

From Hackett.

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1939

Copy of Mrs. Schroedinger's Notes on Events leading up to
Professor Schroedinger's coming to Dublin in 1939

When my husband got the very honourable call to Berlin in 1927 as successor to Max Planck he said to me: "I don't know what is going to happen but I have the feeling that I am not staying in Berlin for decades." Planck held the chair uninterrupted for 40 years. My husband's feelings were right. In the summer 1933 we left Berlin for good and went to Oxford. Three years later in 1936 my husband got a call to Edinburgh and at the same time another one to Graz (Austria). It was rather difficult to choose, the decision fell on Graz. We gave up our nice little house in Oxford and moved to our house in the country. It never occurred to us that this step might turn out to be rather foolish, even dangerous. Many of our friends shook their heads and soon we understood their attitudes. In March 1938 Austria was invaded. Although my husband got several "invitations" to foreign countries, he was not allowed to accept them. It was more than unpleasant to watch the situation in our beloved country and especially in Graz, which was called "Stadt der Volkserhebung". Of course we wished we could leave Austria - but legally it was impossible so we had to stay and wait ... I spent most of the time in Vienna with my dear old mother and only came to Graz for short visits. On one of these occasions we got a letter from my mother with an enclosed slip of paper, a tiny slip not more than 4 x 5" with a few lines handwritten by somebody we did not know, approximately running like that: Mr. de Valéra intends to create an Institute for Advanced Studies. Would you be principally prepared to take up a post there. No signature - nothing.



A Dutchman on a visit to Vienna came to see my mother and told her about Mr. de Valéra's intention. As we were both in Graz my mother asked the Dutchman to write down this important information and he did so on a little piece of paper.

Now I will tell how this important slip of paper came into existence:

Mr. de Valéra was discussing the idea of an Institute with his friend Professor Whittaker in Edinburgh. Professor Whittaker was quite enthusiastic and thought it might be a good idea to start with theoretical Physics as this discipline would not be so expensive and there might be a chance to get Professor Schroedinger who certainly can't be very happy in Austria under the present political situation. Mr. de Valéra agreed. But now arose the very difficult question how to get in touch with Professor Schroedinger? Mr. de Valéra knew that it might be dangerous would it have been known that my husband is in communication with a foreign country. At this time letters were usually censored. This was the way how it was done: Professor Whittaker spoke about Mr. de Valéra's plans to his colleague Professor Max Born who then wrote to our common friend Professor Richard Baer in Zürich. Professor Baer asked a Dutch friend who just happened to go to Vienna to try to let my husband know about Mr. de Valéra's plans. As we were not in Vienna he went to see my mother, wrote the few lines down and was gone again. When we received the letter with this important little piece of paper we were speechless. We read the few lines over and over again - then we put a match to it and burnt it. A fortnight later I sat into my car and went to Konstanz (on the lake of Constance) which is near the Swiss border. There I met our friends Professor Baer and his wife. I thanked them very much for the most discreet information and asked them to let Mr. de Valéra know my husband's



definite answer "Yes". Baers went back to Zürich, they wrote to Professor Born, Professor Born told Professor Whittaker and Professor Whittaker told Mr. de Valéra - nothing more happened. The summer came and we went on holidays. Towards the end of August I spent a few weeks with my mother in Badgastern, there I met my husband near Salzburg and we went back to Graz in our car. On our arrival there we found a note in our letterbox that we should collect a registered letter from the post office. The letter contained only a few lines not more than 2 or three: my husband was dismissed. We were not at all sorry, our only thought was to leave the country as quick as possible. At that time Italy was the only country which could be reached without a visa. We left everything behind, we packed 3 suit cases and three days after receiving the official letter we went off to Rome. As my husband is a member of the Papal Academy we could not have found a better place for the first days of our voluntary exile! The Academy building is most beautiful situated in midst the Vatican gardens. From here my husband wrote a letter to Mr. de Valéra who happened to be in Geneva as President of the League of Nations. Forty-eight hours later the Irish Minister to the Holy See very kindly asked us to come to the Legation. We had a telephone call from Mr. de Valéra, who, after receiving the letter wanted to speak to my husband over the telephone. Mr. de Valéra also gave instructions to his Minister to provide the necessary visas for us and to help us in any way to leave the Continent for England as quick as possible with a short stay in Geneva. It took only five days and then we were ready to leave Rome. I felt already perfectly happy and safe, not so my husband and again he was right. In Iselle, the last Italian station before passing the Simplon Carabinieri entered our compartment holding in his



hands a slip of paper with our name written on. He told us to get out of the train with our luggage. I was shown into a dull waiting room where I was very carefully bodily examined by a woman who did not speak a word to me. I got excited and afraid about what might still happen. After the woman had finished the procedure I could sit down on a wooden bench and looked anxiously through the window longing to get away. Although it was only half an hour it seemed to me an eternity. At last I saw my husband entering the train and then I was called and allowed to enter the train too. We were speechless whilst we passed the Simplon and very glad when we arrived in Brieg, the first stop in Switzerland. My husband tried to find an explanation for the exciting interlude in Iselle, he thought it might have been as follows: in Domodossola the custom-officials saw our passports containing many visas through the Continent to the British Isles. To the question how much money we have with us we said 1 English pound - that was true. One was not allowed to take money out of Italy without an official permission. To obtain such an allowance would have taken more time than Mr. de Valéra wanted us to lose. In Geneva we knew we can get money from our Swiss friends, so we left Rome with £1 each given to us by the Irish Minister who also payed our tickets and sleepers to Geneva. No wonder the custom officials got suspicious, not knowing the details they just saw two persons on their way to England, travelling I Class with no money - hence they must smuggle something valuable in their luggage or on their bodies. As they found nothing whatsoever they had to let us pass and the Express-train had to wait for us.

With half an hour's delay we happily reached Geneva and felt like in paradise when we arrived at the Hotel de la Paix. Although Mr. de Valéra had



to take part in an official banquet in the evening he received us and we were overwhelmed by his kindness and the way he talked to us like an old friend. The next day he had several discussions with my husband, but as the political situation at that time was very critical, the danger of war imminent, Mr. de Valéra was anxious to get us to England as soon as possible.

On our journey through France the atmosphere was very excited. In London we heard the news that the Münchener-Konferenz will take place and that prevented the outbreak of a war at last for the very next future. We found refuge in Oxford. In November my husband visited Dublin. It was clear that it will take some time before the Institute could be started. Meanwhile my husband accepted an invitation to Belgium as a guest professor. The summer months we spent on the Belgian sea-side in La Panne and there we still were when the unfortunate war broke out on September 1st 1939. In the first week of October we got the letter from Mr. de Valéra asking us to come to Dublin at once. On October 7th we arrived in Dublin where we then spent 17 years - the longest period in my husband's academic career - happy and most thankful to Mr. de Valéra.

