

From: Karl	To: Jakob Sternberger, his friend	date: May 1, 1850
Content: A private letter to Jakob before he departs for the United States. He is surprised that Jakob asked for assistance from Paul Schwarzenfeld.		

May 1, 1850

Dear friend,

If there was something in your letter that surprised me, it was definitely not your decision to leave your homeland for a distant country and seek far away what you would never have found here—a free life in a free homeland. What surprised me was the name of the sponsor with whose support you are trying to reach your goal. I don't intend to target the single individual with the same hatred that is directed at the family as a whole. Nor do I see *Paul Schwarzenfeld* as his brothers' equal; there is a great distance between the eldest and the rest as far as unprincipled behavior goes. But that name alone would suffice for me to reject everything offered to me from that source. Now that I find myself at a distance from them, I recognize just how contemptible, how despicable that kind of person is, and it would be hard to find another relationship that would embarrass me more justifiably than the one I used to have with them. Yes, I admit it, that was the most humiliating time of my life up to now, and I would subject myself to the harshest conditions if I could undo what happened. But I don't harbor a grudge against *Paul*. His misfortune has reconciled me with him, and his current decision and offer to you have mitigated our differences. I can only hope that both of you find what you are looking for: you, freedom; he, a tranquil heart and the peace of mind he has lost.

Your decision and its execution will deprive me of a friend and our homeland of one of its best sons, but I cannot oppose the intention you express so clearly. If I did, I'd be showing myself hostile to your happiness and at the same time following a course of action that would be unsuccessful. But nevertheless I beg you above all to consider carefully before you act. Not that I doubt your ability to bear all the things people regard as dangerous and unpleasant, but I would not like to see you disappointed. After what I've said, it must seem to you that I feel the pressure of political events less in my current situation than before, that I'm reconciled with the deformities of civil society, that I've become soft and cowardly, and yet this isn't the case at all. I have never been more absolutely determined than I am now, when I'm threatened by separation from you, to stand for truth and justice, for light and freedom. At an earlier time, I cherished the thought that we would someday act together, and with mutual support we would achieve greater successes and protect each other; what rested on two pairs of shoulders then, one will bear now, and my strength will be doubled. In principle, we agree, but I'm more tenacious than you are. You despair of a happy solution to the social questions, and leave your homeland with scorn and disgust. I believe in the immutability of justice and truth, and in my mind's eye, I see a rebirth in the near future. You prefer to live free in a free country; I want to help free an enslaved homeland and die free. You see the sacred banner torn, and departing, you shed a tear for it; I maintain an honor guard on the mounds of corpses and intend to wait, listening, until the storm rises and the German eagle\*, vengeful, beats its wings. May God hear my plea and spare our homeland still greater humiliation.

If I should lose all hope one day, should I come to the conclusion that all is lost, that nothing can rescue freedom, then I will follow you and spend the rest of my life in mourning on the other side of the ocean. You'll save as much space in your heart as love allows you for

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a friend, and if you are happy yourself, you won't refuse the space that a undemanding person needs. May you succeed quickly in setting up your new home and transplanting the domestic Penates<sup>1</sup> to the only spot where they can stand with honor. Your letter convinced me that you can appreciate the first love of a young heart properly, a heart that I think is worthy above all others to enjoy the happiness unspoiled natures smile at those first in their affection. I also think that her parents will at least have no misgivings that have to be eliminated before they place their daughter's fate in your hands. I can understand your joy and I'm happy about it, since nothing can help make the inconsistencies of life more bearable and reconcile us to the deformities of the world more than the love of a faithful heart that understands us and in which we can confide everything that fills our breast with delight or that tortures and frightens us. In many moments when I was in despair and would have been prepared to break away from the lands which kept my spirit in chains, I must confess that it was love which pushed me back from the bottomless pit, revived my sinking courage, doubled my strength and redeemed the hours that fate or man had struck for me. But you will perceive the effects of a noble attachment on yourself, and you won't find it necessary to ask me for a list of them. But you will forgive me if I speak about myself, and extol a sentiment which, like Hope, remained earthbound after the other virtues and gifts of the gods returned from whence they had come, leaving us nothing more than the notion of them. For I am doing nothing more than giving expression, though perhaps less accurately, to your own thoughts. I myself probably have little hope of ever calling the beloved person my own, but nevertheless, I will nourish myself with shadows and live for my dreams, even though their realization may be denied me. I have never spoken with you about matters of the heart, and I wouldn't do it now unless I were convinced that I was striking the same chords, and that it is my duty to repay you in kind. Write to me again before your departure, specifically about the conditions under which you are going to America with Paul Schwarzenfeld and the place where you are planning to settle. You mentioned Pennsylvania, but it sometimes happens that there is a deviation from the plan, and this could happen with regard to the choice of a location. And by the way, surely I don't have to ask you to send me the details about your new place of residence, either directly or through your relatives, as soon as you have had a chance to look around a bit. Think of me, and be happy.

I kiss you one more time,  
Your  
friend  
Karl

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<sup>1</sup> Penates, in Roman mythology, were the deities of the household: the hearth and home.

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\* The original has only the word “teutsche” (German) but the phrase with the beating wings seems to call for the addition of “eagle”.

Translated March and April 2010 by Victoria Hill of Madison WI.