



1791

Lebensbeschreibung (English Translation)

Friderika Baldinger

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Lebensbeschreibung (English Translation)

English Translation in Lebensbeschreibung (English Translation) by Friderika Baldinger

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LIFE SKETCH OF FRIDERIKA BALDINGER

Written by herself

Translated by Robert McFarland

Edited, and accompanied by a Preface by Sophie, the Widow von la Roche Offenbach:

Ulrich Weiß and Carl Ludwig Vrede

1791

To the Baroness von Lühe born Fregin von Brandenstein

I have received a commission from one of the most meritorious men of our Germany, and I would like to share with you its completion. I know how much you enjoy observing the path which this or that person has trod in the field of knowledge; and that you take great pleasure in observing how neither obstacles nor hardships restrict the course of diligence--and how, in the end, beautiful zeal leads to new heights. You will hear with joy, as I did, that a husband said: I have long wished to present another token of my highest admiration to the memory of my departed wife, and I believe that publicizing the story of her intellect, which she once wrote at

my request, would be fitting. I turn it over to you. You were her friend; my wife loved you; write an introduction to it, and let it be printed.

All who know Councilor Baldinger also know that he is far from any hypocrisy and mere gallantry, rather, he is very genuine and frank. So, when this man holds his wife in high regard, one cannot suspect any flattery; and her friend, whom he treats with respect, truly can view herself with modest pride. It pleases me to say publicly, that I, in my correspondence with Madame Baldinger, came to marvel at her masculine spirit and character, and recognized in both of these traits the worthy friend of Kästner and Lichtenberg. The story of her intellect shows how much depends on natural ability, for the few means of assistance at her disposal were enough to lead her to greatness and strength of mind.

I think that this birthday present must have been priceless to her companion, for it attests so much veneration, love and thankfulness all at the same time. But how many proofs also lie therein, that diligence and stringent attentiveness make everything possible, and that the complaints: "I have had little opportunity to increase and expand my knowledge" are no satisfactory excuse for ignorance, because for those sincerely eager for knowledge, each glance and the slightest sound is educational, just as a plant utilizes every drop of dew. I also hope that these pages and the fame which Madame Baldinger received among intelligent persons will motivate many women to use every opportunity for the betterment and enrichment of their intellect. My precious Madame Lühe knows that Wieland says: One should not prepare the road to knowledge to be too even and accessible; it is very useful to the powers of the soul when they must struggle with obstacles.

I also truly believe that if one were to more exactly know the story of several of the great learned people, one would find that basic knowledge, like gold, must be extracted from hidden depths with excruciating effort. I would like to have attached excerpts from the letters of Madame Baldinger to the little introduction, and, of course, a selection of her thoughts would have served

to embellish her memorial, but it was not easy to take things out of context, and these pages say enough. I will always regret that she died so early, that I do not have more of her exquisite letters--which, (as Kästner said of her mind) are animated by humor, enlightened by knowledge, and show the heart of this best mother and most priceless friend. Only one excerpt from the last of her letters. On the 23rd of November, 1785, she said so beautifully:

God would have to work miracles that I do not expect for myself, if these are not to be my dying strains, my swan's song to Sophie von la Roche. Accept my warm thanks for so much obliging friendship. I ask the friends that I have had in my life, and who have remained true to me in death, to judge me. I have tried to please God, and to live in this world according to my best knowledge and conscience, as I believed that one must live; and now I tread comforted the path that others fear. My good Kästner writes to me every mail day. This great man, who was never ashamed to be a Christian, feels my loss more than I would have believed. God grant to you the years that he takes from me. Believe me, the thought is dear to me that, when I no longer am here, you will keep me in your affectionate memory.

It seems to me, my noble, beloved von Lühe, that this strain of a dying woman is characteristic, and worthy of our veneration. As in the beautiful wish of old--may her ashes rest in peace after her soul has neared its destiny! Heaven grant me also this steadfast view regarding the end of my Path, as well as the loving remembrance of my Caroline von Lühe, whose spirit, virtue and the friendship of my heart will remain precious and dear to me until the last beat of my pulse.

Sophie von la Roche

Dedicated to Councilor Baldinger

On his Birthday

the 18th of May, 1783

I wanted at first to have the enclosed text printed as a present to you, because at one time, it was fortunate enough to have pleased you. I changed my decision, though, partially because I did not know if you would want to read the dedication to you in print, and partially because I am a much too meaningless thing in this world, that I should expect anyone to read the printed story of the development of my intellect. Therefore, take from me affectionately this child of my mind, of which you are actually father through your own wisdom, and do with it as you will. It is said that God just as gladly accepts the offerings of the poor according to their intentions, as when the rich sacrifice from their abundance. Your poor wife has nothing more than her mind, and a heart that belongs to you as long as it shall beat. Be satisfied with these. God has created no one more loyal to you, of this you may be assured. I will do no more celebrating today, even though the 18th of May is the greatest occasion of the year for me; and if you wish, we will not bring up your birthday again this evening. You could attribute it to self-interest, that I ask God with ardent reverence especially today, but also every day, for the extension of your life, so precious to me, if you had not already known for so long that, more than the world's riches, my mortal happiness consists of your soul and your heart. Oh God! increase his years with good, lasting health, with uninterrupted satisfaction of heart, with all the twists of fate that may stand before us mortals, and shorten my days, if I live unworthy of you or of him.

Cassell, the 18th of May, 1783

My dear Baldinger!

Since, at the request of a friend, I must attempt to write about the development of my intellect, you wish to have it printed for yourself and our children. I was rightly reluctant, because I thought it to be unimportant, and I still consider it so. However, should I deny myself joy, by leaving even one of your wishes unfulfilled, when it is possible for me to fulfill it? Allow me therefore to give this document some worth by dedicating it to you. Accept it as a birthday present, that God may return to you many blessings after I no longer am. Accept also my

heartfelt thanks for all of the friendship, love and loyalty which you have shown in such great measure from our first acquaintance until now. Few women are so indebted to their husbands as I am indebted to you. May my readers consider this, if they wish to attribute this obedience to you to mere vanity on my part. Be convinced that my devotion to you will only cease with my life--from your wife.