

Glimpses into the Life of my Father, the Indologist Dr. Moriz Winternitz

Georg Winternitz

Translated from German by Debabrata Chakrabarti

Translator's Note

Looking back on the life of Moriz Winternitz on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary, I am delighted to contribute an English translation of his short biography written in German by his son Dr. Georg Winternitz (i). This is a revised version of what I published in the Winternitz Memorial Number, December 1988 of the journal Tagore International. I'm gratified that Dr. Georg Winternitz wrote this biography at my request in spite of failing health and an advanced age of ninety years. It is worth mentioning that this life-sketch is one drawn by a son of his father, and that it has that quality of familiar warmth that shows his actual person.

Georg Winternitz sent me the manuscript in April 1988, along with a supplement which contained a brief introduction to the lives of Winternitz's four sons and one daughter, each having had a career in a different discipline. The cover letter attached to the manuscript was his last correspondence to me before he passed away on 31st August 1988.

We respect and admire the Indologist not only because he devoted his life to Sanskrit studies with focus on ethnology and other associated subjects but because he was destined to become an exponent of Indian cultural heritage. Most striking about him was his constant search for knowledge and his passion for truth, all of which served to develop his vision. Overcoming bias and prejudices of a Jew, he rose within his field and acquired an appreciation for the fundamental unity of mankind. This realization brought him into contact with Rabindranath Tagore, and that relationship with him was strengthened during the latter's visit to Prague in 1921.

Winternitz came to Santiniketan in 1922 as a visiting professor at the invitation of Tagore and stayed there for almost a year. Proximity to the poet during this time and their regular conversations along with his intensive observation of the poet in course of years took definite shape in his mind. Years later in 1936 on the occasion of Tagore's 75th birth anniversary he wrote this short book on Tagore that we are publishing here. His sensitive understanding of the poet so evident throughout this work is remarkable.

In the translation of the biography I sometimes added notes where I thought necessary. I have included dates relating to eminent persons mentioned but missing in the German biography. To Frau Kveta Vitova, wife of the biographer, the late Dr. Georg Winternitz, Dr. Dusan Zbavitel and Late Dr. Miloslav Krasa I owe thanks for their appreciation and encouragement.

Debabrata Chakrabarti

- i) Dr. Georg Winternitz lived all his life in Prague except a few years in England as an immigrant during the Second World War. He changed his German name to the Czech, Jiri Vit, in 1947. I have highlighted Vit's former German name in order that readers may be able to recognize him as the son of Moriz Winternitz. In his letter dated the 6th of March 1988 Dr. Vit wrote me: "For more than forty years I have used the name Vit, though I do not disclaim my former name."



Figure 1: Moriz Winternitz in Prague

The extensive correspondence of my father and of his documents only partially survived the occupation by the German National Socialists. This is a humble attempt to supplement his formerly published biographies and appreciations of his academic work, and what is set down below is a slender body of documents handed down to us along with some personal recollections.

On completing Gymnasium at his birthplace in the city of Horn in Lower Austria, my father went to the University of Vienna at the age of seventeen and studied there from 1880 to 1885.

Initially he studied classical as well as Germanic language and literature, but the Indologist Georg Bühler (1837-1898) won him over to studying Sanskrit in 1882. At the same time he studied comparative ethnology and philosophy, obtaining his doctorate in the year 1886. As early as in 1887 my father began editing Sanskrit texts and publishing academic papers in the field of Indology, religion and comparative ethnology.

When my father started for Oxford on the recommendation of Professor Bühler to assist Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) in the publication of the Rig Veda, he was already engaged to my mother, Fanny Reik 1 (1865-1905). She lived with her parents in her birthplace at Hotzenplotz, a small provincial town in the Silesian province of Austria (Austro-Schlesien), now Osoblaha in Czechoslovakia. Both of them found it very hard to live apart. Fanny was well aware of the exacting demands of the academic activities and the prospective career of her fiancé, who first had to earn livelihood before he could think of marriage. The great distance from England at that time was bridged only with their frequent and intimate correspondence.

In the year 1890 Professor Bühler urged my father to accept an academic position at the Wilson College in Bombay. Fanny was extremely unhappy to let her fiancé go alone to India at this time, and for this reason she wrote a despairing letter to Bühler in Vienna. Professor Bühler's reply was polite, but it ended with the following admonishing words:

“Under the circumstances I cannot help frankly remarking that by discouraging him you would take upon yourself a grave responsibility. You may only spoil the entire career of Dr. Winternitz, and you might later regret the steps you took.”

With a heavy heart my father made up his mind to settle in Europe. He had dedicated his research efforts to the history of India spanning a thousand years, and his ardent desire to get to know the country ultimately came to be fulfilled only more than thirty years later when he went to Santiniketan at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore. My father wrote to Professor Bühler in 1897 to inquire about the possibilities of a post at the University of Vienna. The Professor replied delineating the facts relative to the problem and added:

“I would be sorry if you have to abandon your study of Sanskrit, in which case we would miss a competent colleague. But I cannot conceal the fact that I have always been anxious about your career ever since you declined the offer of appointment at the Wilson College in Bombay. You would easily get the better of the circumstances to prove your loyalty to your studies.

You would jeopardize your career as a Sanskritist by turning down the offer. Most people usually get such a chance once in a lifetime and their fortune depends on the seizing of it. If I were able, I would gladly find another such chance for you.”

My father did not join the post in Bombay. All the same he did later become absorbed in his study of Indology as is evident from a series of his publications. He took up the job of a German teacher, this time at the Oxford High School for Girls and taught other subject as well such as Sanskrit. He worked arduously so that he could marry as early as in July 1892. From this time on Fanny lived in Oxford, and in course of the next five years of happy marriage the first three of her five children came.

At that time it was not easy for even a talented and enthusiastic graduate in Austria and England to dedicate himself solely to a purely academic vocation unless he came from an affluent family. It was more difficult still if the person had to look after a growing family. The need to earn a living left him with limited time for research. Seeking a way out, my father turned to his former homeland, Austria, and when he heard about the

possibilities of an academic career at the German University of Prague 2, he decided to try his luck there.

In the summer of 1898, as my father made preparations to leave Oxford for Prague, my mother was expecting her fourth baby and she went to her parents at Hotzenplotz where I was born on the 23rd September 1898. My father followed very soon with his children and became a Lecturer in Indo-European philology and ethnology at the German University of Prague. He became an associate professor of the same subjects in 1902. His income from the University being insufficient for a family of seven, he gave English lessons in a commercial college. He could give up this supplementary work only when designated Professor at the University in 1911. Along with these activities he succeeded in devoting himself to his main work, the three volumes History of Indian Literature 3, the first volume having appeared around 1908.

In 1905 our family suffered a severe blow. Mother Fanny died suddenly, following an attack of typhus, which she got during an evening meal at a garden restaurant in Prague. The deep sympathy for my father's sorrows could hardly be better expressed than in the words of the Swiss writer, J. V. Widmann (Josef Viktor Widmann: 1842-1911) in a letter, dated the 7th of September, 1905:

"There was something in your wonderful essay 4 on my book which gave me an idea about this. No other review has so tender an insight into poetic pieces, in which sorrows and sufferings find voice, and it has dawned on me that it could not have been written exclusively from the standpoint of Indian philosophy. It pains me that you had to go through sorrows so extraordinarily severe".

During his stay in England my father had developed an interest in the women's progressive movement, which had a long-standing tradition there. Already in 1851 the great English thinker John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) had written on the emancipation of women. Soon after coming back to Prague, my father became an enthusiastic member

of the German "Association for Women's Progress" 5 and thereafter a very active member of its executive body. In course of his animated lectures at this association he came to be acquainted with the one-time concert singer, Berta Nagel (1862-1932) whom he married in 1908. She was really a loving and dedicated mother whom the five growing children urgently needed. My father was relieved of his worries and anxieties, and the life of the entire family rapidly assumed a joyous quality. Mother Berta had a great interest in all endeavours of her husband and remained a helpful spouse at his side.

In April 1911 Albert Einstein (1879-1955) came to the German University of Prague from Zurich as a professor of theoretical physics. At that time a small circle of physicists knew and appreciated him. Einstein gained an international reputation after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1922. He stayed in Prague for three semesters, returning to Zurich in August 1912. Einstein became acquainted with my father soon after his arrival in Prague. He belonged to the same Philosophy Faculty, 6 and he soon developed a friendship with my father and his family.

Though they belonged to different disciplines, Einstein had something in common with my father. Both of them grew up in modest circumstances and all their thoughts were filled with an urge for research, which for both of them from an early age was bound up with the serious question of existence. In regard to their education, both of them were part of German culture, so far as it signified a true, liberal and humanist culture, and they had an utter contempt for all nationalistic, militaristic, and racist excesses. Both of them declined formal membership in a religious community whose authority adhered to ritual prescriptions even though they shared an interest in and deep understanding of theology. Soon after his return to Prague my father joined the progressive movement of the Free Thinkers, which above all stood against the rigorous clericalism in Austria.

Unlike many other scholars, Einstein took interest in not only the challenges of his own subject, but also in those of philosophy, history of religion, ethnology, among other

fields, and this ultimately led him to problems of social life and politics. He was different from most of his German university colleagues in the sense that he strove to collect objective data on the condition of the Czech people and their historical development. He wanted to have contact with colleagues and students of the Czech university, and the same was true for my father.

Professor Philip Frank, Einstein's successor at the University of Prague and later on his colleague at Princeton, describing in his biography of Einstein the relationship of Einstein to his colleagues in a chapter dedicated to his stay in Prague, wrote:

"Another colleague with whom Einstein became quite close was Moriz Winternitz, a professor of Sanskrit. He had five children with whom Einstein became greatly involved, and he once remarked, I am interested to see how a number of such commodities produced by the same factory will behave".

It has been possible today to briefly reply to this question raised by Einstein. All five children completed their university studies in Prague, and as was in the case of Einstein himself, had to emigrate from their homeland as a consequence of atrocities by the German National Socialists. I will return later to the varied educational qualifications of each one.

I remember with pleasure how our family often gathered with Einstein on Sunday evenings in the presence of my aunt, Otilie Nagel, (1861-1943) my mother Berta's sister. He talked with his soft Swabian accent (similar to the Austrian dialect) and he was most friendly, cordial and without the slightest touch of formality. He had a sense of humour and could attract people in his presence in a moment with his roaring laughter. He engaged himself with us, and, although our ages ranged from eleven to eighteen at that time, he adjusted himself to the age of each individual. Einstein sometimes asked the older ones mathematical riddles, and for the younger ones he brought the usual puzzles of metal and then laughing he told them with how he would set to work on the

solution. A part of the afternoons was always devoted to music. Einstein played violin and aunt Otilie, who was a piano teacher by profession, accompanied him on the piano. At this time she behaved as if she were playing with a younger pupil, and Einstein acted in turn with an apt smile to imply he was her sergeant. The music of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and other classical composers was played. My mother Berta sometimes sang from her earlier concerts.

Einstein lived in Prague with his wife Mileva, neé Mariè (1875-1948) and their two sons, Hans Albert and Eduard, born in 1904 and 1910 respectively. Mileva was a Greek Orthodox Serbian whose parents lived in a small town in what was then Hungary later now Yugoslavia. She had become acquainted with Einstein in Zurich. Their participation in studies of the same subject soon led to a tender attachment, which resulted to their marriage in 1903. It struck me even at that time that Einstein frequently spent entire Sunday afternoons in our company without his wife or children even once. I came to know much later, however, that his marriage did not turn out to be a happy one. They lived apart from 1914 onwards. The marriage was officially dissolved in 1919 before Einstein wedded for the second time. I think I understand today to what circumstances we children owed our acquaintance with Einstein. In the company of his colleague's harmonious family he obviously got his hard-earned relaxation through music and delightful conversation. In his later years he also liked to spend his hours of convalescence with his colleagues or friends and their families. His own family life was bound in great sorrow, and it was fortunate that his efforts were totally absorbed in an extraordinary interest in research. At times he could only find joy in nature, in music, and in unconstrained conversation with good friends.

During the session of 1920-21 my father was the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the German University of Prague, and he was particularly delighted that he would be able, by dint of his position, to welcome Rabindranath Tagore as the Guest of the University at the end of June in 1921. The great poet's world of thought, his views on the urgent need for cooperation between the East and the West had long been a deep

concern for my father, and evidently the poet's view was quite in keeping with my father's own thinking. He later wrote that the days spent by Tagore in Prague were unforgettable experiences for him.

Tagore's stay in Prague was very brief. He came from Vienna and was expected shortly in Paris. But in spite of that he promised to spend an entire evening at my parents' residence in his circle of friends after giving a public lecture. The poet was accompanied by his son Rathindranath Tagore, among others, and talked in a very lively mood with my father and more than thirty guests present there. Among them was the Indologist Professor Lesny of the Czech University, Dr. Otto Stein, the Professor of Philosophy Christian Ehrenfels and Professor Oskar Kraus, the rector of the University, and also Professor Spiegel, Steinherz, Münzer and their wives. During his visit in Prague Tagore formally discussed the possibility of my father's visit to Santiniketan.

Tagore gave a lecture at the German University arranged especially for the circle of scholars. In addition, he read some of his poems in the 'Lucerna', which was at that time the biggest hall in Prague. It being shortly after the First World War, many people irrespective of nationality arranged the most enthusiastic welcome for the great herald of international harmony.

The poet also visited an institution along with my father and Lesny, where, under the care of Dr. Jedlicka, invalids and in particular crippled young people were being trained for suitable professions. Tagore was particularly interested in the aims of the institution, which offered the severely affected young people the possibility of self-reliance.

In November 1922 there finally arrived for my father the happy prospect of travelling to India by ship in order to see the country. It was that land whose thousands of years of writing and culture had motivated him to research for a couple of decades. During his one-year stay in India almost each day brought him new experiences and valuable insights. As agreed, he delivered lectures mainly on Sanskrit and ancient Indian

literature at the University of Santiniketan founded by Tagore. With keen interest he took part in the conspectus organized by the founder. There was ample opportunity for exchange of opinions with Tagore in regard to questions of Weltanschauung, theology, and principles of education.

His stay in Santiniketan brought him new acquaintances and lasting friendships with the university colleagues and the guests who visited frequently. Among them were Professor Andrews and Professor Prasanta Mahalanabis and his wife Mrs. Rani Mahalanabis. Prasanta Mahalanabis often accompanied Tagore in his world tours — he came to Prague also in 1926 with him — and in his letters to my father he wrote about Tagore. He reported in his letter-dated 5.7.1926 that the poet had had a heart condition and had made a good recovery during his twelve-day's stay at Villeneuve in Switzerland. He had chosen the place when he came to Romain Rolland at his invitation, and as Mahalanabis informed him, he had long conversations with Romain Rolland every day. During his stay in Switzerland Tagore had had the opportunity to know much about the Italian Fascism, about which he wrote his impressions after discussions with Italians.

In Santiniketan my father became acquainted with the brother of Rabindranath, Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1926), an artist with versatile gifts, in particular a talented painter who had a passion for discussing questions on the history of religion. The son of the poet Rathindranath Tagore and his wife met my father at times and their friendship lasted for many years.



Figure 2: Rabindranath Tagore and Moriz Winternitz in Santiniketan, 1923

During his stay in India my father had opportunity to visit other places besides Santiniketan and its vicinity, where he gave numerous lectures, particularly at universities. Among other places, he also visited Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Poona, Srinagar, the holy city of Benares, where he made a journey by boat on the Ganges. Then he went further to Trichinopally, the island Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and other places significant in the history of India. He spent the torrid summer in the hills of Kashmir. As the guest of Maharaja of Agra he had the advantage of admiring the unique structure of the Taj Mahal built in marble. This was erected by one of his ancestors in the memory of his beloved wife who died prematurely.

My father used to send home letters with detailed accounts of his experiences in India, which we carefully preserved. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Hitler they arrested my aunt Otilie Nagel — at one time Einstein's accompanist on the piano — and even at the age of more than eighty years she was not spared the experience of the concentration camp in Theresienstadt where she died in 1943. As a result of the tragic events not only the valuable correspondence of my father, but many other things that my father brought from India disappeared without leaving a trace.

In November 1923 mother Berta had gone with her sister Otilie to Italy so that, after visiting the place consecrated to art they could welcome my father arriving at Naples on his way back home. The ship arrived on the 1st of December from India but to her utter dismay she was informed that my father had taken ill during the voyage. The disease could not be diagnosed at first, and the condition of my father became worse. At a telegram my brother Max and sister Ida, both doctors, rushed to my mother's side. After the required clinical tests and consultation with an Italian professor, it was ascertained that it was in fact a severe attack of tropical malaria. During his fever my father spoke only about India. He recovered very slowly, and his foremost task was to dictate a letter to Tagore. The doctors allowed him to go to Prague only in the beginning of January.

At the invitation of the Pen Club of Prague and of my father and Professor Lesny in the summer of 1926, Tagore came again to Prague for a short stay. On this occasion performances in Czech and German languages took place in the Czech and German theatres. Tagore's pieces 'Postmaster' and 'Chitra' were played. Both performances were loudly applauded by the full house. Tagore also met the Czech author, Karel Čapek (1890-1938) and other leading representatives of Czech culture. Tagore talked this time with Professor Lesny about his second visit to Santiniketan, which materialised in 1927-28. For my father there was no question of a renewed visit, because the disease contracted on his way home from India had left permanent after-effects, although he ardently longed for such a visit.

Professor Mahalanabis informed my father in November 1926 that Tagore did not feel well and on the advice of Professor Koranyi, an eminent Hungarian physician, he went to Bad Balatonfüred at the Balaton Lake where he was able to make a good recovery. In his next letter of 2nd December, Mahalanabis wrote:

"Tagore was very anxious to go to Russia, but after his fever in Vienna it was quite impossible"⁹

Later he also reported that Tagore visited Belgrade, Sophia and Bucharest as well, where he was received with enthusiasm and warm hospitality and where he was able to deliver valuable speeches. Before Tagore set out on his way back home from Port Syed, he stopped for a short while in Athens and delivered lectures at the end of November in Alexandria and Cairo. Professor Mahalanabis wrote at the end of his letter dated the 2nd December 1926 about the impressions that Tagore gathered during his tour of about six months through different lands of Europe.

"This has been his biggest European tour and he seems to have gathered a good deal of impressions which have stirred him deeply. On the whole he is very sad and thinks that days of conflicts are not yet over. He anticipates another world war and constantly

broods over it. He has come to know different European people more intimately this time, and feels that they are also conscious of the terrible consequences of present day politics but do not know how to escape from a situation created by their own greed and lust of power.”

How amazing were the evaluation of situations and the broad perspective of the great poet and philosopher of remote India! In a few years his worries and anxieties proved justified. When Tagore was again in Europe in the spring of 1930, after landing in Marseilles, he stayed first in the south of France for a short time to work out a lecture that he was to give at Oxford. He came here along with his son Rathindranath who wrote to my father from Cap Martin on the 14th of April 1930 that Rabindranath Tagore had met President T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937) who was then staying in the same place, and they had a long talk. In view of the growing Nazi menace to Czechoslovakia the reports about Tagore’s worries could hardly be made public.

Along with its various events tragic for the whole world, the thirties brought my father deep personal grief. We saw the symptoms of a severe illness in mother Berta that put an end to her life in May 1932. Mother Berta placed the greatest confidence in my brother’s medical skill, and, thanks to the care given by him, she was unaware that it had to do with the incurable disease called cancer.

The bereavement was obviously a hard blow for my father but his many academic activities helped to lessen his sorrow. He had at the age of sixty-nine his work still ahead of him. He had his family still and always took interest in looking after his children’s careers with the utmost affection. Right from the year 1925 till his death, my father found pleasure in the company of his five grandchildren.

In 1914 our parents had moved with five children to a house in which they shared joys and cares alike. It was in this house that they spent their last days with me alone, but they were always in loving contact with their other children whether in person or through

correspondence. I have given the remaining details of their career in a supplementary note attached here. In the year 1933 my father moved to a more suitable house where he then lived with the family of my eldest brother Artur, whose wife Anna took charge of the entire household and stood by my father and served as a secretary till his death. It was with her cooperation that he found more time to devote himself to his academic work.

My father kept extensive correspondence with many Indologists all over the world and exchanged important views with scholars from other disciplines and with other men of letters. It was in this way that Albert Schweitzer came in contact with him in the twenties, for he had a keen interest in the problems of the history of Indian religion. While he was in Europe in 1932, he informed my father in a letter dated 25.9.1932 from Grünbach, Alsace, that he wanted to take with him Winternitz's personal copy of the History of Indian literature to Lambarene for his work on a book on philosophy. Such a copy was not available in the bookshops. My father was able to help him secure a copy.

On reading my father's article on Mahatma Gandhi, Schweitzer wrote on the 20th of October 1932:

"Many thanks for the interesting essay. Your interpretation of Gandhi supports mine entirely. The man has no Weltanschauung and he has, therefore, done many things for which he took no responsibility. But in his own way he was indeed a noble man of great significance."

In a letter of Easter Monday 1934 from Grünbach Albert Schweitzer's female colleague informed my father that on account of an eye ailment Schweitzer was not in a position to personally correspond and had therefore requested her to inform him "that his experience in the wilds of Africa has not robbed him of his faith in humanity". He had added in his own hand that "in each individual is hidden the same man. – Yours Schweitzer". A letter dated 17.9. 1934 from Lausanne opened with these words: "Many thanks for your friendly, lucid and exhaustive reply to the questions." After this he sent

the text for the preface of his book to ask for advice, whether as comments on the essential German Indologists or about the pronunciation of Indian words. When his book was ready he sent my father a copy in English in August, 1936 from London.

In 1934, at the age of seventy-one, my father formally retired from service, but he never thought of surrendering to a life of retirement. The only difference was that he was no longer able to deliver lectures at the university. All his other activities went on as usual. For a long time he belonged to numerous academic institutions of his own country and abroad in which he was also an active participant. The royal Asiatic Society and the Société Asiatic de Paris gave him honorary memberships in 1934 and 1935 respectively.

The third volume of his History of Indian Literature appearing in 1922 contained numerous "addenda" and "corrigenda" for all the three volumes. So as not to omit any valid scientific findings he constantly followed the most recently published research and used it as further supplement. He welcomed the decision of Calcutta University to publish an English translation of the book, though it meant no small effort on his part. The translation of the first edition appeared in 1927, having been authorized and augmented by him, the second one was published in 1933, but the third volume was left incomplete. Just a few chapters were ready when he suddenly passed away on the 9th of January 1937. The publication of these chapters was completed in 1959 10.

On the day before my father's death I visited him and found him as usual at his writing desk, absorbed in his writing. He had long been suffering from a heart condition. He died in his sleep the following night, a gentle death that spared him the tragic events of the following years.

He was from his youth a lover of freedom and a democrat in best sense of the term. When he lived in England, he was strongly influenced by the Workers' Progressive Movement of that country and by the struggle of English women for equal rights. He

was totally opposed to war, particularly during the First World War. He did not belong to a political party, though he took interest in politics. He was, in fact, not in favour of petty bickering among political parties, nor could he abide the domination by a few who were no personalities at all. What interested him most were the deeds of the great powers, which were significant to the progress of mankind in many directions: the problems of colonial politics, of imperialism in all its forms, of the freedom struggle by oppressed people, and of the much debated questions concerning race, religion and nation. These often came to be associated with his academic work. The problem regarding the position of women in society led him to his doctoral dissertation in 1886, "On the Ancient Indian Marriage Rituals as compared with Customs of Other Indo-European Peoples". Gandhi's precept of protecting all living beings and of avoiding violence also had its roots in ancient Indian traditions spanning a thousand years, all prescribed under the principle of Ahimsa.

My father put high value on those useful outcomes of research, either from lectures or publications that could interest lay people. To this end he took part in organizing in some provincial towns a popular lecture-oriented high school course which workers frequently attended to discuss political problems. In December of 1917 the "Association to Further Knowledge Useful to Common People" in Prague published my father's lecture, "Women and War in the Light of Ethnology", which concluded with a quotation from the charming "The Parade Call of Peace" by Romain Rolland on European women.

He always tried to make scrupulous use of his own scholarly assertions as far as was practical. My father was always receptive to dissenting opinions when he wanted to reach an objective conclusion. In those days tolerance of divergent views was thought of as a noble quality, and that he highly valued. His ideas and opinions provided for us children a range of controversies, which we continued to discuss with him for years. After The First World War three of his sons became enthusiastic followers of the Workers' Revolutionary Socialist Movement and long remained loyal to these beliefs (see the Supplement). My father always had a clear understanding of this political

activity, and though he could not agree with all its points, he viewed it with sympathy in so far as it dealt with the right of workers in conflict with the rich and the powerful. An example may be given here in this regard. In 1935 when bank directors tried to dismiss me on grounds of my activities as a spokesman of the bank workers, I sent my father the newspaper of our labour union, which contained an actual report of the conflict. His reply was: "I see that you are justified. I was also convinced beforehand that you must have had right on your side in according to the balance of power. I earnestly wish you success in the matter". In time I had the opportunity to regain my right.

India's struggle for freedom sometimes came up for discussion. We young ones thought that a rebellion by the people of India was the right way to put an end to British imperialism which had gradually become more dependent on violence. We believed that all the national and religious conflicts, as well as the discrimination between classes and races were to be overthrown quickly, and if possible, by force. We underestimated Gandhi's influence on the Indian people.

My father's viewpoint was based not only on thorough historical knowledge, but also on his personal experiences in India and his conversations with Indians from all social ranks. His views conformed to those of Rabindranath Tagore's world of thought, and particularly with Tagore's personal conviction about the value of intellectual collaboration between the East and the West combined with extensive reforms in the field of education for the people of all social classes. As regard Gandhi's personality he understood him well and wrote: "The sense of my own inability in the face of his mission depresses me profoundly". He was also of the opinion that Gandhi had committed many mistakes, but he always admired his courage, his self-sacrifice and alacrity in each and every act of dedication. Simultaneously he recognized that out of their great respect for the Mahatma 11 the majority of the people of India were not at all prepared to digress from the path of sacrifice shown by Gandhi. Today we see how difficult it has been, to remove the burden of India's past and old traditions in spite of all her progress.

Prague, April 1988

Notes

(1) Franziska Reik (Translator)

(2) The University of Prague was divided into two universities in the year 1881. One was the German University, and the other, the Czech University (Translator).

(3) Moriz Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Literatur*, Leipzig, 1908-1922.

(4) This refers to Winternitz's review on Widmann's "Der Heilige und Tiere (Epos. 1905) (Translator)

(5) The Association had a library, a reading hall, a lecture room and a home for female teachers. Besides educational and cultural matters it also aimed at fighting for the voting rights of women.

(6) A few years later, however, the faculty was divided into the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Science.

(7) Philip Frank: *Einstein, His life and times*, New York 1947, page 83.

(8) Emperor Shahjahan (Translator)

(9) Tagore's plan of travelling to the Soviet Union materialized in 1930 and it influenced him considerably.

(10) Moriz Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Calcutta 1927-1959,

Translated by Mrs. H. Kohn, University of Calcutta.

(11) People have given him the venerated name of Mahatma – the man with a great soul.

(12) Translator's note: Winternitz gave a lecture on Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of Mahatma's 60th birth anniversary in Prague in 1929. His lecture was later published in a more complete form in *Hochschulwissen*, Heft 4, 1930 under the title 'Mahatma Gandhi', where he expressed his notion of Gandhi on these very lines. A Bengali translation of this article is available in *Desh*, dated 30.1.1988 and 6.2.1988, translated and edited by the present translator and this translation has been included in the book "Gandhi Parikrama" along with other four essays on Gandhi written by Winternitz. See Moriz Winternitz, *Gandhi Parikrama*, M.C.Sarkar & Sons, Kolkata, 1994

Supplement

Artur Winternitz (1893-1961)

From his very early days my brother Artur turned his attention to mathematics with single-minded interest and his unusual talent. He started his university studies well before the First World War, becoming first a teaching assistant, and later a full professor of mathematics at the German University of Prague. In 1925 he married Anna, neé Steinherz (1897-1961), daughter of one of the best friends of my father, S. Steinherz, Professor of Austrian History. Anna had completed her German studies at the University by that time. From childhood we were friends of Professor Steinherz's family, which at that time consisted of five persons. After the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Hitler, Artur had to emigrate with his wife and his son John (born in 1931) in 1939. He settled in his birthplace of Oxford, where he devoted himself to mathematics till his death.



Figure 3 Moriz Winternitz' Children

Ida Winternitz (1894-1958)

Sister Ida, after completing her study of medicine at the Prague University, went to Düsseldorf to specialize in children's disease. There she became acquainted with her future husband, the young doctor Walter Marcus (1894-1973). After her marriage in 1924 they had a successful practice as child specialists in Solingen, Germany. They had to leave Germany in 1938 on racial grounds with both their children, Eva, born in 1925 and John in 1929. After a short stay in England they emigrated in early 1939 to Chicago, where it was possible for them to continue medical practice as child specialists.

Josef Winternitz (1896-1952)

I would like to give a more detailed account of the career of my brother Josef in order to show the effects of those disastrous years.

Josef had shown an outstanding and versatile talent since his early school years. He had to join the Austrian army during the First World War, but became exempt as a result of a leg fracture. He then engaged himself in the study of philosophy and physics at the German University of Prague. He had studied the subjects fairly well in the gymnasium, and it helped him toward a doctorate in philosophy in as early as 1919. In the following year he wanted to further his studies in Germany, where he was able to turn to the questions of Einstein's Theory of Relativity which had become very controversial at that time. 1

Josef came to stay in Berlin in order to be in contact with the philosophers and physicists in this city. When he visited the home of Einstein, he was received very warmly as an old acquaintance from Prague, and he became familiar to Einstein's second wife, Elsa and the two daughters of her first marriage. Josef was working at that time on a book on the Theory of Relativity and had opportunity to discuss its content

thoroughly with Einstein along with other matters. The book was then published in 1923 for which Einstein wrote a review:

“Among the philosophers a lack of creative power often becomes evident to the extent that, instead of systematically posing their own theses according to their own plans, they attempt to comment on or criticize the theses of others. But this valiant author has worked in lone encounter with his own thesis, which he systematically presents, and he compares the conclusion of his own analysis with those of others only after reaching his own position through his own independent work, developed it with his own creativity. In this sense the author has shown a unique ability and a thorough knowledge from the perspectives of physics and philosophy. Schlick and Reichenbach are represented in his philosophical approach, and he is, so far as my knowledge goes, the only man to have done justice to Kant, and in doing so he has never lost his own identity. ... Winternitz’s criticism of Kant’s ideas on space and motion appears to me as most striking...” 3

It was presumed for some time that Josef was working as an assistant to Einstein in Berlin, until Josef clarified through a notice in the newspaper that it was not a factual because Einstein had never any assistant in Berlin.

From 1920 to 1925 Josef visited a number of University towns like Hamburg, Kiel, Kassel, Göttingen and Frankfurt on the Main. Professors of philosophy, such as Petzold in Berlin, Cassirer in Hamburg and Cornelius in Frankfurt on the Main in particular welcomed his academic work and knowledge and spoke with him about the possibility of an appointment in the university. These and other efforts, however, did not lead to a position that could have provided him a means of livelihood. All his aspirations for securing an academic work at one of the numerous high schools of Germany were always met with insurmountable hindrances. In Germany, in particular, political factors connected with anti-Semitism were on the increase.

During the First World War Josef was a staunch antagonist to the war and became a supporter of the socialist movements. He began studying philosophical and economic writings of sociologists, and after the end of the war he took a leading role in the students' Socialist Movements of 1918 in the newly established Czechoslovak Republic. The studies on these subjects in Germany made him an ardent proponent of revolutionary socialist scholarship until the end of his life. His inner conviction was that he would not confine himself to theoretical studies alone, but also take a very active part in the revolutionary workers' movement, and soon after, in the struggle against the ever threatening dangers of the German Nazism.

In June 1925 Josef married Tilde, born in 1901 in Kaschau, presently Košice in Czechoslovakia. She had studied medicine. They decided to go together to Berlin where Tilde wanted to specialize in gynaecology. After a short time, she started her private practice as a gynaecologist in Berlin, which was very soon thriving. Josef could devote himself to his academic studies alongside his political activities. I visited them in 1932 in Berlin when both were in a happy mood on the occasion of the birth of their first daughter, Vera. Josef was above all greatly alarmed at the political situation in Germany. He abruptly brought his stay in Berlin to an end once Hitler came to power in the beginning of 1933, supported by the powerful German capitalists.

On the day following the Reichstag Fire, instigated by the Nazis, Tilde appeared at the house of my father in Prague with only her little daughter in her arms. She had fled Berlin in the nick of time without any kind of baggage. Since the passing away of Mother Berta, which had occurred not long before, there had been new life in our house, and this gave my father immense pleasure in spite of events that might have otherwise upset him. Josef continued his anti-Fascist underground activities in Germany a few weeks longer before he too finally came to the house in Prague.

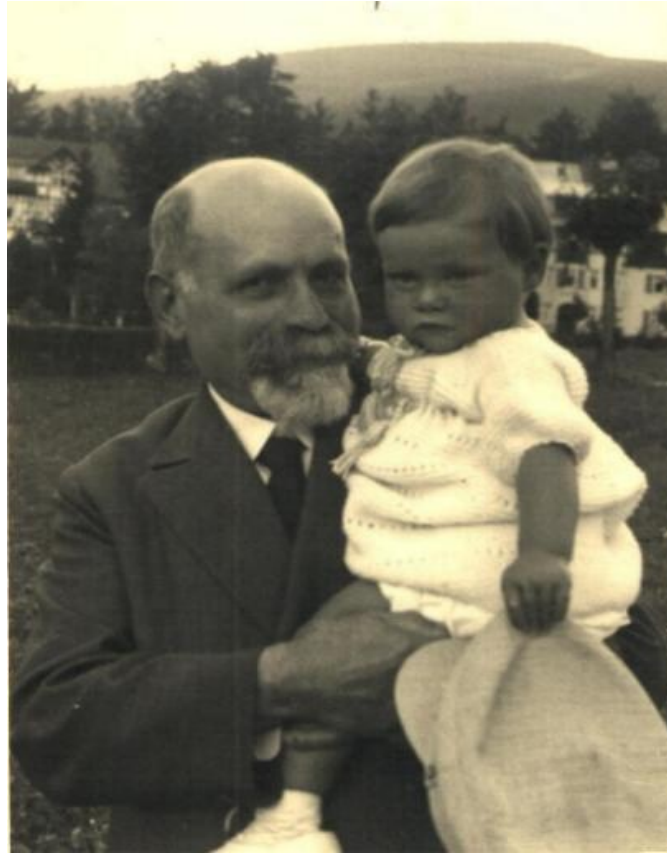


Figure 4: Moriz Winternitz with his granddaughter Vera (Stastny)

Tilde took a bigger house for her family, and her second gynaecology practice again rapidly began to thrive. Josef devoted himself to his studies and his political activities, mainly to the workers' revolutionary movement in Czechoslovakia. At the same time he kept giving assistance to the High Command of the German Movement of Workers as they were organising their struggle against Hitler from Prague. Josef's activity in Prague, however, lasted only a few years. When Hitler appeared in Prague with his troops on the 15th of March 1939, Josef was already in London, where he had been sent to help emigration of the Czechoslovak anti-Fascists in England, above all for those having German nationality. These people were deprived of their homeland as a result of the Munich pact signed by the Western powers and by the invasion of Hitler across the border of Czechoslovakia.

There remained no question of Josef's going back to Prague now. Because of his birth in Oxford he had British citizenship, which enabled Tilde to soon come to London with her little daughter. She was immediately busy appearing at examinations in medicine, which according to regulations were to be answered in English there. She was able to open her gynaecological practice in Wimpole Street in London. Josef took up his academic work and also worked actively with the representatives of the revolutionary immigrants from Czechoslovakia, who, under the leadership of the earlier Czech leaders of the mine workers and the delegate Václav Nosek⁵ launched a struggle for the liberation of Czechoslovakia. Josef also helped leaders of the anti-Fascist immigrants from Germany working in London in their struggle against Hitler, particularly through his writings.

At the end of the war Josef became one of the joint founders of the "British Council for German Democracy" instituted in London, about which he wrote an essay in 1947. "United Germany or Divided Europe". Afterwards he became editor of the journal "Searchlight on Germany" which provided information about the economic, political and cultural problems in Germany. He also published an analysis of the unemployment crisis⁶ and of studies on the so-called Transformation-Problem based on mathematics.

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In the years from 1948 to 1950 Josef worked as Professor of National Economics and Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Humboldt University in Berlin, East Germany. His wife Tilde remained in London with her two daughters — the second Elisabeth, born in 1943 — where she continued her medical practice. Josef spent his holidays with his family in London, which gave him immense pleasure.

Alongside plenty of lectures and teaching assignments, he devoted himself to setting up of a new high school system and was occupied with publication of books in this field. He published among others, essays on economic planning. 8

After his return to London in the summer of 1950 Josef resumed his earlier activities and devoted himself to new assignments of academic duties. A sudden heart attack ended his life on the 21st March 1952 — a life that he had so tirelessly and unselfishly dedicated to the struggle for a better future of the humankind.

Max Winternitz (1900-1952)

My brother Max was born in Prague and completed High School with honours during the First World War and with a great interest turned to the study of medicine. He became an assisting physician in the Clinic of Heart Diseases at the German University of Prague and soon a reputed specialist of cardiology. He taught many young doctors in this field of study, which was at that time a new discipline. While a student, he was a convinced follower of revolutionary socialism and remained loyal to it until the end of his life. He nevertheless devoted himself mainly to his medical occupation and scholarship at all.

He published many of his fundamental works during the 1920s. His academic career was in perfect keeping with his talent, but he was badly affected by political and racist obstacles, as was the case of his brother Josef. For this reason he gave up his post in the university clinic and opened a private medical practice in Prague in 1935. He instantly won hearts of numerous patients who greatly appreciated his sound knowledge and his sympathetic and humane approach to patient treatment. It was during this time that he married Alma Maruschla, born in 1903 in Grottau, North Bohemia, and now Hrádek in Czechoslovakia. She had been a ward nurse in the clinic where he worked.

When Hitler's Army occupied Czechoslovakia Max was able to flee to England, and Alma, who belonged to a German anti-Fascist worker's family, soon followed with their son Paul, born in 1936. During the whole of the Second World War Max worked as a physician in a number of hospitals in Oxford and Stratford.

After his return in 1945 to Prague he assisted in eradication of the typhus epidemic in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt and afterwards assumed leadership positions in the hospitals of the provincial town of Trutnov and Usti n.L. In 1950 he was entrusted with the Directorship of the State Sanatorium, Czechoslovakia in Prague. Although he continued to be quite active, his life came to an end quite prematurely due to a heart attack on the 20th of September 1952.

Georg Winternitz
Or
Jíří Vít (1898-1988)

The author of this biography George or Jíří, born in 1898, had to go to the First World War in the year 1917.

I was found only qualified for clerical work, but I experienced enough to realize the mendacity of the Austro-Hungarian political system and of the awful insanity of the war. I became a socialist as early as in 1918. The following year I began to work in one of the largest banks in Czechoslovakia, The Bohemian Union Bank. This was in order to support myself financially and to study law at the University, where I took a degree in 1924. In 1921, the Bank workers of the entire republic had gone on strike, which ended in our defeat a month later. Since then I have worked actively for building the movement of the labour union in Czechoslovakia, and above all, as the leading worker of the industrial organization of the Union Bank.

In the autumn of 1933 the management of the Bank transferred me to a Branch office as an officer in Gablonz a. N. (Jabloněk n. N.) in order to limit my union activities. This attempt, however, was not successful because the workers of the Banking organization proceeded to again elect me as the workers' representative by secret ballot. The Bank

was then obliged to grant me leave for the meetings to be held in Prague and to pay me traveling allowances according to the rules and regulations. When the Bank executives again attempted to arrange for my summary dismissal, I filed and won a law suit against it.



Figure 5: Georg Winternitz and his wife Kveta

In Gablonz, I became acquainted with Kveta Richterová. Born in 1914, Kveta was a native of this city, predominantly a German city at that time, having a minority of Czech people. She also took part in the Revolutionary Socialist Workers movement. We married in 1937 with a full life before us. As a consequence of the German invasion into Czechoslovakia I was finally released from my position at the bank when it was put under the supervision of the Deutsche Bank in Berlin. All its directors for whom an Aryan descent was lacking were dismissed immediately. All other employees whose blood was not in keeping with racial specifications likewise left very soon. On the 15th March 1939, when Hitler entered into Prague, I left my house with Kveta and we lived illegally at different places before we were able to emigrate to England.

In the beginning I worked in London for the organization of the immigrants from Czechoslovakia. From 1940-1941, I worked in London as an auditor at the Firma

Russell & Co., chartered accountants. I worked simultaneously for the revolutionary immigrants from Czechoslovakia, who had launched a struggle against Hitler. In 1943 the home for children, built by the Czech immigrants was relocated to the country, and with it Kveta, who was an employee there, moved with both our children Peter (1940-44) and Pavel (born in 1942). I remained in London and continued in my profession, surviving German bombs V-1 and V2. Our son Peter passed away in the children's home following a fatal poisoning.

I returned with my family to a Hitler-free Czechoslovakia in October 1945. In July 1945 our daughter Ludmila had been born. I worked once again for the banking organization in Prague and took part in a new socialist economic system. Starting in 1950, I worked in the Finance Ministry of Czechoslovakia and from 1955 to 1968 in the Research Institute of Finance. Now that I was a citizen of the Czech nation, in early 1947 I converted my surname to Vit. But I was never able to forget the surname of my ancestors.

Notes

1. One staunch antagonist of this theory was Oskar Kraus, Professor of Philosophy at the German University of Prague. In Germany this theory (came to found –The meaning is not clear here. Can you be more precise?) a nationalist organization that sought to counter the theory of “Jewish Relativity” and organized public lectures.
2. Josef Winternitz, *Relativitätstheorie und Erkenntnislehre*, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig 1923.
3. Albert Einstein, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, Berlin 1924, Heft 1, S. 20-22.
4. The Munich Pact was signed on September 29th, 1938 by France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy. For a brief account see E. Lipson, *Europe in the 19th & 20th centuries* (ELBS edition, 1972) pp. 405-413. — Translator.
5. The World War being over in 1945, Nosek became the first Minister for Home Affairs, in an independent Czechoslovakia.
6. Josef Winternitz, *The Problem of Full Employment*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1947.
7. Josef Winternitz, *Values and Prices: A Solution of the so-called Transformation-Problem*, *The Economic Journal of the Royal Economic Society*, London, June, 1948.
8. Josef Winternitz, *Probleme der Planwirtschaft*, Verlag der Wirtschaft, Berlin 1949.