

BOOK REVIEWS

Mathematische Werke, by Gotthold Eisenstein, Chelsea, New York, 1975, Volume I. xiii + 502 pp., Volume II. xiii + 426 pp., \$60.00 (total for 2 volumes).

On the 16th of April, 1823, a number of fairies, summoned by Ganesha, the god of mathematical wisdom, assembled in Berlin at the cradle of an infant, to grant boons and bestow blessings. This was the first-born of a not too prosperous businessman who had married in June of the previous year; both parents were Jewish but had been baptized into the evangelical faith. Alas, as in all fairy tales, one old witch managed to creep in and resolved to undo, if she could, the work of the fairies.

“He will have genius, said the first fairy, and will be a worthy successor of Gauss, Dirichlet, Jacobi. –His life will be short and unhappy, said the witch. –He will have many brothers and sisters, said the next fairy, and will be tenderly attached to them, while remaining his mother’s favorite. –He will lose them all, said the witch; seventeen years from now he will see the last one, a beloved small sister, die at the age of seven. –He will have brilliant teachers at the Gymnasium and will make giant strides in his mathematical studies. –But first, said the witch, his parents will misguidedly send him for four years to a private school whose rigid discipline will almost break his already fragile health and make him a nervous wreck for the rest of his life. –In his first year as a student at the University of Berlin, he will attract the attention of Humboldt, the grand old man of German science, and of Crelle, the editor of the leading mathematical journal of his time, and will have more than twenty papers accepted by Crelle that same year. –Maybe, said the witch; but first, for his support at the University, his mother will have to accept a paltry sum from the royal “indigent fund”. –So what? said one big fairy with a strong American accent. Soon Humboldt will get him a yearly grant of 250 dollars from the RSF¹, and will get it renewed when needed. –O.K., retorted the witch; but uncertainties about the payment and renewal of this stipend will plague and humiliate him for the rest of his life. –No matter, said the next fairy. Gauss, one of the hardest men to please in the mathematical world, will invite him, still a first-year student, to a visit in Göttingen, and from then on will take the deepest interest, not only in his work but also in his well-being. Jacobi, intent upon making him a “privatdozent” and anxious to cut bureaucratic red tape, will arrange for him to receive an honorary doctorate at the hands of Kummer in Breslau: surely an unheard-of favor to a second-year student! Gauss, while proposing Dirichlet for a coveted distinction (the order “*Pour le mérite*”), will let it be known that he has “almost hesitated” between him and young Eisenstein. –Much good this will do him! exclaimed the witch

¹ Perhaps she means “Royal Science Foundation” (an obvious anachronism). By “dollar”, of course, she means “thaler”.