

König Ludwig II

Ludwigs Kindheit / Ludwig's childhood

Ludwig was not close with either of his parents.

King Maximilian's advisers had suggested that on his daily walks he might like, at times, to be accompanied by his future successor. The King replied, "But what am I to say to him? After all, my son takes no interest in what other people tell him."^[9] Later, Ludwig would refer to his mother as "my predecessor's consort".^[9] He was far closer to his grandfather, the deposed and notorious King Ludwig I, who came from a family of eccentrics.

The memory of his harsh upbringing and his frosty relationship with his father dogged Ludwig throughout his life. Fully 20 years later he still spoke bitterly about this period of his life. The Cabinet Secretary, Franz von Pfistermeister, recorded that Maximilian rarely allowed himself to be persuaded to take his son Ludwig with him on his morning walk in the English Gardens. "What would I have to say to this young gentleman? He is not interested in the things that interest me," he said to Pfistermeister. There can be little doubt that in fact it was the other way round: the father was not interested in anything that interested his son. Myths and legends were the only things for which father and son shared a common enthusiasm.

At the age of seven his mother gave him as a Christmas present a model, made of building blocks, of the triumphal arch which Maximilian II had just had built in Munich, based on the Constantine Arch in Rome. Ludwig I often spent time watching his grandson playing with building blocks. Once he wrote to his son, King Otto of Greece: "I was astonished by the good taste of the buildings he created. I can see a distinct similarity between the future Ludwig and the politically dead Ludwig the First."

Ludwig's interest in religion and spirituality also emerged in his early years. Queen Marie noted in her diary that Ludwig enjoyed listening to her reading him Bible stories and showing him pictures of them. The young Ludwig was particularly enthusiastic about dressing up as a nun and playing at life in a convent! Above all he started acting from a very early age, his natural inclination towards this being developed by the fact that his mother put her heart and soul into reading Hans Andersen's fairy tales to the children, and at Hohenschwangau she acted out the stories with the children.

There were even times when a considerable number of local people took part in these fairy-tale plays, if the story demanded a large cast of characters or "extras". Prince Ludwig was quite entranced by these performances. Other children were often invited to Hohenschwangau Castle to entertain the princes. These children were allowed to treat the princes as their equals and to talk to them quite naturally as they would to any other child. Problems only arose when the young Count Tony Arco was caught giving Ludwig a clip round the ear. That was too much for the family, and from then on the children's activities were much more tightly controlled.

Within the loose-knit society formed by the royal household and the villagers of Hohenschwangau and Schwangau the royal family soon got to know the Müller family, who were long-standing residents of the area. The Müllers had lived at house number 100 in Hohenschwangau since 1805. These premises later became the present Hotel Müller in Alpeestrasse. Michael Müller was the first member of the family to settle in Hohenschwangau. His eldest son, Mang Anton Müller, kept the "Alpenrose" inn and also

controlled the drinking water for Schwangau. As an adult this Mang Anton Müller got to know the young Prince Ludwig. As he was known throughout the region to be an excellent swimmer, Queen Marie asked him to teach the boy to swim. He carried out this task with great enthusiasm. Ludwig II himself later became renowned as an outstanding swimmer who could swim the length of the Alpee and back. The present owners of the Hotel Müller are descended from one of Mang Anton's brothers.