

“The Education of the Countryman in Lippe” (1789)

Abstract

This text offers an odd combination of description (of the lives of youthful and adolescent villagers, especially those not destined to inherit a family farm) and prescription (particularly of normative daily workloads). From its rhetorical form, it is clear that the text was meant to serve as an address or sermon to village audiences. At the same time, however, it also offered the educated reading public a summary of what custom, as understood by the social authorities, dictated when it came to the common folk's daily lives.

Source

The Education of the Countryman in Lippe

It will not be unimportant but rather useful for philosophers, teachers, and economists to become better acquainted with the person and education of the man who [...] every day from early morning to late at night occupies himself with works benefitting the common good, who contributes to multiplying harvests, who unceasingly sees to the additional breeding of livestock, making its reproduction his concern.

In the same way that general natural history became instructive and useful only once people observed more carefully and studied more diligently the behavior and character of individual animals, knowledge of human nature and human kindness can be fostered only if instead of general formulas and commonplaces, one gathers individual traits and observations from people who were born under the same sky as we were and who comprise the most numerous part of the nation.

In addition, the following description of the education and affairs of the countryman in Lippe from childhood to male adulthood can help spread the word about industriousness, hard work, and business, so that the ignorant may not lack examples for imitation.

Immediately after his birth, this pupil of nature has all of the advantages that are necessary for developing a body that with advancing years is supposed to be exposed to all of the vicissitudes of humid air and rough weather and be trained for hard work. On his mother's bosom, he receives the strengthening milk. [...]

Just as water from a fresh spring strengthens more than water from stagnant pools, his first nourishment must be immensely conducive to the child's health and growth.

For three years the child is nurtured in this way. Whether this method of rearing is equally advantageous to the mother and the child is a matter for physicians to speculate. With respect to the child, the advantage is unquestionable, for since the breast-feeding mother performs the entire range of work, the child's limbs, spine, and nerves are bent and strengthened for all types of movements before he can walk. The mother's care for the child also grows by no small degree through this continuous affectionate contact.

The child learns how to walk in the living room under the mother's supervision; he can also safely practice running and jumping on the extensive, clay threshing floor (which is far removed from the fireplace), so that he can develop the agility and skills needed for his future calling.

As soon as this first phase of exercising the physical powers has been completed, the child, from the age of four on, usually keeps company with the cowherd, thus becoming familiar early on, under the latter's supervision, with his father's open fields, where he shall commence the first part of his hard-working life. At the age of seven, when the time of moral education according to legal regulations begins, the physical education finds its salutary continuation: the child goes to school at a schoolhouse often half an hour's walk away from the parental home. In the process, the body is gradually hardened against the changing weather in winter, when the teaching period is set for three hours each in the morning and in the afternoon.

However, in order that the boy should not be idle outside of teaching hours, he must, during classes, from Martinmas [November 11] or from the time when the livestock is stabled until May Day [May 1], supply seven skeins of yarn every day, each skein at 66 threads over the long reel measuring 4.5 ells. In regions where 'small yarn' is spun, the amount is ten skeins at 60 threads over the small reel measuring 2.25 ells*; during the time from May Day until 14 days after Michaelmas [September 29], though, he must tend geese while attending school for a few hours over the lunch hour in compliance with school regulations.

From the Wilbaser Kirmis [kermes] (14 days before Michaelmas) onward, flax is cleaned during daybreak (the period from 2 o'clock in the morning until the sun rises) for as long as the weather permits; during the time mentioned, four persons, young and old, from the stable boy up, have to break completely, before breakfast, one 50-60 pound bundle of flax, which the lady of the house puts onto the threshing floor the evening before; they do this on the wooden flax breaker, so that during the day the lady of the house and the farmgirls can pull it over the flax breaker, rubbing and hackling it. By the light of a carefully kept lamp, whose light the farmhand must use at the same time in the cutting chamber to chop fodder, this work is continued on the threshing floor until the cold drives the entire family into the spinning room.

There, on long winter nights, the head of the household, the lady of the house, and the farmhands, young and old, spin a certain number of skeins of yarn, conventionally assigned to everyone according to age and other responsibilities. This is done by the light of a lamp hanging from a movable wooden hook in the middle of the room. The perhaps overly liberal conversations of the older folks are moderated by the presence of the children, the latter's mischief is tempered by the seriousness of the old folks, and time is thus spent spinning in pleasant circles, time that otherwise would be frittered away only with contemptible deeds. Just how much would boredom torture the sort of people who cannot entertain themselves with speculative discourse, if constant work and activity did not benevolently grant them this entertainment?

How much yarn everyone, whether young or old, must supply in this spinning room shall be made clear in the graduated description of each person working industriously in this communal storeroom. The quantity to be supplied by the seven-year old boy, who tends geese, has already been mentioned.

At the age of nine, this boy becomes a cowherd. Herding cows lasts from May Day to Martinmas, during which time he must go to school for at least one hour a day at the lunch hour; alternatively, if that is not possible, he must learn the Heidelberg Catechism and psalms as prescribed by the schoolmaster, though he has to go to school for six hours during wintertime; however, in this period, he has to spin nine skeins of yarn over the long reel or 15 skeins over the small reel every day.

From age ten to 12, the activity remains the same: cow herding, attending school, and spinning the same quantity of yarn as in the previous period.

From age 12 into his 13th year, however, every Sunday afternoon during the summer he must go to children's classes (to be precise, to church, where the preacher catechizes) so that the terms of religion

are renewed in souls that would otherwise soon degenerate, and so that the young boy should not grow up in ignorance between cattle herds.

The cowherd receives, if he does not live with his parents, as pay for the summer 1 Reich thaler and 3 ells of *Mengellakenlinnen* (fabric made of flax hackled once to which is added weft made of tow) as a smock.

From the age of 13 onward, he becomes a stable boy, while in the wintertime he attends school for six hours from Martinmas (November 11) and goes every second day and eventually every day to the preacher for Confirmation, which usually takes place before May Day so that everyone can carry out the services within their responsibility.

During this time, from the age of 13 into his 16th year, in the summer he must, as a groom, drive the draft animals on the plow, sometimes operating the implement as well, help make hay during the hay harvest, and put down in order and rake swaths of cut grain during grain harvest.

His activities include tending the horses in the evening, in the autumn breaking flax on the wooden flax breaker before daybreak, supplying the horses with straw for litter and grooming them, carrying water, throwing the sheaves of grain, straw, and hay from the forage loft and bringing it to the chopping room and feed store, chopping wood, and turning swaths during threshing, while at the same time, if he has received Confirmation in Christianity and no longer goes to the preacher, spinning 15 to 20 skeins of yarn over the long reel or 25 to 30 skeins over the small reel; if no threshing takes place, however, he must supply 20 skeins, i.e. a piece of yarn over the long or one and a half pieces over the small reel, and when he turns 17, even 25 skeins over the long reel. In accordance with the Farm Laborers' Code dated February 6, 1752, he receives annually 4 Reich thalers in pay and, in keeping with tradition, *Mengellakenlinnen* for two smocks.

With Confirmation into Christianity completed, upon reaching the age of 16, he is immediately enrolled and registered in the conscription list, solemnly bound in lieu of an oath in accordance with the Sovereign's Decree dated February 19, 1765, not to leave his fatherland, travel without leave and passport to other countries, nor to stay there beyond the duration of his leave. [...]

From his 17th into his 20th year, he becomes *Schulte*, junior farmhand; as such, he has to perform all sorts of immeasurable farm work that the lord and the lady order him to do, for which the groom and the foreman of the farm cannot be used. He has to dig in the garden, trim hedges, make bundles of brushwood out of them (to line the fences), chop wood, operate the plow, and help cut the crop.

In the fall, from the Wilbaser Kirmis onward and in the winter until the celebration of St. Peter assuming the Pastorate (February 22), he has to help with threshing before daybreak, in the evening bring the four heaps of grain to be threshed from the loft to the threshing floor while spinning a piece of yarn over the long or one and a half pieces over the small reel; however, if an entire day's work consisting of eight heaps of grain, each of which counts as ten sheaves, is threshed, he spins over the long reel half a piece consisting of ten skeins, or 13 skeins over the small reel, so-called small yarn.

If no threshing occurs at all on any day, he must supply one and a half pieces over the long or two pieces over the small reel. Weather permitting, the time around the celebration of St. Peter assuming the Pastorate is set aside for farm work.

In the course of this, the junior farmhand must trim hedges, cut bundles of brushwood and put them on the fences; he must also help deliver felled lumber and trimmed wood for summer fuel. During cultivation and fallow time in spring, i.e. in the months of April, May, and June his tasks include operating the plow, helping to load soil, cutting grain during harvest time and bringing the grain to the farmhand on the cart using a pitchfork.

Certainly, during this time of your lives, the physical powers are beginning to increase noticeably, but you must be all the more careful in using them, for you might never run a greater risk of wrecking your health than in this very period.

In case of overheating, either a cold drink or a sudden cooling may cause a stasis of the juices in the small vessels and in the finest inner body parts to develop, whereupon dysenteries, emaciation, and consumption, or whatever the myriad of illnesses might be called, will follow directly.

Most importantly, do avoid the stimulations of lust and the vice of unchastity, so that the vital powers do not wane prematurely and that the horrible consequences of self-weakening, i.e. lethargy, gloominess, melancholy, dull silliness, poor memory, madness, stiffness and paralysis of the limbs, of which the wise among the people have always warned with melancholy earnestness, do not hit you in older age. For most evils one endures in old age often derive from the excesses to which you abandoned yourself in the prime of youth.

From the 21st year onward, the young man, now grown strong and tough, can assume the responsibilities of a foreman on the farm, he has to feed and cut fodder for four to eight horses; from the celebration of St. Peter assuming the Pastorate until the time the plow is put to the field, he helps from daybreak to trim hedges, cutting bundles of brushwood and firewood for the summer, and doing other types of work that comes up outside the house. In terms of work in the fields, he must plow and sow, both in cultivating the summer and the winter seed, while simultaneously performing feudal services for the lord. During harvest time, he precuts corn, loads the corn on the cart, and takes it to the barn. From the Wilbaser Kirmis onward, he must chop fodder before dawn and carry out the work in the fields upon daybreak. As soon as the cultivation of winter seed has ended, he must help thresh during the time before daybreak, then chop fodder for the horses during the day, while spinning half a piece of yarn over the long and 15 skeins over the small reel. If an entire day's work is threshed, he must also help thresh, while chopping fodder for the horses, after which, however, the steward and the junior farmhand clean the grain. If there is no threshing, he must, alongside chopping fodder and feeding the horses, deliver every day once piece of yarn over the long reel or 27 skeins over the small reel, though in case he mucks out the stable, which happens every eight days, he is exempt from spinning his quantity of yarn.

The steward and lord of the feudal manor must observe all of these labors and activities, be present during any of this work, set every activity in motion to begin with, replace any missing thing, primarily though inspecting diligently the chopping rooms and feed store, watching out carefully for the cleanliness of the mangers for all livestock; during the time of fieldwork, they need to check closely every day whether the long iron wedge, the plow coulter, that compass of this implement, is aligned properly.

In addition, it is his business proper to feed the fattening pigs, if he does not employ a swineherd, since he will hardly entrust the key to the granary to anyone else.

For the same reason, he also carries out the grinding, baking of bread, and drying of fruit. Just as he, being an attentive administrator, pays attention to and keeps in motion the whole of his estate management, he must also be the first one in the morning and the last one in the evening, and he must inspect the work and farm implements before going to bed, so that, in case defects occur, they might be repaired in time, thus preventing any delay of work. The things a steward must observe in various relations of civic life as a subject, a serf, a person subject to rent and tithe, belong to the realm of political education. [...]

When reviewing the active and busy lifestyle of the countryman described, the politician will, if he combines the collected arrangements, realize how it is possible that in the earldom of Lippe, on this [...] district covering 25 German geographical miles [= approx. 530 imperial square miles], situated at 51 degrees latitude, 64,465 inhabitants, i.e. 2,578 persons per [German] square mile might eat their fill.

The moralist who knows that employment, work, and industriousness constitute the most reliable means to avoid excesses and vices will not be ill-disposed toward such a hardworking and industrious people, which is to be deemed in general a good and virtuous people, thus not refusing it the high regard that is due the virtuous person both in humble abodes and in palaces alike.

[...]

Source: *Lippisches Intelligenzblatt* (1789), pp. 5–7, 11–16, 18–19; reprinted in Jürgen Schlumbohm, ed., *Kinderstuben, Wie Kinder zu Bauern, Bürgern, Aristokraten wurden 1700–1850*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983, pp. 81–87.

Translation: Erwin Fink

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