

STROKE OF FATE*

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Orphanhood. It happened on Sunday, 14 August 1701. Daniel and Concordia decided to escape from the stuffiness of the summer heat in the city and moved to their summer house with agarden in Winniki, outside the outer fortifications. The reason is not known: some say they got poisoned by eating mushrooms, according to others they ate some sort of poison instead of a medicine. Anyway, it ended tragically. They both died suffering terribly. The five children lost their parents. The oldest, 15-year old Daniel Gabriel, received a responsibility too heavy for his age – he suddenly became the head of the family. It was difficult to expect any help from relatives. The grandparents were long dead. There were no uncles or aunts on any side who could have taken care of the orphans. The half-brothers Jacob and Christian – Concordia’s sons from the first marriage – were still too young. Those godparents who were still alive were obliged to help. Natural interest in the welfare of the children also came from the father’s trade partners. The Fahrenheits did not leave their last will. The accident was widely talked about, so the city authorities, among which there were some further relatives on the mother’s side, felt obliged to intervene.

First of all there was the funeral to be organized. The sad ceremony took place on Tuesday, 23 of August 1701 at St Mary’s Church. Since 20 October 1694 Daniel Fahrenheit, “according to the document from the mayor’s office” had the right to “the whole stone” number 362, which meant he was the only “proprietor” of the grave under the slab of that number. They were buried next to the many members of the wife’s family, and their 5 dead children. Studying the registers, which survived till our times, we can look at the history of that grave, starting with the year 1556, when it belonged to Gottschalk Temme. In 1565 the rights to it were obtained by Georg

* The following pages are taken from the book “Dzieciństwo i młodość Daniela Gabriela Fahrenheita” (The Childhood and Youth of Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit) by Andrzej Januszajtis, which appeared in 2002.

Glassky, and in 1628 by Martin Dassow (Dassau), Concordia's cousin grandfather. In 1640 the latter buried here his mother Elisabeth (Concordia's great-grandmother), and in 1656 his brother Georg (her grandfather). Next year an entry appears in the register "Peter Köpe – half the stone (that meant the grave) [...] Michael Schumann (Concordia's father) and Hans Dassow (the youngest of the cousin grandfathers) – the other half of it". In 1664 Michael Schumann and Hans Dassow "took over the other half, and since then the whole stone belongs to them". Köpe's widow Maria retained the right to her part of the grave, because in 1671, when she died at the age of 84, she was buried here. As has already been mentioned, earlier – in 1665 (8th May) Concordia's mother, Elisabeth, was buried here at the age of 33, and in 1673 (12th October) her father. In 1694 Daniel Fahrenheit became the owner of the grave. Since the 4th October 1690 he was also the owner of halves of the neighboring graves number 431 and 488 in the north nave.

Let us now move to the mourning house, whose façade and threshold have been adorned with pall, and white canvas were hanged out in the top window. It is two o'clock. In front of the house the pupils of St. Mary's School start singing the chorale "Among life death embraces us" and other mourning songs. The doors open and the men in black carry on their shoulders two coffins covered with black and white shrouds, and the procession starts moving towards the church. The order is strict. The coffins are followed by the closest relatives – children, wearing long black frocks. There are seven of them: the 15-year old Daniel Gabriel, 2 years younger Efraim, Anna Concordia, who will be 12 soon, 10-year old Constantin, the crying 7-year old Virginia Elisabeth, and Concordia's two sons of the previous marriage – nearly 20-year old Jacob, and younger Christian. After them goes the procession of no more than 40 people. Accompanied by the bells' melodies they reach the church, cross the porch called the Hall, and stop in the south nave, where the church grave-digger has already opened the grave by the third pillar from the naves' crossing, by the feet of the aldermen stall, which at that time was situated in front of the chapel of Holy Mary Priests' Brotherhood. By the same pillar in the main nave there is the bench in which the family used to seat for masses.

The ceremony starts. The school choir sings two psalms, the parson says a funeral sermon, the friends remember the merits of the dead, and then the grave-diggers lower the coffins to the grave, lift the heavy plate and cover the opening. Some sobbing can be heard, the pupils sing the last psalm. The bells' chimes can be heard over all this. Finally the invited ones come back to the house for the funeral banquet – a modest one since the rules forbid to indulge in any luxury.

The entry in the church registers describes the whole ceremony in a short, dry note:

1701, 23 August,

Daniel Fahrenheit's wife, 44, fine, stalls, own grave number 362,

Crypt, 12 fl.

Daniel Fahrenheit, 45, fine, own grave number 362, 9 fl.

The 10-mark fine mentioned in the note had to be paid if the body remained not buried for longer than 2 nights after death. In the case of sudden death the delay was understandable, as it was necessary to perform abduction, yet, as we see, this

was no excuse from paying the “delay” fine. The church cost of the funeral of that class, according to the official tariff, was 10 marks 5 grosz, so two bodies with the fine made 40 marks 10 grosz = 27 florins (1 mark = 20 grosz, 1 fl = 1.5 mark = 30 grosz). The Fahrenheits had a discount, yet the full cost, with the coffin, pupils singing, and so on, could amount to 65 fl per person.

Under the guardians’ supervision. Eight days after the funeral of the parents the mayors and the Gdansk City Council appointed guardians for the orphans:

We announce that for the 5 under age children of the late Daniel Fahrenheit, named Daniel Gabriel, Ephraim, Anna Concordia, Constantin, and Virginia Elisabeth, we appoint and hereby approve as guardians the respectable Bruno Plander, Beniamin Hedding and Daniel Nützmann, to take care of the above mentioned under age and their possessions with all their honesty and diligence, as it is required from the guardians by the law. At our city hall on 31st of August 1701.

Who were the guardians? We have already mentioned Bruno Plander (1657–1729) as a provisional, managing, together with Fahrenheit, St. Jacob’s Hospital. He was among the friends of the family: in 1695 he was the godfather of Adelgunda Constantia. Similarly to Daniel, he was also a charterer. In 1687–1699 he had his share in 7 ships. Daniel Nützmann (1657–1707) was equally close to the Fahrenheit family. In 1687 his sister Elisabeth was the godmother for Salomon Godfried. He himself came from a chartering family, and after Daniel Fahrenheit’s death he took over the function of a provisional of St. Jacob’s hospital. Beniamin Hedding (1659–1717) was not closely related to the Fahrenheits. His father, Baltasar, was a specialist in fortification construction, a co-author of the project of their extension at Bishops’ Hill and Grodzisko. Beniamin himself was simply an honest, respectable citizen. A year after he started to care for the orphans he became the principal of the Holy Trinity Church.

The first task of the guardians was to settle the property problems and assess the inheritance. In the case of no will being left the law was to divide the inheritance equally among the successors, after their coming of age.

Some of the actions undertaken by the guardians can be traced from the Gdansk legal registers from the years 1701–1702. At the same time they give us the picture of the extent and kind of business that Daniel Fahrenheit was interested in while he was still alive. Among others we get to know the name of the person he co-operated with. It was Ulrich Isenhut (1646–1712) connected through the wife Constantia Amende (1654–1698) with the influential Barkhusen family, with which the Fahrenheits were in good relationship, as two of the family members were the godparents of the Fahrenheits’ children, as was Isenhut – the godfather for Virginia Elisabeth. So, already in 1694 he could be Daniel’s partner.

The most burning matter was to ensure the orphans a home. Did the godparents help in that? Because of the lack of official data we are left to wonder. Daniel Gabriel’s godfather, councilor Gabriel von Bömmeln, was wealthy enough to accept him into his home, maybe together with Ephraim, whose godparents were already dead. This could also be done by his brother, Georg, married to Concordia’s cousin, Anna

Constantia Schumann, or by Dorothea Elisabeth Schlieff – now the wife of councilor Constantin Friedrich Ferber. Neither of them had any children, so it was easier for them than for von Bömmeln, who had four children of his own. Anna Concordia could be living by her godfather, the secretary of the City Council, Johan Heinrich Oloff – others were dead. Konstanty could be accepted by the Old City Councilor Ludwik Scheweke, the nephew of the great-grandmother of the orphans, Anna Greverath. In the case of Virginia Elisabeth we rather cannot count upon the above mentioned Isenhut, a widower (since 1698), rearing his children on his own. So the remaining person was Virginia Renata Stüve – the childless daughter of the famous doctor of medicine Johan Schmidt, the godfather for Johan David Fahrenheit. She was a wife of a doctor herself (also her brother Johan Gabriel was a doctor). Another possibility, although a less probable one, was Katharina Elisabeth Dassau, one of Concordia Fahrenheit's grandfathers' widow. We do not know the real division of the family. Anyway, the necessity of being separated and having to live in different houses must have been very painful for the orphans.

The merchant company of Daniel Fahrenheit and Ulrich Isenhut was not limited to trade. It also obliged Polish magnates with loans. As can be understood from the files of the Council, they lent money twice to “Jan Aleksander Radziwiłł, prince of Ołyka and Nieśwież, count of Klecko *etc.*”. The first time, on 7 July 1698, it was 18 thousand, the second time, on 19 May 1700, 3 thousand of florins. To settle the matter the prince sent his plenipotentiary who presented the Council with “a letter signed and sealed by the prince” that read as follows:

I, prince Radziwiłł, cup-bearer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, starost of Lida, etc., give it for the knowledge of all the interested parties, that I am sending my servant, Mr. Jakub Skalski to Gdansk, to buy some things according to my register, and I am giving him hereby the full power and freedom to discuss with Mr. Daniel Fahrenheit and with Mr. Ulryk Isenhut the case of the silvers being the security on a certain written sum, to give him back some silver tableware, and to help him with as much money as will be needed, on the written agreement. On the same agreement shall Mr. Skalski give the gentlemen his own obligation, which he had received from me in blank, that I shall be obliged to pay the two gentlemen the surplus next spring from the received money (which I shall get for rye); and if the two above mentioned gentlemen do not want to help my servant in that matter, then I give him of my own free will the full power to take away all the silverware and to place it elsewhere, and to make some other arrangements, according to my knowledge, both for getting back the silverware and for the money necessary to pay the costs according to my register. The same Mr. Skalski is free to take away all the silver according to the register, present the above-mentioned gentlemen with a receipt, and take over all the documents. At the end I hereby sign the document myself and seal it with my seal. Dan in Czarnowijce, 16th October, 1701.

Jan Prince Radziwiłł

The creditors gave back all the silver according to a specification and received 21 thousand florins. On 16th December 1701 the document was signed by Mr. Skalski, Isenhut and all the three guardians of the orphans. The transaction was implemented on 5th January 1702. The prince was represented by Skalski, the other party by Daniel Davisson, whom we have already met as the ship owner, co-owner of the “Gilded Lad”.

The guardians as well appeared in front of the councilors. The parties were obliged to have no more reservations. The Council heard the declarations, looked into the letters of procuratory and receipts, and approved the contract, which came into force. By the way, it would be interesting to see what the silverware was like, that it was the equivalent of a quarter of a million of the present zloty!

Let us quote one more entry from 28th January 1701: “Ms. Katharina von Beuningen, Abraham Clement’s widow, in the presence of Matthias Clement states her agreement and satisfaction that [the sum of] 2000 florins that was assigned to her late husband on the 1/4 of the granary called the Cock, that belonged to Daniel Fahrenheit, be cleared from the land register also in her absence”. We will meet the Gdansk-Amsterdam von or van Beuningen family again on the pages of this book.

There is also another matter that the guardians had to settle, and which may be a proof of the extent of financial operations of the deceased and of his co-operator. That was obtaining 1800 guilders from the city of Grudziadz that were borrowed from the city of Toruń. The company Fahrenheit et Isenhut obtained a suitable bond, of course not for free. The council of Grudziadz did not want to pay the money back, so the guardians had to ask the Councilor and the Council of Gdansk to put certain pressure on them through the mediator of the city at the king’s court “to protect the minors and to demonstrate the power of protection that the Notorious, Venerated, Wise and Mighty Councilors always kindly show to all the orphans under age, as well as we do”. We do not know whether such intervention really took place.

Some of the cases needed many years to be settled. Still in 1709 Joachim Braun, a lieutenant for the city, asked to get back the 1500 florins which were borrowed to a Nataniel Graus by the just deceased Heinrich Ocker, who in turn owed money to Braun. Ocker asked Daniel Fahrenheit to collect the money, and in November 1700 the latter one managed to obtain 500 florins. He supposedly took “an exceptionally high interest on that”, which, according to Braun, obliged him to collect the rest of the debt as well. In the explanation considered by the Council on 10th December 1709, the guardians refused to answer the claims.

Let us mention here another important deed of the guardians: on 3rd March 1702 they sold the house “in Ogarna street, walking down, fol. Number 32A, with the wall separating the allotment from Albrecht Stiper’s one”. The buyer was Johan Ernst Seyler, represented by Kaspar David Schaum.

Finally, the same year they settled all the matters with Isenhut. From the documents we learn that the company did business with the Netherlands – most probably with Amsterdam.

Translation: Anna Kucharska-Raczunas

