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GOOD BLOOD

By Ernst Von Wildenbruch

Is it possible that there are people quite free from curiosity? People who can pass on behind any one they see gazing earnestly and intently toward some unknown object without feeling an impulse to stop, to follow the direction of the other's eyes, to discover what odd thing he may be looking at?

For my part, if I were asked whether I counted myself among that class of cold natures, I do not know that I could honestly answer "Yes." At any rate, there was once a moment in my life when I was not only goaded by such an impulse, but when I actually yielded to the temptation and fell into the way of any mere curiosity seeker.

The place in which it happened was in a wine-room in the old town where as Referendar {1} I was practising at court; the time was an afternoon in summer.

1 The title conferred in Prussia on the candidate who has passed the first of the two examinations held before appointment as judge.

The wine-room, situated on the ground floor of a house in the great square which from the window one could look out upon in every direction, was at this hour nearly empty. To me this was all the more agreeable, for I have ever been a lover of solitude.

There were three of us: the fat waiter, who from a gray, dust-covered bottle was pouring out the golden-yellow Muscatel into my glass; then myself, who sat in a nook of the cozy, odd-cornered room and smacked the fragrant wine; and still another guest, who had taken his place at one of the two open windows, a tumbler of red wine lying before him on the window-sill, in his mouth a long brown, smoke-seasoned meerschaum cigar-holder, out of which he wrapped himself in a cloud of smoke.

This man, who had a long gray beard framing a ruddy face tinged bluish in places, was an old retired colonel, whom every one in town knew. He belonged to that colony of the Superannuated who had settled down in this pleasant place to wearily drag out the end of their days.

Toward noon they could be seen strolling deliberately in groups of twos or threes down the street, shortly to disappear into the wine-room, where between twelve and one they assembled at the round table to gossip. On the table stood pint bottles of sourish Moselle, over the table floated a thick mist of cigar smoke, and through the mist came voices, peevish, grating, discussing the latest event in the Army Register.

The old colonel, too, was a regular patron of the wine-room, but he never came at the hour of general assembly, but later, in the afternoon.

He was a man of lonely disposition. Rarely was he seen in the company of others; his lodging was in the suburbs on the other side of the river, and from the window of his room one could look out over a wide stretch of meadow land which the river regularly inundated every spring, when it overflowed its banks. Many

a time have I passed by his lodging and seen him standing at the window, his bloodshot eyes, rimmed with deep bags beneath, thoughtfully gazing out toward the gray waste of water beyond the embankment.

And now he sits there at the window of the wine-room and gazes out upon the square, over whose surface the wind sweeps along in a whirl of dust.

But what is he looking at, I wonder?

The fat waiter, bored to death over his two silent fees, had his attention already drawn toward the colonel's behavior; he stood in the middle of the room, his hands clasped behind the tail of his coat, and was gazing through the other window out on to the square.

Something must surely be going on there.

Quietly as possible, so as not to break the interest of the other two, I rose from my seat. But there was really nothing to be seen. The square was nearly empty; only in the center, under the great street lamps, I noticed two schoolboys who were facing each other in threatening attitude.

Could it be this, then, that so fixed the attention of the old colonel?

But having once begun, such is the nature of man, I could not withdraw my attention before knowing whether this threat of a fight would really swell to an outbreak. The boys had just come from afternoon school session; they were still carrying their portfolios under their arms. They may have been of equal age, but one was a head taller than the other. This bigger one, a tall, lank, overgrown schoolboy, with an unpleasant look in his freckled face, was blocking the way of the other, who was short and plump and had an honest face with chubby, red cheeks. The bigger boy seemed to be nagging at the other with taunting words, but by reason of the distance it was impossible to understand what he said. After this had been going on for a while, the quarrel suddenly broke out. Both boys dropped their portfolios to the ground; the little chubby boy lowered his head, as though to ram his opponent in the stomach, and then rushed at him.

"The big fellow there will soon have him in a fix," now said the colonel, who was earnestly following the movements of the enemy, and who seemed not to approve the tactics of the little chubby boy.

For whom he intended these words it would be hard to say; he spoke them to himself without addressing any one of us.

His prediction was at once justified.

The big fellow dodged the onset of his enemy; the next moment he had his left arm squeezed around the other's neck, so that the head of the latter was caught as in a noose; he had him, as they say, "in chancery." With his right hand he gripped the right fist of his opponent, who was trying to pummel him with it on the back, and when he had regularly trapped him and brought him completely under his power he dragged him again and again round and about the lamp-post.

"Clumsy lad," muttered the old colonel, continuing his monologue, "always to let himself get caught in that way." He was plainly disappointed in the little chubby boy, and could not endure the long, lanky one.

"They fight that way every day," he explained, noticing the waiter, to whom he seemed willing to account for his interest in the matter.

Then he turned his face again toward the window. "Wonder if the little one will turn up."

Scarcely had he mumbled this to the end when there came rushing from the city park that adjoined the square a slender little slip of a lad.

"There he is," said the old colonel. He swallowed a mouthful of red wine and stroked his beard.

The little fellow, who one felt sure by the resemblance must be a brother of little Chubby Cheeks, but a finer and improved edition, ran up, lifted high his portfolio with both hands and gave Long-Shanks a blow on the back that resounded away over to where we sat.

"Bravo!" said the old colonel.

Long-Shanks kicked like a horse at this new assailant. Little-Boy dodged, and the same instant Long-Shanks got a second blow, this time on the head, that sent his cap flying.

Nevertheless, he still kept his prisoner held in the trap and fast by the right hand.

Then Little-Boy tore open his portfolio with frantic haste; from the portfolio he drew out a pen-case, from the pen-case a pen-holder, which all at once he began jabbing into the hand of Long-Shanks that held his brother prisoner.

"Clever lad!" said the colonel to himself. "Fine lad!" His red eyes fairly gleamed with delight.

The affair was now becoming too hot for Long-Shanks. Stung with pain, he released his first opponent to throw himself with furious blows on Little-Boy.

But the latter was now transformed into a veritable little wild-cat. His hat had flown from his head, his curly hair clung round his fine, deathly pale face, out of which his eyes fairly burned; the portfolio with all its contents was lying on the ground—over cap, portfolio and all he went for the anatomy of Long-Shanks.

He threw himself on the enemy, and with little, clenched, convulsive fists belabored him so on stomach and body that Long-Shanks began to retreat step by step.

In the mean while Chubby-Cheeks had recovered himself, snatched up his portfolio, and with blow after blow on the sides and back of his oppressor, pushed into the fight again.

Long-Shanks at last threw off Little-Boy, took two steps backward and picked up his cap from the ground. The fight was drawing to a finish. Panting and out of breath, the three stood looking at one another. Long-Shanks showed an ugly grin, behind which he tried to hide the shame of his defeat; Little-Boy, with fists still doubled, followed every one of his movements with blazing eyes, ready at a moment to spring once more upon the enemy should the latter renew the attack. But Long-Shanks did not advance again; he had had enough. Sneering and shrugging his shoulders, he kept drawing away farther and farther until he had reached a safe distance, when he began to call out names. The two brothers now collected the belongings of Little-Boy that lay scattered about, stuffed them into the portfolio, picked up their caps, whipped the dust from them, and turned home ward. On the way they passed the windows of our wine-room. I could now

plainly see the brave little fellow; he was a thoroughbred, every inch of him. Long-Shanks was again approaching from behind and bawling after them through the length of the square. Little-Boy shrugged his shoulders with fine contempt. "You great, cowardly bully," said he, and stopping suddenly, turned right about and faced the enemy. At once Long-Shanks stopped too, and the two brothers broke out into derisive laughter.

They were now standing directly under the window at which the old colonel was sitting. He leaned out.

"Bravo, youngster!" said he, "you are a plucky one—here—drink this on the strength of it." He had taken up the tumbler and was holding it out of the window toward Little-Boy. The boy looked up, surprised, then whispered something to his older brother, gave him his portfolio to hold, and gripped the big glass in his two little hands.

When he had drunk all he wanted, with one hand he held the glass by its stem, with the other took back the portfolio from his brother, and without asking for your leave, handed the glass over to him.

Chubby-Cheeks then took a long swallow.

"The blessed boy," muttered the colonel to himself. "I give him my glass, and without further ado he makes his *cher frère* drink out of it, too."

But by the face of Little-Boy, who now reached the glass up to the window again, one could see that he had only been doing something which seemed to him quite a matter of course.

"Do you like the bouquet?" asked the old colonel.

"Yes, thanks, very well," said the boy, who snatched at his cap politely, and went on his way with his brother.

The colonel looked after them until they had turned a corner of the street and disappeared from his sight.

"With boys like that"—then said the colonel, returning to his soliloquizing—"it is often an odd thing about boys like that."

"That they should fight so in the public streets!" said the fat waiter with disapproval, still standing at his post. "One wonders how the teacher can allow it; and they seem to belong to good family, too."

"It isn't that that does the harm," grunted the old colonel. "Young people must have their liberty, teachers can't always be keeping an eye on them. Boys all fight—must fight."

He rose heavily from his place so that the chair creaked beneath him, scraped the cigar butt out of its holder into the ash-tray, and walked stiffly over to the wall where his hat hung on a nail. At the same time he continued his reverie.

"In young blood like that nature will show itself—everything, just as it *really* is—afterward, when older, things look all much alike—then one is able to study more carefully—young blood like that."

The waiter had put his hat into his hand; the colonel took up his tumbler again, in which there were still a few drops of the red wine.

"God bless the youngsters," he murmured; "they have hardly left me a drop." He looked, almost sadly, into what remained of the wine, then set the tumbler down again without drinking.

The fat waiter became suddenly alive.

"Will the colonel, perhaps, have another glass?"

The old man, standing at the table, had opened the wine list and was mumbling to himself.

"H'm—another sort, maybe—but one can't buy it by the glass—only by the bottle—somewhat too much."

Slowly his gaze wandered over in my direction; I read in his eyes the dumb inquiry a man sometimes throws his neighbor when he wants to go halves with him over a bottle of wine.

"If the colonel will allow me," I said, "it would give me great pleasure to drink a bottle with him."

He agreed, plainly not unwilling. He pushed the wine list over to the waiter, lining with his finger the sort he wanted, and said in a commanding tone: "A bottle of that."

"That is a brand I know well," he said, turning to me, while he threw his hat on a chair and sat down at one of the tables—"it's good blood."

I had placed myself at a table with him so that I could see his face in profile. His look was again turned toward the window, and as he gazed past me up into the heavens, the glow of the sunset was reflected in his eyes.

It was the first time I had seen him at such close quarters.

By the look of his eyes he was lost in dreams, and as his hand played mechanically through his long beard, there seemed to rise before him out of the flood of the years that had rushed behind, forms that were once young when he was young, and which were now—who can say where? The bottle which the waiter had brought and placed at a table before us contained a rare wine. An old Bordeaux, brown and oily, poured into our glasses. I recalled the expression which the old man had used a short time before.

"I must admit, colonel, that this is indeed 'good blood.'"

His flushed eyes came slowly back from the far away, turned upon me, and remained fixed there, as if he would say: "What do you know about it?"

He took a deep draft, wiped his beard, and gazed at his glass. "Strange," he said, "when a man grows old—he recalls the earliest days far easier than those that come later."

I was silent; I felt that I ought neither to speak nor question. When a man is lost in recollections he is making poetry, and one must not question a poet.

A long pause followed. "What an assortment of people one has to meet with," he continued. "When one thinks of it—many who live on and on—it were often better they did not live at all—and others have to go so much too early." He passed the palm of his hand over the surface of the table. "Beneath that lies much."

It seemed as if the table had become to him as the surface of the earth, and that he was thinking of those lying beneath the ground.

"Had to keep thinking of this a little while ago"—his voice sounded hollow—"when I saw that little fellow. With a boy like that nature comes right out, fairly gushes out—thick as your arm. You can see blood in it. Pity, though, that good blood flows so freely—more freely than the other. I once knew a little chap like that."

And there it was.

The waiter had seated himself in a back corner of the room; I kept perfectly quiet; the heavy voice of the old colonel went laboring through the stillness of the room like a gust of wind that precedes a storm or some serious outbreak in nature.

His eyes turned toward me as if to search me, whether I could bear to listen. He did not ask, I did not speak, but I looked at him, and my look eagerly replied: "Go on."

But not yet did he begin; first he drew from the breast pocket of his coat a large cigar-case of hard, brown leather, took out a cigar and slowly lighted it.

"You know Berlin, of course," said he, as he blew out the match and puffed the first cloud of smoke over the table. "No doubt you have traveled before this on the street railway—"

"Oh, yes; often."

"H'm—well, then, as you go along behind the New Friedrich Street from Alexander Square to the Jannowitz Bridge, there stands there on the right-hand side in new Friedrich Street, a great ugly old building; it is the old military school."

I nodded.

"The new one over there in Lichterfelde I do not know, but the old one, that I do know—yes—h'm—was even a cadet there in my time—yes—that one I do know."

This repetition of words gave me the feeling that he knew not only the house, but probably many an event that had taken place in it.

"As you come from Alexander Square," he continued, "there first comes a court with trees. Now grass grows in the court; in my time it was not so, for the drills took place there and the cadets went walking there during the hours of recreation. After that comes the great main building that encloses a square court, which is called the 'Karreehof,' and there, too, the cadets used to walk. Passing by from the outside, you can't see into the court."

I nodded again in confirmation.

"And then comes still a third court; it is smaller, and on it stands a house. Don't know what it is used for now; at that time it was the infirmary. You can still see there the roof of the gymnasium as you pass by; then next to the infirmary was the principal outdoor gymnasium. In it was a jumping ditch and a climbing apparatus and every other possible thing—now it has all gone. From the infirmary a door led out into the gymnasium, but it was always kept locked. When one wanted to go into the infirmary, one had to cross the court and enter in front. The door then, as I said, was always locked; that is, it was opened only on some special occasion, and that, indeed, was always a very mournful occasion. For behind the door was the mortuary, and when a cadet died he was laid therein, and the door remained open until the other cadets had filed by, and looked at him once more—and he was then taken out—yes—h'm."

A long pause followed.

"Concerning the new house over there in Lichterfelde," continued the old colonel in* a somewhat disparaging tone, "I know nothing, as I said, but have heard that it is become a big affair with a great number of cadets. Here in New Friedrich Street there were not so many, only four companies, and they divided themselves into two classes: Sekundaner and Primaner, and to these two were added the Selektaner, or special students, who afterward entered the army as officers, and who were nicknamed 'The Onions,' because they had authority over the others and were barely tolerated in consequence.

"Now in the company to which I belonged—it was the fourth—there were two brothers who sat together in the same class with me, the Sekun-daner. Their name is of no consequence—but—well, they were called, then, von L; the older of the two was called by the superiors L No. I, and the smaller, who was a year and a half younger than the other, L No. II. Among the cadets, however, they were called Big and Little L. Little L, indeed—h'm—"

He moved in his chair, his eyes gazed out into vacancy. It appeared that he had reached the subject of his reveries.

"Such a contrast between brothers I have never seen," he continued, blowing a thick cloud from his meerschaum pipe. "Big L was a strapping fellow, with clumsy arms and legs and a big fat head; Little L was like a willow switch, so slender and supple. He had a small, fine head, and light, wavy hair that curled of itself, and a delicate nose like a young eagle's, but above all—he was a lad—"

1 "Die Bollen," a term of dislike among the Berlin cadets.

The old colonel drew a deep sigh. "Now you must not think that all this was a matter of indifference to the cadets; on the contrary. The brothers had scarcely entered the Berlin Cadet. School from the preparatory school (they came from the one at Wahlstatt, I believe) when their status was at once fixed: Big L was neglected, and Little L was the universal favorite.

"Now with such boys it is an odd thing: the big and the strong, they are the leaders, and on whomsoever these bestow their favor, with that boy all goes well. It also procures for him respect from the others, and no one ventures lightly to attack him. Such boys—here again nature stands right out—much as it is with the animals, before the biggest and strongest all the rest must crouch."

Fresh, vigorous puffs from the meerschaum accompanied these words.

"When the cadets came down at recreation time those who were good friends together met and would go walking arm in arm around the 'Karreehof' and toward the court where the trees stood, and so it was always until the trumpet sounded for return to work.

"Big L—well—he attached himself just wherever he could find attachment, and stalked sullenly ahead by himself—Little L, on the contrary, almost before he could reach the court was seized under the arm by two or three big fellows and compelled to walk with them. And they were Primaners at that. For ordinarily, you must know, it never occurred to a Primaner to go with a 'Knapsack,' or Plebe, from the Sekunda; it was far beneath his dignity; but with Little L it was different, there an exception was made. And yet he was no less loved by the Sekundaner than by the Primaner. One could see that in class, where we Sekundaner boys, you know, were by ourselves. In class we were ranged according to alphabet, so that the two L's sat together very nearly in the centre.

"In their lessons they stood pretty nearly even. Big L had a good head for mathematics; in other things he was not of much account, but in mathematics he was, as you might say, a "shark," and Little L, who was not strong in mathematics, used to "crib" from his brother. In all other respects Little L was ahead of his older brother, and in fact one of the best in his class. And right here appeared the difference between the brothers; Big L kept his knowledge to himself, and never prompted; Little L, *he* prompted, he fairly shouted—yes, to be sure he did—"

A tender smile passed over the face of the old man.

"If any one on the front form was called upon and did not know the answer—Little L hissed right across all the forms what he ought to say: when it came the turn of the back benches little L spoke the answer half-aloud to himself.

"There was there an old professor from whom we took Latin. During nearly every lesson he would stop short in the middle of the class; 'L No. II,' he would say, 'you are prompting again! And that, too, in a most shameless fashion. Have a care, L No. II, next time I will make an example of you. I say it to you now for the last time!'"

The old colonel laughed to himself. "But it always remained the next to last time, and the example was never made. For though Little L was no model boy, more often quite the contrary, he was loved by both teachers and officers as well—but how indeed could it have been otherwise? He was always in high spirits, as if receiving a new present every day, yet nothing ever got sent to him, for the father of the two was in desperately poor circumstances, a major in some infantry regiment or other, and the boys received hardly a groschen (2.4 cents) for pocket money. And always as if just peeled out of the egg, so fresh,—without and within—eh, eh, altogether—"

Here the colonel paused, as if searching for an expression that would contain the whole of his love for this former little comrade.

"As if Nature had been for once in a proudly good-humor," he said, "and had stood that little follow upright on his feet and cried: 'There you have him!'"

"Now this was to be observed," he continued, "that just so much as the brothers differed, one from the other, the more they seemed to cling to each other. In Big L, indeed, one did not notice it so much; he was always sullen and displayed no feeling; but Little L could never conceal anything. And because Little L felt conscious of this, how much better he himself was treated by the other cadets, it made him sorry for his brother. When we took our walks around the courtyard, then one could see how Little L would look at his brother from time to time, to see if he, too, had some one to walk with. That he prompted his brother in class and allowed him to copy from himself when sight-exercises were dictated was all a matter of course; but he also took care that no one teased his brother, and when he observed him quietly from the side, as he often did, without drawing his brother's attention to it, then his little face was quite noticeably sad, almost as if he were a great care to him—"

The old man pulled hard at his pipe. "All that I put together for myself afterward," said he, "when everything happened that was to happen; he knew at the time much better than we did how matters stood with Big L, and what was his brother's character.

"This was, of course, understood among the cadets, and it helped Big L none the more, for he remained disliked after it as before, yet it made Little L all the more popular, and he was generally called 'Brother Love.'

"Now the two lived together in one room, and Little L, as I said, was very clean and neat; the big one, on the contrary, was very slovenly. And so Little L fairly made himself servant to his brother, and it turned out that he even cleaned the brass buttons on his uniform for him, and just before the ranks formed for roll-call would place himself, with clothes-brush in hand, in front of his brother, and once more regularly brush and scrub him—especially on those days when the 'cross lieutenant' was on duty and received roll-call.

"Well, in the morning the cadets had to go down into the court for roll-call, and there the officer on duty went up and down between the lines and inspected their uniforms to see if they were in order.

"And when the 'cross lieutenant' attended to this, then there reigned the most woful anxiety throughout the company, for he always found something. He would go behind the cadets and flip at their coats with his finger to make the dust fly, and if none came, then he would lift their coat-pockets and snap at them, and so, beat our coats as much as we would, there was sure to be left some dust lying on them, and as soon as the 'cross lieutenant' saw it, he would sing out in a voice like that of an old bleating ram: 'Write him down for Sunday report,' and then Sunday's day off might go to the devil, and then that got to be a very serious matter."

The old colonel paused, took a vigorous swallow of wine, and with the palm of his hand squeezed the beard from his upper lip into his mouth and sucked off the wine drops that sparkled on the hair. Recollection of the "cross lieutenant" made him plainly furious.

"When one considers what sort of meanness it takes to so deprive a poor little fellow of the Sunday holiday he has been hugging for a whole week, and all for a trifle—bah! it's downright—whenever I have seen any one annoying my men—in later days that sort of thing didn't happen in my regiment; they knew this, that I was there and would not tolerate it.—To be rough at times, ay, even to the extreme if necessary, to throw one into the guard-house, that does no harm—: but to nag—for that it takes a mean skunk!"

"Very true!" observed the waiter from the back part of the room, and thus made it known that he was following the colonel's story.

The old man calmed himself and went on with his story.

"Things went on this way for a year, and then came the time for examinations, always a very special occasion.

"The Primaners took their ensign's examination, and the Selektaners, who, as I have said, were called 'Onions,' the officer's examination, and as fast as any had passed the examination, they were dismissed from the cadet corps and sent home, and it came about that the second classmen, or Sekundaner, who were to be promoted to first class, still remained Sekundaner for a time.

"Well, this state of affairs lasted until the new Sekundaner entered from the preparatory school and the newly dubbed 'Onions' returned, and then once more the wheelbarrow trudged along its accustomed way. But in the meantime a kind of disorder prevailed, more especially just after the last of the Primaners had left—they were examined in sections, you know, and then despatched, after which everything went pretty much at sixes and sevens.

"There was now in the dormitory where the two brothers lived a certain Primaner, a 'swell,' as he was called by the cadets, and because he had made up his mind, as soon as he should pass the examination and breathe the fresh air again, to conduct himself like a fine gentleman, he had had made for himself, instead of a sword-belt like those the cadets procured from the institution and wore, a special patent-leather belt of his own, thinner and apparently finer than the ordinary regulation belt. He was able to afford this much, you see, for he had money sent to him from home. He had displayed this belt about everywhere, for he was inordinately proud of it, and the other cadets admired it.

"Now as the day arrived for the Primaner to pack together his scattered belongings in order to go home, he looked to buckle on his fine belt—and all at once the thing was missing.

"A great to-do followed; search was made everywhere; the belt was not to be found. The Primaner had not locked it in his wardrobe, but had put it with his helmet in the dormitory behind the curtain where the helmets of the other cadets lay openly—and from there it had disappeared.

"It could not possibly have disappeared in any other way;—some one must have taken it.

"But who?

"First they thought of the old servant who was accustomed to blacken the boots of the cadets, and keep the dormitory in order—but he was an old trusty non-commissioned officer, who had never during the course of his long life allowed himself to be guilty of the least irregularity.

"It surely could not be one of the cadets? But who could possibly think such a thing? So the matter remained a mystery, and truly an unpleasant one. The Primaner swore and scolded because he must now leave wearing the ordinary institution belt; the other cadets in the room were altogether silent and depressed; they had at once unlocked all their wardrobes and offered to let the Primaner search them, but he had merely replied: "That's nonsense, of course; who could think of such a thing?"

"And now something remarkable happened, and caused more sensation than all that went before; all at once the Primaner got back the belt.

"He had just left his room with his portmanteau in his hand, and had reached the stairs, when he was hastily called from behind, and as he turned about, Little L came running up, holding something in his hand—it was the Primaner's belt.

"Two others happened to be passing at the time, and they afterward told how deathly pale Little L was, and how every member of his body was literally shaking. He had whispered something into the ear of the Primaner, and the two had exchanged all quietly a couple of words, and then the Primaner affectionately stroked the other's head, took off his regulation belt, buckled on the fine one and was gone; he had handed the regulation belt over to Little L to carry back. Naturally the story could now no longer be concealed, and it all came out accordingly.

"A new assignment of rooms was ordered; Big L was transferred; and just at the time all this was taking place, he had completed his removal to the new quarters.

"Afterward it occurred to the cadets that he had kept strangely quiet about the whole affair—but one always hears the grass growing after it has grown. So much, however, was certain; he had allowed no one to help him, and when Big L put his hands to the work, he became quite rough toward his little brother. But Little L, ready to help as he always was, did not allow himself to be deterred by this, and as he was taking out of his brother's locker the gymnasium drill jacket that was lying neatly folded together, he felt all at once something hard within—and it was the belt of the Primaner.

"What the brothers said to each other at the moment, or whether they spoke at all, no one has ever learned; for Little L had still so much presence of mind that he went noiselessly from the room.

"But hardly was he out of the door and in the corridor, when he threw the jacket on the ground, and without once thinking of what might be made out of the affair, he ran up behind the Primaner with the belt.

"But now, of course, it could no longer be helped; in five minutes the story was the property of the whole company.

"Big L had allowed himself to be driven by the devil and had become light-fingered. Half an hour later it was whispered softly from room to room: "To-night, when the lamps are turned out, general consultation in the company hall!"

"In every company quarters, you must know, there was a larger room, where marks were given out, and certain public actions proceeded with, in what was called the company hall.

"So that evening, when the lamps were out, and everything was quite dark, there was a general movement from all the rooms, through the corridor; not a door ventured to slam, all were in stocking feet, for the captain and the officers still knew nothing and were allowed to know nothing of the meeting, else we would have brought a storm about our ears.

"As we came to the door of the company hall, there stood near the door against the wall one as white as the plaster on the wall—it was Little L. At the same moment a couple took him by the hands. 'Little L can come in with us,' they said; 'he is not to blame.' Only one of them all wished to oppose this; he was a long, big fellow—he was called—name of no consequence—well, then, he was called K. But he was overruled at once; Little L was taken in with us, a couple of tallow candles were lit and placed on the table, and now the consultation began."

The colonel's glass was empty again. I filled it for him, and he took a long swallow. "Over all this," he went on, "one can laugh now if one wills; but this much I can say for us, we were not in a laughing mood, but altogether dismal. A cadet a rascal—to us that was something incomprehensible. All faces were pale, all speaking was but half aloud. Ordinarily it was considered the most despicable piece of meanness if one cadet reported another to the authorities—but when a cadet had done such a thing as to steal, then he was for us no longer a cadet, and it was for this reason that the consultation was being held, whether we ought to report to the captain what Big L had done."

"Long K was the first to speak. He declared that we ought to go at once to the captain and tell him everything, for at such meanness all consideration ceases. Now Long K was the biggest and strongest boy in the company; his words, therefore, made a marked impression, and besides, we were all of his opinion at bottom."

"No one knew anything to object to this, and so there fell a general silence. All at once, however, the circle that had formed around the table opened and Little L, who had till now been flattening himself against the farthest corner of the room, came forward into the centre. His arms hung limp at the side of his body, and his face he kept lowered to the ground; one saw that he wished to say something, but could not find the courage."

"Long K was again laying down the law. 'L No. II,' said he, 'has no right to speak here.'

"But this time he was not so fortunate. He had always been hostile to the two, no one quite knew why, especially Little L. Moreover, he was not a bit popular, for as such youngsters have once and for all a tremendously fine instinct, they may have felt that in this long gawk lay hidden a perfectly mean, cowardly, wretched spirit. He was one of those who never venture to attack their equals in size, but bully the smaller and weaker ones."

"At that broke out a whispering on all sides: 'Little L *shall* speak! All the more reason for him to speak.'

"As the little fellow, who was still standing there, ever motionless and rigid, heard how his comrades were taking his part, suddenly the big tears rolled down his cheeks; he doubled his two little fists and screwed them into his eyes and sobbed so heart-breakingly that his whole body shook from top to bottom and he could not utter a word."

"One of them went up to him and patted him on the back."

"'Take it easy,' said he; 'what is it you wish to say?'"

"Little L still kept on sobbing."

"'If—he is shown up—' he then broke out at long intervals—'he will be dismissed from the corps—and then what will become of him?'"

"There was silence everywhere; we knew that the young one was perfectly right, and that such would be the consequence if we reported him. Added to this we also knew that the father was poor, and involuntarily each thought of what his own father would say if he should learn the same of his son."

"'But you must see yourself/ continued the cadet to Little L, 'that your brother has done a very contemptible thing and deserves punishment for it.'

"Little L nodded silently; his feelings were entirely with those who were censuring his brother. The cadet reflected a moment, then he turned to the others."

"'I make a proposition,' said he; 'and if it be accepted we will not disgrace L No. I for life. We will prove on his body whether he has any honorable feelings left. L No. I. himself shall choose whether he wishes us to report him or whether we shall keep the matter to ourselves cudgel him thoroughly for it, and then let the affair be buried.'

"That was an admirable way out. All agreed eagerly."

"The cadet laid his hand on Little L's shoulder. 'Go along, then,' said he, 'and call your brother here.'

"Little L dried his tears and nodded his head quickly—then he was out of the door and a moment after was back again, bringing his brother with him."

"Big L ventured to look at no one; like an ox that has been felled on the forehead, he stood before his comrades. Little L stood behind him, and never once did his eyes leave his brother's slightest movement."

"The cadet who had made the foregoing proposition began the trial of L No. I."

"'Does he admit that he took the belt?'"

"'He admits it.'

"'Does he feel that he has done something that has made him absolutely unworthy of being a cadet any longer?'"

"'He feels it.'

"'Does he choose that we report him to the captain or that we thrash him soundly and that the matter shall then be buried?'"

"'He prefers to be soundly thrashed.'

"A sigh of relief went through the whole hall."

"It was determined to finish the matter at once then and there."

"One of the boys was sent out to fetch a rattan, such as we used for beating our clothes."

"While he was gone we tried to induce Little L to leave the hall, so that he should not be present at the execution."

"But he shook his head silently; he wished to remain on hand.

"As soon as the rattan came, Big L was made to lie face down on the table, two cadets seized his hands and drew him forward, two others took him by the feet so that his body lay stretched out lengthwise. The tallow candles were taken from the table and lifted up high, and the whole affair had an absolutely gruesome look.

"Long K, because he was the strongest, was to perform the execution; he took the rattan in his hand, stepped to one side, and with the force of his whole body let the cane come whistling down on to Big L, who was clothed only in drill jacket and trousers.

"The young fellow fairly rose under the fearful blow and would have cried out; but in a second Little L rushed up to him, took his head in both hands and smothered it against himself.

"Don't scream,' he whispered to him; 'don't scream, else the whole affair will get out!'

"Big L swallowed down the cry and choked and groaned to himself.

"Long K again lifted up the cane, and a second swish resounded through the hall.

"The body of the culprit actually writhed on the table, so that the cadets were scarcely able to hold him down by his hands and feet. Little L had wrapped both arms around the head of his brother, and was crushing it with convulsive force against himself. His eyes were wide open, his face like the plaster on the wall, his whole body was quivering.

"Throughout the hall was a stillness like death, so that one could only hear the wheezing and puffing of the victim whom the little brother was smothering against his breast.

"All eyes were hanging on the little fellow; we all had a feeling that we could not look on at it any longer.

"When, therefore, the third blow had fallen and the whole performance repeated itself just as before, a general excited whisper followed: 'Now, it is enough—strike no more!'

"Long K, who had become quite red from the exertion, was raising his arm again for the fourth blow, but with one accord, three or four threw themselves between him and Big L, tore the rattan from his grasp, and thrust him back.

"The execution was at an end.

"The cadet aforesaid raised his voice once more, but only half aloud.

"Now, the affair is over with and buried,' said he, 'let each one give his hand to L No. I., and let him that breathes even a word of the matter be accounted a rascal.'

"A general 'Yes, yes,' showed that he had spoken entirely in accord with the mind of the others. They stepped up to Big L and stretched out their hands to him, but then, as at a word of command, they threw themselves upon Little L. There formed a regular knot about the lad, first one and then another wished to grasp him by the hand and shake it. Those standing at the back stretched out their hands 'way across those in front, some even climbed on to the table to get at him; they stroked his head, patted him on the shoulder, and with it all was a general whispering: 'Little L, you glorious rascal, you superb Little L.'"

The old colonel lifted his glass to his mouth—it was as if he were forcing something down behind it. When he set it down again, he drew a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart.

"Boys like that," said he, "they have instinct—instinct and sentiment.

"The lights were turned out, all stole hushed through the corridor back to their rooms. Five minutes later every boy was lying in his bed, and the affair was ended.

"The captain and the other officers had heard not a sound of the whole matter.

"The affair was ended"—the voice of the speaker grew thick; he had buried both hands in his trousers' pockets and was gazing before him through the fumes of the smoking cigar.

"So we thought that night, as we lay in bed.—Did Little L sleep that night? In the days following, when we assembled in class, it did not seem so. Before, it had been as if an imp were sitting in the place where the lad sat, and, like a rooster, had crowed it over the whole class—now it was as if there were a void in the place—so still and pale he sat in his place.

"As when a man flicks the dust from the wings of a butterfly—so was it with the little lad—I can not describe it otherwise.

"On afternoons one always saw him now walking with his brother. He may have felt that Big L would now find less companionship than ever among the others—so he provided company for him. And there the two went, then, arm in arm, always around about the Karreehof and across the court with the trees in it, one as well as the other with head bent to the ground, so that one scarcely saw that they ever spoke a word."

Again there came a pause in the narrative, again I had to fill the empty glass of the colonel, who smoked his cigar faster and faster.

"But all this," he continued, "would perhaps have worn itself out in course of time and everything have gone on as before—but for people!"

He laid his clenched fist on the table.

"There are people," said he, scowling, "who are like the poisonous weed in the field, at which beasts nibble themselves to death. With such people the rest poison themselves!

"So, then, one day we were having lessons in physics. The teacher was showing us experiments on the electric machine, and an electric shock was to be passed through the whole class.

"To this end each one of us had to give his hand to his neighbor, so as to complete the circuit.

"As now Big L, who was sitting next to Long K, held out his hand to him, the lubber made a grimace as if he were about to touch a toad and drew back his hand.

"Big L quietly shrank into himself and sat there as if covered with shame. But at the same instant Little L is up and out of his place, over to his brother's side, at whose place, next to Long K, he seats himself, whose hand he grips and smashes with all the force of his body against the wooden form, so that the long gawk cries out with pain.

"Then he grabbed Little L by the neck and the two now began regularly to fight in the middle of class.

"The teacher, who had been tinkering all this time at his machine, now rushed up with coat-tails flying.

"Now! Now! Now!" he cried.

"He was, you must know, an old man for whom we had not exactly a great respect.

"The two were so interlocked that they did not break away, even though the professor was standing directly in front of them.

"What disgraceful conduct!" cried the professor. "What disgraceful conduct! Will you separate at once!"

"Long K made a face as if he were about to cry.

"L No. II began it," he said, "though I did nothing at all to provoke him."

"Little L stood straight up in his place—for we always had to stand when a professor spoke to us—big drops of perspiration coursed slowly down either cheek; he said not a word; he had bitten his teeth together so hard that one could see the muscles of his jaw through the thin cheeks. And as he heard what Long K said a smile passed over his face—I have never seen anything like it.

"The old professor expatiated at some length in beautiful set phrases over such disgraceful behavior, spoke of the 'utter depths of abysmal bestiality, which such conduct betrayed'—we let him talk on; our thoughts were with Little L and Long K.

"And scarcely was the lesson at an end and the professor out of the door, when from the back a book came flying through the air the whole length of the class straight at the skull of Long K. And as he turned angrily toward the aggressor, from the other side he received another book on his head, and now there broke out a general howling: 'Knock him down! Knock him down!' The whole class sprang up over tables and benches and there was a rush for Long K, whose hide was now so thoroughly tanned that it fairly smoked."

The old colonel, pleased, smiled grimly to himself and contemplated his hand as it still lay with fist doubled on the table.

"I helped," said he, "and with hearty good-will—I can tell you."

It was as if his hand had forgotten that it had grown fifty years older; as the fingers closed convulsively one could see that it was in spirit once again pummeling Long K.

"But as people must belong once and forever to their own kind," he continued his narrative, "so this Long K had to be naturally a revengeful, spiteful, malicious, *canaille*. He would much rather have gone to the captain and resentfully told him everything, but in our presence he did not dare; for that he was too cowardly.

"But that he had received a thrashing before the whole class, and that Little L was to blame for it, for that he did not forgive Little L.

"One afternoon, then, as recreation hour came round again, the cadets went walking in the courts; the two brothers, as usual, by themselves; Long K linked arm in arm with two others.

"To get from the Karreehof to the other court where the trees were, one had to pass under one of the wings of the main building, and it was a rule that the cadets must not pass through arm in arm, so as not to obstruct the passageway.

"On this particular afternoon, as ill-luck would have it, Long K, as he was about to pass through with his two chums from the Karreehof to the other court, met the two brothers at the corridor, and they, deep in their thoughts, had forgotten to let go of one another.

"Long K, although the affair was no concern of his, when he saw this stood still, opened his eyes wide and his mouth still wider, and called out to the two: 'What does this mean,' said he, 'that you go through here arm in arm? Do you intend to block the way for honest people, you set of thieves?'"

Here the colonel interrupted himself.

"That is now fifty years ago," said he, "and more—but I remember it as if it had happened yesterday.

"I was just going with two others from the Karreehof, and suddenly we heard a scream come from the corridor—I can not describe at all how it sounded—when a tiger or other wild beast breaks loose from his cage and throws himself on some one, then, I think, one would hear something like it.

"It was so horrible that we three let our arms drop and stood there quite paralyzed. And not only we, but everything in the Karreehof stopped and suddenly grew quiet. And then everything that had two legs to run with kept rushing up at full speed toward the corridor, so that it fairly swarmed and thickened black around the corridor. I, naturally, with the rest—and what I saw there—

"Little L had climbed on to Long K like a wildcat—nothing else—and with his left hand hanging on by the latter's collar so that the tall gawk was half-choked, with his right fist he kept up a crack—crack—and crack right in the middle of Long K's face, wherever it happened to strike, so that the blood was pouring from Long K's nose like a waterfall.

"Now from the other court came the officer who was on duty and broke his way through the cadets. 'L No. II, will you leave off at once!' he thundered—for he was a man tall as a tree and had a voice that could be heard from one end of the Academy to the other, and we had a wholesome respect for him.

"But Little L neither heard nor saw, but kept on belaboring Long K in the face still more, and with it came again and again that fearful uncanny shriek that thrilled through us all, marrow and bone.

"When the officer saw that he-took hold himself, gripped the little fellow by both shoulders, and by main force tore him away from Long K.

"As soon as he stood upon his feet, however, Little L rolled up the whites of his eyes, fell his full length to the earth, and writhed on the ground in a convulsion.

"We had never yet seen anything like it, and were shocked and, stared at it in absolute terror.

"But the officer, who had been bending down over him, now straightened himself: 'The lad certainly has a most serious convulsion,' said he. 'Forward, two take hold of his feet'—he himself lifted him under the arms—'over to the infirmary!'

"And so they bore Little L over to the infirmary.

"While they were carrying him there we went up to Big L to learn just what had happened, and from Big L and the other two who had been with Long K we then heard the whole story.

"Long K was standing there like a whipped dog and wiping the blood from his nose, and had it not been for this nothing would have saved him from receiving another murderous thrashing. But now all turned silently away from him, no one ever spoke another word to him; he made himself a social outcast."

The top of the table resounded as the old colonel struck it with his fist.

"How long the others kept him in Coventry," said he, "I know not. I sat in class with him for a whole year longer and spoke never a single word more to him. We entered the army at the same time as ensigns; I did not give him my hand at parting; do not know whether he has become an officer; have never looked for his name in the army register; don't know whether he has fallen in one of the wars, whether he still lives or is dead—for me he was no more, is no more—the only thing I regret is that the person ever came into my life at all and that I can not root out the remembrance of him forever, like a weed one flings into the oven!

"The next morning came bad news from the infirmary: Little L was lying unconscious in a burning, nervous fever. In the afternoon his older brother was called in, but the little fellow no longer recognized him.

"And in the evening, as we all sat at supper in the big common dining-hall, a rumor came—like a great black bird with muffled beat of wings it passed through the hall—that Little L was dead.

"As we came back from the dining-hall into company quarters, our captain was standing at the door of the company hall; we were made to go in, and there the captain announced to us that our little comrade, L No. II, had fallen asleep that night, never to wake again.

"The captain was a very good man—he fell in 1866, a brave hero—he loved his cadets, and as he gave us the news, he had to wipe the tears from his beard. Then he ordered us all to fold our hands; one of us had to step forward and before all say 'Our Father' out loud—"

The colonel bowed his head.

"Then for the first time," said he, "I felt how really beautiful is the Lord's Prayer.

"And so, the next afternoon, the door that led from the infirmary to the outdoor gymnasium opened, the hateful, ominous door.

"We were made to step down into the court of the infirmary; we were to see once more our dead comrade.

"Our steps shuffled with a dull and heavy sound as we were marched over there; no one spoke a word; one heard only a heavy breathing.

"And there lay little L, poor little L!

"In his white little shirt he lay there, his hands folded on his breast, his golden locks curled about his forehead, which was white like wax; the cheeks so sunken that the beautiful, delicate little nose projected quite far—and in his face—the expression—"

The old colonel was silent, the breath came choking from his bosom.

"I have grown to be an old man," he went on falteringly—"I have seen men lying on the field of battle—men on whose faces stood written distress and despair—such heart sorrow as I saw in the face of this child I have never seen before or since—never—never—"

A deep stillness took possession of the wine-room where we were sitting. As the old colonel became silent and spoke no word more, the waiter rose softly from his corner and lit the gas-jet that hung over our heads; it had grown quite dark.

I took up the wine bottle once more, but it was now almost empty—just one tear still crept slowly out—one last drop of the good blood.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GOOD BLOOD ***

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