

Erinnerungen von Hans E. Suess an seinen Vater Franz Eduard Suess

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Hans E. SUESS (1909-1993), der einzige Sohn von Franz Eduard SUESS (1867–1941), Enkel von Eduard SUESS (1831–1914) hat im Stil der „Erinnerungen“ von Eduard SUESS (1916) mit Hilfe seines Sohnes Stephen E. SUESS Memoiren verfasst, die in englischer Sprache als unveröffentlichtes Typoskript vorliegen (SUESS & SUESS 1987).

Franz Eduard SUESS betreffend, der 1941 verstarb, gibt es einige Arbeiten, die sein Leben und Wirken beleuchten. Hier sind zunächst die Nachrufe von LEUCHS (1947) und KÖLBL (1949) zu nennen, die nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges veröffentlicht wurden. Durch KRENN & SCHEDL (2016) wurde jüngst ein Nachruf evident, der unmittelbar nach Franz Eduard SUESS' Tod am 25. Jänner 1941 in der „Grenzmark-Zeitung“ vom 8. Februar 1941 erschien. Eine halbseitige Notiz mit Kurzlebenslauf (ANONYM 1941) erschien zeitnah nach seinem Tod in der Zeitschrift der Deutschen Geologischen Gesellschaft. Aus Anlass des 100. Geburtstages erschienen Würdigungen des Lebenswerkes von WALDMANN (1968) und KÖLBL (1968). Anlässlich des 70. Todestages von Franz Eduard SUESS haben HUBMANN & SEIDL (2011a,b,c) das Wirken des großen Forschers erneut beleuchtet.

Nachfolgend werden aus den unveröffentlichten Erinnerungen von Hans E. SUESS (SUESS & SUESS 1987) jene Passagen im Originaltext wiedergegeben, die sich auf Franz Eduard SUESS' Leben beziehen. Mit den Zeilen des Sohnes über den Vater wird dem Wissen zur Biographie von F. E. SUESS, das bislang ausschließlich auf Arbeiten dritter beruht, eine neue, familiäre Komponente hinzugefügt.

Franz E. SUESS hatte lange Zeit in der Wohnung seines Vaters (Afrikanergasse 9) im zweiten Bezirk gewohnt, als spätere Adresse ist die Landesgerichtsstraße 12 in unmittelbarer Nähe zur Universität Wien bekannt. Bislang unveröffentlicht waren die Adressen zwischen beiden Wohnsitzen. „*I was born December 16, 1909 on the second floor of Radetzky Strasse 4, in the 3rd district of Vienna, Austria.*“). Diese Angabe steht im Gegensatz zum „Lehmann, Jahrgang 52“, wo in Jahrgang 52, Band 2 auf Seite 1237 folgender Eintrag zu finden ist: „Süß, Franz Eduard, PhDr., a.o Univ. Prof, III/2 Radetzkystr. 3.“ Im Jahr 1909 ist Afrikanergasse 9 als Adresse angegeben, für 1911 findet sich: Radetzkystraße 3. Eine Postkarte von Jaroslav Jiljí JAHN (1865–1934) aus Brünn an F.E. SUESS ist ebenfalls an die Radetzkystraße 3 gerichtet, was belegt, dass Nr. 4 falsch ist. Ebenso wenig bekannt war der nächste Wiener Wohnsitz, den die Familie SUESS nach ihrer Rückkehr von Prag bezog („*Only one year later [1911] we moved back to Vienna into an apartment on Lindengasse in the district of Mariahilf. I remember that there was a little fountain in the yard, which was turned on when I begged that this should be done.*“) Dazu der „Lehmann, Jahrgang 54“ (Band 2 auf Seite 1404) für 1912: „(Süß) Franz Eduard, PhDr., o.ö. Univ. Prof, VII, Lindengasse 46.“ Auch 1913 findet sich diese Adresse (S. 1412), ebenso 1914 (S. 1374), erst 1915 taucht auf Seite 1410 die Adresse Landesgerichtsstraße 12 auf. Diese Adressen hatte zwar Johannes SEIDL (Archiv der Universität Wien) recherchiert (email vom 18. Mai 2011; 09:57 an den Erstautor), sie wurden aber bislang nicht veröffentlicht.

Bei der Todesmeldung von Eduard SUESS, der am 26. April 1914 verstarb („*Around Easter 1914 my father rented a vacation apartment in Kalksburg near Vienna. One day in this apartment, while my mother dressed me in the bathroom, my father entered and solemnly whispered that his father had died. My grandfather*

was 83 years old at the time.“), fällt vor allem die Adresse, „vacation apartment in Kalksburg“ auf, was verwundert, würde man doch die Familie auf dem Familiensitz in Marz vermuten.

Kurz darauf übersiedelte die Familie von F.E. SUESS nach Wien. „Shortly after my grandfather died on April 26, 1914, we moved to a new apartment in Landesgerichtstrasse 12, in a new section of Vienna, the so called „Rathaus Viertel“. The apartment was on the fifth floor with no elevator but had a wonderful view down to the traffic of the Lastenstrasse and the streetcars below, and also to the mountains of the Wiener Wald with Kahlenberg and Leopoldsberg in the distance.“

Nach dem Tod von Eduard SUESS erlebte Franz Eduard SUESS mit seiner Familie den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges in Marz. Hans SUESS erinnert sich: „A few months later we were again in my grandfathers summer house in Marz. My sister, not yet three years old, and I were standing in the living room of the house, which at that time appeared enormously large to me, when suddenly my mother rushed in and screamed, "Poldie", which was her sisters name, „Poldie, It's war! (Krieg is'!)“ „Where is the war?“ we children asked, and wanted to see it. Then it was explained tous that it had not quite started yet and that it would not be nearby.

That same night I remember in the middle of a dark night seeing the face of my father bent over my bed in the candle light. „Do you want to get up and come outside?“ he said. He took me out of the bed, and we walked outside to the front of the house. In the little village street, people could be seen in the dark, standing in front of their houses and speaking in low voices. Then we heard the drummer get the people together, and in a monotone voice, in the local dialect, he declared that general mobilization was ordered and that all young men had to report to some military office. My father took me back inside and explained that this was a historical moment that I would remember for the rest of my life. The next day, pubs and wine houses were filled with noisily singing recruits preparing to leave their homes.“

Der Weltkrieg zeigte bald Auswirkungen auf den Alltag. „When we came back to Vienna in September of 1914, World War I had started. I remember that there were two cans of sardines and a larger can with a picture of a fig, some peaches and some oranges in the kitchen cupboard. No such things were available in stores any longer. These items were left over from Frieden, from the peacetime.“

Über den Alltag berichtet Hans als Schüler. „School, in those days, was from eight o'clock in the morning until one in the afternoon, including Saturdays. My father came home for lunch, which we had at two o'clock sharp. In the afternoon he took a short nap after which he walked back to his office in the nearby University building. He came home for supper at nine in the evening. After supper my father used to read from a play by a German playwright, such as Kotzebue, Nestroy, or Raimund, and then we were supposed to be in bed by ten.“

Nach dem Ende des Krieges, in Zeiten bitterer Not und Entbehrungen, suchten die einzelnen Familienmitglieder ihr individuelles Fortkommen. Hans, wurde nach Holland geschickt und erinnert sich: „In the meantime my sister, who was almost two years younger, had been sent to Heidelberg to live with the family of a Geologist, Professor Salomon-Calvi [1868–1941], and my father himself had accepted an invitation from his brother Otto [Otto Franz SUESS, 1869–1941] who lived in the newly established country of Czechoslovakia, where conditions were much better than in Vienna. My mother was left behind in Vienna and had to get along on my father's salary; in those times of rapid inflation it didn't buy much. Early in January, 1920, I was taken to Den Haag to live with an elderly couple, a medical couple as I remember.“

Über seine Eltern berichtet er: „My mother must have been a good secretary. Her knowledge of orthography and German grammar must have been well above today's average, or of that of an American high school graduate. She had lost her parents at an early age of about 8, but still had attended what might be called a mercantile school. She had taken English, shorthand and bookkeeping. When at the age of 68, she came to visit us in the United States she found that her English was surprisingly adequate. Her German

spelling had always been much better than mine. In school she had been exposed to 19th century and earlier German literature, and yet one would not call her an „intellectual“. She adored my father, who was nearly 20 years her senior, and considered academics, and especially University professors, the peak of human society from the viewpoint of a cultural level. She was what one would call a „strong personality“: a woman who ran the family with authority and in an intuitive and rational way.

In contrast, my father might have been called a typical professor. He was notoriously absentminded, but continually stated that this resulted from his thoughts being so concentrated on specific questions that they distracted him from what was going on around him. I regret now that I did not learn more from him than I actually did. There were certain things that he never discussed, and which were never mentioned at home, topics such as politics, religion, and sex. In my parents' house, these topics simply did not exist.

I am sure now that my father would have liked to tell me more about his own field of science, but he realized that I was not particularly interested. During his many years as a field geologist, he had been doing his work walking through fields and forests, but now he was spending most of his time at his desk working on his publications and lectures. On Sunday mornings, he liked to take a streetcar out into one of the Vienna suburbs, where he liked to hike through the hills of the Wienerwald for a few hours. He would be back around 2:00 o'clock, when mother expected him for lunch. He wanted us to join him for these hikes, but mother maintained that she got enough exercise running the household. My sister was not very enthusiastic, and thus I was the only one who occasionally kept him company. During these hikes he would show me sedimentary and igneous rocks, granites, limestones, hornblends, feldspars, and once in a while an occasional fossil. While looking at the hills at the very eastern end of the Alpine mountains, terminating with the large bend of the Danube river, my father, in the early 1920's, explained to me the principles of continental drift, and the existence of continental plates. He explained to me how the Alps had been pushed up by the pressure of the African continent against central Europe.

Once when my father wanted to visit a geologically interesting location, he took me on a trip up to the Semmering, first by railroad and then hiking for about two hours up a mountain path to a place with a wonderful view, where we had our lunch. A friendly middle-aged man entered into a conversation about the fine weather and view, and my dad, with rapidly increasing enthusiasm, explained how the rocky limestone range across the steep valley had been pushed over from the south, millions of years ago, and how some other formation had been folded, and had been metamorphosed through the tremendous pressure exhibited by the interacting continental plates. The good man, obviously interested and following the explanations, began to look more and more worried. Soon his face assumed a visibly frightened expression and he hastily excused himself with a polite good-bye. Obviously, the man had misinterpreted my father's picturesque explanations as a case of complete insanity.

Remarkably, in the many scientific publications of my grandfather, still frequently quoted, there is not a single mathematical equation or formula, nor is there any mathematics at all in any of my father's works.

My father's scientific interests corresponded closely to those of my grandfather. However, in many other respects, my father did not follow his father's aims and traditions. Above all, he did not concern himself with political or economical questions. Shortly after World War I, he discovered huge deposits of bauxite, an aluminum ore, near Tapolza, Hungary. These deposits are now considered the largest aluminum ore deposits of central Europe and of great economic value. But my father never profited financially from his discovery.

Also, contrary to my grandfather, he was deeply involved in matters of fine art, poetry, drama and above all, music. As a student, he had enrolled in a class on the laws of harmony given by Anton Bruckner. He often mentioned that he regretted that there were no transcripts, no records available and that he should have written up what Anton Bruckner had been teaching.

For example, he mentioned how Bruckner had characterized the seven tones of the octave. „The second“, Bruckner said, „is a poor chap, not important at all, but the septim is a rascal. Sits there modestly in the corner and still dominates the tune (Die Secund is a arm's Hascherl, ganz unwichtig, aber die Septim is a Schlingl, sitzt da bescheiden im Eckerl und gibt doch den Ton an.)“.

My father used to play the piano, and was able to read the music without ever having heard or played it before. He did not have any trouble in school learning the obligatory Latin and Greek that were required for admission to the University at that time. He also had a fairly good knowledge of English and French, and had attended conferences where he had delivered lectures in these languages. He had taught himself, without an instructor, Italian, well enough to travel in that country and engage in scientific discussions with his Italian colleagues.“

An die Auszeichnung von Franz Eduard SUESS als „Dr. honoris causa“ erinnert sich Hans: *„In August 1927, the British Association for the Advancement of Science held it's annual meeting in Glasgow, Scotland. My father in Vienna obtained an official invitation to attend this meeting at the expense of the Association and also was asked if he wished to bring his wife. He replied that his wife would not be able to come, but that his son, spending some time in Dublin would like to come and stay with him in Glasgow and then join him on the return trip to Vienna. My father, on that occasion, was awarded an honorary doctorate, an „LLD“, from Glasgow University. Much later, I understood that this was because only Scottish, Scandinavian and a few American geologists, at that time, believed in continental drift and plate tectonics. My father had been more or less the only Geologist in Central Europe who followed these thoughts.“* Tatsächlich fand das Glasgow-Meeting vom 5. bis 12. September 1928 statt, wie eine schriftliche Einladung der „British Association for the Advancement of Science“ vom 13. Juni 1928 an F. E. Suess belegt.

Interessant sind die Gedanken zur Wahl des Studiums. *„I intended to take chemistry and physics at the University. My father asked me to take one class in biology, by all means. „Biology“, he said „is the science of the future, and we are approaching an age of biotechnology.“ So, I also enrolled in one course of zoology. I attended a few classes dealing with the anatomy of the cat, but dropped this course soon, as my time was taken up with laboratory work in chemistry.“*

Hans' Onkel Otto (1869–1941), der jüngere Bruder von Franz Eduard SUESS, er war Bergbaudirektor in Mährisch Ostrau, hatte ihm einen Studienaufenthalt in München finanziert. *„When I was in Munich in 1932, my father wrote and asked if I would like to accept the position of teaching assistant in the physical chemistry lab course. This course had been organized and was run by Dr. Phillip Gross [1899–1974], and the condition was that I would work on my Ph.D. thesis under his direction. I had enjoyed taking the lab course, and I found Phillip Gross a very pleasant and appealing scholar, though many of my colleagues found him and his field difficult to understand.“*

Otto SUESS hatte sich auch um das Familienanwesen in Marz gekümmert. *„Otto, had been the director of a cokery in connection with the steel mills in the Mährisch Ostrau area. Until shortly before he died in 1942 [sic!], he had been a bachelor of considerable wealth, and had made it possible to preserve and keep up the family country house in Marz, Austria. He had considerably enlarged and modernized the house and made it suitable as a country house for the families of his two brothers, my uncle Erhard, my father Eduard, and himself.“*

Bei der Jobsuche von Hans SUESS, dessen Promotion am 19. Juli 1935 war, zeigen sich wieder die Verbindungen seines Vaters. *„Fortunately, a former student of my father's, who had made a spectacular career in Germany had the chair in Geology in Munich and had become the equivalent of the chancellor of the University there. This former student, Prof. Leopold Kölbel [1895–1970], visited Vienna that winter and met with my father who told him about my plans. Kölbel, who was in good standing with the Nazi administration as the chancellor of the University, warned my father and me that Munich would be the*

worst place for me to get a job, as people there knew of my grandfather's liberal politics and his mother's Jewish background."

Über das Naziregime berichtet er wie folgt: *„In Vienna the spirit of the newly appointed Nazi leaders was quite different. Still, my good mother, a resolute Viennese housewife, was able to defend the door of our apartment against boys who wished to decorate it with the words „Jud Suess“ using red paint and paintbrushes.*

My father reached his compulsory retirement age of 70 in 1937, but had been retired one year early as a means of saving money. As a liberal protestant he had not been particularly cherished by the Schuschnigg government, and this was the real reason for this premature retirement. As expected, the Nazis relieved him of his affiliation with the Austrian Academy of Sciences, of which he had been a member since 1916.“ Hier gilt es zu präzisieren: Im Jahr 1911 wurde er zum korrespondierenden Mitglied und per Entschließung vom 29. August 1915 zum wirklichen Mitglied der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften gewählt (HUBMANN & SEIDL 2011c: 69).

Über einen Besuch in Hamburg schreibt er: *„In the fall of 1938, my parents came to visit me in Hamburg. I was staying at a pension that was mainly frequented by business men from South America. They judged the situation extremely pessimistically. I remember I rented a little Opel and drove with my parents on the autobahn to Lübeck and the Baltic Coast. My father enjoyed this trip tremendously and found the German scenery extremely beautiful. He said, „If only no war would occur and if the political unrest would cease, then there would be a wonderful future. But at present, Germany is like an airplane that can not stop. It must move at great speed or else it will crash“.*

Über seinen Tod schreibt er: *„During the course of 1939 my father had been suffering from a kidney infection that grew increasingly serious. I saw him for the last time during Christmas of 1939. Shortly after I had returned to Hamburg, he had to be admitted to a hospital where my mother visited him daily for many hours. Much to her regret, however, she was not present when he died on the early morning of Jan. 27, 1940. [sic!, richtig: 25. Jänner 1941] According to the nurse the last words he said were in English, „The ship is sinking.“*



Abb. 1: Franz Eduard Suess und Ehefrau Olga (Fotosammlung Stephen E. Suess).

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