

Gruesswort der Familie Klemperer durch Frau Maria Aweida

Guten Tag, meine Damen und Herren. Ich gruesse Sie Alle aus Amerika. Ich schaetze die Gelegenheit sehr, ein paar Worte ueber meinen geliebten Grossvater zu sagen, der heute mit einer Medaille, die seinen Namen traegt, geehrt wird. Ich weiss, dass er, und auch alle unsere noch lebenden Verwandten, auf die heutigen Preistraeger dieser Medaille, stolz waeren. Georg Klemperer in dieser Weise zu ehren, dehnt seine Bedeutung ueber die drei Jahrhunderte seiner Geburt, seines Lebens, seiner jetzigen und kuenftigen Wirkung durch die Aerzte, die in seinem Namen geehrt werden. Ohne Zweifel wissen Sie etwas von der Lebensgeschichte des Herrn Dr. Klemperer. Ich moechte nun ein paar persoenliche Eindruecke schildern. Diese Einzelheiten kommen aus drei Quellen: meinen eigenen Erinnerungen, Briefen, die er geschrieben hat, und Geschichten, die mein Vater oft erzaehlt hat (mein Vater starb 2002). Wie Sie wissen, verschied Georg Klemperer Heiligabend 1946. Gerade vorher gab er mir ein ledergebundenes Haeftchen, worin er eingetragen hatte: to Maria, for our joint study of German and English. Ich habe dieses Notizbuch heute noch, aber die Seiten sind immer noch unbeschrieben. Haette mein Grossvater laenger gelebt, waere mein Deutsch viel besser. Und so werde ich gnaedig sein und hierbei auf Englisch umschalten.

Professor Dr. Klemperer immigrated to the USA in 1935, at the age of 70 years. Before he arrived himself, he had arranged for all his children and many other relatives as well to emigrate from Germany. This was with the help of friends and former patients who had already left the country and were more than willing to act as sponsors. He had a devoted following. After arriving, he and my grandmother bought a house near Boston and my family moved in with them. My father was an internist, like his own father. As a matter of fact, they worked together at Moabit for a while and even talked about opening a practice together, but that was not to be.

Georg Klemperer spent much of his time writing. He wrote well and prolifically, very analytically, reminiscent of his brother Victor's writing style. I remember him sitting at his desk, covering page after page of onionskin paper, in his small pointed handwriting, very fluid, hardly ever a crossed out word. His thoughts just poured from the end of the pen. He was revising and also adding new material to older manuscripts he had written earlier. (These latest revisions didn't make it to print, however.) And he was also writing many, many letters. He wrote letters daily.

In addition to writing, he spent much time reading. And in his letters he explored the thoughts and philosophies of his favorite authors. He read from Spinoza, for example, and rephrased his thoughts, applying them to his own life and times. "... wisdom consists in preserving insight into logical connections and interactions between things." Concerning interactions, he quotes Goethe: "One soul can influence another through a mere quiet presence."

Of course, the years that I knew him were his retirement years. My father often worried that he would have a hard time with retirement because he had no hobbies. Well, in a

sense that was true; he didn't have many non-intellectual hobbies. But the intellectual ones kept him very busy. He had a great interest in history and read a lot in that field. His favorite historical figures were Abraham Lincoln and Bismarck. He had an extensive stamp collection and he started me and my younger brother on ones of our own. We spent many happy hours together with our stamps and he was a fount of information about the historical circumstances surrounding each one. As time went on he did in fact develop some non-intellectual diversions. He took a long walk in the neighborhood every single day. He took me along most of the time, as well as walking me home from school every day. And in his last few years he took a great interest in his flower garden. As well as tending to the weeding, he looked up the names and the needs of all the flowers. His garden was also the source of thoughts and philosophies. In September, 1941 he says in a letter (and I translate): "... I've been removing the wilted things daily from my circle of blooms. If I had any influence in the governing of the world I would arrange it so that the same occurred in the garden of mankind. Those who are wilting would be spared much sorrow. That's actually the meaning of Goethe's: Living one must, and love, though each must end. Oh fate, but cut both threads at once."

He loved metaphors such as these, particularly on the subject of advancing years. One time his son Friedi bought an old, rattling, second hand car and took his father for a ride. GK referred to the car as the "Old Gentleman." He noted the rattles but as soon as Friedi turned the radio on, he could hear nothing but the music. He commented, "Advancing old age can be banished with beauty and joy!"

That is an example of his ever buoyant spirit. "Everything in the world has two sides," he says once in a letter, "sometimes even three or four. One must be glad when one of them is really good."

I'm sure, in selecting GK's name for the medal, you had in mind his achievements. You are more aware of these than I am, I with only my three sources. But these sources evince certain personal traits which are indicative of success in his field. Perhaps you are familiar with some of these so I hope I'm not being too redundant. One trait was his phenomenal memory. Apparently he never took notes on any of his patients. He just remembered every detail. Forever. (I'm sure this would not be appreciated in this day and age.) He could write in Greek or Latin and wrote excellent English. It was not just the vocabulary he could remember, but the spelling, punctuation and grammar as well. One time he wrote down all the American presidents and their dates for me, without looking them up. Another aptitude was his gift for lecturing. Of course, I never heard any of his talks (Actually, that's not true. He often gave lectures in his sleep, which woke me up in the night). One more ability, as I've mentioned before, was his writing skill. He wrote well and easily, and much! This I can attest to. He could be quite flowery and sentimental, but one must keep in mind, that was characteristic of the times in which he lived. (Abraham Lincoln, in his correspondence, professes undying love for the members of his cabinet.) Another characteristic of his style was that he worked best under pressure or under a deadline. This fact I learned from my father. A further quality, often pointed out in literature about him, was his innovative thinking. He was convinced of the fact that physical illness had a mental component, this at a time when such an idea was not yet

prevalent. More than once I've seen him quote from Schiller, "Es ist der Geist der sich den Koerper baut." And then, finally, there was his eternally active mental curiosity. He was forever looking up the meanings and etiology of words and sayings, names and facts. Here is an example: In a letter, he described his son Friedi, clearing out some underbrush like a "berserker." And he enclosed on separate little notes the following definitions from multiple dictionaries: Beserker (bear-like) in Norse sagas, a man who had the strength of twelve when fury seized him; Rutledge's Encyclopedia, Berserk . . . In Norse folklore, one of a wild class of warriors or champions of the heathen age, supposed to assume animal shapes, as of the bear and wolf, and then to be seized with frenzy and to be invulnerable to fire and iron.

My grandfather was an impeccable dresser. I rarely saw him without being dressed in a three piece suit and a tie. The collars were starched. Even while sitting on the beach at the North Sea, this was his attire. But I will end with an interesting fact: In my photo collection I have some pictures of him in his bathing suit, charging around the beach with his sons, all carrying large sticks, all looking like Beserkers!

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to say these few words. It gave me great pleasure to share my beloved grandfather with you.

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