 1826-1827, 57 Bl. Deutsches Zentralarchiv, Merseburg, GDR, "Die Erhebung des Geh. Legationstrates Karl August Ludwig Philipp Varnhagen mit Beilegung des Namens von Ense in den Adelsstand," nr. 29).
Varnhagen's remark on being granted his diploma was: "Mein Adelsdiplom! Man hat mir aufgenötigt, die Beamten waren nach den Gebühren gierig, die bei solchen Ausfertigungen für sie abfallen. Ich wollte keines nehmen und es darauf kommen lassen, ob man mir meinen alten, wieder aufgenommenen Adelsnamen absprechen würden. Doch der Minister Graf v. Bernstorff beredete mich, den Lärm zu meiden, und schrieb mir sogar vor, wie ich an ihn und an den König schreiben sollte, es müsse durchaus von Gnade die Rede sein, damit es nicht aussah, als wollte ich auf ein Recht pochen, daß der König lieber verleihe als anerkenne" (Varnhagen Collection, Cracow, Jagiellonian Library, Kiste 257).

[15]"Varnhagen v. Enses Entwurf zur Herausgabe eines Ministerialblattes," *Zur Geschichte der Tagesliteratur während der Freiheitskriege, ed. Paul Czygan*

(Leipzig, 1910), II, Aktenstücke: Zweite Abteilung, 189-190.

[16]Eduard Gans, *Rückblicke auf Personen und Zustände* (Berlin, 1836), 231-232.

[17]Taken from a handwritten note on *Hegel* deposited in the Varnhagen Collection, Jagiellonian Library, Cracow. Photocopy in possession of author.

[18]These notes are on hand in Cracow at the Jagiellonian. Among the Tageblätter for 1840, for instance, Varnhagen relates having dreamt of Hegel: "Er hatte seine alte Weise völlig beibehalten, aber durchaus mit der Weise Voltaire's vereinigt, und seiner beredten Laune, seinem zerschmetternden Scherze konnte nichts widerstehen. Er gab auch ordentlich Befehle, und sagte, wie er alles haben wollte. Über den preußischen Staat und den Ursprung der Hohenzollern sprach er ganz wundervoll, kräftig und spaßhaft..."

[19]Jeffrey Sammons' *Heinrich Heine* treats Varnhagen's relationship with Heine and renders a sympathetic picture of Varnhagen.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER 6

[1]Z. Funck, who was actually Carl Friedrich Kunz, the publisher and friend of E. T. A. Hoffmann, published *Rahel. Geistes-und Charakter-Gemälde dieser großen Frau, in sorgfältig gewählten Stellen des Vortrefflichsten aus ihren Briefen und Tagebüchern.* (Bamberg, 1835).

[2]Redelia Brisbane, *Albert Brisbane. A Mental Biography with Character Study* (Boston, 1893). Brisbane relates how he worked as an intermediary with sympathetic contacts in Berlin, among them the Varnhagens. The author is presently editing Brisbane's letters to Varnhagen.

[3]Karl Gutzkow, *Götter, Helden, Don-Quixote. Abstimmungen zur Beurtheilung der literarischen Epoche* (Hamburg, 1838), 174.

[4]*Denkwürdigkeiten des Philosophen und Arztes Johann Benjamin Erhard,* ed. Varnhagen v. Ense (Stuttgart, 1830), 1-3. Erhard was the same physician who nursed Varnhagen back to health after he left the Pepiniere.

[5]*Die Geschichte der Kriegszüge des General Tettenborns während der Jahre 1813-1814 (1814), 1-3.*

[6]*Geschichte der hamburgischen Begebenheiten während des Frühjahrs 1813* (London, 1813), 3.

[7]Heinrich Laube, "Varnhagen von Ense," *Moderne Charakterisken* (Mannheim, 1835),II, 284: "Varnhagen von Ense stammt aus einer alten Familie in Westphalen, der Fürst Pückler spricht zuweilen davon, daß die Ense mit den Pückler von alter Zeit her verwandt seien..."

[8]F. G. Kühne, "Varnhagen von Ense," *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* (1837), Nrs 142/143, 24. Juli - 25. Juli, 565-571.

[9]Konrad Feilchenfeldt, "Karl August Varnhagen von Ense: Sieben Briefe an Rebeka Dirichlet," *Mendelssohn Studien* 3 (1979), 65-67.

[10]Handwritten documents entitled "Politisches Wirken," dated Prag, 1811, and "That, Begebenheit in der Geschichte," dated Prag, 1812. Photocopies in possession of the author, taken from the Varnhagen-Collection, Jagiellonian University Library Cracow.

[11]Brisbane Correspondence, microfilms in the possession of author, Vendredi, 20 Decm 1831.

[12]Werner Vortriede argues in "Der Berliner Saint-Simonismus," *Heine-Jahrbuch* 75 14 Jhrg, 93-110, that Varnhagen's conversion was largely due to Brisbane; the notion originates with Brisbane himself, who felt that he had initiated the Socialist movement in Germany during his sojourns there.

[13]Unpublished note in the Jagiellonian University Library: Ende Februar 1832, Graf Bernstorff sagte dieser Tage über den St-Simonismus die Civilisation erreiche unter den Menschen von Zeit zu Zeit einen Punkt, wo es unmöglich sei, in den bisherigen Formen weiter zu kommen, sie müsse alsdann neue Formen annehmen...

[14]T. H. Pickett and Richard Porter, "Varnhagen von Ense and the Reception of Russian Literature in Germany," *Germano-Slavica* (1974) Heft 4, 77, footnote 3.

[15]Handwritten note, Varnhagen-Collection, Jagiellonian.

[16]*Rahel Varnhagen und ihre Zeit. Briefe 1800-1833.* ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Munich, 1968), 351.

[17]"Im Sinne der Wanderer," *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum* (1832), drittes Heft des sechsten und letzten Bandes, 541.

[18]*Ibid.,* 542-543.

[19]Werner Vortriede, "Der Berliner Saint-Simonismus,", 98, footnotes 10 and 17.

[20]Varnhagen's review of Goethe's *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Stuttgart, 1833), Vierter Theil, was published a second time in *Denkwürdigkeiten und vermischte Schriften* (Mannheim, 1837), 311-331.

[21]Konrad Feilchenfeldt, "Das Buch 'Rahel'," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* Nr 577 (Fernausgabe 339), Sonntag, 10 Dezember 1972, 53.

[22]15. Juli 1831 writing to Tettenborn in Vienna. Copy in possession of author.

[23]Ludwig Geiger, "Varnhagen's Denkschrift an den Fürsten Metternich über das Junge Deutschland 1836," Deutsche Revue XXI (1906), 187.

[24]Nr 154, 2. Mai 1831, Cotta-Archiv, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar.

[25]15. Juli 1828, Berlin. Microfilm in possession of author.

[26]*Galerie von Bildnissen aus Rahel's Umgang und Briefwechsel,* ed. Varnhagen von Ense (Leipzig, 1836), Erster Theil, VII-VIII.

[27]*Reliquien. Erzählungen und Dichtungen von A. F. Bernhardi und dessen Gattin S. Bernhardi geb. Tieck,* herausgegeben von deren Sohne Wilhelm Bernhardi mit einem Vorwort von Varnhagen von Ense (Altenburg, 1847), I, iii-iv.

[28]*Denkwürdigkeiten des eignen Lebens,* ed. Joachim Kühn, (Berlin, 1922) 2 vols.; another one volume edition was issued by Karl Leutner at the Verlag der Nation, Berlin, in 1951.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 7

[1]Notes relevant to the episode with Marianne Saaling are deposited in the Varnhagen Collection, Jagiellonian University Library, Cracow.

[2]Joachim Kühn, "Zur Lebensgeschichte Jenny von Gustedt," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 239 (1935), Januar-März, 230-243.

[3]Brisbane first speaks of her in his diary entry Monday 20th December 1830 when he received a letter from her in Salerno. "I have read hers," he writes,"it pleases me very much. It is written with truth of feeling, and tenderness: it is not so long as I could wish. but she does not seem to think it will reach me. There is a tender tone of feeling in it that gives me pleasure; there our correspondence *shall become* new life, vigiour (sic), and tenderness on my side= = " The re-union on his return to Berlin in 1831 was not satisfactory, however, and he writes on the 19th and 20th Nov. 1831: "I liked Miss Solmar very much. She seemed to me to possess a feeling mind, and a great fund of good nature. besides an acute understanding. and a great deal of general knowledge, — I saw her constantly. she interested me, and there was a certain degree of love between us. = = a change has taken place there also. we seem now to be ungenial to each other. I think I have even become disagreable to her, and I must confess also that I begin to dislike her turn of mind, and character." (From the Brisbane diary, courtesy of the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University).

[4]*Bankiers, Künstler und Gelehrte. Unveröffentlichte Briefe der Familie Mendelssohn aus dem 19. Jahrhundert,* ed. Felix Gilbert (Tübingen, 1975), Henriette Mendelssohn writing to Varnhagen on 30. September 1810.

[5]T. H. Pickett and Richard Porter, "Varnhagen von Ense and the Reception of Russian Literature in Germany," *Germano-Slavica* (1974), Fall, No. 4, 71.

[6]*Der Freihafen* (1838), Heft 2.

[7]See footnote 5. In that study we conclude that Varnhagen's translations are competent.

[8]The author is presently studying letters by Mel'gunov, Turgenev, and Neverov. The Russian correspondence is deposited at the Jagiellonian University Library, Cracow. Microfilms of the correspondence are in the possession of the author.

[9]Josef Pfitzner, "Bakunin und Varnhagen von Ense," *Bakuninstudien* (Prague, 1932).

[10]*Tagebücher,* XIII, 17.

[11]Brisbane is often cited as one of the causes for the failure of Brook Farm.

Zoltan Haraszti, *The Idyll of Brook Farm* (Reprint: 1937), 27 ff. T. D. Seymour Bassett, "The Secular Utopian Socialists," *Socialism and American Life,* eds. D. D. Egbert and S. Persons (Princeton, 1952), 175-180.

[12]Brisbane's letters to Varnhagen are deposited in the Jagiellonian University Library. These letters are all written in Brisbane's peculiar French.

[13]Philip Glander, *The Letters of Varnhagen von Ense to Richard Monckton Milnes (*Heidelberg, 1965).

[14]Publications dealing with Varnhagen's connection to Carlyle are Walther Fischer's "Varnhagen von Enses Carlyle-Bibliothek," *Die Neueren Sprachen XXIV* (1916), Heft 8, 449-462; Richard Preuß's "Briefe Thomas Carlyles an Varnhagen von Ense aus den Jahren 1837-1857," *Deutsche Revue* LXXI (1892), 96-120; Rodger L. Tarr's "Some Unpublished Letters of Varnhagen von Ense to Thomas Carlyle," *Modern Language Review* 68 (1973), 22-27. Amely Bölte was Varnhagen's informant. She went to England as a governess and was friends with Carlyle's wife, knew Monckton Milnes, Fanny Lewald, Charlotte Williams Wynn, perceived Carlyle as a difficult person with marital troubles. *Amely Böltes Briefe aus England an Varnhagen von Ense (1844-1858),* eds. W. Fischer and Dr. Antje Behrens (Dusseldorf, 1955).

[15]The words Varnhagen used were "ungründlich" and "überschätzt."

[16]Varnhagen's private notes on his romance with Charlotte were examined by the author in the archives at the Jagiellonian University Library, Cracow.

[17]*Rosa Maria's poetischer Nachlass,* ed. D. A. Assing (Altona, 1841), 11-12:

> Meinem Bruder den 21 Februar 1806
>
> Nur wenig hat mir das Geschick gegeben,
> Mein Herz das höchste Lebensgut entbehret,
> In dunkler Nacht verfliesst mein junges Leben,
> Wenn gleich mich innre heisse Gluth verzehret,
> Doch zum Ersatz ward etwas mir gegeben:
> Ein Bruder mir wie Wenigen gewähret,
> Der, funkelnd wie ein Stern in dunkler Nacht,
> Mein Leben hellt durch seines Glanzes Pracht.

[18]Lewes's letter is dated 5 Sepr 57 and reads:

"My dear Friend

On our return from a visit of five months to the coast your letter & your niece's interesting book awaited us. Before reading it I resolved to write a notice of it for one of our journals, but after reading it, that idea was relinquished from the conviction that in the present state of opinion in England such a book

would be greedily laid hold of by the enemies of the good cause as an argument easily turned to their account. I don't want to place such a story in their hands, and hear them exclaim triumphantly: 'See the effects of disregarding conventions.' "

Varnhagen's answer came in a private, biographical sketch of Lewes attached to his correspondence and deposited at Cracow: "Sein Urtheil für Personen und Sachen ist unsicher, er scheint dies zu fühlen and versteckt seinen Mangel gern hinter scharfen Tadel, ablehnende Verneinung....Ein Seitenstück dazu ist seine Antwort auf meine Zusendung von Ludmilla's Gräfin Ahlefeldt; er erschrickt und verneint, weil er nicht ahndet, daß Carlyle, daß Miss Wynn hier loben. Er hat selber die Vorurteile der Engländer nicht, aber fürchtet sie."

[19]Emil Jacobs, "Aus Gottfried Kellers Berliner Zeit," *Westermanns Illustrierte Deutsche Monatshefte* 97 (1904-05), 56-64. Emil Beber, *Gottfried Keller und Ludmilla Assing* (Zürich, 1952).

[20]*Tagebücher,* V, 259. *Schlichter Vortrag an die Deutschen über die Aufgabe des Tages* (Berlin, 1848).

[21]*Tagebücher,* XI, 151.

[22]*Ibid.,* 388.

[23]*Ibid.,* VII, 250.

[24]Charlotte Williams Wynn's letter can be found at the end of the rare volume, *The Memorials of Charlotte Williams Wynn,* ed. Harriet Gaskell (London, 1878), 291.

[25]Ludwig Geiger, *Bettine von Arnim und Friedrich Wilhelm IV* (Frankfurt am Main, 1902), 53.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 8

[1]*Aus dem Nachlass Varnhagen's von Ense. Tagebücher von K. A. Varnhagen von Ense* (Hamburg, 1870), XIV, 387: Sonnabend, 19. Dezember 1839...Wohl, ich sitze auf einer Pulverkammer, wenn ich einmal die Lunte anlege, fliegt halb Berlin auf, aber ich mit...

[2]H. Grimm, *Neue Essays über Kunst und Literatur* (1865), 166.

[3]Rudolf Haym, "Varnhagen von Ense. Tagebücher von K. A. Varnhagen von Ense. Sechs Bände,"*Preußische Jahrbücher* XI (1863), 445-515. Haym wrote (515): "In unserem politischen Leben steht er als das Sympton einer Krankheit: in unserer Literatur als eine immerhin höchst beachtenswerthe, ja, unumgängliche Erscheinung da."

[4]Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen. Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin* (Munich, 1962). My note on Arendt's book in *Germanic Notes* 11 (1980), no. 1, 7-9.

[5]Philip Glander, *The Letters of Varnhagen von Ense to Richard Monckton Milnes. Anglistische Forschungen,* Heft 92 (Heidelberg, 1965), 8.

[6]My review of Klaus F. Gille in *The German Quarterly* LV (1982), no. 4, 596-597.

[7]Schondorff, *Europäische Zeitenwende, Tagebücher 1835-1860* (Munich, 1960). My note, "Varnhagen's Mistaken Identity in Two Recent Works," *Germanic Notes* 6 (1971), 42-44.

[8]"Erinnerungen an Varnhagen von Ense," *Deutsches Museum* (1859), Nrs 27, 28, 1. und 7. Juli.

[9]H. H. Houben, "Literarische Diplomatie, 1. Der Herr Geheime Rat," *Jungdeutscher Sturm und Drang. Ergebnisse und Studien* (Leipzig, 1917).

A CHRONOLOGY OF VARNHAGEN'S LIFE

1785	February 21: Born in Düsseldorf on the Rhine.
1790	Moved to Strasbourg in French territory.
1792	Family separates. Varnhagen accompanies father.
1794	Settle in Hamburg.
1796	Mother and sister join them in Hamburg.
1799	Death of father.
1800	Varnhagen admitted as cadet to the Pepiniere in Berlin.
1803	Publication of first "green" *Almanac.* Varnhagen leaves Pepiniere. Begins tutorial position with the Cohen family.
1804	Cohen firm bankrupts.
1804	Tutorial position with the Hertz family in Hamburg; romance with Fanny.
1805	Begins school career with support of Hertz brothers.
1806	Matriculates at the University of Halle. Publication of *Testimonia Auctorum de Merkelio.*
1806	Autumn. In Berlin when Napoleon defeats Prussia. Last *Almanac* appears.
1807	After closing of the University of Halle return to Berlin. Meets Rahel. Work on *Doppelroman.* Publication of *Erzählungen und Spiele.*
1808	Leaves Berlin to continue medical studies in Tubingen. Publication of *Versuche und Hindernisse Karls.*
1809	Visits Hamburg then proceeds to Berlin. Joins Austrian Army and wounded at Battle of Wagram, July 5/6. Captured by French and held "at liberty" in Vienna. Prisoner-of-war exchange, returned to unit, since removed to Hungary.
1810	Sojourn in Vienna. Unit quartered in Prague. Accompanies commander to Paris.
1811	First articles published in Cotta's *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände.* First correspondence with Goethe. Granted leave-of-absence from Austrian service.
1812	Severe winter in Berlin. Varnhagen's situation desperate.
1813	French troops appear in retreat from Russia. Joins General Tettenborn in Hamburg; commissioned in Russian service. Tettenborn leaves Hamburg. Varnhagen publishes the *Zeitung aus dem Feldlager* as Allied propaganda initiative. Publication of journalistic history of campaigns: *Geschichte der hamburgischen Begebenheiten während des Frühjahrs 1813. Gedichte während des Feldzuges 1813* also appears.
1814	Napoleon abdicates. Sojourn in Paris. Serious illness as result of combat strains. September 27 marriage to Rahel Levin in Berlin. Publication of *Die Geschichte der Kriegszüge des General Tettenborns während der Jahre 1813-1814. Der Kriegsrath Osswald und dessen Veruntreuung der Freiwilligen Beiträge für die Hanseatische Legion wahrhaft dargestellt* appears in defense of Tettenborn.
1814	October - June, 1815 with the Prussian delegation at the Congress of

Vienna. Serves as an information officer. Publication of *Deutsche Ansicht der Vereinigung Sachsens mit Preussen.*

1815 March, Napoleon returns from Elba. Varnhagen proceeds to Berlin and, after Waterloo, accompanies the Prussian chancellor to Paris as his "press chief." Published *Deutsche Erzählungen.*

1816 Appointed Prussian attaché at the court of the Grand Duchy of Baden in Karlsruhe. *Vermischte Gedichte* published.

1817 Visits Goethe in Weimar. Promoted to Minister-in-residence in Baden.

1818 Essay, "Die Rückkehr der Bourbons," appears.

1819 Recalled from his post. Turns down appointment as minister to the United States.

1820 1821, attempts to be rehabilitated for further diplomatic service. Publication of first Goethe essays.

1822 Varnhagen's edition of *Cherubinic Wanderer* appears.

1823 *Goethe in den Zeugnissen der Mitlebenden.*

1824 Publication of first volume of the *Biographische Denkmale.*

1825 Promotion to Geheimer Legationsrat.

1826 Varnhagen's mother dies. Ennobled secretly after his right to "von Ense" challenged. Joined Eduard Gans in founding the Hegelian Society for Scientific Criticism.

1829 Ambassadorship to the court of Hesse. First knowledge of Saint Simonism. Visit with Goethe. Continued activity as eminent literary and historical critic.

1830 Last volume of *Biographische Denkmale* appears. Edition of J. G. Erhard's writing appears.

1832 Appearance of important essay on Goethe, "Im Sinne der Wanderer." Rahel's brother, Ludwig Robert, and wife die.

1833 March 7, Rahel dies. Privately printed edition of *Rahel. Ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde* appears. Varnhagen's collected reviews published as *Zur Geschichtsschreibung und Litteratur. Literarische Berichte und Berurtheilungen. Angelus Silesius und Saint Martin (als Handschrift)* also appears.

1834 2 volume edition of *Rahel* issued; also Varnhagen's biography, *Leben des Generals Freiherrn v. Seydlitz.* Temporary engagement to Marianne Saaling. Subsequent journey to Weimar to urge the founding of a Goethe society on the reigning duke.

1835 *Die Schriften von Wilhelm Neumann,* 2 vols.

1836 Publication of *Galerie von Bildnissen aus Rahel's Umgang und Briefwechsel,* as well as another biography, *Leben des Generals Hans Karl von Winterfeldt.* Meets Charlotte Williams Wynn. First volume of the *Denkwürdigkeiten und vermischte Schriften* published.

1837 Publication of Leben der *Königin von Preussen Sophie Charlotte.* Varnhagen begins to learn Russian.

1838 Review of Pushkin published in the *Jahrbücher.*

1839 Romance with Charlotte Williams Wynn ends without marriage.

1840 Varnhagen's sister, Rosa Maria Assing, dies in Hamburg.

1841 Publication of *Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen von Schwerin.*

1842 Death of Varnhagen's brother-in-law in Hamburg, David Assing; arrival of his daughters at Varnhagen's in Berlin. Ottilie emigrates to U.S., Ludmilla remains as Varnhagen's companion.

1844 *Leben des Feldmarschalls Jakob Keith* appears.

1845 Tettenborn dies after reunion with Varnhagen. Publication of *Hans von Held. Ein preußisches Karakterbild.*

1847 *Karl Müller's Leben und kleine Schriften.*

1848 Varnhagen observes street fighting in Berlin from his apartment window during March18-19 insurrection. Publishes *Schlichter Vortrag an die Deutschen über die Aufgabe des Tages.*

1853 *Leben des Generals Grafen Bülow von Dennewitz* appears.

1854 Begins editing the poetry of Achim von Arnim at Bettina's request.

1856 Journey with Ludmilla to Switzerland where she sees Gottfried Keller. Maid, Dora, dies.

1858 Final trips to Weimar and Hamburg. Varnhagen dies on October 10 in Berlin.

1859 Ludmilla begins the posthumous publications with a final volume of the *Denkwürdigkeiten.*

1860 Ludmilla publishes the Alexander von Humboldt correspondence with Varnhagen, initiating the scandal that jeopardized her continued safety. Pückler intervenes with the king to protect her.

1861-1871 Ludmilla publishes fourteen volumes of the *Tagebücher* (diaries). She lives in Italy, chiefly in Florence.

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[1]Feilchenfeldt's study contains an exhaustive bibliography on Varnhagen studies.

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Varnhagen von Ense was no ordinary man nor secondary literary figure. His work was governed by an embracing view of his world and what it should become. To say that Varnhagen's vision was focused upon society is merely to emphasize that he recognized meaning, significance, and value as being created in the matrix of human relationships. History is significant because it is society in transformation, the dynamic movement of which — as Varnhagen saw it — is benevolent: an ascending profile of emancipation and improvement. His own role within the context he viewed as that of a minor but militant catalyst that assists in the historical process. It was within this self-conceived identity that Varnhagen generated a literary persona and active presence as critic, journalist, memoirist, biographer, literary arbiter, and promoter of the cause of representative government and social reform that was unique in 19th century German literature. It is the objective of this biographical treatment to correct past distortions of Varnhagen's person and achievement.

BOUVIER

ISB N 3-416-01883-4