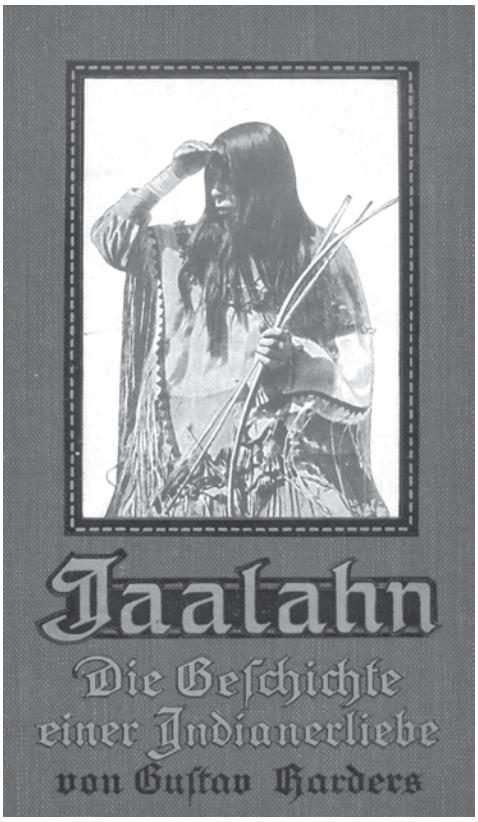
Man on a Mission: Reverend J. F. G. Harders

Kevin Kurdylo



When I began working at the Max Kade Institute in 2001, one of the first German-American books I became aware of was *Jaalahn. Die Geschichte einer Indianerliebe*, written by Gustav Harders and first published in 1911 by Rauhes Haus in Hamburg, and then again in 1913 by Northwestern Publishing House in Milwaukee. The book was mentioned in an article on the interest Germans have in Native Americans.[1] On the first page of the book, one learns that "*Jaalahn* bedeutet *Auf Wiedersehen*!" (*Jaalahn* means "Till We Meet Again").

It wasn't until the fall of 2012, when I added *Wohin? Ein Geleitswort auf den Lebensweg für die konfirmierte Jugend* (1897) to our library, that I came to think more about the author of *Jaalahn*. Both titles had been published by Northwestern, but while the author of the book about love among the Indians was Gustav Harders, the guidebook for confirmands was attributed to "J. F. G. Harders." Wondering if these writers were the same person, I began to investigate, quickly discovering that, indeed, the same man had written these two books, and many more besides.

Johann Friedrich Gustav Harders was born December 18, 1864, in Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein, to Heinrich Harders and Henriette Gerstenkorn Harders. After completing his elementary and gymnasium education in Kiel, he worked as a teacher at institutions for troubled boys in Riga and then in Liepaja, both in modern-day Latvia. These early positions were secured through Rauhes Haus, a social service agency in Hamburg. Then, for reasons as yet undiscovered, Harders emigrated to the United States in August of 1887, a passenger aboard the steamship Bohemia. According to one source, "[B]efore Harders set sail, he stopped at Rauhes Haus. The manager of the organization's publishing arm, a family friend, urged Harders to give Rauhes Haus first rights to his writings."[2] This agreement proved beneficial to Rauhes Haus and its ability to do good work, as Jaalahn was reportedly something of a best-seller in Germany when it appeared in 1911.

After arriving in New York in 1887, Harders made his way to Milwaukee, that most German of American cities. There he met Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, who persuaded him to study for the ministry. The day after he completed his training at Milwaukee's Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1889, Harders was ordained and installed as pastor of Milwaukee's newly established Jerusalem Lutheran Church (now St. Philip's) at the corner of Holton and Chambers. He immediately also began teaching the 74 children in the congregation's school until other teachers could be found. In November of 1889, Harders married Isabella Schmidt, born August 8, 1866, in Racine, Wisconsin, to John Schmidt (born in Holstein) and Louise Lisch Schmidt (born in Mecklenburg). The first of Gustav and Isabella's many children (at least seven) was their daughter Irmgard, born in 1891, the same year Gustav became the first editor of *Kinderfreude*, an illustrated monthly journal for Lutheran children that was published by Northwestern. His interest in children and his aptitude for writing are evidenced by the number of books he published during his years in Milwaukee. They were all either religious or for children (and frequently both); three dealt with topics related to the celebration of Christmas, one was about Christopher Columbus and the discovery of America, and one was about Gustavus Adolphus, who as king of Sweden intervened to help German Lutherans during the Thirty

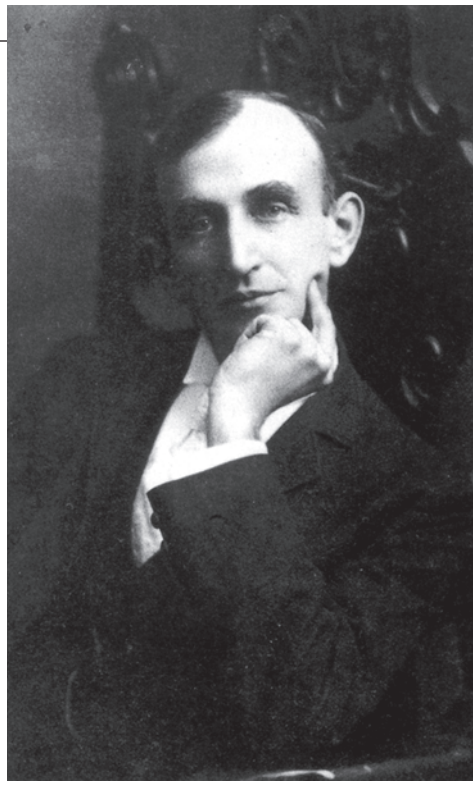
Years War.

In 1896, Harders was naturalized as a U.S. citizen, with Christian Koerner and Emil A. Wegner (both apparently Milwaukee pharmacists and active Lutherans) as witnesses. The same year Harders applied for a passport; he is described as being six feet and two inches in height, with greyish-blue eyes, a roman nose, and a bearded chin—though he is clean-shaven in the only photo I have been able to find of him. Other descriptions indicate he was "a poet and eccentric"[3] and "a master of German prose as well as a consecrated missionary."[4] He also suffered from an unspecified affliction.

Twice during his nineteen years at Jerusalem, Pastor Harders requested a leave of absence because of a recurring voice and throat ailment. Hoping a different climate might provide relief, he first spent a short time in Colorado and later nearly a year in Peridot, Arizona, staying with his friend Carl Guenther, who was among the first missionaries to the Apache Indians. Harders did return to Milwaukee and to his congregation, but "it became evident that a permanent change of climate was needed."[5] Thus, in 1907, he accepted a call from the synod (possibly arranged specifically to address his health condition) to become superintendent of the Apache Mission in the town of Globe, Arizona. Globe was a mining town on the edge of the San Carlos Reservation, and many Apaches—as well as members of other ethnic groups—had gone there seeking work, both in the mines and on the construction of the Roosevelt Dam.

Several accounts emphasize that Harders had an affinity for and deep empathy with peoples of other cultures; he unfailingly attempted to befriend and bring religious comfort to "Indians, Mexicans, Negroes, Japanese, Chinese, or Filipinos"[6] whenever he encountered them. Soon after his arrival in Globe, Harders used private funds and scrap lumber to build a chapel named "New Jerusalem." Attempting to connect with the Apaches through education and meals, he also constructed a schoolroom and a dining room. Some books in German were donated by Georg Brumder of Milwaukee, while students were often fed left-overs and scraps he collected from hotels and local restaurants.[7] "Miss Irmgard," Harders's first daughter, who had recently graduated from the new Lutheran High School in Milwaukee (which Harders had helped to found in 1903), was a teacher there, while his second daughter, "Miss Hilde," helped with the meals and taught Bible classes. The four young Harders boys ran errands. The members of the family were busy, though there are indications they suffered from isolation and loneliness.

Although it is reported that Harders never mastered English, he was fluent in German, Russian, and French, and he struggled to learn the Apache language so that he could preach to them in their native tongue. He was also able to communicate well enough in Chinese to provide religious instruction to a group of Chinese laborers in Globe.[8] Despite the difficulties of his missionary work and his fragile health, Harders would awaken before the family and spend the early morning hours writing, usually while



Johann Friedrich Gustav Harders

smoking a pipe. Because the pipe would frequently go out, a heap of burnt matches would often greet his wife when she came to set the table for breakfast.[9] Harders wrote short stories, missionary reports, and three novels in German that featured Native Americans: *Jaalahn*, *La Paloma*, and *Wille wider Wille*.[10] All feature a fictional missionary preaching in Arizona, and all provide sharp and sometimes disturbing insights into the life, thoughts, and spirit of the Apaches, while also revealing Harders' deep love and respect for them. In his afterword to *Jaalahn*—the poignant romance of two Indian lovers who remain faithful unto death—he wrote that he wanted to correct the ignorant and mistaken view of Indians as "dirty, lazy, and drunkenly depraved."[11]

Harders's fictional missionary became acquainted with federal

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government schools to which Indian parents were forced to send their children, and was impressed by the first one he saw, built like a fair-sized village with many buildings, including dormitories, dwellings for the employees, and shops to teach trades, as well as a chapel, administration building, corals, and barns. However, at the remark "Boys, you certainly have a fine life here," one youth replies, "A fine life? No camp, no mother, no father, no hunting, no riding, no freedom here. This is no life at all." The missionary agrees with this assessment, thinking:

> Police authority brought you here, ruthlessly separated you from your parents. . . . This is no life at all. Life is liberty. Real life requires love, an atmosphere of love; and that was not present here. Love did not build this institution of compulsory education for you; it was rather born of the feeling that one ought to give something in return to those from whom one had taken so much; it was rather created by the necessity of putting up with this incompatible people in the nation's midst. And therefore—despite the external beauty which deceived the superficial observer—this was a place where sadness dwelt, where broken hearts quivered, where real life was not to be found.[12]

Other whites in the story express extremely biased views against the Indians, saying that they cannot be educated, are willful and disobedient, refuse to learn the customs of white society, or, worst of all, that they "are only Indians." Such disregard for their humanity, Harders insists, allows the white people to excuse and justify their misconduct toward them.

> "My dear white man," Harders writes, "the Indian is in all respects a human being with thoughts and emotions and desires just like yours. What difference there is between you and him is due only to your training, to the observance of certain customs from your childhood, to habit, and to the demands of society. . . . Really, the things you want him to learn, and to which you want him to accustom himself, are all external. You say that he does not want to learn, and that provokes you and makes you embittered against him. But please give him time, just as you were given time to become what you are today; and if after due time he still does not want to follow your customs, then leave him as he is. But remember, he has the right to demand of you that you recognize in him a full-fledged human soul.

The missionary vows to "do [his] utmost to obliterate among [his] white brethren the use of the despicable phrase, 'Only an Indian'. . . ."[3]

Jaalahn has its humorous moments, as when the missionary comes to realize that when he spoke of the Son of God in his church, his Indian translator had understood this to be "God's sun" and interpreted it accordingly. The missionary is alarmed to find he had been consistently preaching sun worship! Interestingly, Harder himself often refers to the sun in Arizona's sky: "Nowhere in the world did I find the heavens so blue by day and so black by night, the sun so bright and the moon and stars so clear as there. Arizona's sky, once you have lived under it, will charm you with a spell that cannot be cast off."[14]

We lack sufficient space to discuss Harders's other two novels to the extent they deserve. In *La Paloma*, whose subtitle is "A Story of Joy and Sorrow from the Camps of the Indians and Mexicans in Western North America," the ethnic diversity of workers constructing the Roosevelt Dam and their problems are portrayed. The missionary protagonist befriends the Hispanic owner of a restaurant in the town of Roosevelt—a suprising gesture for the time—and in Globe, while eating in a Chinese restaurant, he listens to a blind Hispanic street musician play the song "La Paloma"—a song Harders is said to have so admired that he owned more than ten different recordings of it.[15]

In *Dohaschtida* (Apache for "I will not," and the title of the English translation of *Wille wider Wille*), the main Apache character expresses a sentiment that must have caused conflict within Harders himself:

> I know what you want. You want to rob us. All you pale-faces have ever wanted since you came to our country was to take from us. And you are

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NOTES

[1] Hermann Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand: USA*, vol. 10/1 of *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Erich Maschke (Munich, 1972) 203. Translation by CLK.

[2] Hermann Bernhard Ramcke, *Vom Ritterkreuzträger zum Angeklagten* (Coburg, 2001) 6. Translation by CLK.

[3] *Deutsche Insel*, 15 June 1945: 19.

[4] Derek Ray Mallett, "Prisoners of War—Cold War Allies: The Anglo-American Relationship with Wehrmacht Generals" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2009) 222f.

[5] Kristi Dykema Cheramie, "The Scale of Nature: Modeling the Mississippi River," n. 16. <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-scale-of-nature-modeling-the-mississippi-river/25658/> (visited 6 May 2013).

[6] Ben H. Fatherree, *The First 75 Years: History of Hydraulics Engineering at the Waterways Experiment Station* (Vicksburg, Miss., 2004) 93.

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> the worst. You want to take the last remaining pleasure, the only thing that makes life worth living. . . . You want us to stop hating, which is our only motive for living."[16]

Having a poet's sensitive soul sometimes led Harders to indulge his impulses. On one occasion, overcome with a desire to walk on Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee, he used passes that allowed him to ride the trains for free, and took a week's vacation so that he could spend an hour or so walking there before boarding a train to return to Arizona.[17] He named his last son Holton Globe, after the street in Milwaukee where Jerusalem Church stood, and after the town where he was born. Harders died in 1917, ten years after arriving in Arizona, and a week after Congress declared war against Germany, thus spared from the knowledge that his son Hans, who had trained for the military in Phoenix, would "fire a gun against soldiers of his native land."[18]

In 1953 *Jaalahn* was translated into English and published by Northwestern. *Wille wider Wille* was translated in 1958, and *La Paloma* in 1968. In one of the forewords we read:

> Usually readers react unfavorably when they hear a book described as a "religious novel." There is some reason for this. Often such novels are heavy in religious content but rather weak as to a good sound plot and convincing character-portrayal. . . . But the missionary novels of Gustav Harders do not share [this] weakness. . . . The characters ring true because they were sketched from life by a keenly observant eye and a skilled pen. The plot is a closely knit whole. The religious element in the story appears entirely natural.[19]

Harders's religious beliefs strongly influenced his approach to Native Americans and others; while by no means entirely devoid of Eurocentric attitudes, his faith allowed him to open his eyes to the humanity around him, and to create stories that do not rely on iconic stereotypes.



NOTES

[1] Heidi Marzen, "Collection Feature: Native Americans in Late Nineteenth-century and Early Twentieth-century European and German-American Literature," *Friends of the Max Kade Institute Newsletter*, vol. 9, no. 4, Winter 2000–2001.

[2] Morton A. Schroeder, "Eccentric Man, Faithful Christian," *Forward in Christ* (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), July 1997, vol. 84, no. 7.

[3] A. E. Rogge et al., *Raising Arizona's Dams: Daily Life, Danger, and Discrimination in the Dam Construction Camps of Central Arizona, 1890s–1940s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

[4] From the foreword to *Yaalahn*, by Gustav Harders, translated by H. C. Nitz (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Publishing House, 1955).

[5] Henry C. Nitz, *Trophies of Grace: Echoes from Apacheland* (Milwaukee: Northwest Publishing House, 1962).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Eric S. Hartzell, "Men on a Mission: The Early Years in Apacheland, *Forward in Christ* (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), August 1993, vol. 80, no. 8.

[8] Rogge, *Raising*.

[9] Foreword to Harders, *Yaalahn*, trans. H. C. Nitz.

[10] Around this time he also wrote *Tante Bertas Reise nach Amerika. Eine Geschichte für grosse und kleine Leute*, which was published in Konstanz by Carl Hirsch. WorldCat shows only two copies, one held at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and the other at the Zentralbibliothek Zürich. MKI would very much like to see a copy of this story!

[11] Harders, *Yaalahn*, trans. H. C. Nitz.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Rogge, *Raising*.

[16] Gustav Harders, *Dohaschtida*, translated by Alma Pingel Nitz (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1958).

[17] Rogge, *Raising*.

[18] Schroeder, "Eccentric Man."

[19] Foreword to Harders, *Dohaschtida*, trans. Alma Nitz.