

Hotel Schirmer,
Königs Platz, Cassel, Germany

Thursday, 25th May, 1891

Dear Birdie,

At last, dear sister, we have arrived in Cassel. After four long, long days of travel, Mama insists that I rest. But I am so impatient to see the town that I cannot sit still. I am not allowed to venture out alone, but must wait until Mama is ready. But I am ever so restless!

And I am all aflutter to meet my new violin teacher and begin lessons. I must not waste a minute if I am going to take the entrance examination at the Conservatory in the autumn. I know you think I am proud and a little foolish to dream of performing on a concert stage, but being accepted into the Conservatory is very important to me.

When she returns to Edinburgh, Mama will have much to tell you about our journey. But I shall write about it as well as I intend my letters to serve as an account of my exciting new life. Please keep them for me, will you, dear Birdie?

I need not write about coming down from Edinburgh to London. I am glad, though, that we took the morning train, as the rest of the journey was indeed rather arduous.

The first interesting part was the paddle steamer passage. We went aboard at Queenborough at ten o'clock at night. I was disappointed that we were to sail overnight, because by the time we embarked it was too late, in Mama's opinion, to explore the vessel as I should have liked to do. The Flushing Line runs two crossings a day, but Mama chose the overnight passage so that we should not have to spend the next night on the train.

I liked the *Prinses Marie*. She is much larger than the packets we have taken on our visits to Ireland and I believe she is the largest paddle steamer in their fleet. We shared a cabin with two large, good-natured Dutchwomen but we could not communicate very well. They smiled a great deal, but they almost filled up the small space, if it is not unkind to say so. Oh well, it was only for the one night and I am determined to treat everything as part of the adventure.

We were both fearful of sea sickness, and felt ourselves lucky to have a quiet crossing. Indeed both Mama and I slept well enough, despite the narrow bunks and the discomfort of sharing a cabin with strangers.

To wake up in the morning and find oneself in Holland, in Europe – now that was thrilling! In Flushing, or Vlissingen perhaps I should say now that I am in Europe, the Customs Officers were very nice and polite. Please tell Papa for me.

On the train, we very much appreciated the air cushions which Aunt Kate gave us as a going-away present. Although they are not quite the latest thing – a passenger in our compartment had one of the new Melon cushions – we found that ours are rather more convenient. When emptied, ours roll up and fit neatly into a pocket.

My new travelling costume served me well. I know I had complained about it, but it was very suitable for travel. And my new petticoat – the one of striped Oxford shirting – was much more sensible than a white one. I was glad I had brought my tam, so that I could remove my straw hat and rest my head against the back of the seat. What a good thing I listened to Miss Mackenzie's advice. Do you remember her? The very tall girl who was ahead of me at Mr. Waddell's Music School? She has been at the Conservatorium in Leipsic for a year now.

There is much to learn about travelling. I was curious about the brightly coloured circles some passengers had painted on the ends of their trunks. But later I could see that it was good deal easier for those people to recognize their belongings. I shall certainly do that when next I travel by train.

I shall stop here, Birdie, as finally Mama is ready to go out and I most certainly do not wish to keep her waiting.

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Friday, 26th May

Dear Birdie,

Mama said we must first go to meet Frau Brimmer where I am to lodge, so we have paid a call and I believe Mama is satisfied that I shall be well looked after. But I cannot yet meet Herr Kaletsch, the violin teacher, until he returns from a short trip. I should not be so impatient but passing the entrance exam means everything to me. If I fail, this is all for naught!

But before we start off sight-seeing, I want to tell you more about the train journey. Our second-class compartment from Vlissingen was comfortable, and as we had taken care to find a ladies' compartment labelled, "Für Nicht Raucher", we were not bothered by people smoking. Happily I had the window seat facing forward and I was in charge of opening and closing the window which I also liked.

In Antwerp we had an hour's delay and as we were hungry we decided to visit the refreshment room. This was not, dear Birdie, a pleasant experience. It was very crowded and there was a long queue and honestly these people do not seem to have the habit of queuing, so there was a good deal of pushing and shoving. We had a struggle to find a place to sit and by the time we had been served, it was nearly time to leave, so we ate in great haste with no possibility of taking a sweet or coffee. Someone had told us to avoid the pastries "as we would be the plague" – I do not know why – and the puddings looked unappetizing in any case.

I have quickly learned, dear sister, that travel is full of mystery. One is forever wondering the why of things but one cannot get an answer. Another time we could order a refreshment basket and enjoy our food at leisure. That is what I shall do when I come home at Christmas.

Indeed one of our fellow passengers had such a basket and when she was finished eating, she did the oddest thing. She took a silver toothpick from her large handbag and proceeded to use it, in public. I did not know where to look.

There was another very long stop at the German border and once again we were obliged to fetch out all our luggage. Mama had taken care to watch where our cases went and she cleverly found a porter straightaway to see our trunks and boxes through Customs, so that was all right.

I was worried about the tea. Miss Mackenzie had warned that one cannot get good tea in Germany and said she always carries tea with her when she leaves home, so Mama had packed several ounces in her valise. I had not asked Miss Mackenzie how much was allowed and I was fearful that it might be confiscated, or worse. Mama was not at all flustered and said confidently that we had nothing to declare, and we were sent on our way. I still do not know just how much tea is permitted.

Here is another odd thing. You know, Birdie, how we sit in complete silence amongst strangers in a railway carriage at home? Well, on this train, people coming and going from our carriage would nod or bow to each other, to complete strangers, when they entered or left the carriage. And they spoke to each other, although it seemed obvious that they did not know each other. Mama was rather perturbed by this but I am beginning to think that it is a more natural way of behaviour, especially when one is cooped up with others for hours in a railway carriage.

But my goodness, Birdie, how rude the guards were! At home we are used to railway guards being helpful and respectful, but at the border one guard practically bawled at us as we came hurrying along the platform after we were finished with the Customs officials. Of course we could not run!

It was late in the day when we reached Düsseldorf where we were to spend Tuesday night. We went directly to an hotel and fell asleep straightaway. Our beds were lovely with soft feather comforters, but the breakfast was very strange. This was my first German breakfast and it consisted of cheese and cold meat and cold hard-cooked eggs and rolls and butter, but alas, no toast. I have decided that this is a part of my wonderful

adventure, but I do not think Mama enjoyed her breakfast.

Düsseldorf, from the little I saw of it, was busy but scarcely a pretty place. We were happy to catch the morning express train to Cassel and leave Düsseldorf behind. The Germans are proud of their splendid railway system, but the next part of the journey seemed very long. We were nearly nine hours on the train! "Express" has a different meaning here. This "express" train did not stop at every single small station, only at the larger ones. At first we passed through town after town with endless factories and foundries. Mama napped a good deal of the time but I was sure that if I fell asleep I should miss something interesting, but I did find myself nodding off from time to time. The district is evidently dedicated to manufacturing so it is not very picturesque and I do not suppose I missed much. The spires of the numerous churches were all that relieved the view.

Towards the end of our journey, we crossed over one valley by means of a long viaduct. We were alarmingly high up; a fellow passenger explained that the viaduct is more than one hundred feet high. Do you see why at times it is a good thing to speak to strangers? Had that gentleman remained silent, I should not have known about the viaduct. After that we were in hills and forest and soon came down to Cassel.

We shall stop at the Hotel Schirmer for another two nights. Except for that one night in Düsseldorf, I have never stayed in a proper hotel before and I am enjoying this ever so much. This is a very long letter I know, but at present I have the leisure to write and plenty to write about. There are these new picture postcards here and I am sending one to Jack and Reg.