

## Marianne Schnitger (1870-1954) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Married 1893.



Marianne and Max Weber, 1894

*Maximilian Weber was a seminal figure in sociology. Marianne Schnitger Weber was also a sociologist, and a feminist activist. Marianne was Max's first cousin once removed; his father's father was her mother's father's father. At the time of their courtship and marriage, Max was on the faculty of the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin.*

*The texts below are taken from Marianne's 1926 biography of her husband, Max Weber: A Biography, trans. Harry Zohn. In the biography, Marianne refers to herself in the third person.*

The charm of the Baumgarten home<sup>1</sup> was further enhanced by two fine daughters. When Weber came to Strasbourg, the older one, eighteen-year-old Emmy, had blossomed into a girl of great loveliness. She was remarkably dainty and delicate, intelligent and lively, a young madonna with a crown of blonde tresses above her narrow, oval face. Her soul and her heart were entirely in the Fallenstein manner: absolutely pure and self-denying, profound and unselfish. But she had also inherited the nervous problems of her mother and grandmother, and at an early age exhaustion and melancholia began to overshadow her youth.

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<sup>1</sup>Weber was close to his aunt (his mother's sister) and uncle, Ida and Hermann Baumgarten and often visited their house during his student days and afterward.

The young one-year soldier was profoundly touched by her loveliness, charm, and animation, and he confided in her in a tender, brotherly friendship. Without suspecting it, she was one of his guardian angels in those days. Military exercises took him back to Strasbourg on several occasions—first in the spring of 1885, then in 1887. In the meantime he cultivated his relationship with the Baumgarten house by corresponding with Hermann and Ida. In 1886 he began exchanging letters with Emmy as well, and when the young people met again during the second officers' exercises, a restrained affection sprang up between them. Weber was now twenty-three years old and had just become a Referendar [junior barrister]; for the first time Eros had touched him deeply.

Ida's motherly heart sensed what was going on with conflicting emotions. She loved this unusual nephew like a son, as did her husband, but she feared the disaster of a love match between such close relatives. ... And so, to forestall danger, Ida sent Emmy to Waldkirch to stay with her brother Otto for a while. But Weber followed her there, and the young people spent a few days of sweet closeness in the poetry of spring. They felt that they were in love with each other, but no word was spoken, and they remained at a chaste distance. Only at parting did a warm stream of tears moisten the young man's eyes for an instant.

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*[A year later, Emmy gave up hope of marrying Max.]*

Not only his empathy with his mother's spiritual life but the fate of his girl friend as well gave Weber a deeper understanding of the special problems of a woman's life, a life in which service to others does not produce objective achievements, but is constantly obliterated by the passage of time. During those years the depression and physical exhaustion from which his girl friend suffered more frequently and more acutely oppressed him too. She suffered all the more from the limitations imposed upon her by illness because, like Helene and Ida, she was naturally inclined to serve and help others.

Just a year after the beautiful spring they had spent together, she decided to give up the man she secretly loved. She could not even be sure that he still loved her. His letters, which were intimate in a brotherly way, did not give her an unequivocal answer. But even if he did, she came to doubt more and more whether she would get well and be a worthy life's companion to him. Under no condition would she tie him down or give him any indication that she was waiting for him. She was out of his sight, and for years the two young people made no attempt to see each other again. Their exchange of letters became less frequent, and the image of the girl friend faded. But Weber did not break away from her inwardly. After all, there still was hope that one day she would reemerge in good health and, with her old charm, give him

a radiant smile. He left everything in abeyance. Because the nature of such illnesses was then little known, he secretly had the guilty feeling that his own indecisiveness was the cause, that she was withering away because of unrequited love. And with every year he became more convinced that if he could not cure the girl and make her happy, he had no right to full human happiness either. There also gradually developed a mysterious feeling, from his innermost being, that it was not given to him to make a woman happy.

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*[Marianne Schnitger's mother died when she was two or three, and her father had severe psychological problems; eventually he and two of his brothers were institutionalized. Marianne was brought up by her grandmother and aunt in poverty and hardship in their house in Lemgo, a small town in central Germany. When she was 16, her father, Karl Weber, sent her to finishing school. She graduated when she was 19.]*

Marianne studied eagerly and learned a great deal; she developed intellectual appetite and ambition, heard and saw genuine works of art, and compared herself with others. When she left Hannover at the age of almost nineteen, she had become a cultured person with exacting standards in every respect and was alienated from the limited conditions of a provincial city. She no longer belonged in that framework; when her grandmother died, no one wanted to keep her in that town, for there was nothing to satisfy her lust for life. Her former schoolmates were already struggling with the barrenness of an unfulfilled youth, slowly wasting away with unsatisfied longing for fulfillment in marriage, something achieved by only a few in that small-town society. For the young men went away, often for good, or else they returned with a wife. ...

Now Marianne was homeless. ... [Her mother] Anna's younger sister Alwine, a kindly, serious woman with many children, whose husband had become a partner in the family business, lovingly took Marianne in, In this very harmonious family circle she was supposed to prepare herself for the future tasks of being a housewife and mother by helping around the house. It seemed to be high time for this. She was sure to find a suitable husband some day, even though in the country the prospects were not exactly favorable for a girl with her high intellectual standards. But Marianne's disposition was not typical, and she inwardly rebelled against the traditional fate of girls. The small domestic duties in a household that did not really need her help seemed unimportant to her. She had no capacity for this kind of work, and to help by serving others was an effort for her.

The smooth but uneventful flow of rural life in which the men devote themselves to their businesses and the women to the home and the children offered nothing to her

aspiring intellect and passion for life. There was nothing to develop her own strength, and she felt that her life was condemned to stand still. The days did not stream by, they crept by. She was almost sick with boredom and was profoundly unhappy, but felt guilty about it. The family sensed her alienation with mounting discomfort and would have liked to help, but did not know how. Unfortunately the girl did not at all conform to the hallowed ideal of femininity that the men believed in, an ideal that had shaped all the women of this group, and evidently her stay at the institute, with its highly organized work and all its stimulation, had also spoiled her for country living!

What now? A career? Surely that was not necessary. A profession for a woman made sense only if she was poor and had to forgo all prospects of marriage. Karl Weber's granddaughter need not and must not earn any money; what would people think? Marianne was at her wit's end. ...

When Marianne was twenty-one, the Charlottenburg family took pity on her and invited her to spend a few weeks with them during the winter. Now she could get her fill of the intellectual atmosphere of their house and the cultural treasures of the big city. The quick rhythm of Berlin life surged through her veins; *this at last was living!* She could hardly take everything in. The assessor, Max, took her to her first ball and benevolently uncled [*beonkelt*] her. For the first time she met a group of lively young men. Of them all, her three grown cousins seemed to her to be the most impressive and the most distinguished. The two younger cousins were extremely handsome, but the assessor was not. He did not attach any importance to his appearance. He was corpulent, his pear-shaped head bore fencing scars, and his hair was cut short. His delicately curved lips were in strange contrast to his large, unshapely nose, and his dark eyes were often hidden by his overlapping eyebrows.

No, this colossus was neither handsome nor youthful, but in his every gesture he was powerful and manly, and despite his massiveness he had a subtle grace of movement. What elasticity in his stride, what expressiveness in his hands! Now and then his eyes would show flashes of kindness, anger, or mischief, and occasionally his peculiar aloofness gave way to liberating humor, sympathetic understanding, and chivalrous kindness.

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When after an interval of a year and a half Marianne saw the assessor again, she immediately knew how she felt, and she also knew that she would be able to stay near him only if no one suspected that she was in love. She also heard about the delicate, lovely Emmy, her mysterious illness, and her closeness to [*Max's mother*] Helene. The rest she surmised. The secret did not bother her at all; for the time being, all she wanted was to be near the man she loved. In the fall of 1892 Weber traveled south for the first reunion in five years with his girl friend, who had found a second home in a beautiful sanatorium. She could increasingly bring her illness under control and was

now able to help other patients. When he told Marianne about this, she felt that he had visited Emmy in order to find out how they felt about each other — and that he was finished with the past. She could not help but ask herself why this had happened at that particular time. Now her feelings were beginning to assume a clearer outline and she began to hope for fulfillment.

But the road there went along an abyss. A friend of Max, whom Helene was mothering, courted Marianne. The girl was too dazed to be aware of this; she noticed only that her cousin was changing and withdrawing into his shell again. Helene ardently wanted her young friend and Marianne to marry, a union in which she saw great happiness for both. And her “eyes were holden” [Luke 24:16], all the more so because she was still hoping for a marriage between Max and Emmy. After all, Max had visited Emmy, and this had been followed by the news that the girl was slowly getting well. Marianne was given away without being asked. Hopeless confusion ensued. Helene felt responsible to her young friend, and her guilty feelings toward him brought her to the point of a nervous breakdown. The situation demanded renunciation all around, which seemed to be the only dignified and bearable thing to do. Weber wrote a letter to Marianne which like no other document illuminates the fate of his youth and his nature in those years.

Read this letter, Marianne, when you are calm and composed, for I have things to tell you that you may not be prepared to hear. You believe — I think — that we are through with each other and that I shall banish you to the still, cool harbor of resignation in which I myself have lain at anchor for years. But that is not so.

First this: If we understand each other at all, I need not tell you that I shall never dare to offer a girl my hand like a free gift. Only if I myself am under the divine compulsion of complete, unconditional devotion do I have a right to demand and accept it for myself. I am telling you this so that you will not misunderstand what follows. And now listen.

As you yourself realize, I have known you for only a very short time, for you have been a mystery to me in many respects which I now understand. But you do not know me, you cannot possibly know me. You do not see how I try, with difficulty and varying success, to tame the elemental passions with which nature has endowed me. But ask my mother; I know well that her love for me — which forces me to silence, because I cannot repay it — is rooted in the fact that morally I used to be her problem child. For years the idea that the rich heart of a girl could come close to my sober nature never occurred to me. This is why I was blind and certain of my opinion even in your case.

When I watched my friend's affection for you grow and thought I saw signs of your returning it, I was not able to understand why more than once

an obscure oppressive feeling—something like sadness—came over me when I looked at you and thought that I would have to see you go through life at his or another man's side. I took it for the selfish feeling of someone who has given up at the sight of another person's happiness, and I suppressed that feeling. But it was something else. You know what it was. The word must not pass my lips, for I have a double debt to pay to the past and do not know whether I am able to do so. You know about both, but I have to speak about this nevertheless.

First, the events of the last difficult days. Both of us, although the guilt is mine alone, have impaired my friend's happiness, and more severely than you are able to fathom now. His pure figure stands between us. He knows what I am writing you now, and he is manly and rational. But I do not know if and when the time will come when he could look into your eyes without embarrassment or a feeling of resignation, and with lively sympathy, if you stood before him as the wife of another man. For as long as this is not so, I could never build my own life's happiness on his resignation, for a shadow from the past would fall over the feelings that I would be able to offer to the wife at my side. But I must speak of even more difficult matters.

From my mother you know that six years ago I came close to what I now regard as the pure heart of a girl who resembles you in some respects and is dissimilar in others. But you do not know the full weight of the responsibility that I assumed when I was still half a boy in my relationship with girls. I did not recognize it myself until late, and it is a lifetime responsibility. She knew better than I what my situation was; I did not realize this until later. For a long time I was not sure whether we were through with each other. In order to know it for certain I went to Stuttgart last fall. I saw her, the appearance and voice of old, and it was as if some invisible hand were extinguishing her image deep in my heart, for the figure that approached me was different from the one that had lived in me, as though it were from another world. Why that was so I do not know. We parted — so I thought — for life.

Then, at Christmastime, I heard that the doctors were not able to find the cause of her continuing illness and had come to the conclusion that she was *still* secretly in love. So I am searching my heart in vain for a definitive answer to this question: Is it possible that when I thought I was helping her overcome her feeling for me (provided it existed), I was actually arousing hopes in her? Now comes the news that she is beginning to get well, and believes that she is, and I am doubly oppressed by the uncertainty as to whether it is hope or renunciation that is strengthening her nerves. Whatever the reason, I could not accept cool renunciation or resignation from her either. I cannot be dead for her if I am to live for

another, and that is why I must look into her eyes and see whether her heart beats sympathetically when I receive from another girl the happiness that she would have given me if prejudices, my outward hopelessness in my tedious period as a Referendar, and also my weakness had not intervened. But when will that day come? I do not know.

And now I ask you: have you inwardly renounced me in recent days? Or resolved to do so? Or are you doing it now! If not, then it will be too late, we shall then be bound to each other, and I shall be hard toward you and not spare you. I say to you: I shall take the course that I must and which you now know. And you will take it with me. Where it will lead, how far it is, whether it will lead us together on this earth, I do not know. And even though I now know how great and strong you are, you proud girl, you may still succumb, for if you go with me, you will not only bear your burden but mine as well, and you are not used to taking such paths. Therefore, test both of us.

But I believe I know how you will decide. The tidal wave of passion runs high, and it is dark around us — come with me, my high-minded comrade, out of the quiet harbor of resignation, out onto the high seas, where men grow in the struggle of souls and the transitory is sloughed off. But bear in mind: in the head and heart of the mariner there must be clarity when all is surging underneath him. We must not tolerate any fanciful surrender to unclear and mystical moods in our souls. For when feeling rises high, you must control it to be able to steer yourself with sobriety.

If you will go with me, then do not answer me. In that case I shall quietly press your hand when I see you again and not cast down my eyes before you, something that you should not do either.

Farewell; life is coming down hard on you, you misunderstood child. This is all I shall say to you now: I thank you for the wealth you have brought into my life, and my thoughts are with you. And now once more: Come with me, I know that you will come.

When Marianne read this letter, she was profoundly shaken by a sense of the ineffable and eternal. She asked nothing further. From then on her life was to be a thanksgiving for the gift of this hour. But oh, how hard it was to wait when the ecstasy had subsided, for now renunciation had been transformed into hope. ... A few months after the event — the time seemed long — Max and Marianne were permitted to become engaged.

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In early autumn a great family wedding took place at Oerlinghausen. Wina [Alwine], the loving and graceful mistress of a flourishing clan with whom the bride

had spent her tortured girlhood, was delighted to be able to open her beautiful country estate to so many important guests. Since her engagement the local family had been very pleased with Marianne. Helene and her family were dearly loved there, and the Privatdozent [adjunct lecturer] was already admired as the distinguished man with a “future.” Who would have thought that this peculiar girl would draw such a lot in life?