

Gregor Mendel's Autobiography

[Translated from the German by Mrs. Hugo Iltis, Curator of the Mendel Museum, Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia, Fredericksburg, Virginia.]

PRAISEWORTHY Imperial and Royal Examination Commission!

In accordance with the high regulations of the Ministry of Public Worship and Education, the respectfully undersigned submits a short sketch of his life.

The same was (in accordance with enclosure A) born in the year 1822 in Heinzendorf in Silesia, where his father was the owner of a small farm. After he had received elementary instruction at the local village school, and later at the Piarist's College [upper elementary school] in Leipnik, he was admitted in the year 1834 to the first grammatical class of the Imperial Royal Gymnasium in Troppau. Four years later, due to several successive disasters, his parents were completely unable to meet the expenses necessary to continue his studies, and it therefore happened that the respectfully undersigned, then only sixteen years old, was in the sad position of having to provide for himself entirely. For this reason, he attended the course for "School Candidates [applicants] and Private Teachers" at the district Teacher's Seminary in Troppau. Since, following his examination, he was highly recommended in the qualification report (enclosure B), he succeeded by private tutoring during the time of his humanities studies in earning a scanty livelihood.

When he graduated from the Gymnasium in the year 1840, his first care was to secure for himself the necessary means for the continuation of his studies. Because of this, he made repeated attempts in Olmütz, to offer his services as a private teacher, but all his efforts remained unsuccessful because of lack of friends and recommendations. The sorrow over these disappointed hopes and the anxious, sad outlook which the future offered him, affected him so powerfully at that time, that he fell sick and was compelled to spend a year with his parents to recover.

In the following year the respectfully undersigned found himself finally placed in the desired position of being able to satisfy at least his most necessary wants by private teaching in Olmütz, and thus to continue his studies. By a mighty effort, he succeeded in completing the two years of philosophy (enclosures D, E, F, G). The respectfully undersigned realized that it was impossible for him to endure such exertions any further. Therefore, after having finished his philosophical studies, he felt himself compelled to step into a station of life, which would free him from the bitter struggle for existence. His circumstances decided his vocational choice. He requested and received in the year 1843 admission to the Augustinian Monastery St. Thomas in Altbrünn.

Through this step, his material circumstances changed completely. With the comfortableness of his physical existence, so beneficial to any kind of study, the respectfully undersigned regained his courage and strength and he studied the classical subjects prescribed devotion. In the spare hours, he occupied himself with the small botanical-mineralogical collection which was placed at his disposal in the monastery. His special liking for the field of natural science deepened the more he had the opportunity to become familiar with it. Despite his lack of any oral guidance in these studies, plus the fact that the auto-didactic method here, as perhaps in no other science, is extremely difficult and leads to the

goal only slowly, he became so attached to the study of nature from this time on that he will not spare any effort to fill the gaps that are still present through self instruction and the advice of experienced men. In the year 1846, he also attended courses in agriculture, pomiculture, and wine-growing at the Philosophical Academy in Brünn (enclosure, H, I, K).

After completing the theological studies in 1848, the respectfully undersigned received permission from his prelate to prepare himself for the philosophical rigorosum [examination for the Doctor of Philosophy degree]. In the following year at the time when he was about to undergo his examination, he was asked to accept the position of a substitute teacher at the Imperial Royal Gymnasium in Znaim, and he followed this call with pleasure. From the beginning of his substitute teaching, he made all efforts to present his assigned subjects to the students in an easily comprehensible manner. He hopes his endeavor was not quite without success since, during that private tutoring to which he owed his bread for four years, he found sufficient opportunity to collect experiences regarding the possible accomplishments of the students and the different grades of their mental capacity.

The respectfully undersigned believes to have rendered with this a short summary of his life's history. His sorrowful youth taught him early the serious aspects of life, and taught him also to work. Even while he enjoyed the fruits of a secure economic position, the wish remained alive within him to be permitted to earn his living. The respectfully undersigned would consider himself happy if he could conform with the expectations of the praiseworthy Board of Examiners and gain the fulfillment of his wish. He would certainly then shun no effort and sacrifice to comply with his duties most punctually.

Znaim, on the 17th April 1850

*Gregor Mendel
Subst. Professor
on the Imp. Roy. Gym. in Znaim*