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'JENA' OR 'SEDAN'?

**FROM THE GERMAN OF
FRANZ ADAM BEYERLEIN**

**LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN**

1905

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Publisher's Note

The German original of this novel had a larger circulation in the first year of its career than any novel of our days, close upon one quarter of a million copies having been sold. It was praised by some as a superb piece of imaginative literature of the realistic school: by others it has been anathematised as a libel on the great army that made Modern Germany. The truth about it is probably best summarised in the words of a reviewer of the "Daily Mail":--

"The author holds up the mirror with impartiality, without fear or passion, and with an unmistakably friendly intention, and asks, 'Where art thou going? Towards Jena or Sedan?'"

It is perhaps unnecessary to remind the English reader in explanation of the title that Jena stands for French supremacy and German defeat--Sedan for German victory and a French débâcle; but he should be warned that in this truthful mirror of life there may be details liable to shock insular notions. The author could not shrink from such in the fulfilment of his task, which was to give the truth--the whole truth and nothing but the truth. His work must be judged not only as a novel (and assuredly as such it is a most admirable and artistic piece of work), but it must be regarded also as the cry of a patriot who loves his country above anything in the world. This is most completely realised in the following opening sentences of a long and careful review given to the original by the "Spectator":--

"The Englishman who is acutely distressed by the report of shortcomings in the German Army can hardly be human. The frank pleasure which the Germans took in our troubles is too recent to be quite forgotten, even by a people so forgetful as we are. But for all that, only those who crave for the 'wicked joys of the soul,' which grow, the poet tells us, near by the gates of hell, can lay down Herr Beyerlein's story without a sense of sadness. In spite of its freshness and its humour, there breathes through it that note of disappointment, almost of lassitude, which is not seldom audible in Germany to-day. It is as though the nation, which has travelled such an astonishing distance in the last thirty years, were pausing to ask, 'Is this all that has come of it?'"

"Herr Beyerlein's theme is the decadence of the German Army. That it is decadent he has no doubt at all, and he is a close, careful and not unfriendly observer. But the writer who deals boldly and broadly with the German Army is in reality dealing with a much larger subject. The British Army is a piece cut from the stuff of which the nation is made, and shaped to a particular end. In Germany the whole material of the nation passes through the Army, and is to some extent shaped and coloured in the process; if does not come out precisely as it went in. German military training is an iron pressure to which men cannot be submitted for two years at an impressionable age and remain unchanged. Symptoms of decay in the Army point, therefore, not only to possible disaster abroad, but to demoralisation at home; and it is with this aspect of his subject that Herr Beyerlein is chiefly concerned."

JENA OR SEDAN?

CHAPTER I

"Must I go, must I go,
Away into the town?"

(Swabian Folk-song.)

Franz Vogt was on his way home. He carried a neatly tied-up parcel containing the under-linen and the boots that he had been buying in the town. He had trodden this same road a countless number of times during his life; but now that he must bid good-bye to it so soon, the old familiar surroundings presented themselves to him in a new light.

Of course it was not good-bye for ever, nor was it even as though he were going to America. At the most he would only be away for his two years of military service, and between-whiles there would, he supposed, be leave now and again; moreover, this was not the first time he had left the village. But there was one circumstance peculiar to this going away--he was obliged to go.

Franz Vogt did not trouble his head much about the why and the wherefore of this obligation. He reasoned it out thus: Germany had enemies--the French and the Russians, to wit--who might some day and for some unknown reason begin a war; therefore, of course, it behoved Germany to keep watch and ward, and for that soldiers were necessary. Furthermore, there was a certain consolation in the thought that this authoritative call took no respect of persons; the sons of the two richest peasants in the village had been called up just like himself--they to the Uhlans, he to the field-artillery.

The life, however, must be so different from anything hitherto experienced that one could not but feel a little nervous about it. For the men on leave whom he had come across were never tired of talking about the hard words and harder usage that fell to a soldier's lot. Never mind! hard words break no bones. He was strong and active; no one had done better than he in athletics. One must take things as they come, and perhaps after all they won't turn out as bad as they have been painted.

The young man pushed his hat back from his brow and began to whistle as he stepped forward more briskly.

It was fairly warm for October. The broad dusty road that led onward up the hill lay shining as brightly in the sun as if it were July and the corn rising on either side, tall and golden. But instead the stubble showed in paler streaks against the darker ground that was already prepared for a new sowing. Further on in the valley green meadows stretched away to the border-line of a forest.

On the hither side of those woods, but disappearing at last in the dense verdure, ran the straight line of the railway. A cloud of white smoke could just be seen above the trees, and then the train would glide out into the open. By that line Franz Vogt must travel on the morrow to the place where he would have to sojourn for the next two years; and again the thought, "How shall I get on there?" forced itself upon his mind, and absorbed his thoughts until he reached the cross-roads where stood the paternal dwelling. Years ago, when toll was still levied on the highway, it had been the gate-keeper's cottage; and Franz Vogt's father, the last turnpike-keeper, had bought it from the State when the toll was abolished. Nearly twenty years had gone by since the white-painted barrier had been let down at night for the last time, but the little house remained the same in appearance. His father had even stuck the old barrier up in the garden, and had nailed at the top a box for the starlings to nest in; every spring a pair of birds built there.

And his father himself, how little he had altered! Only the beard, which he wore after the fashion of the old Emperor William, had become more and more grey, and the hair of his head had retreated from the crown in an ever-widening circle. But the old man who now stepped to the door held himself as stiff and erect as ever; the eyes looked forth from beneath the bushy eyebrows with a stern yet kindly gaze, and the deep voice rang out with military precision and sharpness.

"Why, boy," he cried, "you're looking quite dashed! Shaking in your shoes about to-morrow, eh? See what comes of having a woman for your mother! Come along in." He preceded his son into the parlour, and made him exhibit his purchases.

"Dear, very dear, all these odds and ends!" he grumbled; but finally declared himself pleased that Franz had preserved intact a good portion of the money entrusted to him.

"That you can keep," said his father; "for you know at first you'll have nothing more from me. By-and-bye, perhaps, a few groschen now and then; but first you must learn to shift for yourself. That's always good for one. I had to get along on my pay the whole time, from the first year to the fifteenth. Now go up and pack your traps, and make everything shipshape."

At supper the fare was no more sumptuous than usual; but Franz was surprised to see that his father had set out two smoked sausages instead of one.

"To-morrow, boy," said the old man, "you'll have regimental black bread. Good nourishing stuff! You'll soon like it." And pointing to the two long fat sausages, he continued:

"And the remains of those sausages can go in your box. You shall pack them up."

The two men ate off wooden platters, and cut up their bread and sausage with their pocket-knives; there was nothing to do afterwards but to gather up the fragments and carry the plates into the kitchen. An old woman came every morning to do the housework and prepare the midday meal, and every afternoon the turnpike keeper waited with repressed impatience till the door had closed behind her. Then he felt better.

When Franz had put the sausage in his box and come downstairs again, he found his father with cap in hand, ready to go out.

"Come, boy," he said, "let's stretch our legs a bit."

They went past the village, and wandered for a while in silence under the starry heavens. Then the old man began to speak less briskly and decidedly than was his wont.

"Look you, my boy, to-morrow you will be standing on your own feet, as it were; you'll be responsible for yourself. For it's like this: before one has served one is a silly youth: but afterwards, a man. Therefore you want something that you can steer by; and I tell you, you must make a rule for yourself that you can look to. The printed ones--they're only just by the way. Always ask yourself: is it right, is it honest, what you're doing? If yes, then fire away! And when you don't know exactly one way or the other, then just think: could you tell your old father about it and look him straight in the eyes?"

He had a heavy load of cares and hopes on his mind for the welfare of this son, the only thing left him to love; but he broke short off. He felt himself incapable of expressing clearly the result of the experience gained during his sixty years of life. He lived himself by that gathered wisdom, and it had passed into his flesh and bone; but the right words failed him when he would have imparted it to his son.

Friedrich August Vogt and his twin sister had been born in 1840, the little-prized children of an unmarried mother, who had vanished one day and left no trace. Probably she had died in a ditch. The children were taken into an orphanage, on leaving which the girl had gone to service, while the boy had become a soldier and climbed the ladder of promotion to the rank of sergeant, receiving the silver medal for bravery, and at St. Privat the iron cross. In command over others he proved strict and just; and though assuming an outwardly harsh, bearish manner, he looked after those who were under him with indefatigable and almost fatherly care. His whole endeavour throughout those fifteen years had been to stand blameless, not only in the eyes of his superiors, but, what was more important still, in his own.

His comrades disliked the quiet, serious man, and Vogt himself was just as little drawn to their frivolous ways; nor had women any attraction for him. He was sufficient unto himself, and looked neither for friend nor wife; but though he had grown up independent of love, he yet craved to win for himself some modest amount of grateful recognition within the narrow limits of the service, and he felt richly rewarded if a reservist when bidding good-bye gripped his hand and muttered a few clumsy words of gratitude. Of such were many good-for-nothings whom he had saved from dangerous follies and their inevitable punishment, not by rough words, but by kindly counsel. When he eventually doffed his uniform he had nothing with which to reproach himself; no neglect and no overstepping of duty, no injustice and no improper leniency; he had good cause for self-satisfaction.

He was given the post of turnpike-keeper in recognition of his good service, and could then carry out a long-cherished wish: he took his sister to live with him. But he did not long enjoy her companionship. She left him after but a few years, during which she succeeded--not without difficulty--in bringing some sort of brightness into the life of her grave brother. She foresaw that he would in all probability lapse into deeper and deeper gloom when she was no longer there; and on her deathbed she joined his hand with that of a girl some years younger than herself, with whom she had struck up a firm friendship. They respected the wishes of the dead, married, and lived together happily, thinking themselves the most fortunate of mortals when a son was born to them. But August Vogt was doomed to loneliness, for his wife died when the boy was just old enough to go to school.

Shortly after this Vogt inherited a small property from his wife's father, and the toll on the highway being at the same time abolished, he bought the now superfluous house cheap from the State, and set up as a peasant proprietor. He had now a new source of pride: that this land, which he watered with his sweat, should bring forth abundantly; that his cattle, whom no strange hand might touch, should be the sleekest and fattest of all. Solitary and unaided he laboured in house and field, as if wishing to defy that fate which had torn from him the only two people he had loved. As he could love them no longer he had rather be quite alone, save for the little chap who trotted after him everywhere, and--looking almost as grave and preoccupied as his father--copied with his tiny gardening tools everything he saw his father do. In course of time the child became a more and more useful helper, till at last the two in equal comradeship spent their entire energies on the land, by whose produce they were almost exclusively nourished, with the addition of the milk from their own cow.

In the evening they sat opposite to each other, resting after their toil. Occasionally, with a youth's eagerness for adventure, the younger man would ask the elder to recount those military experiences to which the decorations in the cash-box bore testimony; but the father gave only scanty and unwilling replies. He bethought himself how in those days of St. Privat they had stormed a burning village, rushing through a fine field of ripe oats, and how a man had fallen next to him--a boyish drummer--with a bullet in his throat. In dying he had grasped and torn up the golden ears; and he held a bunch of them in his dead hand, all dyed in his blood like some red flag.

Oh yes, he was proud of his medal and his cross, notwithstanding a sort of doubt that he could not suppress. An ever-widening gulf now separated him from that famous past; and it gave him a certain sense of discomfort, in the midst of this life of creative labour, to think of a time devoted chiefly, after all, to death and destruction.

It was from this feeling that he had abandoned his first intention of making his son follow his own old profession. There was no hurry. When the youngster was serving his time, he could decide to join on if he liked.

And now one thing was certain: it was very tiresome that his son should be called up just at this moment. Of course he mustn't let the boy see it; but he felt it hard, all the same. The recruiting-sergeant had pointed out to him that he could claim his son if he could show that the lad was indispensable to his work. But August Vogt was too honourable for that. Certainly he was sixty years of age; but even had he been ninety he would have managed to keep things going. Still, it was hard.

The father was probably heavier of heart than the son, as they paced through the night together; but when they stood once more before their door, after making a somewhat lengthy round, he only said: "Well, well, young 'un; you'll often think of this. Now sleep well, your last night at home." And as his son went off upstairs he added softly to himself, "My dear good boy!"

Early next day Franz Vogt departed.

The greater number of the recruits left the train when it reached the capital, and it was only a small company that proceeded onwards to the little garrison town.

Two or three non-commissioned officers received the detachment when it ultimately arrived at its destination. The recruits were then formed into squads and conducted to a large exercise-ground. The main body, hailing from the coal-mines and factories of the neighbouring mountain district, had already arrived by special train. There must have been about four hundred men altogether. Two or three officers, and numerous non-commissioned officers with helmets and shoulder-straps, were standing about. An endless calling over of names began. Those who were told off to the first battery were taken first, and were led away as soon as their number was complete. Then came those of the second battery, then the third, and so on. The other recruits stood looking dully in front of them, while those whose names were called out pressed forward through the ranks with feverish haste, jostling every one else with their boxes and bundles.

Franz Vogt listened at first full of expectation. Each time he thought that his name would be the next; but when the third battery had marched off without him his interest began to flag, and he thought he would take a look round. What he saw was not very encouraging. The large square exercise-ground was strewn with a fine black dust, coke-refuse, evidently; on three sides it was

surrounded by a wooden paling through which bare fields could be seen, and, in the direction of the town, miserable-looking vegetable-gardens in all the desolation of autumn. On the fourth side was an irregular row of buildings; first a long shed with windows at wide intervals, before which stood a sentry, who gazed across at the recruits with great curiosity; next a forge, from the door of which a grimy blacksmith and his assistants were watching, and a soldier in a grey jacket was leading out a black mare that had just been shod; then came another shed with large gates, one of which was open, and a number of men inside were busily engaged around a gun with cloths and brushes.

At length the names of the men belonging to the last--the sixth battery were read out. Franz Vogt counted them for want of something better to do--his own was the nineteenth on the list; he answered with a loud "Here!" and hurried forward. The corporal, who was arranging his men in ranks of six abreast, was a little man with a red face, flashing eyes, and a heavy dark moustache over a mouth whence continually issued objurgations and reprimands. When Vogt with quick comprehension placed himself at the beginning of a new row he gave a nod of satisfaction, and the young recruit felt mildly gratified that he had at any rate begun well.

As soon as the recruits told off to the sixth battery were in order they were marched off, two non-commissioned officers in front, one on either side, and another behind. It looked almost as if they were prisoners with a military escort.

The road went through part of the town and then took a curve round a corner into a street that led out into the open country. Broad fields stretched on either hand, those on the right separated from the road by a stream, alongside of which ran a branch railway line. Beyond these fields rose steep, sparsely-wooded hills, showing in some places the bare rock.

A good way up the valley the walls of a large mass of buildings gleamed white in the sunshine. The little corporal in front turned round and cried, "Those are your future quarters, boys!"

Vogt felt glad they were not in the town with its close alleys, but out in the open country, where one could feel nearer the fertile mother-earth; where the eye had an uninterrupted outlook, and where one could watch the sprouting and blossoming of springtime.

A whirl of dust now issued from the barrack gates and drew rapidly nearer. An officer, and behind him a soldier, both mounted, came along at a trot. When he had almost reached the detachment of recruits the officer reined in his bay horse, and as they passed by let his eyes rest for a moment on each one of them in careful scrutiny. He acknowledged with a curt nod the salutes of the non-commissioned officers as they marched quickly past. Although not a big man, he sat his horse with dignity; while a huge red moustache and piercing eyes that flashed through his *pince-nez* lent him an aspect of considerable fierceness. Vogt thought to himself, "He looks strict, but not exactly bad-tempered," when the little corporal turned round once more and said: "Boys, that was your captain--von Wegstetten."

The escort of armed and spurred non-commissioned officers had already made Vogt feel as if he were going to prison, and the entry into the barracks made it full clear that he was, at any rate, under stringent discipline, and must henceforth renounce a large measure of individual freedom. The opening gates were of iron, and were adorned with sharp spikes on the top, so as to make climbing over impossible; a sentry, too, stood at the entrance. The gates opened on to a spacious courtyard surrounded by buildings. Not a green thing was to be seen, and the gravelled yard was as naked and barren as the buildings themselves, whose blank windows suggested deserted rooms. Only a few were graced with white curtains, which gave promise of habitation. Even the young chestnut-trees that had been planted round the borders of the courtyard thrive but poorly; now and then a yellow leaf fell to the ground, although the woods outside were still a mass of green.

The quarters of the sixth battery were exactly facing the entrance, but the inner yard was evidently held sacred, for the recruits were taken round it by a paved pathway.

The little corporal now marshalled them carefully in two rows, and announced to an older man in a green jacket trimmed with red braid who was standing in a doorway: "The recruits are here, sir."

"Are they all there?" asked the other, as he came down the steps.

"All here, sir," replied the little man.

The sergeant-major passed slowly along the ranks, and examined each recruit with a searching glance. Vogt looked him fearlessly in the face. He reminded him of his father. He, too, could look one through and through like that; but one need never cast down one's eyes if one has a clear conscience.

The recruits were next conducted into the barrack-rooms, where to each was allotted a locker of his own, in which a white napkin and a spoon had already been placed. After putting their bundles into these lockers, they were taken straight to the dining-hall. Each gave in his white napkin through a serving-hatch and received it back again full, almost burning his fingers with the contents before he could put it down on the well-scoured wooden table. Beans and bacon was the fare, and it tasted rather good. No wonder, when the men had been travelling ever since

early morning.

Vogt's neighbour during the march came and sat next him on the wooden bench. He wiped his short black beard, and nodded to Vogt.

"This goes down pretty quick, doesn't it?" he said, as he spooned up his food.

"Rather!" answered Vogt. And the other went on, as he pointed to his empty napkin:

"If only our two years would go as fast!"

They soon made acquaintance. Weise was the man's name, and he was a locksmith from a factory in the neighbouring coal-district. But they only had time to exchange the barest preliminaries of intercourse when they had to get up again, go and wash their dishes and spoons at a tap, and then return.

Outside in the court-yard, in front of the quarters of another battery, some recruits who had arrived still earlier were standing, looking hungrily towards the kitchen.

"We've come off better than they," remarked Weise. "Things are going well with us, it seems."

Now again they had to go outside, and the reading over of names began once more. This time the standing-orders were given out, and during this performance their captain came into the barrack-yard. He dismounted, and walked up and down, sometimes behind and sometimes in front of the recruits, occasionally standing still and examining a man with special attention. It felt very uncomfortable if the little captain paused too long behind one; but--so much they had learned already--it would not do to turn round.

It was a considerable time before the last standing-order was given out, after which the sergeant-major desired those who wished to attend to the horses and to be drivers to stand on one side, and those who wanted to be gunners to take up their position on the other. Vogt and his new friend Weise placed themselves with the gunners, Vogt in this acting after his father's advice. "Youngster," the old man had said, "first and foremost be a good gunner. Then if you want to go on serving and become a corporal, you will get on faster than you would otherwise. You will know your gun and will only have to learn to ride."

Vogt began now to long for the end of all this. He felt tired in every limb, and would never have believed that waiting and standing about could take it out of one to such an extent. But what had gone before was child's play compared with the tiresome business of getting fitted with a uniform, which now began. Vogt himself came off rather well: the trousers, measured according to the length of the outstretched arm, fitted exactly, as did also the second coat he tried on; the leather belt with sword attached he buckled on at once, and cap and helmet were soon forthcoming, but he had to put on several pairs of boots before he found the right ones. Then the corporal tossed him over a drill suit as well, and he was ready.

But with some of the men nothing would fit. The tallest of all found the sleeves reaching just below his elbows, and when he tried the next size, the coat hung in folds across his chest. Others had square heads on which the round helmets rocked about, until they were jammed on by two or three good blows of the fist. One sturdy, thick-set, big-bellied fellow it seemed impossible to suit; everything was far too tight for him.

"What have you been hitherto?" asked one of the non-commissioned officers.

"A brewer," answered the fat man.

"Did you drink all your beer yourself, then, eh?" inquired the other; and the man who gave out the clothing flung over a fresh suit, saying, threateningly: "Well, if that doesn't fit, by God! you shall drill in your drawers!"

He made the trousers meet with difficulty, and the coat was abominably tight; but the corporal gave him a dig in the stomach and said: "Cheer up, fatty! that'll soon go. They'll get rid of your paunch here in no time!"

When Vogt left the kit-room with his regimentals on his arm the erstwhile perfect order of the shelves, and of the symmetrically-folded piles of clothing, had been transformed into a scene of the wildest confusion. "A pity so much labour should be wasted," he thought.

And in what a wretched state were the clothes he had now to wear! The green cloth of the coat was so shabby that in parts it was positively threadbare; dark patches had been put in near the arm-holes, and the once red facings were quite faded. He examined them dejectedly and shook his head; he had expected something very different, and certainly he would not cut much of a figure in this get-up. He pulled a stool up to his locker, and began to take his things off. Weise sat down near him, already a full-blown soldier. The smart young fellow could adapt himself to anything, and had known at once how to give just the right saucy tilt to his forage-cap.

"Fine, eh?" he said, laughing, as he struck an attitude and gave his moustache an upward twirl.

But now once more the little corporal's penetrating voice recalled the recruits from their short breathing-space; those who were ready dressed must go down into the yard again, and then began another putting-to-rights all round. The presiding non-commissioned officers were in despair, for one of the men had one leg shorter than the other, another had crooked shoulders, and a third drew forth the exclamation: "Why, the fellow is humpbacked!"

The corporal called across the court-yard to his comrades: "We've got a hunchback here in the sixth!"

And the poor devil, a firmly-knit, broad-shouldered fellow, who had got somewhat round-shouldered from sheer hard labour, stood inwardly raging, and letting them pull him about as they liked; straighten his back he could not.

"A fellow-townsman of mine, that Findeisen there, a stonemason," said Weise.

He and Vogt came off well in this inspection. Their things fitted exactly.

"Thank God some of them have straight bones!" sighed the corporal, and sent them indoors again.

"You can be packing up your civilian clothes," he called after them, "and getting them ready to be sent away."

In the passage Vogt stopped: "Which is our room then?" he asked.

"Oh, number nine; we're all in nine," answered Weise. He pushed the door open, and with mock ceremony invited his comrade to enter.

At this moment the opposite door opened, and a tall thin soldier stepped over the threshold. Weise started. "What! you, Wilhelm?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

The other said, "Well, why not? Didn't you know?---How are you, anyhow?"

They shook hands warmly, and it seemed to Vogt that they looked at each other as if there were some private understanding between them. Curious for an explanation, he inquired, "Who's that? He's an old hand, isn't he?"

Weise replied: "Oh, he's an old friend of mine; Wolf is his name. Yes, he has served since last autumn."

He had been speaking quite gravely; but quickly regained his cheerful manner, and soon after left the room.

Vogt put his civilian clothes into his box and snapped the padlock with a click. With that he felt that the last link that had bound him to the old life was broken. He was a soldier now. He looked round the room that was to be his home for two years: the floor of bare boards; the grey-plastered walls, hidden for the most part by the rows of lockers, and their only decoration a portrait of the King over the door and two unframed battle pictures fastened up with tin-tacks. These had evidently been torn out of a newspaper. Two large tables surrounded by stools stood in the middle of the room; and at one of the two windows, which were bare except for their striped roller-blinds, a smaller table was placed with a common chair before it, the seat assigned to the corporal in charge of the room.

The others now began to come up from the court-yard. They were fifteen, all told; but as there were sixteen cupboards in the room, one man must be still to come. Most of them had to finish packing their civilian clothes; when that was done they sat down in the darkening room, tired and silent, hardly even caring to make acquaintance with one another.

The fat brewer had placed himself at the table next to Vogt and Weise. He was overcome with heat, and said he would rather hang himself than endure this horrible drudgery for two whole years. But Weise chaffed him in his genial way: "How do you know you could find a tough enough rope, brewer? you're no light weight!" And presently the brewer grew less melancholy; now that he could sit down things did not look so formidable, and he only groaned pathetically: "Oh, if I'd only a mug of beer--just one!"

At last Weise suggested lighting up. The two lamps gave but a scanty light; yet even that helped to dispel the gloomy thoughts of the men. And soon the little corporal appeared, with two of the "old gang" carrying loaves of bread, of which every man received one.

It tasted very good, this hard black bread, to which each recruit had some little relish of his own to add--butter, or dripping, or perhaps a sausage. Only one sat regarding his dry loaf disconsolately: Klitzing, a pale, spare young fellow with hollow cheeks, whose uniform was a world too wide for him. Vogt, who sat beside him, cut a big piece from his smoked sausage and pushed it to his neighbour: "There, comrade, let's go shares!"

Klitzing at first declined; but at last he took it, and thanked Vogt shyly.

"Why didn't you pack up your clothes?" asked the latter.

"I have no friends," replied Klitzing, "and I only came out of hospital on Monday."

"Poor fellow! all the more reason for you to eat. What were you?"

"A clerk."

"Well, we'll stick together, and you'll get along all right," said Vogt kindly. This pale clerk attracted him more than did Weise. Klitzing had frank honest eyes; one could not but feel sorry for his pallor and languor; how was he going to stand the hard work?

The men were still sitting over their meal when the little corporal brought in another recruit, a tall overgrown lad with a pink and white boyish face, apparently several years younger than the rest. The corporal spoke less gruffly to him, and showed him his locker with something like politeness. Apparently there was something special about this Frielinghausen, as he was called; even the uniform he wore was rather less patched and threadbare than those of the others. However, the new comrade seemed in anything but a cheerful mood; he dropped into a seat at the darkest end of the table, leant his head on his hand, and did not touch the loaf which the corporal placed before him.

Most of the recruits regarded him with unconcealed mistrust. What kind of stuck-up fine gentleman was this, who sat there as if his comrades didn't exist? He was no better than they. Only Vogt and Klitzing looked at him with compassion; who could tell what trouble this Frielinghausen was suffering from?

Weise became only the more gay. He took on himself to enliven the feast with jokes and drollery, and they all listened willingly; it kept off dulness, and the disagreeable thoughts that assailed them.

The corporal, too, listened awhile, well pleased. Then he called to the joker: "Hi, you black fellow! come here a minute!"

Weise sprang up, and his superior looked him up and down, not unfavourably.

"You're right," he said; "it's no good pulling a long face; a soldier should be jolly. Tell me, what's your name?"

"Weise," answered the recruit.

"Weise? Gustav Weise?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, indeed. Well, all right; sit down again."

Weise went back to his place, feeling somewhat snubbed. Why had the corporal suddenly looked so glum when he heard the name? There was nothing peculiar about his name. He did not trouble his head very much about it; but his cheerfulness passed away.

The last thing to do on this first day of their soldier's life was to give up their civilian clothes, with the address to which each box was to be sent. Klitzing knew no one who could receive his belongings; so they remained in the custody of the battery.

At length the day drew to a close. Shortly before ten o'clock "Lights out and go to bed!" was called. They hung up their jackets and went upstairs to the dormitory.

This was a spacious room, which extended, directly under the roof, the whole length and breadth of the building. Vogt had the good fortune to secure a bed in one of the outer rows close to a window, and he beckoned to Klitzing to take possession of the bed next him on the right. That on the left, in the corner, had been allotted by the corporal to Frielinghausen. The recruits were not long in getting to bed; though the "old gang" were more leisurely in their proceedings.

It was only on lying down that Vogt discovered how tired he was. The lean clerk on the right fell asleep immediately. Frielinghausen, however, seemed wakeful. Vogt listened. No, he was not deceived: the tall lad was weeping. For a moment he felt inclined to question his comrade about his trouble; but he feared a repulse, so turned over on the other side. After all, it was not for a man to weep, especially a soldier!

Once more he started from incipient slumber; he thought he heard the cow in her stall, clattering her chain. Surprised, he collected his wits. "Of course," he then said to himself, "it is the tattoo. I am a soldier."

CHAPTER II

"Every hour of every day,
Gunners, be ye blithe and
gay!"

(Old Artillery song.)

There was a good deal to do in the orderly-room. This new batch of sixty recruits meant a large amount of work that must be seen to at once, if the wilderness of papers were ever to be brought into some sort of order.

Three men sat bending over their writing: a bombardier, a corporal, and the sergeant-major.

The bombardier was doggedly filling in the lists, only glancing occasionally to see if the pile of forms still to be got through were not growing somewhat smaller.

Käppchen, the corporal, a lanky fellow with cunning eyes, grumbled from time to time at the trouble, and consigned to perdition the dirty rascals who caused it. Of course it was much pleasanter for him to sit in the orderly-room than to be messing about with the idiots out of doors; but he had never bargained for having to scribble away till he nearly got writer's cramp. And to-day the sergeant-major didn't even seem to be thinking of a pause for luncheon.

It therefore happened very opportunely when Captain von Wegstetten, having scarcely listened to the sergeant-major's report, "Nothing new in the battery," said: "Sergeant Schumann, I want to speak to you for a minute."

No further intimation was needed; Käppchen and the bombardier disappeared from the room instantly.

Sergeant Schumann stood by his table in the orthodox attitude of respectful attention. As on every day of the eight years during which Wegstetten had commanded the sixth battery, and he, Schumann, had been its sergeant-major, he waited until the former by a gesture or a word should permit him to assume an easier position. Nothing could alter this; not even the confidence that time had gradually established between them.

Wegstetten motioned him kindly to a seat, and then bent over the records of the recruits.

"Well, Schumann," he began, "what sort of a lot have we got this time?"

"It doesn't seem a bad year, sir," answered the sergeant-major; "they've nearly all got clean sheets----"

"Hm," assented the officer, "nearly all, but----?"

"Two have been convicted, one of theft, the other of resisting lawful authority. The first made away with a quantity of copper wire from a building; and the second made a row because he was notified that he had contravened some regulations as to driving. He was a cab-driver. Then there is another who has been punished for begging, tramping the streets, and sleeping out at nights."

"Well, he won't catch cold camping out, at any rate! What do you think, sergeant? mustn't a chap like that be glad to have a good roof over his head every night? Well, go on! What about political antecedents?"

"There is only one marked for that, sir--Gustav Weise."

Wegstetten began to polish his eye-glasses; then, "Read it aloud, Schumann," he said.

The sergeant-major took the paper and read: "Weise has more than once taken an active part in socialist propaganda; in spite of his youth he was for a time confidential agent for the Metal Workers' Union, and sometimes spoke at meetings, without, however, necessitating the interference of the police-officer in attendance, as Weise's communications chiefly referred to details of the trade."

"Nothing further? He seems a promising fellow! Where have we put him?"

"In Room IX., Corporal Wiegandt."

"Does he know----?"

"Yes, sir, I've mentioned it to him."

"Right. Call him in; I'll speak to him, and afterwards to Frielinghausen."

"Very good, sir."

In a few minutes the little bearded corporal was in the room and awaiting his captain's pleasure.

The officer appealed to the honour of his subordinate, in whom he was placing a special trust, and impressed upon him in carefully chosen language the necessity for keeping a watchful eye on the new recruit Weise, without, however, treating him differently from his comrades.

Wiegandt thereupon felt called on to describe and commend Weise's smartness and good humour.

Wegstetten listened, a fleeting smile once passing over his face. At the end he said: "Well, that's another proof that this sort often turn out good soldiers. You understand what I have said, Wiegandt? A sharp eye, and a firm grip on the rein; otherwise--just as with the rest of them."

"Very good, sir."

"That's all then."

When Wiegandt had gone, the officer turned to the sergeant-major and said with a sigh, "Damned nuisances they are! Now we've got two of these fellows, Wolf and Weise, we must see they don't get together. How is Wolf doing?"

"No fault to find with him, sir."

Wegstetten walked to the window and looked out silently. This was not the lightest part of an officer's duty, this supervision of the suspicious political element among the men. A perfect task of Sisyphus, indeed! After all, one could do nothing more than prevent the fellows from spouting their wisdom as long as they were soldiers, make them keep to the beaten track, give them "patriotism and the joys of a soldier's life" for their watchword. What sort of a fanatic was this Wolf? A man who had been handed over to him labelled "Poison!" with four cross-bones and a death's-head; who put on an expressionless face when his opinions were alluded to, and to the question "Are you a social-democrat?" answered with a stereotyped, almost sarcastic, "No, sir," and always went about looking as dark as a regular conspirator!

He turned round and began again: "Do you know, Schumann, I shall be glad when Wolf is off our hands. The man strikes me as almost uncanny. And then that Sergeant Keyser; he's a revengeful, resentful kind of fellow. He'll never forgive Wolf the six weeks he had on his account. Just see to it that the two have as little to do with one another as possible. Of course he'd never really do anything to a fellow like that; but it's always as well to be on the safe side. I'm not going to have another rumpus in my battery, with the whole lot of them had up as witnesses for three days on end! And that Keyser must mind what he's about. After all, we can't have the army turned into a big incubator for social-democrats."

"Very good, sir. And as Keyser has got charge of the kit-room now, that's easily arranged."

Any mention of this affair of Keyser and Wolf always rekindled Wegstetten's anger. Had he not himself been publicly shamed by it, as it had taken place in his battery? It had only been a trifle at bottom; such rough words as the sergeant had hurled at Wolf's head were daily showered on the men; but this social-democrat had, of course, a quite peculiar sense of personal dignity, and the stupid thing was that they had had to allow him to be in the right. For these zoological comparisons were strictly forbidden. An inquiry had been held about the sergeant's conduct, and then such a crowd of other "oxen," "pigs," and "donkeys," had appeared in the witness-box, that the commanding officer of the battery had felt quite giddy, and the presiding judge had perpetrated the cheap witticism that the entire German army might have been fed for a month on the cattle that the defendant had bullied into existence. He, Wegstetten, had hardly been in a humour to enjoy the joke, when the senior major (that detestable Lischke, in whose bad books he already stood), who was commanding the regiment during the colonel's absence on leave, had taken him aside and lectured him about the rough tone that seemed to prevail in the sixth battery. Wegstetten had taken it much to heart, and as he made the stiff little bow that formality prescribed, he had sworn a grim oath that never, no, never, should such a sickening business occur again in his battery. To have affairs like this connected with one's name had been for many the beginning of the end. And he was ambitious; he meant to go far.

He turned once more to the sergeant-major. "But it will be all right," he said, "at any rate so long as I have you, Schumann. I can depend on you. God knows, I should be pretty furious if you thought of deserting the colours."

The sergeant-major looked somewhat embarrassed: "Forgive me, sir. I shall have seen eighteen years' service come Easter; and however glad I might be to stop on, still--a man ought to provide for his old age. Schmidt, of the fourth battery, left four years ago, and he's got a good post as assistant station-master."

Wegstetten reassured him: "You mustn't think I was serious, Schumann. I know better than

any one what you've gone through and what I have to thank you for, and I shall wish you good luck with all my heart when you go. But you must feel for me, and understand how hard it will be for me to do with-out you. If I only knew who could take your place!"

The sergeant-major shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, speak out; you know the men better even than I do."

Schumann hesitated a little, and then said: "You know yourself, sir; Heppner is the next in seniority."

"Of course," said Wegstetten rather testily, "I know that. But I know, too, that you have something in your mind against him. What's the matter with Heppner? Isn't he steady in his work and first-rate in the stables?"

The sergeant-major answered slowly: "In his work, and as far as the horses are concerned--oh, yes."

"But----?"

Schumann shrugged his shoulders again.

The captain began to be angry. "Good God, man! so----" but he swallowed the sentence and continued more mildly: "Look here, Schumann. I'm not asking you for any gossip about your comrades; I only speak in the interest of the service. What is all this about Heppner? Is it that story about his wife and his sister-in-law?"

"No, sir, that's his private affair. But he won't do for the office, or to--to assist in money matters."

"But why?"

"He gambles, sir."

Wegstetten walked up and down the room for a few moments, plunged in thought; then came to a stand in front of the sergeant-major.

"Thank you for being so open with me, Schumann," he said; "but I don't see how we can avoid it. Heppner has served eleven years, the colonel likes him well enough,--and he really is a capable man in all practical work."

He looked at the clock and went on: "Thank goodness, you will be here another six months, and we shall be able to get this year's recruits well started. Now it's half-past ten, and I must be off to the riding-school. What else was there? Oh yes, Frielinghausen. Have him here at eleven." And with a friendly "Good morning, Schumann," he left the room.

Schumann sat down again to his writing; but he did not take up the pen. What his captain had said about "desertion" kept running in his head. He himself sometimes had the feeling that it would be wrong of him to quit the service. Especially now, when these new-fangled ways made men of the good old stamp all the more necessary.

He had worked his way upwards through long years of service, only getting promotion by slow degrees; and eight years ago he had been made sergeant-major, Wegstetten getting his battery on the self-same day. Nowadays any young fool of a gunner might be made bombardier in a year, in another six months corporal, and then be set to teach others. Raw, empty-headed fellows that only thought of their own comfort, and disappeared from barracks the moment their time of service had expired, without leaving a trace behind. Chaps without the least pride or interest in the service;--nice sort of non-commissioned officers!

He looked round. Just so; Käppchen was still away. Where was that lazy beggar? and where was the bombardier? He shut up his book and went off on the hunt.

The bombardier was waiting outside the door: he "thought the captain was still in the orderly-room." That might be true, of course. He didn't know where Käppchen was.

The sergeant-major knew where to look, and went straight to the canteen. There indeed was Käppchen, just lighting a cigarette, after wiping from his thin black beard the froth of a freshly-drawn glass of beer.

Schumann would not make a fuss before the other non-commissioned officers who were standing about, so only said: "Käppchen, you're wanted in the orderly-room." Whereupon the corporal was off like a shot, not even finishing his beer.

Wegstetten sauntered along the sandy road that led from the riding-school to the barracks. Now and then he stopped to switch off the dust scattered over him by the galloping hoofs. Now and then he flung an oath or so at the riders, but on the whole he was contented enough. It could

not be gainsaid, Heppner was the man for him. Yes, the battery was all right, and he, Wegstetten, would see to it that it remained so. On every speech-making occasion when the chief held it up as an example, he had rejoiced to see the envious faces with which the commanders of the other batteries congratulated him.

Undoubtedly on this account he was given extra hard nuts to crack--such as this case of Frielinghausen.

Baron Walter von Frielinghausen was a second-year student, expelled from the gymnasium for repeated misdemeanours. His mother, a very poor widow, had not the means to continue his education, neither was the family ready to do so. They had therefore suggested that the young scapegrace should be brought under strict soldierly discipline, with the view to his eventually entering the Fire-Workers' Corps, and perhaps being made an officer therein.

And it was the sixth battery that was selected as the scene of action for this young man's talents! Wegstetten resolved to take all the nonsense out of him, and to destroy any delusions the youth might have as to his being in any way privileged.

But when Frielinghausen stood before him, an overgrown stripling, whose somewhat angular limbs looked still more immature in the coarse, ready-made uniform; and when he met a pair of anxious young eyes fixed on him, his tone softened perceptibly. There occurred to him, too, the consciousness of another bond: Frielinghausen, like himself, belonged to the old Thuringian nobility--possibly even to an older family than Wegstetten's. Although this youngster had undoubtedly caused his mother grave anxiety, yet he had not stolen copper-wire, nor taken part in any socialistic demonstration. Wegstetten at the moment did not know of what worse he could be accused. Naturally he would see to it that this sympathy with the fate of a common soldier should not be wasted on an unworthy object. Directly Frielinghausen did amiss, he would be down on him; just as with that other sprig of nobility, Count Egon Plettau, who had actually managed to serve nearly eight years and of that time to spend, first six months, then two and then five years confined in a fortress--always on account of insubordination. Now this incarnate disgrace to the German nobility was nearing his release, and was expected to be back again soon in the battery. Accident would determine whether he would finish his remaining two months before he was put on the Reserve, or would again get himself into prison.

Wegstetten had sufficient knowledge of men to recognise the difference between the two. Count Plettau was a mere hopeless idler and vagabond. Frielinghausen was at least inspired with a wish to pull himself together and become good for something.

Accordingly Wegstetten spoke to him like a father; told him in a few pointed words that he must try to be independent and steady, and must not expect to be treated exceptionally; enjoining him by zeal and good conduct to earn promotion as quickly as possible. But at the door he added softly, for he did not wish the non-commissioned officers to hear: "Be worthy of the name you bear! That alone should be sufficient inducement to make you try to get on."

Frielinghausen stood breathless for a moment after he had closed the door of the orderly-room. His heart was full of gratitude for the warm, humane words, which, after all the dry exhortations and admonitions, put new life into his heart. He earnestly resolved to repay his chief by his deeds, and to take all possible pains to please him.

The boy, than whom a few weeks ago none had been more light-hearted and careless, had been forced into serious reflections the night before. He had been a favourite with all his fellow-students, even outdoing the others in boyish exuberance, looking only at the sunny side of life and laughing at the censure of his teachers. Now suddenly he found himself banished to surroundings the misery of which made sweet by comparison even the bitterest hours of the past, which he could only remember with shame. He thought of the times when his mother had implored him with anxious, fervent words to be good. How ill he had succeeded as to that "goodness"! That dear tender mother had not grudged him the freedom of youth; often she had told him that she had no wish to see him a priggish, model boy, but had urged him not to lag behind the others, nor to fall short of his goal. This was chiefly because of the stingy, well-to-do relations, whose goodwill she had to secure in order that he might not have an utterly joyless youth. She had borne every burden, and was prematurely aged through her anxiety that he should attain the object which had shone so brightly in the future: namely, the family scholarship at the University of Jena, an endowment founded by a Frielinghausen of old for the benefit of his descendants.

Then came the catastrophe. Never in all his life would he forget the blank dismay of his mother when the head of the gymnasium interviewed her and told her of the inevitable expulsion. "Levity, carelessness, lack of industry, superficiality in almost every subject," thus ran the reports of his teachers.

Hereupon followed a period of dreary inaction, and again a feverish succession of petitions and persuasions, with the object of obtaining means for three years' private coaching, but the relations declined to open their purses. So they had fallen upon this last expedient for providing him with a career as a sort of mongrel, half officer, half non-com.

He envied the simple lads who were his comrades. They had, it is true, entered into new and

strange conditions, but after all they remained in their natural environment. Many of them had never been so well off as in barracks. There was no bridge between the heights of culture to which he had aspired and the uncivilised depths in which his comrades dwelt so contentedly. Possibly they numbered among them fine and loveable natures: he was most attracted by the shabby clerk Klitzing, and by Vogt, the rough peasant-boy; but all these men, with their scanty words and awkward gestures, fought shy of him, fearing to be despised by an educated gentleman.

The prospect of intercourse with the non-commissioned officers, who, on promotion, would be his comrades, promised to be but little better than with the recruits. Among them he met, for the most part, with the same distrustful reticence that he had experienced among the men, though a few of them made up to him, thinking him the *protégé* of the captain, and this he resented. Käppchen, in particular, a little man, with unpleasant cunning eyes, offered to his "future comrade" sundry little favours which, being battery-clerk, were in his power to bestow.

Look at it as he would, the life of both the present and the future had seemed to him scarcely worth living. Upon such reflections broke the captain's hearty, friendly words, bringing a glimmer of light into the terrible darkness. To merit the goodwill of this man, to show him that his sympathy had not been unworthily bestowed, was at least an object to live for. Frielinghausen set himself to attain it.

He paused near the door sunk in thought, he hardly knew for how long. He was startled by a hand on his shoulder and a voice saying: "Just let me pass, my son."

Frielinghausen stood aside at the bidding of an officer who, in full-dress helmet, with aigrette, epaulettes, bandolier, and scarf, strode into the orderly-room. He thought sadly how he had himself as a youngster dreamt of being an officer, until his mother had talked him over to the safer career of letters. Now he glanced at his own shabby uniform and compared it regretfully with that of the other.

In the orderly-room Wegstetten rose briskly to meet the new-comer, and held out his hand: "Delighted to have you in my battery, Reimers; you are heartily welcome!" cutting short the lieutenant's acknowledgments with: "Yes indeed, I am pleased to have a man with me who has some actual experience of soldiering; of possibly something even more severe than that of Madelung with the fourth battery in China."

Laughingly he held up a warning finger as he added:

"Even though it was entirely contrary to orders that you should have fought for the Boers. How did you get on in the fortress?"

Reimers answered, smiling:

"Pretty well, sir. I have scarcely ever been so well treated as during that arrest."

"Very likely. And his majesty did not let you languish there long?"

"No, indeed, sir."

Wegstetten glanced at his watch.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't stop any longer now, for I must go back to the riding-school again. So good-bye, my dear fellow. But let me say once more how glad I am to have a man who has really smelt powder. They are only to be found among colonels and generals as a rule nowadays."

As soon as the captain had gone, Reimers put his helmet on the table, and drew off his gloves.

He glanced round the orderly-room and nodded with satisfaction as he noted that everything was as it used to be. Then he held out his hand to the sergeant-major.

"Good-day, Schumann!" he said cheerily. "You're still here? How are you?"

"I'm well, sir, thank God. And, beg pardon, sir, but how are you?"

Reimers looked surprised. "I'm quite well, of course. Why should I not be?"

"Well, sir, you had sick-leave last year----?"

"Ah, yes, that's all gone, Schumann; all gone--not a trace of it left."

"I'm delighted to hear it, sir," said the sergeant-major; "and, if you will excuse me, sir," he went on somewhat hesitatingly, "I'm glad, very glad, you've come back to the sixth, especially after you've fought for the Boers. I should like to go out there myself, you know, sir."

"Oh, no, Schumann," said Reimers, "you must not think of that. I don't believe you would like it. There's another side to that affair. Stay contentedly here. This is the place for you. Besides, the poor devils have next to no artillery left."

Lieutenant Reimers took Schumann's familiarity in good part. He recognised that it was the strong love of justice which made him espouse the cause of the weak.

"No, Schumann," he went on: "that is no place for you. Wait; wait quietly here. Mark my words! There will be work enough! The lessons learnt over there in China, too, will have to be worked out here, and for that we shall want our best men. You will be wanted. If only we had more like you!"

Reimers emphasised the last words, and heartily wrung the sergeant-major's hand.

Then he put on his helmet again and strode out of the room; a man, indeed, over whom the soldier heart of Schumann rejoiced. One could have confidence in a man like that, with his quick penetrating glance and his easy, erect carriage. He was a handsome fellow too, fair-haired and of open countenance, only just a trifle thin from his campaigning experiences. Not one of those young puppies, like some of the officers, who caused the sergeant-major, notwithstanding his due respect for his superiors, to shake his head sadly at times.

Schumann seated himself at his table. But despite all his efforts he could not concentrate his attention on the recruiting papers. The words of Reimers haunted him: that he, Schumann, would be wanted. That was the second time the same thing had been said to him this very day. There must be something in it. He felt as though he had a bad conscience.

But all day long he was busy, and it was only towards evening, when work was nearly done, that he had time to think. He left what he could for the next day, and went into his own quarters at the end of the corridor. Here he would earnestly think it out, whether he would not remain for a few more years with the battery.

Two families were quartered at the end of the corridor, that of Sergeant-major Schumann and that of the deputy sergeant-major, Heppner; each had a bedroom, sitting-room, and kitchen, and they shared the entrance-hall between them.

As Schumann entered he could hear through the door the rough, blustering voice of Heppner.

That was the worst of these quarters; the thin walls and doors let the faintest sound through, to say nothing of rows and quarrelling. Unless one positively whispered, one's neighbours could overhear everything one said, even though they were not intentionally listening.

The Heppners were always noisy. It was the old story that caused the bickerings of the ill-mated pair: a sickly wife stricken with lung disease, drawing daily nearer to her grave, and a husband of rough exuberant physical strength.

Heppner had married his wife when she was already with child by him; and he never could imagine afterwards how he had come to tie himself to her. He had at no time really cared for the pale, thin woman; but she had a quiet way of managing, inch by inch, to attain the end she aimed at. She had caught him by appearing humble and patient; so humble and patient that he fancied she would make a submissive wife--a wife who would let him go his own way and would wink at his shortcomings. For he had never had the smallest intention of playing the faithful spouse.

Devil take it! Wasn't he a jolly young chap who looked thoroughly well in his smart uniform; tall, broad-shouldered, strong of limb, with full ruddy face and black moustache; a fellow all the women ran after; was such as he to belong solely to a broomstick like his wife? It would be a sin and a shame! Lucky for her that she was so tame and yielding!

But after marriage the pliant, patient woman altered suddenly. She turned out a regular scold; a perfect vixen, who was ever at his heels, distorting his most harmless acts, and starting a new jealousy every day. Once she went for him with finger-nails and scissors; but he had given her such a drubbing that she never attempted that game again. She used her tongue all the more; and when, driven to extremity, he sought to chastise her, she screamed so that the whole barracks ran to the rescue.

In the end Heppner completely gave up troubling about her. He went his own way, going out evening after evening, enjoying himself after his fashion. He hardly ever gave his wife money enough for housekeeping. When he did come home it was he who was the aggressor now, and the reproaches of his wife were indifferent to him.

Thus things went on for months. It was not exactly pleasant for Heppner; but one can get used to anything. He seemed only to grow handsomer and more robust, while his wife became daily thinner and uglier. Finally she did him an ill turn by falling sick. The doctor declared her case to be hopeless from the first, and gave her but a short time to live. But even the approach of death did not silence her evil tongue.

Once the wretched wife went to Wegstetten, the captain of their battery, in the vain hope that he might be able to help her.

"Just consider a little, Frau Heppner," he suggested, "whether you yourself may not be

somewhat to blame. For it is impossible that a man so regular in his duties, who never has to be found fault with, can be as violent as you make out. You exaggerate a bit, my good woman."

After this she resigned herself angrily to her miserable fate.

Wegstetten was not wrong in his praise of Heppner. Outside his own quarters Heppner was a blameless non-commissioned officer; one who knew his duties as well as any, and was strictly obedient to rules and regulations. He handled the men smartly, his brutal, leonine voice being audible all over the parade-ground; yet he never permitted himself any undue licence of speech.

In general, if his men took the trouble to try, he got on well enough with them. It was a satisfaction to him to command a well-drilled body of men; if they behaved themselves he showed them thorough good-will. Only now and then he would fix on a man and worry him to the utmost permissible limit in a grim, cold way almost past endurance. It would always be one of the weaker sort; pale-faced lads he could never endure. And occasionally in other ways the rough animal nature of the man would show itself. If any one got hurt, Heppner was the first to run up—not to help, but to see the blood; he would watch it flow with unmistakable pleasure in his eager eyes.

His special forte was the breaking-in of chargers. In the riding-school he was thoroughly in his element; particularly under cover in the winter, when the horses steamed and the dim lamps glowed red through the dust. With the air of a conqueror he would mount some horse which had refused a jump. His hand could be as soft as satin or as hard as steel, and he would always try gentle means first. Throwing himself back on the hind-quarters, where the weight tells most, and thus driving the brute involuntarily forward till with his powerful legs he had forced it up to the obstacle, with one final squeeze he would get it over. If a refractory horse fell with him, he would be out of the saddle in a moment, and would wait, rein in hand, smiling quietly, until the animal was up again snorting. Then he would remount, and four or five times must the rebellious horse take the jump; then at last his rider would be satisfied.

Heppner's voice would sometimes sound quite good-humoured during riding instruction; he would then relax somewhat. He knew that his men would ride well when it came to the point; for that the sixth battery must have the best horsemen was an understood thing.

Thus it will be seen that the brutality Heppner displayed at home he could successfully repress when on duty. But the most remarkable thing about this man, who behaved like a brute to his wife, and had no affection for his comrades, was the metamorphosis he underwent if the horses were in question. Towards those beautiful animals he showed an almost womanly tenderness. They all knew him, and he loved them all, though naturally he had his favourites among them. There was Udo, a light-brown gelding, who could kneel down. And Zulu, almost black, would shake his head when asked if he were French, but nodded when one said, "A German artilleryman, aren't you?" Heppner would take them sugar every day, or other tit-bits, which he would divide among them with scrupulous fairness.

If by chance a horse fell ill, Heppner's devotion amounted to actual self-sacrifice, and he would anticipate the orders of the vet. with marvellous acuteness. Once only had he mal-treated a subordinate, a driver whom as a rule he particularly liked. He gave him a blow which caused the blood to spurt from both nose and mouth, because he had, when on stable duty, allowed Dornröschen to get caught in her chain. Dornröschen was Heppner's own riding-horse, and the very apple of his eye.

It was chiefly among these beautiful and intelligent animals that the more human element in Heppner's nature came out, and his love for them almost amounted to superstition. There must always be a goat about the stables, for it was an old belief that the strong smell of that animal was a preventive of disease, and the long-bearded Billy was the special *protégé* of the deputy sergeant-major. Now and then there were difficulties concerning him; as, for instance, when an unexpected attack in the rear knocked the major down in the dust before the whole corps. It was only by desperate entreaty that Heppner succeeded in saving the life of the bleating culprit, and then a curious chance led to his reinstatement. The very first night that the goat was turned out of the barracks, two of the horses began to cough the vet. hinted at bronchitis--four weeks only from the manœuvres, and bronchitis!--Billy was at once restored to his place in the stables, and both horses ceased to cough.

The deputy sergeant-major would have found it difficult to answer had he been asked which he preferred: to play cards in a beerhouse with a buxom Bohemian waitress beside him, or to be in the neat stables amid the chain-rattling, snorting, stamping company of the horses. Both were to his taste; but perhaps on the whole he was really happiest walking up and down before the stalls, with the goat trotting after him, and the horses turning their heads to follow him with their sagacious eyes.

But as soon as the stable-door closed behind him the soft look would vanish; and as he opened the door of his own quarters an evil expression would overspread his face, as if he were ready at once to fall upon his defenceless wife.

Through grief and illness the unfortunate woman became at last incapable of attending to her domestic duties. She cast about for an assistant, and at last wrote to her sister Ida, who was in

service in Lusatia. Ida willingly threw up her situation, came to her brother-in-law's dwelling, and immediately took over the management of the little household and of the invalid.

For a time it seemed as if the loathsome atmosphere of hate and squalor must disappear in presence of the tall fresh country girl; the deputy sergeant-major put a restraint upon himself before his sister-in-law, and the sickly wife found comfort and relief in talking to her. But eventually the presence of this third party transformed the house into a veritable hell.

The eyes of hatred are as keen as those of love. Julie Heppner soon discovered that her husband loved her sister with his usual coarse passion, as he had loved so many others before. She recognised the ardent fixed gaze that rested lustfully on the young girl, following her every movement. This, then, was to be the last, bitterest, deadliest drop in her cup; this betrayal, in her own home, under her very eyes.

The sick woman watched her sister's conduct in agonised suspense. At first Ida had been honestly indifferent to the behaviour of her brother-in-law; after a while, however, a faint embarrassed flush would sometimes overspread her pretty youthful countenance. From the fugitive glances which she now and then intercepted between the two, the invalid foresaw the most sinister results.

Heppner himself, not being particularly quick-witted, and being used only to coarse associates, did not quite know what to make of his sister-in-law. Of only one thing was he certain, this beautiful girl must be his. He was even prepared, if he could not otherwise succeed, to resort to violence.

One evening Heppner had been exercising Walküre, Wegstetten's charger, for an hour. Having seen her wisped down in the stable and covered with a horse cloth, he went towards the canteen for a drink, when he remembered that there was a bottle of beer in his own kitchen. He strolled slowly and somewhat stiffly towards his quarters.

Ida was washing in the kitchen. He said briefly, "Good evening," poured out the beer, and drank it in great gulps. Then he shook the last drops in the glass to make them froth up, silently watching his sister-in-law the while. She had round white arms; and as she bent over the tub, the outline of her hips showed broad and firm.

Through the open door came the shrill hoarse voice of his wife.

"Ida, who is there?"

"Who else should it be but Otto?" answered the girl.

Again the shrill voice called, yet more insistently, "Why does he not come in?"

Heppner finished his glass, put it down, and said: "Because I won't. Because I'm better off here. Because Ida's a pretty girl, and you're an old crone."

At this, as though in fun, he put his arm round the girl and pressed her to him.

Ida kept still for a moment. She shivered. Then she shook him off: "Let go, stupid! Go to your wife."

Heppner let her go. The single moment that she had permitted his embrace convinced him that here, too, he would conquer. How she had quivered in his arms! He understood such signs.

Meanwhile Sergeant Schumann, only separated from the Heppners by a partition wall, sat at the round table by the sofa with his wife.

Their room, with its antimacassars, its upholstered furniture, its flower-pots and canary-bird, its sewing-machine in the window, was more like an old maid's best parlour than a soldier's sitting-room. The small, neat-featured mistress herself, who was not very strong, and always, even in summer, wore a little shawl round her shoulders, suited her surroundings admirably.

She had a thousand small cares, and one great grief: that they were childless. But she never troubled her husband with her sorrow, taking care to bear it alone. He had bothers enough in the service; how often did she not hear his voice storming outside! He should have peace at home. One thing only she could not bear without complaining to him: the terrible quarrellings of their neighbours. She shuddered whenever she heard the strife begin afresh; and gradually out of this had grown an aversion from all this noisy life. She became a most zealous advocate of her husband's plans for retiring; and could scarcely find patience to await the moment when he would put off the richly-laced coat beside which she had formerly been so proud to walk. In her heart she had always been rather against the martial calling, and would take Schumann's sword from him as though it dripped blood.

All this would cease when he changed his military coat or the handsome dark uniform of a railway-official; all this discomfort would come to an end; above all, this noise: the shouts and curses with which recalcitrant recruits had to be knocked into shape, the trampling of nailed

boots on the stone stairs, the bellowing of commands on the parade-ground, and--last, but not least--the hideous racket next door.

The sergeant-major had almost finished his time of service. A post awaited him as assistant at a small railway-station in the neighbourhood; and once when Schumann was away at the practice-camp, she had not been able to resist the temptation to see the place for herself. It was on a branch-line, which wound up among the hills. The station was a little distance from the village in a green plantation. She yearned after the peaceful spot.

And now Schumann had again begun to speak of remaining on in the army!

His wife let him talk, listening patiently. She sat quietly opposite to him, giving him his supper as usual, as busy and attentive as though he were only speaking on indifferent topics. But when he had finished she spoke out, saying that, as a rule, she was not the woman to meddle in her husband's affairs, but that *this* was a matter which concerned herself as well. His notion that to quit the service now would make him feel like a deserter and a scoundrel seemed to her utter unpractical nonsense. He would be sacrificing a couple of years to a mere fancy.

Finally she produced her trump-card. She knew that the rural quiet of the little station had wound itself round her husband's heart during the week of trial he had already passed there. So she confessed her own secret journey.

And she conquered.

Each could describe as well as the other the charms of the unassuming little retreat. What one omitted the other supplied. Thus the picture in the sergeant-major's mind was revived afresh, and in such vivid colours that it regained its old power over him, dissipating the cloud of self-reproachful doubt. He saw before him a calm bright future in the narrow valley between wooded heights, and it came over him suddenly that there in the stillness, where one could live in touch with nature, he would for the first time begin really to live.

CHAPTER III

"I vow to thee my duty,
My heart and my hand,
O land of love and beauty,
My German fatherland!"

(*Massmann.*)

Lieutenant Reimers had reported himself to the colonel of the regiment and to the major.

These officers had given him a hearty welcome, each after his own fashion.

Major Schrader, who never let pass an opportunity of making a joke, received his report at first in a very stiff official manner, assuring him with a frown that he was very loth to have in his division officers who had been in disgrace; then almost fell on his neck, and asked him if it were true that the Kaffir girls had such an abominable smell.

Colonel Falkenheim gave him only a prolonged handshake; but Reimers could read the great gladness in his eyes.

The colonel had treated the young man almost as a son; and a year before, when the doctors had sent Reimers to Egypt as a consumptive patient with a very doubtful prospect of recovery, had seen him depart with a heavy heart. Now, looking upon him once more, he was doubly glad. Reimers had not developed into a broad-chested, red-cheeked, powerful man, but every trace of illness had vanished from the bronzed face; the thin features and the rather spare rigid figure gave an impression of tough endurance, a characteristic of greater value in resisting disease than mere well-nourished sleekness.

"You are well out of that, thank God! Reimers," he said, once more shaking the lieutenant's hand; "and it looks as if the improvement would be permanent, considering the test to which your health has been put."

"It was rather *va banque*, sir," replied the lieutenant. "Either all or nothing."

"I decidedly prefer the all," said Falkenheim, in such a hearty, affectionate tone that a rush of

devotion carried the lieutenant past the barriers of formality. He bent quickly over the colonel's hand and kissed it. Tears stood in his eyes--tears of grateful pleasure. Now he indeed felt himself back in his native country.

How he had longed for it, day after day, during this year of furlough!

At first when, in Cairo, he was again laid low by the fatigues of the journey, he had thought of his country with pensive melancholy. Later, as his strength returned, homesickness asserted itself increasingly; he suffered from it more than from his gradually-substiding bodily malady, and the aimless life of a health-resort only increased his sufferings. He could never have resigned himself to pass long months of such inaction in a strange land; and when he joined the Boer forces, it was to no small extent in order to counteract the torturing longing for Germany.

He loved his country with a passionate ardour. The ideas of greatness, power and sovereignty were inseparably connected in his mind with the name of the German Empire. But his chief enthusiasm was reserved for the diligent, unostentatious work, quietly accomplished and conscious of its aim, which, begun by Stein, Scharnhorst and Boyen, had led through long struggles to such a glorious result. He reviewed the whole story with the eye of a soldier from the collapse at Jena onward to the last great war he seemed to trace an uninterruptedly ascending line, not diverted even by Prussia's temporary political defeats. In the unparalleled siege of Sedan a height of military efficiency had been reached from which no further ascent was possible. He could not imagine anything in the whole world more honourable than to belong to that splendid army of Sedan; and he wore his officer's sword-knot with a pride far removed from any kind of conceit: in fact, nearly akin to religious veneration.

As a boy, it had been his bitterest grief that his mother's wishes and the doctor's opinion were against his becoming a soldier,--an officer like his dead father, who had fought in the great campaign. His mother and the doctor had feared that he was too weakly for the military profession. In order to remove this objection, the boy voluntarily subjected himself to heroic discipline, and by strictly following a graduated system of physical exercises inured his body to hardships, until he was actually found fit for service. Conquered by such persistent devotion, his mother at last yielded to his wishes; but she saw him wear his father's familiar old uniform only a few times, for she died shortly after, barely forty years old.

Bernhard Reimers thus became doubly an orphan. But he had far more than the death of a mother to deplore. With his mother he also lost the only person who had loved him, and the only one whom he in return had loved.

So closely was the boy encircled by his mother's love, that the need which led his schoolfellows at the gymnasium to form friendships was never felt by him. Whenever he wanted to learn something, to solve a doubt or to confide a secret, he could count on his mother's tenderness; she would explain, soothe, or sympathise, as the joys and sorrows of the growing youth became ever more serious. From this relation he retained a touch of womanliness in his character, even after he had left home to enter the regiment: a shrinking from everything coarse, a reserve before all that was unlovely. This instinctive feeling did not, indeed, altogether protect him from temptation, but it withheld him from yielding to excess. He joined in the little drink and love follies of the other young subalterns from a sense of comradeship; alone they would never have appealed to him.

As at school, so in the regiment, he had many comrades, but no friend. He did not trouble himself about this, and until his mother's death he felt no want. Then he recognised sadly that he was quite alone; but he was incapable of setting to work to seek a friend, so he just waited for some happy chance to bring the right person across his path.

When, at last, he found the friendship he sought, it did not come in the way he had dreamed, suddenly, like a gift from heaven thrown into his lap; but was a gradual strong growth, a slow mutual recognition.

It would be difficult to find a greater contrast than that presented by Reimers and this Senior-lieutenant Güntz; externally and internally they differed radically. Reimers was tall and lean, with golden-brown hair, and a noble, but somewhat melancholy expression; Güntz was small and very fair, with a tendency to stoutness, and with a red jovial face like the full moon. The one was romantic and even exuberant, slightly fantastic in his moods; the other firmly rooted in prosaic fact.

Both were prized as able officers. Reimers was referred to on questions of military history and science; Güntz was considered an authority on mathematical technicalities, especially in connection with the artillery. Thoroughness was a characteristic of each alike; and on the strength of this, and despite all difference, they were daily attracted more and more to each other. Güntz, the more expansive nature, soon opened his whole heart to his friend; though Reimers, partly from a kind of timidity, still kept his deepest and innermost feelings somewhat hidden. For Güntz, with his sober sense and terrible logic, must necessarily, since he could never be otherwise than sincere, destroy most of the ideals and illusions to which Reimers passionately clung, and without which he believed he could not live.

Little by little, however, the wall of separation between them gave way, and their friendship and mutual confidence had become almost ideal, when Guntz was ordered to serve in the Experimental Department of the Artillery in Berlin. This was a distinction; but it meant absence for a year.

Reimers had thus found a friend only to lose him again.

The exchange of letters between the two was not specially brisk. Things which could be instantly understood in conversation had to be treated in such detail on paper! They would have had to write each other scientific treatises, and for that there was no time; Reimers was too zealous in his garrison duty, and Guntz too much absorbed in the technical problems on which he was engaged. His loneliness only caused Reimers to devote himself with the greater zeal to his profession.

Even the irksome duties of the service did not trouble him, and he took special interest in his recruits, superintending, correcting, and instructing them. In times of peace this was, indeed, the greatest and most important work of the young officer, to mould this stubborn human material into soldiers--soldiers who, after the first rough shaping, had to be trained till finally they attained their highest end: fitness for active service.

At the same time he had to pursue his own studies in military science. But he would have been ashamed to call that work; he knew no nobler pleasure, and would gladly have sat up the whole night over the plans of the general staff, only refraining so that the next morning might find him fresh with the needful, or, as he smilingly called it, the "regulation" vigour for practical duty.

Thus, when Guntz had gone, Reimers was in danger of becoming somewhat shy of his fellow-creatures. He had honestly to put constraint on himself to fulfil the claims of comradeship with a good grace, and more especially his social obligations. He was most at home in outdoor recreations; he played tennis with enthusiasm, and had nothing against excursions on foot or bicycle with a picnic thrown in, or the regimental races, or hunting. These all meant healthy exercise, and afforded a wholesome change from the confined life of the garrison. But winter, with its obligatory dinners and balls, was a torment to him.

On one occasion, standing in the doorway of a ballroom, he had closed his ears so as to exclude all sound of the music, and then had seriously doubted the sanity of the men and women he saw madly jumping about. He felt almost ashamed afterwards when he had to ask the no longer youthful Frau Lischke for a dance; but the fat lady hung smiling on his arm, and did not spare him a single round. Reimers thought sadly of his honest friend Guntz, and the rude things he had been wont to say about such follies as these.

But chance threw in his way a gift which to some extent compensated him for the loss of his friend. He and Colonel von Falkenheim were brought together; and, by the irony of fate, at one of these same odious balls.

After working through his duty dances, Reimers had allowed himself to omit a polka, and was leaning out of a window in the end room of the suite, when Colonel Falkenheim tapped him on the shoulder.

The colonel was bored; for those of the older men who were not occupied with the ladies had set themselves down to cards, and he--a widower, whose only daughter was still at school--could not bear cards, and liked dancing still less. This Lieutenant Reimers, standing alone gazing out into the night, seemed a kindred spirit.

The young officer had already excited his interest; his behaviour as a soldier was loudly praised by his superiors; and then unprofessionally he was distinguished from the average type of young lieutenant by a certain attractive maturity of bearing, without, however, impressing one as a prig. Priggishness was even less endurable to Falkenheim than play and dancing.

The colonel had the gift of making people open their hearts to him by means of a few judicious questions, and could very well distinguish between genuine and spurious sentiment.

Reimers answered with a candour which astonished himself most of all, and Falkenheim listened with a pleased attention. Here was a man after his own heart, possessed by a manly seriousness, and with a deliberate lofty aim in life; not merely dreaming of substituting a general's epaulettes for the simple shoulder-knots of a lieutenant. Here, too, was a fine enthusiasm, which touched the veteran of fifty and warmed his heart. It recalled the old warlike days and the cry: "Only put us to the proof! and rather to-day than to-morrow!" Ah! since those days he had learnt to judge such things rather differently; but nevertheless it was the right way for youth to regard them. Such enthusiasm was a little exaggerated, at any rate as things stood at present, and also a trifle shortsighted. It was now no longer as in the days of 1870 and after, when the watch on the Rhine had to be kept for fear of vengeance. He could not join as heartily as he might then have done in the proud joy of the young officer.

He felt inclined to take himself to task for this, and on no account would he pour cold water on this fine flame of enthusiasm. It was the very thing in which the present time was most lacking: patriotism as a genuine conviction rooted firmly and deep in the breast, not venting itself in mere cheering and hurrahs; and accompanied by a steady comprehension of the soldier's profession as

simply a constant readiness for war.

From the time of this conversation, Reimers began to feel heartily enthusiastic about his colonel. He was almost ashamed to find that his good friend Guntz was thus slightly forgotten; but this was not really the case--the two might safely share in his affection without wrong to either of them. The honest, faithful fellow in Berlin remained his dear friend; the colonel he began to look on as a second father.

Falkenheim's partiality was not, of course, openly expressed; but by many little signs he let the young man see how much he thought of him. Reimers, fully aware of the fatherly sympathy, was happy in the knowledge of it. His comrades were, indeed, surprised to find how lively and almost exuberant the hitherto staid Reimers could become; and particularly was this so during the artillery practice and the autumn manœuvres, when--garrison and parade drills at an end for a time--conditions were somewhat akin to those of real warfare.

Then the even course of things was broken by his illness.

When, before his enforced furlough, he took leave of the colonel, the latter's hearty liking for the first time broke through the barriers of official form. His clear eyes became dim, and his voice slightly trembled as he said: "Come back well, my dear Reimers--come back to me. Be sure and do all you can to get cured!"

Now, when at last Reimers found himself once more standing face to face with this honoured colonel, joy overpowered him, and he kissed the hand of his fatherly friend.

The colonel tolerated this altogether unmilitary excess with a good-natured smile. He would have been delighted to clasp in his arms this young man, who was as dear as a son to him; but he, an old soldier, could not allow his feelings to get the better of him as the lieutenant had done, rejoiced though he had been by the latter's outburst.

Out on the parade-ground Reimers looked about him with interest. Everything seemed to have become different and delightful; even the bare, prosaic yard of the barracks appeared no longer devoid of charm. He passed through the gate and went slowly along the high road towards the town. Then it was that the glad feeling of being in his native country asserted itself in full force. He realised that it was just the tender green of those beeches and alders edging the brook that he had longed to see when, in Cairo, the fan-like palm-leaf hung motionless at his window; just this slope of meadow land that he had remembered on the arid veldt of South Africa. It was this mild sunshine of his native land, this blue German sky that he had pined for in the glowing furnace of the Red Sea. The tiny engine which puffed along asthmatically up the valley, dragging its little carriages and ringing its bell from time to time when a browsing sheep strayed between the rails, had been ever present in his mind during his journeyings to and fro.

As he walked along, the young officer thought of his comrades whom he would now meet again.

In this glad moment he could tolerate them all. Their various defects, whether small or great, now appeared less offensive than of yore; and in any case it was kind of them and a great compliment to him that on this very day of his return they should have arranged a feast. It is true he rather dreaded this feast, which was sure to end in the usual way--general drunkenness--but it was well meant, and there was at least one advantage in it, that he would at once be made acquainted with all the details of garrison gossip; for, though altogether beneath contempt, they must be known in order to avoid giving unintentional offence.

At the door of his quarters he found waiting the gunner who had been appointed as his servant.

"Gunner Gähler, as servant to Lieutenant Reimers," he announced himself.

Reimers took a good look at the man. The sergeant-major seemed to have done well for him in this respect. Gähler was a smart fellow, not exactly tall, but well proportioned, and very clean. His hair smelt a little too strongly of pomade, and wax had not been spared on his fashionably-stiffened moustache.

When Reimers drew his bunch of keys out of his pocket to unlock the door, Gähler hastened to take them from his hand, and opened the door for the lieutenant to pass in before him. He quickly laid his bundle of clothes upon a chair, and at once helped to take off Reimer's helmet, shoulder-belt, and scarf.

The officer smiled at such excessive zeal.

"How is it that you are so well up in this work?"

"I was for a time servant to Captain von Wegstetten, sir."

"Indeed? And why did you leave him?"

Gähler hesitated a little; then he resumed glibly: "Please do not think badly of me, sir. There were difficulties; the servant-girl slandered me; you will understand, sir."

He stood there embarrassed, polishing the chin-piece of the helmet with the sleeve of his coat.

Reimers felt amused at his choice manner of expressing himself. "So you can't leave the women alone?" he asked. "Well, with me you will not be led into temptation."

Gähler modestly demurred: "I beg your pardon, sir; but in that case it was really not at all my fault."

The lieutenant laughed. "Oh, all right!" he said; "but before that, where were you?"

The gunner drew himself up proudly, and replied with dignity: "I was groom to Count Vocking, in Dresden."

"Aha, that accounts for it!"

Reimers was no longer surprised. The aristocratic cavalry-officer was considered the richest and smartest sportsman in Germany.

First, Reimers asked for his smoking-jacket, and then told Gähler to help him in unpacking the case of books which had just arrived from Suez.

Gähler handed him the volumes, and could not help remarking: "You have an awful lot of books, sir!"

The lieutenant did not look offended, so he went on: "The count hadn't so many, and none at all of this sort."

He stole another glance to assure himself that he had not displeased his master, and then added: "The count only had books about horses, and a few about women, and the Regulations for cavalry-exercise."

At this Reimers could not help laughing, and his "Hold your tongue," did not sound to Gähler particularly angry.

But if Count Vocking possessed fewer books than the lieutenant, he apparently surpassed him greatly in other respects.

As Gähler was arranging the washhand stand, he remarked: "The count had lots of little boxes and bottles, with real silver tops."

And when he fetched Reimers some sandwiches and a glass of beer for lunch from the kitchen on the ground floor, he informed his master, "The count had his own kitchen, and used to drink Burgundy at lunch."

And here another result of his training in the Vocking household came to light. In a few moments the table was covered with a clean cloth, with knife, fork, and spoon neatly in place; and it was certainly not the rough maid down below in the simple kitchen to whom it had occurred to decorate the dish so prettily with parsley and radishes. The meal looked far more appetising than usual, and this was Gähler's work.

"Where did you get the radishes from?" Reimers asked.

"The cook gave them to me, sir," his servant replied.

"So you are at it again, making yourself agreeable?"

This time Gähler was not in the least confused, but replied frankly, "I beg your pardon, sir; the cook is very old and very fat, I---"

That evening, in the mess-house, the officers, both his seniors in rank and those of his own age, vied with each other in pleasant speeches. But it ended just as it had done a year before; when all had greeted him, he was left standing alone in the doorway of the reading-room.

His only friend, Güntz, was still in Berlin, and the officers chatted together in the other rooms of the mess-house, standing in groups which in almost every case denoted circles of friends. There was hardly any change in the composition of these circles, which was usually due to similar length of service, but in certain cases they were held together by some other bond. There was the Keyl-Möller group of two senior-lieutenants and a lieutenant, who were brothers-in-law in a double sense, two Keyls having married two Fräulein Möllers, and a Möller a Fräulein Keyl. There was also the trio of musical officers, one of whom sang and played the violin and also the French horn, while the second was an excellent pianist, and the third only whistled, but in a most artistic manner. Then, finally, there was the philosophic group, to which little Lieutenant Dr. von Fröben gave the tone. He had taken his doctor's degree in jurisprudence at Heidelberg, and had

recently become an officer, as during his year of military service he had lost all taste for legal science. He bore his academic honours with that dignity which often accompanies the unusual; he was considered extremely up-to-date, and at times rather extravagant in his opinions. Among his friends were two officers still very young, one of whom was always reading Prevost and Maupassant; and the other blushingly acknowledged himself to be the author of an ode, printed in a daily newspaper, welcoming the troops just returned from China, among whom had been Captain Madelung of the regiment.

Everything at the mess-house seemed to be just as of old; it seemed to Reimers as if he had not been away for a day. He looked around him: all were as before, the elder men, with thick moustaches and hair growing thin in places, with the cares of a future command already on the brow; those of his own age, easy-going and assuming nonchalant airs; and the youngest of all very spick and span and extremely correct. Just as of old the three brothers-in-law stood close together (two of them had in the meantime become fathers, and the wife of Keyl II., *née* Möller, was in an interesting condition), and chatted about their various uncles and aunts. As of yore, the singing, violin and horn-playing Manitius was at the piano, turning over the leaves of a pianoforte arrangement of the "Trompeter von Säckingen." And again, as of old, the little red-haired Dr. von Fröben held forth learnedly to every one who would listen. There were only two new men who had entered the regiment during his illness, and had just got their commissions as lieutenants. One of them, Landsberg, had introduced himself to Reimers as belonging to his battery.

Reimers was not much taken with him. This youth, with his somewhat vacant expression, hair glossy with pomade, and single eye-glass squeezed into his eye, was too artificial and dandified to suit his taste. But he seemed somehow to be an object of interest to Landsberg, though the latter was evidently shy of addressing his elder comrade.

Reimers thought he could guess what was coming. No doubt it was again some question about his experiences in the war, of the kind he had already answered twenty times this evening in a more or less evasive fashion. This curiosity did not offend him, for such questions must be in every officer's mind, and especially in that of one who was fresh to the soldier's calling.

Sure enough Landsberg came up. He began rather slowly. "Excuse me, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, I shall be most happy," answered Reimers.

"Do tell me," Landsberg proceeded hesitatingly, "I would like so much--in fact, the shape of your boots pleases me immensely; they are awfully smart, and I--in fact, you would confer a tremendous favour on me if you would give me the address of your bootmaker."

Reimers considered for a moment, then replied coldly: "I bought these boots in passing through Berlin."

"Just what I expected! They do look awfully smart, really! And do you remember the address of the shop?"

"No."

"What a pity! But, if you don't mind, I will send my servant to you to copy it off the lining. May I?"

Again Reimers was silent for a moment, then he said: "I have no objection, if you think it important."

Landsberg brought his heels together with a click, bowed, and murmured: "You are very kind; I shall certainly do so."

Then he moved away with, "Thank you so much."

Reimers turned away. He suddenly found the room too hot, and he walked up and down for a time in the cooler air of the vestibule. All the doors were open. In the mess-room the staff-officers and the captains were standing near the table, which was already laid. It was a few minutes before half-past seven. Only the colonel had not come yet.

Andreae, the senior staff-surgeon, gave Reimers a friendly nod through the doorway. Reimers was his show patient. The specialist had shrugged his shoulders, but he, Andreae, had not thrown up the sponge. The thing was in reality quite simple. It only needed, like other military affairs, initiative. The right diagnosis must be made as promptly as possible, and the right treatment must follow without delay. Then all went well, as in this case--unless, indeed, something went wrong. Yes, indeed, this patient was a triumph which should finally reduce to silence those civilian colleagues of his who considered a military surgeon competent at most to deal with venereal diseases and broken bones.

Reimers listened in an absent-minded way to his long-winded deliverances on the subject of acclimatisation, taking furtive glances the while at the other officers in the mess-room.

They also seemed in no way changed. Major Lischke and Captain von Wegstetten were still at

loggerheads, Lischke blustering away in his loud voice, and Wegstetten assuming his most ironical expression. Captain Stuckardt was listening in a half-hearted way; he had quite recently been put on the list for promotion to the staff, and consequently wore a rather preoccupied look. Hitherto he had found the charge of one battery difficult enough, and now he would have to command three. Undisturbed by the dispute, the captain of the fifth battery, Mohr, had sat down to the table by himself; he was always thirsty, and had already disposed of half a bottle of champagne. Madelung, fresh from the Far East, paced up and down with short nervous steps between him and the disputing officers. In passing, he glanced at the two fighting-cocks with a kind of scornful pity, and at the silent toper with contempt. Major Schrader and Captain von Gropphusen were whispering and chuckling together in a window nook. They had one inexhaustible theme--women; while forage was the favourite topic of the two men standing beneath the chandelier--Träger and Heuschkel, the officers commanding the first and second batteries. The third battery had the fattest horses in the regiment--"and the laziest," said the colonel; nevertheless, it must be allowed, that when the inspector from the Ministry of War paid his visit, it was an uncommonly pleasant sight to see the hind-quarters of those horses shining so round and sleek in their stalls.

"Carrots! carrots!" cried Heuschkel. "They're the thing!" And Andreea, who, as a healer of men must also have some knowledge of the inside of beasts, was called on to endorse this view as to the excellence of carrots as fodder.

Thus Reimers felt himself rather out of it all, and was just about to leave the mess-room and join his younger comrades, when Madelung came towards him.

The lieutenant waited expectantly. He was interested, for it was almost an event when Madelung spoke to any one.

This lean, black-haired man, with the thin dark face and the deep-set penetrating eyes, was undoubtedly the most unpopular officer in the regiment. He was characterised as an unscrupulous place-hunter, and gave himself not the slightest trouble to disprove the accusation. The one excuse that could be offered for him was that, his father having been ruined through no fault of his own, he was almost entirely dependent on his pay, and had been able to keep up his position as an officer only by means of the strictest economy, and with the help of an extra allowance from the royal privy-purse. It may have been this that embittered him so that he avoided all social intercourse with the other officers, and devoted himself entirely to his profession. By means of relentless industry he had now won for himself the prospect of a brilliant career; on leaving the Staff College he had been presented by the king with a sword of honour, and he could look forward to a position on the general staff. Naturally he had volunteered for the expedition to Eastern Asia, and had recently returned from China decorated with an order, thinner and more pinched-looking than ever, and still less amiable.

Reimers stood before him in a strictly correct attitude, for the captain was not to be trifled with. But Madelung put him at his ease with a nod, and said, glancing sharply at him, "So you are the other exotic prodigy who is being fêted to-day!"

He laughed drily.

The lieutenant made no response, and Madelung went on rapidly: "I may tell you that I envy you!"

Reimers felt the captain take his hand and give it a quick, hearty shake; but before he could answer, Madelung had turned and walked away to the table.

At this moment the colonel appeared. He greeted each of the older officers with a couple of words, and the younger with a general nod. Reimers alone, on the day of his return, had a special greeting and a hearty handshake.

Then they sat down to table. From the colonel in the seat of honour, downwards, the officers were placed according to rank and length of service. The youngest and the last was an *avantageur*[A] who had joined the regiment on October 1st. He had been on stable duty from half-past four that morning, and had to pull himself together now not to fall asleep; till at last a bottle of Zeltinger was placed before him by the orderly, and then he became livelier.

[Footnote A: A one-year volunteer who elects to remain in the army and await promotion.--*Translator.*]

Reimers had chosen a place near the little lieutenant of doctor's degree, who was quite an amusing fellow, and chattered away so glibly that his neighbour hardly needed to contribute to the conversation.

Of course Fröben had begun: "Well, Reimers, fire away! Give us some leaves from your military diary. We are all ears!" But Reimers soon changed the subject. What he had seen and gone through down there among the Boers was still in his own mind a dim, confused chaos of

impressions, and it was repugnant to him to touch on it even superficially, so long as he was not clear about it himself.

The little doctor began to dilate on the splendid German East-African line of steamers, which conveyed one for a mere trifle from Hamburg to Naples, by way of Antwerp, Oporto, and Lisbon, and he enlarged at great length on the educational influence of long journeys in general and of sea-voyages in particular.

Reimers listened patiently, letting his eyes wander round the table. Just as of old, the various groups still kept together, and were continuing their conversations uninterrupted. Falkenheim, in their midst, listened with amusement as the senior staff-surgeon chaffed Stuckhardt about that oldest and yet newest of nervous diseases--"majoritis." Madelung was looking rather glum, and kept twirling the little silver wheel of the knife-rest. Next to him, Mohr was staring straight before him with glassy eyes, and Schrader leant back in his chair laughing, while Gropphusen still kept on talking to him.

"He's got something to laugh about!" said Fröben to his neighbour, interrupting his discourse.

"How do you mean?" asked Reimers.

"Well, to put it delicately, Schrader has got a flirtation on with Frau von Gropphusen--a very intimate flirtation!"

"Indeed!" Reimer responded indifferently.

Here was a fine piece of gossip, and strange to say, in this, too, things were as before; it was not the first time that Major Schrader and Frau von Gropphusen had afforded material for conversation.

Dr. von Fröben continued: "But you must not think, Reimers, that in such matters I am a bigoted moralist. Ideas of morality are subject to just the same fluctuations as----"

And he dealt out what remained in his memory of a newspaper article, the writer of which had entirely misunderstood Nietzsche.

After the toast of "The King," a momentary silence fell upon the company, contrasting strangely with the clatter of voices which had preceded it.

During this lull in the conversation the word "China" was spoken somewhere near the colonel, and all eyes involuntarily turned to Madelung.

He sat there stiffly with his cold face, a cynical smile on his thin lips. "Dangers!" he cried in his hard voice, which had the shrillness of a musical instrument that has lost its resonance, "Dangers! I knew nothing about them."

He laughed drily.

Captain Heuschkel, who was always worrying about his fat horses, inquired: "Well, against such an opponent, surely cover had to be considered most of all. Wasn't it so? that cover was of more importance than action? Ten thousand of those yellow fellows were not worth a single trained soldier, surely?"

"Or one of my horses," he added in his own mind. He would probably have committed suicide if he had seen one of his horses shot by a dirty Chinaman.

"Surely it was a question of good cover, wasn't it?" he insisted.

"No," answered Madelung in a loud voice. "It was a question of keeping your fingers out of your mouth."

"What on earth had that to do with it?" put in Captain von Stuckardt, rather hesitatingly.

Madelung bowed with ironical politeness.

"Infection with the typhus bacillus," he replied, "was the principal danger in China, Captain von Stuckardt."

After a little pause the shrill voice continued: "We had a senior-lieutenant in our cantonment, belonging to some Prussian grenadier regiment, a gay fellow, and, indeed, quite a useful officer besides."

Madelung paused a moment, and again his dry, mocking laugh resounded.

Then he continued: "He had a queer fad. He cultivated one of his finger-nails, that of the little finger of his left hand, with the greatest care. Just like a Chinese mandarin. At last the nail was fully a centimetre long, and made holes in all his gloves. Now, whenever a speck of dirt lodged in this nail, he was in the habit of removing it with his teeth. It wasn't exactly a nice thing to do; but, you see, he had a passion for that nail. I often said to him, 'My dear fellow, do keep your

finger away from your mouth--it's just swarming with typhus bacilli.' He did try, but sometimes he forgot; and so in the end he was caught."

Every one looked inquiringly at Madelung, and he added: "He died of typhus."

He sipped his wine, and continued, rather more gently: "I firmly believe that it required greater self-control in that senior-lieutenant to refrain from putting his little finger into his mouth than to lead his men under the heaviest fire against one of those Chinese clay and mud walls."

Then he raised his voice again, as if ashamed of the rather gentler tone of his last words, and concluded, harshly and shrilly: "Besides, it really is a bad habit, putting one's fingers in one's mouth."

And again he sat silent and stiff, twirling the little silver wheel of the knife-rest.

The feast then took the usual course.

After the table had been cleared some of the officers remained in the mess-room sitting over their wine, while others went off to the reading or smoking-rooms with a *schoppen* of Pilsener. In the mess-room the talk became more and more noisy, while in the adjoining rooms quieter conversation was the rule. A couple of inveterate card-players started a game of skat; and in the billiard-room Captain Madelung amused himself alone, making cannon after cannon. At his first miss he put down his cue and waited impatiently for the colonel's departure, that being the signal for the official close of the festivity. Madelung left almost immediately after Falkenheim, and the majority of the married men followed his example.

At last only lieutenants remained, except Major Schrader and Captain von Gropphusen. The one other senior officer, Captain Mohr, did not count. He had not quitted his seat the whole evening, and still went on persistently drinking with the assistant-surgeon, an exceedingly stout man, with a face scarred by students' fights. The scars were glowing now as if they would burst.

The subalterns could feel quite at their ease, for Schrader and Gropphusen were no spoilsports.

Manitius now sang his "Behüet dich Gott," rather unsteadily, accompanied by Frommelt, who was quite tipsy. The song was a great success, for the young *avantageur* was overcome by emotion, and began blubbing about a certain Martha whom he loved prodigiously, and whom he must now abandon, because he would never be permitted to marry a barmaid. On this Schrader suddenly tore open his uniform and offered him nourishment from his hairy breast, and the boy sank weeping into his arms.

At last the comedy grew wearisome. The *avantageur* was sent off to bed, and Frommelt had to play a cancan, to which Gropphusen and Landsberg danced. Gropphusen was supple and agile, and, with his pale, handsome, rather worn face, looked a perfect Montmartre type. Landsberg, on the contrary, cut a grotesque figure, kicking up his long shoes in the air, and as he did so almost choking in his unduly high collar.

The company became smaller and smaller, and at last only two groups were left.

In the card-room half-a-dozen men still sat awhile at one of the tables, and in the mess-room Captain Mohr and the junior surgeon continued drinking. They had long ago given up conversation; but occasionally one of them would say "Prosit!" and then they would both drink. When at last they left their seats they found the orderly in the ante-room half-asleep, half drunk, fallen from his chair, and lying snoring on the ground.

Growling "Damned swine!" the assistant-surgeon kicked the man till he rose, and with an effort stood upright.

When the last two officers had left the mess-house he locked the doors, drank the end of a bottle of champagne, and lay down to sleep on the sofa in the smoking-room.

The sofa-cover was a sacred relic, a present to the mess-house from an officer in the East African forces, who had formerly belonged to the regiment. It was a magnificent specimen of Oriental art. The orderly found the thick gold embroidery very uncomfortable to his cheek; but then it certainly was a fine thing to scratch his head with!

When Reimers, who had left early, reached his quarters, he was surprised to find his servant waiting up for him.

"Why on earth are you not in bed?" he inquired.

Gähler answered respectfully, "Beg pardon, sir, on such occasions the count used sometimes to need me; he often went out again."

"Well, I don't. So remember that in future," enjoined Reimers.

Gähler still waited, and asked, "Would you like some tea, sir?"

Reimers looked up. Not a bad idea that! He was too much excited to sleep, for he had been obliged to pledge his comrades far too often, and a cup of tea would be just the thing. After that he would read a few pages, and only then try to go to sleep.

"Yes, make me some tea," he assented, "but not too strong."

He put on a comfortable smoking-jacket. Gähler brought his tea almost immediately, and with it a plate of anchovy sandwiches.

Reimers smiled. It certainly paid to have for one's servant the quondam groom of an elegant cavalry officer. He gave Gähler a friendly nod, and said, "I think, Gähler, that we shall get on capitally together."

The gunner stood at attention.

"Any other orders, sir?" he asked.

"No. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Reimers ate a few mouthfuls as he walked up and down the room; then he carried the green-shaded lamp to his writing-table, and took down a volume of the official history of the great Franco-Prussian War.

He spread out the marvellously accurate maps, and began, as he had done so often before, to follow the various phases of his favourite battle, the three days' fight on the Lisaine. That was the only great defensive battle of the campaign, clearer and easier to follow than any other in its simple tactics, almost suggesting the typical example of a textbook, and yet what a living reality! Almost at the same moment when the German Empire was being proclaimed at Versailles, Bavarians were fighting shoulder to shoulder with East Prussians, regiments from Schleswig next those from Upper Silesia, soldiers from the Rhine-provinces side by side with soldiers from Saxony: a glorious demonstration of the newly achieved unity.

His admiration for the valiant defenders was no greater than his pity for the tragic fate of the attacking army, which, almost dying of starvation, had fought with the wild courage of despair, and had deserved a more honourable reward than to be driven along that terrible path of suffering to the Swiss frontier. Not less tragic was the fate of its commander; a fate, indeed, which Bourbaki shared with the other military leaders of the Republic. All those generals, Aurelle de Paladines, Chanzy, Faidherbe, Bourbaki, who at the brave but somewhat futile summons of the Committee of National Defence tried to arrest the victorious advance of the German army, were inevitably doomed to defeat; and even the inspiration of a military genius could not have got over the fundamental mistake that had been made, of considering the impossible possible.

Reimers looked up from the book with a glowing face. He had followed the French army as far as Pontarlier. That was the moment in which the German forces commanded the largest area. In the west the Rhinelanders were gazing astonished at the winter waves on the canal, while to the east, Pomeranians greeted the sentinels of the Swiss frontier.

Where in all the world could a nation be found richer in honour and in victories?

During the next few days Reimers had to make calls on the ladies of the regiment.

It was wearisome work, answering the same questions over and over again; and once more he had proof of the fact that against certain conditions time seems powerless. Some of the young married women had during his absence become mothers; but most of the ladies of the regiment presided without change over the solid domestic comfort of their house-holds. The main thing noticeable was that they had sacrificed themselves with greater or less success to fashion, which was just now in favour of slender figures.

The course of their conversation was almost literally the same as of yore, and in each case the curiosity shown was of exactly the same degree, except that Captain Heuschkel's wife, who was president of the Red Cross Society, inquired as to the care of the wounded in South Africa; while the lady who presided over the Home Missions wished to know if the Boers were really as pious as they were represented to be.

This monotony was, to a certain extent, the result of natural selection. Most of the officers had chosen their wives very carefully, and this had brought about a fine similarity in their views, a similarity which even found expression in the rather unattractive arrangement of their dwellings, in which the upholsterer's hand was but too evident.

Only two ladies, the wives of Captains von Stuckardt and von Gropphusen, differed from this type.

Frau von Stuckardt was unjustly considered haughty. She was merely unfortunate in being unable to adapt herself to the mental atmosphere of the other ladies. She had been placed for a couple of years in an institution for the daughters of the nobility, and was just preparing to enter a convent when Stuckardt, who was a distant cousin of hers, proposed to her. In her heart she regretted the worldly emotion to which she had then yielded; she believed that, by her marriage, she had defrauded the Church, and felt her conscience constantly oppressed by this grave offence. The interests of the other officers' wives puzzled her, doubly separated from them as she was by creed and by education; and when, under social compulsion, she gave a coffee-party, she sat among her guests like a being from a strange world, a pale and slender figure, always dressed in dark colours and wearing a cap of old lace upon her smoothly parted black hair; a striking contrast to the other fair, rosy, lively women in their gay gowns.

Frau von Gropphusen's parties were much more amusing. You could not be quite sure that she was not making fun of you; but you were certain to carry away on each occasion a supply of gossip which would last for weeks.

Externally, Gropphusen and his wife were exceedingly well matched. He was of medium height, with slender limbs and a pale, finely chiselled face, vivacious eyes, wavy dark hair, and a small black beard. She was one of those dainty blondes who remind one of iced champagne, with a marvellously graceful figure, a droll little nose, and steel blue eyes under dark eyebrows.

When first married they were madly in love with each other; but when the fire burnt out, Gropphusen went back to his old habits.

Truth to tell, he was a rake, who, even after marriage, thought nothing of spending dissipated nights week after week in the capital, returning by the early morning train. He seemed to have cast-iron nerves; for even the envious had to admit that his official work did not suffer. He had a clever head, and was an artist into the bargain, an excellent painter of horses; experts advised him to hang up his sword on a nail and devote himself to the brush. But he had not yet made up his mind to that.

Irregular in all other departments of life, he was regular only in his excesses. He was very rich, so that he could give the rein to almost all his whims. Indeed, reports of a rather fantastic kind, somewhat recalling Duke Charles of Brunswick, were current about him, the most extravagant being of a ballet he had had performed for him by fifty naked dancing girls. There was a certain amount of exaggeration about this, perhaps. In any case he troubled himself no longer about his young wife.

Hannah Gropphusen indemnified herself in her own way by coquetry and flirtations, and she was soon gossiped about as much as her husband. But those that whispered and chattered about her felt their consciences prick them when they carried their backbiting further; the young wife could never be accused of anything more serious.

It was noteworthy that Reimers had always felt more attracted by these exceptions among the officers' ladies than by the typical representatives of that class. He did not know why exactly, but he thought he saw a certain similarity between the position of these ladies and his own; these two and he were different from the average.

Unlike his comrades, he enjoyed visiting Frau von Stuckardt. She never talked platitudes, she would rather remain silent, and she was a little given to proselytising. Reimers liked to hear her subdued voice extolling the mysteries of the Catholic faith; he was proof against her endeavours, but a beneficent calm emanated from this unworldly woman, and he could feel with her that the spiritual renunciations of Catholicism offered a quiet resting-place to the world-weary.

The Gropphusen interested him. She was considered superficial and frivolous, but he did not think her really so. There was too much system in her frivolity and superficiality.

He had purposely left these two visits to the last. But Frau von Stuckardt was away from home; and when he handed his card to Frau von Gropphusen's servant he was told that the lady was unwell, but the man would ask if she could receive.

Reimers felt rather vexed, and was just turning away when the gunner returned and asked him to come in.

He conducted the lieutenant along the corridor. "My mistress is in her boudoir," he said.

Reimers was shown into a small room, the only window of which was darkened. Frau von Gropphusen half raised herself from a broad couch. She wore a loose tea-gown of soft silk, and had a light covering spread over her knees.

"Welcome back, Herr Reimers!" she said, and stretched out her hand to him.

Reimers bent over it respectfully, and kissed the tips of her fingers.

Then his young hostess let herself fall back again upon the couch and drew her hand across her forehead.

"I am not very well," she resumed; "but I could not refuse to see you."

"No, no, you must stay," she went on; for Reimers looked as if he meant to take leave at once. "There, sit down. Just wait a minute; I feel better already."

Reimers took a seat and glanced round the room. The couch almost filled it, the only other furniture being a dainty little writing-table in the window and a couple of chairs. Above the couch hung the only picture, a fine print of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*.

In the meanwhile, Frau von Gropphusen had recovered herself. Her pretty pale face was lighted up by a somewhat melancholy smile, and she began softly: "No, really, I couldn't let you go!"

She raised herself again, drew her knees up beneath their covering, and clasped her arms round them. It was done quite simply and naturally, without any touch of coquetry. And then she stretched out her hand again to Reimers and said: "You, the champion of the Boers!" Then, supporting her chin on her knees, she continued: "But now you must tell me exactly why you fought for them?"

As Reimers was preparing to answer, she interrupted him: "No, I will question you. Wait a minute. Was it from love of adventure?"

"No. At least, that is not the right way of putting it. I wanted for once to see something of the serious side of my profession. But even that was not the chief reason."

"Well, then, was it in search of fame?"

Involuntarily Reimers deviated from his usual rule of answering evasively, and replied: "No; that was not it either. I wanted nothing for myself personally, or at most only to prove my fitness for my profession."

"But neither was that your principal motive?"

"Oh, no."

"Perhaps it was indignation against the strong who were oppressing the weak?"

Reimers was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Perhaps. But other things contributed; above all, boredom. And--I wanted a decision as to whether I was to live or not. I could not remain an invalid for ever."

"But still your chief, your final motive was the love of justice, wasn't it?"

"Well, yes."

Hannah Gropphusen sank back again languidly. For the third time she stretched out her hand to Reimers: "It rejoices me to find that such people still exist, and to know one of them!"

Reimers had held her hand for a moment in his own. It was a small hand, almost too thin, with slender fingers. As he looked at it, he was reminded of the gentle hands of his mother. He respectfully touched the beautiful fingers with his lips and rose. Frau von Gropphusen made no effort to detain him.

"It is perhaps better for me," she said wearily; and as he reached the door, she added: "But it has given me great pleasure to see you again," and she dismissed him with a friendly nod.

Reimers stood for a moment before the front door, thoughtfully buttoning his gloves.

It was certainly odd; the very woman whom every one else seemed to distrust appeared to him more worthy of esteem than any of the others. He realised this only after the visit just paid. To her alone had he answered frankly, and although they had hardly exchanged a dozen words, he felt they understood each other perfectly. He could not avoid the thought that their souls were akin. Each of them yearned after what was great and beautiful in life. This woman, indeed, deserved pity, for she had suffered shipwreck in the greatest and noblest end for which woman is created--in her love; but he, thank God, was a man; and his ideal, Germany, still stood out clear and definite, dwarfing mere personal aims.

In that dim room a sinister thought had seized upon him, oppressing and paralysing him; a vague foreboding that his fate would resemble that of this pale woman. But he chased the dark clouds away. His star did not vary in its light as does the shifting and drifting human mind; it was like the sun, steady, unchangeable, inspiring.

CHAPTER IV

"For oh! I had a comrade,
And a better could not be."

(*Uhland.*)

During the first days of December Corporal Wiegandt would sometimes observe, in a pause of the drill, that the recruits were beginning to look a little like soldiers; and in the bar-rack-room, after drill was over, he occasionally even went so far as to give them some praise.

When he was getting ready to go out in the evening, and, with sabre buckled on and forage-cap stuck jauntily on his head, brushed his moustache before the little looking-glass, he would say: "Boys, I am almost pleased with you to-day. I shall tell my Frieda."

Whereupon the recruits would laugh, as in duty bound. They might all hate the corporal; he would not dispense with a fraction of their drill, and did not express himself in a complimentary way during the exercises; but he made things easy for them as far as possible, changing about from difficult to less difficult movements, and giving them long intervals between those that were the most exacting. His division never had to stand for minutes together with their knees bent, like Heppner's. Moreover, despite his roughness, there was about him a certain kind-heartedness which took the form of good-natured little extra lessons to the least efficient after drill.

His Frieda was a merry industrious girl who sewed muslin in a frilling factory, and hoarded up the groschen she earned in order to save enough money to be married some day.

And Wiegandt, who, despite his martial appearance, was an ardent lover, added the pfennigs of his pay, and deprived himself of his evening beer, going for walks with his sweet-heart instead, and kissing her over and over again.

"That tastes better than beer," he would say, "and costs nothing."

As the pair had not much to talk of except their lover-like wishes, Wiegandt used to tell the girl about the recruits, so that by degrees Frieda learnt to know all their names and idiosyncrasies, and began to take a certain interest in them. Above all had the case of Frielinghausen appealed to her. The sympathetic little seamstress saw in him something of the romantic disguised prince; and it amused her to make the credulous Wiegandt a little jealous, until at last she would assure him with a hearty kiss that he was her dearest and best.

When the corporal had gone off to his rendezvous, Frielinghausen was left in supervision of Room IX. The sergeant-major had arranged it thus, in order that from the very beginning the young man might become accustomed to responsibility. And the charge was quite an easy one. By evening none of the recruits had much inclination to make a noise or to get into mischief. All the day-time, from morning till evening, was occupied in the various branches of their duty; and the hours which then remained were completely filled up with the brushing and polishing of their clothes and accoutrements. If they could have done as they liked, they would have gone to bed directly after evening stable-duty; but that was not permitted until nine o'clock.

So when their cleaning up was done and they sat on their stools round the table, most of them would stretch their arms on the top and fall asleep; occasionally some one would scribble a few lines home. When bedtime came at last, none of them tarried; but, drunken with sleep, would tramp one after the other up the stairs to the dormitory.

Some, of course, were more fatigued by the work than others. Vogt and Weise were among those who got on best. Both were strong, healthy lads, and, moreover, not stupid; so that the theoretical instruction was as easy to them as the foot-drill, gun-practice, and gymnastics. To be attentive and quick--that was the chief thing.

Among the worst were Truchsess the fat brewer, the clerk Klitzing, and Frielinghausen.

The brewer, it is true, was a strong, powerful man, but far too slow in his movements. Klitzing, on the other hand, was too weak for the demands of the drill. It was impossible for him, in the gun-practice, to raise the end of the gun-carriage as "Number 3," or as "Number 5" to direct the pole of the carriage; in gymnastics he would hang helplessly on the horizontal bar; and even in the foot-drill it was difficult for him to stand up straight.

When Vogt advised him to report himself as ill he refused. "No, I won't go into hospital. Never!"

"Why not?" asked Vogt.

"I don't wish to," replied the clerk; and as Vogt insisted, he said, "Well, Vogt, I'll tell you: I should never come out again; I should die there."

And with a strained smile he added: "It doesn't matter where I die; but I shouldn't like it to be in hospital."

Frielinghausen, though an active and agile young fellow, seemed to be constitutionally flighty and superficial. He had been one of the quickest to pick up a general idea of things; but afterwards the minute details of instruction, which sometimes appeared so unpractical and so apt to make more of the "how?" than of the "what?" would not stay in his head. What difference could it make whether one sprang forward with the right foot or with the left, or whether in pulling the lanyard the right hand had rested upon the left? Surely the essential things were that one should spring over the line and that the shot should go off!

So, despite his honest zeal, he made many mistakes, and the everlastingly warning calls of his name maddened him. In the theoretical work he was naturally far in advance of his comrades; for, despite idleness at school, this was mere child's play to his practised memory. He, who had had to learn hundreds of lines of the "Odyssey" by heart, could easily remember facts about the bores of guns!

Klitzing also distinguished himself in these instruction-lessons. The delicate clerk possessed another advantage, in his own calling almost surprising, and particularly useful to an artilleryman: that is to say, unusually sharp sight, which found the mark in a moment and took aim with absolute accuracy.

This somewhat atoned to Wiegandt for his other faults, and it was only for Lieutenant Landsberg that Klitzing remained nothing but a scapegoat.

During drill Landsberg generally stood at the end of the parade-ground, looking utterly bored and staring at his boots, which he had had made in the style of Reimers'. It was only if Wegstetten was in sight that he troubled himself about the recruits. Then he would run to Corporal Wiegandt's division, and always began to abuse Klitzing, the "careless fellow," the "lazy-bones."

He was constantly threatening the poor devil with extra drill; but he never enforced the punishment, as that would have meant that he himself must put in an appearance at the same time.

At last Reimers, who was commanding the battery during a brief absence of the captain, put an end to this little game.

"Tell me, Landsberg, have you ever consulted Corporal Wiegandt about that wretched Klitzing?"

"No, sir," answered Landsberg.

Reimers called Wiegandt to him.

"What's the matter with Klitzing?" he inquired.

The corporal replied: "Beg pardon, sir; the man means thoroughly well and takes great pains; but I think he is far too delicate."

"Very good, Wiegandt," said Reimers, and dismissed him. Then he turned seriously and officially to Landsberg. "I think, Landsberg, you had better leave the man in peace."

Landsberg murmured: "Yes, sir," and looked out for another victim.

During the week the recruits in Room IX. had got to know each other better. The band of comradeship had wound itself imperceptibly around them, and within it some closer, more cordial friendships had sprung up.

The most varied types of men found themselves thrown together.

If, in the evening, the fat brewer happened for once not to be resting his tired body in sleep after the fatigues of the day, he would squat down near Listing, who had been a wanderer and a vagabond. He would listen with many a shake of the head to the stories Listing related of his life on the roads, especially of the nights the fine ones, in which one lay on the dry grass beneath the twinkling stars, or in the forest under a beech in the branches of which the screech-owl was calling; and of the wretched, rainy, cold nights of late autumn. Then one would pull a few trusses of straw out of a stack and creep shivering into the hole, which would gradually become wet through from the dripping rain, and through the opening of which the east wind would blow in icily.

Then the brewer would clap his comrade on the knee with his broad, fat hand, and say: "Well, friend, it must feel first-class to you now when you roll into a good bed?"

But Listing replied: "Well, no. Not exactly. But perhaps I shall get used to it. I have often slept better out of doors; but worse too."

Vogt soon formed his own opinions about his comrades.

The best of them all, the one who put the whole lot into the shade, was without doubt Klitzing. The courage with which the weakly clerk performed his duties filled him with an almost reverential admiration, and the honest fellow was ready to stand by the poor, harassed lad whenever it was possible.

During the dinner hour, if Klitzing were too much fatigued to go to the dining-hall, Vogt would carry his rations to him, and if possible would add his own piece of meat to the other's portion. Then he would quickly polish up boots and buttons for him and hand him his cap when it was time for the after-noon drill to commence.

"Come, Heinrich, I have made you smart," he would say with an attempt to joke. "Now we shall be all right."

And Klitzing would go down the steps with aching limbs and fall into line.

Vogt's care for him only ceased at night and began anew every morning. It was the source both of joy and shame to the clerk; he deprecated it to his comrade, but Vogt shut him up with good-natured roughness. So Klitzing let the matter be, and thought that a mother's care for her child must be something like this. For he had never known his parents, but after their early death had grown up as the adopted child of some distant relations.

Vogt himself had also the feeling that instead of a comrade Klitzing was more like a child, or, rather, a younger brother to care for; but that suited his strength of character, and anyhow Klitzing was a very different fellow from the gay, clever, Weise, and a far better one.

Weise tried to make himself a favourite with all, but the others noticed that he kept a check upon himself and never showed himself as he really was. Moreover, even when he was alone with them, he evidently felt a certain constraint.

One morning while washing there was almost a quarrel, when Vogt caught him by the arm and tried to examine the tattoo marks on his skin. Weise angrily shook himself free; but Vogt had seen that on the right forearm the words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" were inscribed, surrounded by a broken chain and a wreath of flame, and above them something that looked like a nightcap.

His father had never discussed politics with him, but Vogt had learnt enough by himself to recognise the significance of the tattooing; Weise was a social-democrat! Well, that was nothing so very bad. At home in the village there were numbers of social-democrats, chiefly workers in the large fire-clay factory by the river, and they were all very good sort of people. Certainly, such tendencies were strictly forbidden in the army, so Weise must take care of himself.

On the whole this meant nothing to Vogt. He had almost forgotten about the tattooed arm, and the recollection of it was only once forced upon his memory when taking the oath. Then Weise had sworn fealty to the king, raising the arm on which was inscribed the motto of revolution. His sleeve had slipped up a little, so that the word "Fraternity" could be distinctly seen.

Surely there was some inconsistency here! But then Vogt reflected: how could Weise help the hypocrisy? If he had objected to taking the oath, he would simply have been imprisoned. Weise's swearing falsely was practically on compulsion; he was in the same case with Findeisen and all the others.

At Christmas the greater number of the "old gang" went on leave. For those who remained behind there was a tree in the large Room VII., with something on it for every one; a penknife, a cigarette holder, or a wooden pipe, together with a few cigars; but Listing, who could not even yet be got to wash himself properly, received a large piece of soap with his cigars. At the same time a big barrel of lager-beer was broached.

But before the battery Christmas-tree most of the men had had a special rejoicing of their own. The orderly had had the precaution to take a small hand-cart with him to the post-office, and had brought it back full of boxes and packages. Then the men stood round the sergeant-major, and each one pricked up his ears to hear whether there was anything for him.

Klitzing had moved aside, he had nothing to expect. Suddenly his name was called. There was a small box for him, and it was not very light either when he took it in his hand. He thought it must be a mistake, but there were his name and address sure enough: "Gunner Heinrich Klitzing, 6th Battery, 80th Regiment, Eastern Division, Field Artillery." He looked at the label, the sender was Friedrich August Vogt; and on the back was written, "To my boy's best friend, for Christmas!"

The clerk went to Room IX. and showed the label to Vogt, who was already unpacking his parcel. Klitzing could say nothing; he could only press his friend's hand, while tears stood in his eyes.

But Vogt shouted cheerfully: "I say! the old man has done finely! Let's see what else there is."

And when they compared their gifts--sausages, Christmas fare, and warm woollen underclothing--it looked almost as though his father had given more presents to his friend than to himself. At the bottom he found a letter from the old man:

"My Dear Boy,--Herewith are a few trifles for you for Christmas. I think I shall have done as you would wish by sending half of what I intended for you to your friend and comrade, Klitzing, of whom you are always writing to me. You know I was an orphan myself, and I can understand his feelings. I had my dear sister; but he has nobody. So a merry Christmas to you! and keep well and hearty. "Your loving father, "FRIEDRICH AUGUST VOGT."

Frielinghausen also had a letter, which he read with streaming eyes and a glowing face. He held his mother's pardon in his hands, and the love which trembled in her words poured balm and healing on his heart, and raised his desponding spirits.

He was another man after this Christmas Eve. Duties which before had been a burden to him, which he had, besides, despised, he now performed willingly and zealously.

If now Wegstetten inquired about him, Corporal Wiegandt always answered, "He could not be doing better, sir."

The captain took an opportunity of praising him; and when he had finished, Frielinghausen, his face quite red with pride and joy, remained standing before him.

Wegstetten asked, "Well, is there anything you want to ask me?"

The tall youth choked a bit over his reply, but finally he got it out: "Pardon me, sir--I don't know whether my request is in order--but, sir, if you would have the goodness to write to my mother and tell her that you are satisfied with me?"

Wegstetten was silent with astonishment. The request did seem a little unusual and unmilitary; but he consented, and wrote to "The high and well-born Baroness von Frielinghausen" a letter over which a mother might well rejoice.

It seemed the more terrible for Frielinghausen when in February, after the examination of the recruits, he received a telegram briefly announcing his mother's death.

Work became lighter for the recruits after the examination. Certainly the battery foot-drill and gun-drill was no joke; but things went more quietly than they had done during the wild rush of the training, and between-whiles one had occasionally time to take breath.

And now the recruits were gradually allotted their respective duties. Horses to look after were given to the young drivers and to some of the gunners. Vogt, Klitzing, and Weise, however, were not among these. Corporal Wiegandt, who had been promoted to sergeant after the examination, and had been put in charge of the guns and waggons of the battery, knew them for industrious, trustworthy fellows, just such as he needed to assist him.

The recruits were also being trained in sentry-duty; though this was not made very much of. The field-artillery would never be put on sentry-duty in time of war; gunners only equipped with swords and revolvers would not be sufficiently armed for that work; for it the infantry, or in case of necessity the cavalry, must be responsible. So all that was necessary was easily learnt, and in the peaceful garrison-town it was merely a question of guarding the official buildings.

However, Vogt felt as if something very important were taking place when he was the first recruit to be put on sentry-duty.

The second-year soldiers, on the other hand, rejoiced over their lazy days. They took things easy, and laughed at the recruits, who adhered conscientiously to every detail of the instructions, and would not take off their uncomfortable swords while sleeping on the hard benches, even after the orderly-officer had inspected them.

Vogt was posted inside the back gate of the barracks, through which the road led towards the riding-school on one side, and straight on to the wood on the slope of the hill. The first two hours from five to seven o'clock in the after noon seemed to him terribly wearisome and purposeless; but during the night from eleven to one o'clock he felt stimulated by the sense of responsibility. The sentries were then locked outside, and had to patrol two sides of the great quadrangle surrounded by the public offices.

The night was pitch dark, so that Vogt was unable to distinguish his narrow path. But he stumbled bravely up and down by the buildings for his two hours. Even if he often missed his footing, it was better than standing still. For then one heard all kinds of strange noises, the cause of which could not be perceived in the baffling darkness. The forest was never quite silent; there were always cracklings and rustlings from its boughs and bushes. But in going the rounds these

things went unheard in the noise of one's own footsteps; and one passed the quarters in which comrades were sleeping, and the stables, whose dimly-lighted windows showed small squares in the night, and one could indistinctly hear the rattling of the halter chains.

When Vogt went into the dormitory from the fresh, pure, night air he thought at first that he would choke in the atmosphere laden with stale tobacco-smoke and foul odours; but in the end he slept splendidly, despite his hard bed.

At five o'clock he was again on sentry-go. It was still dark, but there was already movement in the kitchen and the stables. At the gate there was a delay; the watch about to be relieved was nowhere to be found. The bombardier in charge cursed and swore unavailingly; finally, he consented to the suggestion of the others and organised a search. In a small shed, which served for the storing of hurdles and such-like, the gunner was discovered fast asleep. He had covered himself up with straw, and his sword lay by his side. The bombardier kicked him in the ribs with his heavy boots, and stormed at the rashness of such conduct, when at any moment an officer might come by.

But the sentry, a tall, strong fellow, answered crossly, "Shut your mouth, you stupid swine! And if you dare to report me I'll break every bone in your body!"

The bombardier grumbled something about "not going too far and getting into trouble."

"Any one might happen to fall asleep," continued the gunner. He yawned a few times, brushed the dust off his uniform, and said laughingly to Vogt: "It is nothing unusual on sentry-duty, you raw booby of a recruit! Nothing for you to gape about!"

And he walked off solemnly behind the bombardier.

Vogt stood thoughtfully beside the sentry-box. That was pretty bad discipline! At the same time the case was quite clear: if the bombardier reported the sentry, then the latter would naturally be punished, and severely too; but he would certainly revenge himself on the bombardier. Despite the buttons on his collar, the bombardier was not technically superior to the gunner; it would only bring about a quarrel, and in a fight it would certainly be the bombardier who would come off worst. It was quite the rule for the men to stick loyally together, and never expose a comrade if it could possibly be avoided.

Vogt, however, considered that there was a limit to comradeship, and that the sentry ought to have been punished. For in such ways respect was lost for other still more important rules. And, finally, he congratulated himself on having nothing to do with the matter.

This morning, for the first time for weeks, the memory of his home and the longing for it overwhelmed him.

He thought of how at home in the early days of the year he and his father had finished preparing the fields for the spring cultivation. He remembered how the young sun, in those fresh morning hours, had seemed to caress the long-deserted wintry earth with his kindling rays; and the black soil turned up by the harrow had exhaled a refreshing odour as of incense offered by nature's maternal heart. The daily increasing heat of the sun, the milder air, and the grateful receptivity of earth: all betokened the end of idle winter and the beginning of a new year of fruitfulness, the gospel of labour and of blessing. The ardent forces of nature welled up also in the hearts of men; and though his father had seemed to him old in the short cold days of winter, the scent of spring-time always made him young again.

He almost felt like a deserter not to be at home working. But no! the contrary was really the case. It was these thoughts that were disloyal. Was he not now a soldier, called to protect the soil of his beloved fatherland, if an enemy threatened it?

If---? he reflected further. There had been peace for thirty years now, and it might quite well last thirty more, or even a hundred. Was not this, then, mere waste of time? But, on the other hand, there was nothing to prevent a war breaking out to-morrow. He knew that it was improbable, but not impossible. The devil! then of course war must be prevented. But how?

His simple mind saw no solution of these contradictions. He gazed contemplatively at his sentry-box, and almost omitted to present arms to his captain, who was passing to the riding-school with the remount division.

After being relieved he watched two comrades who were playing at *skat* in the guard-room with dreadfully dirty cards. Suddenly he had a kind of waking vision. It was like the taking of the oath, when each man stretched out an arm to swear. The tattooed letters on Weise's arm, where the sleeve had slipped off, began suddenly to glow as brightly and clearly as if the sun were shining on them. Fraternity! that was not merely an empty word, then, not simply talk? If all men, Germans, French, Russians, and all others, stretched forth their arms and swore to be brothers, then--yes, then--there would be no more war.

But would that ever happen?

The card-players brought his reflections on the question of fraternity to a hasty close; they

began to quarrel furiously, and wound up by throwing the cards at each other's heads in a very unbrotherly manner.

The recruit had to pick up the scattered cards, and when a king and a ten were missing there was nearly a fight. Finally the corporal in charge angrily stopped the noise.

When Vogt returned from his sentry-duty between eleven and one, he found his comrade Klitzing singularly depressed, and after a time the clerk confided to him that he had been very unlucky all the day before.

"You see, Franz," he said, "I can't get on at all without you. If you are my neighbour at foot-drill, I know just where I am. But yesterday you were absent, and I was a regular blockhead. Just because of me the drill lasted nearly an hour longer than usual."

"Well, now I shall be back again," Vogt replied.

Klitzing continued: "Yes, but this morning it was the same thing; and after drill the deputy sergeant-major said that slack fellows like me should be given a lesson by the other men, and so--"

Here he was silent, and nothing more could be got out of him, so that Vogt was quite angry over this lack of confidence.

By and by the fat brewer (who, however, was no longer fat) joined them, and said: "Well, mate, aren't you a bit dense to-day? The 'old gang,' especially the drivers, mean to be at him, to do for him, all because of that little bit of extra drill."

Vogt could not but smile at his comrade's good-nature. Truchsess, the most easy-going of them all, whose clothes after drill were as wet with perspiration as if they had been in water, Truchsess called it "a little bit of extra drill!"

But before he could speak, Klitzing began again: "Franz, you mustn't mix yourself up in this. If they mean to do it you can't prevent it. The best thing will be for me to submit quietly."

And with a little bitterness he added: "The most they can do is to beat me to death."

But Vogt interrupted: "Don't talk such nonsense! I don't know what they are thinking of doing, but I can tell you it shall be prevented. I promise you that. Don't be afraid. I shall find a way out."

He began to ponder how he could protect his friend from the roughness of the "old gang."

Should he ask Sergeant Wiegandt to give up going to see his Frieda for one evening? If he told him, of course not officially, but in a sort of way privately, about the intentions of the elder soldiers, then Wiegandt would certainly stay in. But his feeling of solidarity with his comrades forbade this.

Only, were they any longer comrades when they could ill-treat a poor weakling? Surely not.

Still he rejected this plan, and in the end decided himself to defend Klitzing regardless of consequences. If he challenged the fellows fearlessly and cheekily they would be sure to turn on him, and he would be able to defend himself. At any rate he could better stand a good hard blow than the clerk could.

Evening came, and Sergeant Wiegandt went to his rendezvous as usual. An expectant silence lay over Room IX. The recruits cleaned their things and glanced now and then in an embarrassed way at the corner where Vogt had seated himself close to Klitzing. The brewer had joined them also.

All was quiet until shortly before bed-time. Then heavy clanking steps approached from the large Room VII. on the other side of the corridor, and eight or nine old drivers pushed themselves in, armed with whips, belts, and snaffle-reins.

Vogt placed himself full in front of Klitzing.

"You be off!" they said.

"I shan't!" answered Vogt.

"We'll soon make you!"

"We shall see about that!"

In a moment a dozen hands had seized him; but the big, strong fellow defended himself bravely. He lashed out powerfully with fists and feet, making the attacking party more and more furious; but finally he was dashed to the ground, dragging several of his opponents with him. As if they had been waiting for this, the others now threw themselves upon him, and their blows fell

thick as hail.

Klitzing, with his whole body trembling, stood by as if he had been paralysed. But the brewer bent his round head like a furious bull, and charged, using his skull as a battering ram, right into the middle of the scrimmage. Now there were two against ten. The odds were still far too great; and the brewer also was soon on the floor. The fighters made a tremendous noise, but whereas usually at the least sound a corporal would come running up to enjoin quiet, to-day nobody seemed to heed.

With a sudden effort Vogt succeeded in shaking two of his opponents off, and in half raising himself; he just caught Weise's eye, who, with his hands in his trousers pockets, was looking on at the row and laughing a little. He shouted to him goadingly: "Is this what you call liberty, equality, fraternity, you lousy fellow? Liberty, equality, fraternity!"

And he gave a shrill, scornful laugh.

But, as if summoned by the words, the haggard, sombre-visaged Wolf came to the door from the opposite room. He had at once understood why the row was going on. It was only to be expected, after the deputy sergeant-major's words! It was one of those injustices that he hated so intensely; worse and a thousandfold more cowardly even than a blow given to a soldier on the parade-ground by his superior officer.

He felt he had been summoned by those three words.

"Here I am!" he shouted, and his long thin arms brought substantial help.

But the "old gang" also received reinforcements. The struggle became wilder and wilder, and the combatants grappled with each other more and more furiously. The shouts had ceased, and one noticed now only the gasps of the fighters, the grinding of their teeth, the dull sound of blows, and now and then a grim oath.

Vogt was bleeding from a wound in his brow, in return for which he had bitten his opponent in the hand. But now the heavy buckle of a belt caught him full in the face. Sparks flew before his eyes, he reeled from the force of the blow, and, like an infuriated animal, his only desire was to revenge himself, to hit out and to kill his enemy. A newly polished sword lay near him, where it had fallen from the table. He seized it and struck and thrust with it in blind fury.

The recruits shrieked as they saw this development, but no one had the courage to seize the arms of the furious man.

Then an inspiration came to one of them.

"The sergeant-major!" he yelled at the door.

The struggling *mêlée* dispersed in a twinkling, the "old gang" vanished from Room IX., and only a great cloud of dust betrayed what had taken place.

The sergeant-major of course did not appear. But it was just as well; blood poured down Vogt's face, and when Klitzing awakened from his torpor he was seized with a kind of convulsive attack. He threw himself down, weeping and shrieking before his brave comrade, embracing his knees, and no talking could soothe him.

The other recruits stood frightened and helpless around the two. The brewer sat down on his stool to get his breath, and wiped the perspiration off his face.

Listing, the quondam tramp, was the most sensible. On the roads there is occasionally a fight or an accident, therefore one must know how to render assistance. He ran to the water-tap, and returned with a bowl of fresh water. He washed the wounded man's face, and then put quite a respectable bandage round Vogt's head. It is true that the folds were a little thick, as two towels were applied, and they looked almost like a turban, but they stopped the bleeding and held together.

The tattoo sounded over the courtyard.

It was high time to get ready for bed. The corporal in charge came into the room and told them to be quick. Suddenly he noticed the wounded man.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Listing lied fluently: "He fell down the dormitory stairs, sir, just a little while ago, when the wind had blown out the lamp."

"Indeed!" said the officer in charge. "Is he badly hurt?"

"No, sir," answered Vogt.

"Then off to bed!"

Vogt and Klitzing were the last to leave Room IX. Klitzing went silently along by his wounded comrade and looked at him timidly.

"Does it hurt, Franz?" he asked on the stairs.

Vogt began hesitatingly: "Well, you know----" but then when he saw his friend's sad eyes he continued: "Oh, no; it's not a bit bad."

Tears stood in the clerk's eyes.

"Franz, what a dear good fellow you are!" he said softly. "I don't know how I can thank you; but never doubt that I *shall* thank you some time."

In the bedroom Listing whispered to him that the "old gang" would beware of beginning it again. Wolf had told them that he should at once report them if they did, and he was known to keep his word in such matters.

When the two friends were in bed, the tall man came round to their corner.

"How are you?" he asked Vogt.

"All right, thanks," he answered.

"Glad to hear it."

He stretched out his hand to the recruit, and the two men exchanged a hearty grip.

CHAPTER V

"So pass the bottle about, hurrah!
Gaily sing and shout, hurrah!
Jolly artillerymen are we!"

(Artillery song.)

Sergeant Schumann looked once more round the two rooms and the kitchen; no, nothing had been left behind. Only his overcoat and hat hung on the window-bolt, and his stick stood in the corner.

The civilian clothes did not please him at all. Every other minute his hand was up at his neck, feeling for a collar-band which seemed to be much too loose, but which, in reality, was not there at all.

His wife came in, busy as ever, in her hat and cloak, a little leather bag and an umbrella in her hand. She was to start at noon for the little mountain railway-station, where she would get the house ready for the furniture, which should arrive during the day. The sergeant-major, or rather the station-master's assistant, had some money matters to settle in the garrison town, and would not follow her until the next morning.

Frau Schumann was quite out of breath. Those stupid gunners had been so disagreeable when she wished to have her flowers put in the furniture van. She began excitedly: "Thank God, Schumann, the van is ready. Here are the keys. It's quite time for me to go to the station, isn't it?"

Schumann looked at his watch and growled: "Certainly, quite!"

"Then I'll be off," said the little woman.

But she remained standing in the middle of the room, seemingly unable to tear herself away.

"Dear, dear!" she said, "for years I have wished to leave this place, and now that we are really going I feel quite sad; don't you, Schumann?"

The sergeant-major muttered something unintelligible. If it had depended on him the house would not now have been empty and the furniture-van before the door. It was his wife who had worried him into it, and yet now probably she would begin to snivel.

Indeed, she had just taken her handkerchief out of her pocket and raised it to her eyes, when

suddenly her face changed: "Good gracious! our bean-poles are still in the garden! I'm not going to leave them behind. Fancy it's only occurring to me now!"

She was hurrying out. But the sergeant-major got in the way and held up his watch in her face.

"Look here!" he said. "If you don't stir your stumps you'll miss your train."

She was alarmed: "Good heavens, yes, of course! I'm going. Good bye, Schumann! Look after everything, and--and--good bye."

Standing on tiptoe she reached up for a kiss from her husband and was quickly out of the door.

Schumann drew a long breath. She was his dear wife, but now that he had to say farewell to the battery he preferred to be alone, without her.

He stood still in the doorway.

A driver had just brought two horses out of the stable and was harnessing them to the furniture van.

Schumann had not taken much to do with the horses of late years; he knew that they were thoroughly well cared for under Heppner's superintendence, and the deputy sergeant-major was rather apt to resent any interference with his department. But he would have failed in his duty if he had not, in spite of this, kept himself informed of all that concerned the horses; if, in fact, he had not been individually acquainted with each one of them.

Sergeant Schumann went down the steps. He must begin his leave-taking--so he would first say good-bye to the horses.

Slowly he passed between the stalls. At that moment the strong smell of the stable seemed to him more delicious than the most fragrant scent, more delicious than the resinous forest breeze which blew through the valley where the little station of the mountain railway lay surrounded by pine woods.

There stood the beautiful creatures side by side in splendid condition and with coats like satin. Nearly all of them were dark bay, and according to temperament they stood stolidly staring before them, or pawed impatiently at the straw, or playfully bit and teased each other. Only four stalls were empty. "Sybille" and "Achat" were drawing his belongings to the station. Another pair had been borrowed by Major Schrader, who had been invited to a hunting party on a neighbouring estate.

Last he came to his own riding-horse in the loose box, a pretty creature with four white fetlocks, who was rather nervous, and unusually tender-mouthed. Baldwin shrank from the man in the dark brown suit, and it was only when the sergeant-major spoke that the animal recognised him. Even then he was shy, and sugar and bread failed to reassure him. Schumann called him by his pet name, rubbing his cheek against the velvet nostrils, and then only did the horse become quiet. The sergeant-major could have shed tears. But he wanted to make an end of it, and clear out from these barracks, where he no longer had his place. Lingeringly he quitted the stable, and going out on to the parade-ground, stood once more before the battery's memorial tablet. The sixth was one of the oldest batteries; there were therefore a goodly number of skirmishes and battles engraved upon the tablet. Sedan was the most disastrous and at the same time the most glorious day--the day on which the battery had fired nearly eight hundred shots, so that by evening the gunners had become so deaf that they could hardly understand the orders which were shrieked into their ears.

Oh yes, it had been an honour to belong to the battery, and it was only right that in times of peace also the sixth should always have been an example for others.

"To commemorate the fallen; to inspire the living!" he read softly.

He nodded in earnest assent; then turned round suddenly and re entered his house.

He put on his overcoat hastily, and seized his hat and stick. Then he locked up, and knocked at the deputy sergeant-major's door, in order to give up the keys.

Frau Heppner was alone.

"Are you just going, Herr Schumann?" she asked softly.

The sergeant-major nodded, and said: "I am putting the keys here, in front of the looking-glass."

Then he went up to the sofa on which the invalid was lying and took her hand. "Good-bye, Frau Heppner."

"Good-bye," answered the woman; and whispering softly she added: "And as we shall not meet

again, I must thank both you and your wife."

"But what for?"

The invalid was silent for a moment, then she replied: "Well, when one's own house has always been a perfect hell, one learns to appreciate the peace and quiet of others. At least, it helps one to see there is something better than one's own lot."

The sergeant was silent. What could he say to the unhappy woman?

"So, good-bye, Herr Schumann!" she went on. "I sincerely wish you well!"

Schumann breathed more freely as the door closed behind him. He felt deeply for the poor woman, and was relieved to have got over the parting from her.

With the giving up of the key the last cord was loosened which had bound him to the battery and to the military life as a whole. Everything else had already been done.

The evening before there had been a small *fête*, to which the captain and the two subalterns had invited him and all the non-commissioned officers of the battery. Then in the morning, in the presence of the officers, including the colonel, and before all the men of the regiment, the good-service cross, which the king had granted him, had been handed him by the commanding officer; he had also received permission to wear his old uniform at any patriotic festivities. The colonel had spoken of him warmly as a pattern soldier, and had concluded with a cheer for the emperor and the king. Then the sergeant-major had requested that he, on his side, might be allowed to say a few words; and with a voice which failed many times he led a cheer for the beloved regiment, and especially for the splendid sixth battery. Afterwards handsome presents were given him: from Wegstetten and the two lieutenants a beautiful gold watch; from Major Schrader a heavy gold chain for it; from the non-commissioned officers an album with views of the town and the barracks, and with photographic groups of officers, non-commissioned officers, men, and horses. Finally, the commanding officer presented to him that service sabre which he had worn for ten long years, to be now his own private property.

He had only been able to thank them by a silent grasp of the hand, for fear that if he spoke he would begin to cry like a girl. Afterwards he had also said farewell to all the men. So now he was ready and could go.

It was about half an hour before the time for the afternoon drill. As Schumann entered the parade-ground he heard a voice shout from the steps: "The sergeant-major is going!" And in a moment all came running towards him, the drivers and gunners, old stagers and raw recruits, the entire battery crowding round to shake hands with him once more.

Again the sergeant-major had to clench his teeth; he passed silently along, shaking the hands that were stretched out to him.

Suddenly he stopped in astonishment, thinking he must be mistaken. But no, Wolf was there too--Wolf, the social-democrat, whose whole existence as a soldier was a cynical mask, the revolutionist who was only waiting for the moment when, free from the green uniform, he might preach his faith again! And he, Schumann, had never been at any pains to conceal what he thought of such disgraceful opinions.

Wolf had not exactly run up, but had come with the rake over his shoulder with which he had been raking the riding-ground, and was at any rate associating himself with the others.

"What, you too, Wolf?" Schumann involuntarily exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," answered the soldier. "You never were hard on any-one. You were always just."

Schumann was just a little bit shamefaced at this obviously sincere praise. Generally speaking, he had honestly tried to deserve it; but with regard to this social-democrat, he knew quite well he had many times been lacking in justice. He remembered how often, when Wolf's turn came, he had ordered him to perform some specially unpleasant work.

Embarrassed and hesitating, he replied: "Well, well, and you have always been a good soldier yourself, at any rate in externals. Only that you--well, there was no getting at you there!"

It was a good thing that after Wolf others came up to grasp his hand in farewell; or else, notwithstanding order, watch, and sabre, he would have left the barracks with a bad conscience.

The last, who kept on moving further down in order to be the very last to say good bye, was Niederlein, a smart little gunner, who had polished his accoutrements for him during the last year.

The sergeant-major pressed his hand with special heartiness, and breathed freely: Thank God, Niederlein made up for Wolf! Once when ill, and left alone in the dormitory, Niederlein had broken open a locker and appropriated a piece of sausage therefrom. Schumann had caught him red-handed. Thieving from a comrade was a serious offence, entailing severe punishment and public disgrace; but Schumann knew Niederlein was only thoughtless and greedy, and it had

been more a stupid prank than a crime, for the money which lay near the sausage was untouched. So he had held the boy across the table and given him five-and-twenty strokes with his leather belt. He was not quite clear in his mind whether this had been entirely in order--it might have been technically an assault; at any rate it turned out right. Niederlein was now about the best soldier in the whole battery, and would have, gone through fire and water for the sergeant-major.

The lad watched awhile how Schumann went slowly out through the back gateway and disappeared into the little wood. Then he hurried off to his quarters, for the battery was collecting for foot-drill.

Schumann had purposely chosen to go to the town by the lonely way through the wood, because if he had gone by the high road he would have met the battery officers again. That would have meant another delay; and then besides he felt he belonged far more to the men than to the officers, despite his double stripes.

He paused on the hill and gazed at the well-known landscape beneath him, where in the foreground lay the great drill-ground at his feet.

With his sharp eyes he could even recognise individual men. The fourth battery had just brought its six guns up to the gate; the fifth had not stirred as yet--Captain Mohr was not fond of duty so soon after dinner; and now his own battery, the sixth, arrived on the ground to perform foot-drill. The ornaments on the helmets shimmered in the sun, and he almost fancied he could hear the even tread. Wegstetten and the two lieutenants were behind.

The drill began, and the breaking up into files, the deployment, and finally the parade-march, first in file and then in battery column--all went splendidly. It was a joy to look down upon the smart, well-ordered straight lines as they moved. Instead of himself, Heppner marched in the sergeant-major's place, and Keyser, as the senior non-commissioned officer present, led the file of drivers instead of the deputy sergeant-major.

All was thoroughly well done, there was not a hitch anywhere.

And he, Schumann, had believed that he was indispensable, he had thought things could not go on without him!

At supper Julie Heppner said to her husband: "Otto, the money you give us for housekeeping isn't enough. Ida couldn't pay the milkman to-day."

"No affair of mine," replied the deputy sergeant-major, with his mouth full. "You must manage things better."

When he had finished eating he put his coat on, buckled on his sabre and put on his forage cap.

His wife watched him from the sofa with angry eyes as he brushed his heavy beard and put on his gloves.

Heppner looked her straight in the face, laughed scornfully and said: "Yes, you are thinking again: 'Now he is going to the public-house and will spend all the bit of money!' Well, as it happens, it's not so this time. But you had better believe it all the same, and make yourself really angry."

This perpetual lack of money was, however, no joke to the sister-in-law either, as she was always having to put off and conciliate the creditors, and she joined in angrily: "It's the truth! You squander the money and we have to manage as best we can."

Heppner went round behind her and mockingly retorted: "So you're beginning to scold like your dear sister? It seems to be catching. But I'll tell you how it is: there was a good lot of the farewell beer left over yesterday, and I saved it up for myself. Now, who's right?"

He tapped his sister-in-law's round shoulder playfully, and added: "Who knows? Perhaps tomorrow I may give you quite a lot of money."

With that he left the house.

He was in a good temper. It had long been a grievance to him that Schumann--grumbling old plodder!--instead of packing up his few sticks and being drafted into the civil service, should have remained so long stuck fast to the battery, thus preventing his own promotion. Now at last the old man had disappeared, and he was certain of becoming sergeant-major.

To-day was a lucky day for him, he felt sure; and this must be taken advantage of: a little game must be arranged for the evening.

Therefore, he had taken care only to invite men on whom he could rely to this second instalment of the farewell drinking party: the sergeant-major of the fifth battery, who imitated his

chief in drinking, and Trumpeter Henke of his own, the sixth battery, two seasoned gamblers. The two other members of the party were to be the landlord of the White Horse, and the fat baker, Kühn, who held the contract for the white bread supplied to the regiment. To the baker in particular he had allotted the *rôle* of loser, as he had the most money.

At the gate it suddenly occurred to Heppner that it would be much pleasanter to walk the half-mile to the town in company, and he decided to fetch the trumpeter.

Sergeant Henke was a lively young fellow, with a fresh, rosy face, a flowing black beard and curly hair, rather beyond the regulation length. He was of a handsome soldierly appearance, and contrasted well with his wife, Lisbeth, a beautiful blonde, who with her slender figure always looked like a young girl.

This fair woman was blindly in love with her husband. She almost worshipped him, but he did not trouble himself much about her. He regarded himself as a great artist, because in the choir concerts he played the cornet solos, and always received much applause from the female part of the audience, and he considered that his marriage alone had prevented him from becoming a "celebrity." Once he had received a passionate love letter, signed by "a lady of high degree, who deplored with tears of blood" the dividing difference of rank between them. It was transparently the coarse work of a practical joker; but Henke in his conceit believed in the high-born heiress, and this dream quite turned his head. He ever afterwards posed as a fine gentleman, ogled all the elegant women of the town, and had hardly a glance left for his wife. She worked and pinched for him in order that he might be able to enjoy his aristocratic tastes, and thought herself happy because he bore with her. And he was always urging her to work and earn money, as he longed to become rich and be the equal of really fashionable people.

Gambling was to help him to this; besides, in itself it gave him intense pleasure.

He was ready dressed to go out, and was only lingering before the looking-glass, when he heard outside the signal-whistle with which Heppner, his boon-companion, was accustomed to call him. He soon joined the deputy sergeant-major in the street, and after a brief greeting the two walked rapidly towards the town.

A few steps from the White Horse the trumpeter suddenly stopped, felt in his pocket, and exclaimed, "Damnation! I've left my money behind at home!"

"Never mind!" said Heppner, in his genial mood. "You shall eat and drink free to-day, and I'll lend you a thaler into the bargain. There, catch hold!"

He gave him the piece of money before they reached the door, and the trumpeter rejoiced: borrowed money brought luck.

The landlord of the Horse had laid the table neatly in the little parlour. The leavings of the previous evening had been freshly dished up, and the barrel, which must still contain nearly forty litres of beer, had been cooled with ice.

But only one of the five banqueters was in the vein--Blechschiidt, sergeant-major of the fifth battery. He was still eating and drinking when the four others were already sitting at the half-cleared table playing cards.

"Something moderate to begin with!" the master baker Kühn had suggested; so each one put down three marks.

It was a long time before the last fifty-pfennig piece was played out of the pool; but Heppner triumphed. He had been right in his premonition; when he counted his money he had won nearly two marks.

After this exertion the players took a little refreshment, and while eating talked the game over.

Heppner swallowed his bread and meat eagerly, and the last plate had hardly been cleared before he began, his eyes twinkling craftily, "And what next, gentlemen?"

The master baker laughed pleasantly and replied, "Well, as we've been lying low, we may afford to let ourselves go a bit now."

Thereupon the landlord bolted the door and saw that the shutters were firmly closed. They drew closer together, and even Blechschiidt came nearer.

The players bent over the table, their eyes followed the dealing of the cards with eagerness, their faces glowed. They lighted their fresh cigars on the stumps of the old ones, and when their throats became parched from excitement, they gulped down rapid draughts of the beer, which was gradually becoming flat and muddy as it flowed from the tap into the glasses.

They had lost all thought of time.

Suddenly Blechschiidt, the tireless toper, grumbled, "No, I shan't play with you any more. Beer's best."

The landlord looked at the clock. "It is nearly five," he said.

None of them could believe it; they thought they had not been playing above an hour at most.

But late or early they must finish the game, and they all heaved deep breaths as the last round ended. While playing they had been quite unconscious of the terrible fatigue, which, now that they had stopped, utterly overpowered them.

Now they had to calculate the gains and losses of the night. The trumpeter got through quickest. He tossed Heppner the borrowed thaler, and laughed contentedly to himself. He had every reason to be cheerful, he, who had not brought a single red pfennig with him, and who now had more than a hundred marks--chiefly in silver, but with a few gold pieces also--clinking in his pocket!

The other four had all lost. The deputy sergeant-major was quite thirty marks poorer. He glanced darkly at the small sum which still lay before him. How stupid he had been! He had thrown away his luck with the thaler which he had lent Henke, that was quite certain. Now, instead of himself, this fop had hauled in the fat baker's money. That was the reward of his good nature!

Then suddenly Henke had an idea.

"Gentlemen!" he began, "I see that I have had tremendous luck. I must really give some of it away."

He dug the sleepy landlord in the ribs, and shouted in his ear, "Now then, Anton! I want two bottles of champagne."

The landlord was quite alert in a moment. He stood to win by this sort of play.

"Bring the most expensive!" trumpeted the trumpeter. "Eleven marks the bottle, Henke!"

"No matter! What our officers can do I can do also. Bring it along!"

Mine host hurried down into his cellar and fetched two bottles of Pommery from the furthest corner, a good dry brand with which horse-dealers sometimes christened a concluded bargain.

There was no more ice to be had; so he opened the bottle as it came out of the cellar. The cork sprang to the ceiling with a loud pop, and the wine poured from the neck like a fountain.

The two sergeants had given the word of command, "Fire!" as the cork flew out, and the trumpeter had blown a fanfare. All five buried their noses in their glasses and let them be tickled by the rising bubbles. Then they drank off the wine, which was far too warm, and could not praise it enough.

The trumpeter, who was always imitating the officers, considered himself a judge of wine. He smelt the champagne, let it lie on his tongue, while at the same time his face took on an enraptured expression, and he shouted enthusiastically, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! in this bouquet one recognises the true French brand. It is utterly different from German champagne!"

The others imitated his action and were in complete agreement with him.

Only Kühn remarked discontentedly, "The hog-wash tastes like bitter almonds!"

At which the landlord took offence. "Don't you know then, baker," he snarled, "that that is just the way to know genuine French champagne?"

And he looked lovingly at the two corks which he had placed carefully in a corner.

When Captain von Wegstetten entered the orderly-room on the morning of April 1st, he at once said to the deputy sergeant-major, "What is the matter with you? You look quite green."

Heppner answered, "Excuse me, sir, my wife has had a very bad night."

"Indeed!" drawled Wegstetten. "I am sorry to hear it."

But to himself he thought: "If that is at all true, the man must have been consoling himself with whisky; one can smell it five paces away from him."

However, the captain offered to let him dispense with riding; but Heppner objected, and begged to be allowed to take part in the drill. He felt that would help him to shake off his unpleasant sensations; an hour's ride and he would be fresh again. A fine thing if a night's dissipation could really upset a man like himself!

His commanding officer was pleased at such enthusiasm; and as during the drill the deputy sergeant-major managed his horse--the most troublesome of all the remounts--exceedingly well,

he remarked to him, "Heppner, I think I shall be able to bring you some good news at noon."

Afterwards it occurred to him that he had intended to raise objections to the colonel with regard to Heppner's elevation to the rank of sergeant-major, but now that he had committed himself to the man this was no longer possible.

He did just mention his doubts in the colloquy with Falkenheim, but he made no impression, and in the end the colonel himself covered the retreat.

"What do you expect, my dear Wegstetten?" he said. "I ask you, just take all your non-commissioned officers. Who is there you cannot accuse of gambling? It is a fatal characteristic of these mongrels that they will copy the officers, and unfortunately only in what is stupid or bad. The fine gentlemen all play, drink, fool with women, gamble; it's only a question of the one a little more, the other a little less."

Wegstetten objected modestly. "Pardon me, sir, not all. My old sergeant-major----"

He got no further. Falkenheim interrupted quickly: "You mean Schumann? Yes; there you are quite correct. But then he was the last of another generation, one of the old type--steady, quiet, discreet, honest, and trustworthy to the last fibre. But they are dying out, my dear Wegstetten. Such perfect specimens of non-commissioned officers, that used to be the rule, are now more and more the exception. I ask you for the truth: since you entered the army, have our non-coms. become better, or--well, less good? What do you say?"

"Less good, sir, unfortunately," replied the captain.

"Yes, unfortunately. Exactly my opinion."

The colonel rummaged among the papers lying on his desk, and selected two.

"Now, my dear Wegstetten," he said, "here are the appointments. I can't settle such details. That is not my business. I put it to you, therefore; will you try with Heppner?"

"As you wish, sir."

"Good; I think you are right."

Falkenheim signed the document and gave it to the captain.

"There! now he is sergeant-major!" he said, and continued: "What I most regret is, that you should partially lose him in the active work. That was his real field. But a younger man cannot be promoted over his head."

He took the second document and handed it to Wegstetten. "And here, at the same time, is the other promotion. I have followed your advice. Sergeant Heimert is to-day appointed deputy sergeant-major and relieved of his present duty. He will report himself to you to-morrow.

"Thank you, sir," replied the captain.

Wegstetten stuck the documents into his sleeve and took leave. The colonel accompanied him to the door and shook hands with him very cordially.

The captain reflected, however, as he went down the steps, that every one must have at least one fault. He, like the whole contingent, was of opinion that Falkenheim was one of the finest officers in the army, certain to become a major-general, if not a full general. And with an artilleryman this was of double significance. But why, because a man had had the good fortune to work under the sainted Moltke on the general staff, he should, therefore, always describe anything that had occurred since that time as "less good,"--that he could never understand.

That evening after roll-call Heppner read out his own promotion to the rank of sergeant-major, and that of Sergeant Heimert to the post of deputy sergeant-major.

Everybody was surprised. Heimert? Who was Heimert? No one could say.

Ah! It went on: "Deputy sergeant-major Heimert will therefore be relieved from his management of the forage department of the infantry and artillery ammunition columns and will return to his battery."

So it really was that fellow with the gigantic nose, who was always slouching about the coach-houses and baggage sheds!

Heppner returned to the orderly-room and sat down at his table, on which lay a mass of unfinished writing. Now the wakeful night was making itself felt. The sergeant yawned and took up his work unwillingly. Evidently the post of sergeant-major had some drawbacks! To be kept shut up in this room! It was not pleasant to retire from drill, riding remounts, giving riding-lessons, and leading a line in driving exercises--all that had been so much after his own heart. And this eternal scribbling would be altogether against the grain.

If only he had a clever clerk, like Blechschmidt of the fifth battery, who did not over-exert himself! But Käppchen was a lazy fellow; and yet on Käppchen he must rely, asking his advice about all kinds of things, because he himself did not know the routine yet.

It was very late before he locked his desk and went home.

His sister-in-law greeted him with news which did not improve his temper. "The tailor has been here," she said, "and wanted the money for your uniform, which you have owed for a month. He will come again to-morrow."

Heppner grumbled: "The fellow must wait!" He had no more money. It had nearly all vanished yesterday, and to-day he had been obliged to give the greater part of what remained to the women for housekeeping.

With a surly face he sat down to his supper.

"Have you been made sergeant-major?" his wife asked.

He saw his sister-in-law's eyes too fixed on him questioningly. He muttered, "Yes," to her, and then turned roughly on his wife: "What business is it of yours?"

She lay back, and answered gently: "I am so glad." "Really?" he sneered. He cast a sharp glance at her and snarled between his teeth: "Don't gush!"

Then he pushed his plate away, tossed off two glasses of beer, and lay down to rest in the bedroom.

The two sisters remained together, the invalid stretched on the sofa, the other sewing near the lamp. They heard Heppner snoring.

His wife's face was in shadow, but her eyes blazed at her sister and rested with an uncanny expression of hatred on the strong, well-developed beauty of the young girl.

There was a knock at the door. The battery tailor had brought the sergeant-major's tunic, on the sleeve of which he had stitched the double stripes. Ida took it from him and hung it up silently.

The invalid watched her indifferently. A short time before she had been mildly excited with joy at her husband's promotion; he had quite spoiled this feeling for her. Now she was callous to everything.

Suddenly she pressed her lips together and clenched her hands feverishly.

Had not her sister just handled his tunic lingeringly with a kind of furtive tenderness?

Had the scandal already gone so far?

Julie Heppner believed that she would die betrayed and forsaken by all; but during her last days she gained a sympathetic friend in the newly appointed deputy sergeant-major Heimert.

Heimert had taken possession of the Schumanns' empty house. True that at the time he was still single; but as his marriage was to take place in a few weeks, the captain had at once allotted married quarters to him. Now the deputy sergeant-major was furnishing the rooms and decking the bare walls and windows with touching care. He would arrange and rearrange the furniture, and would drape a curtain a thousand different ways, and yet nothing was ever beautiful enough for him.

On holidays he was seldom able to visit his sweetheart, Albina Worzuba. At other times he devoted every spare hour to her; but she was the barmaid of a small tavern in the town, and had no time to spare for him on holidays. Besides, Heimert did not like watching how the guests would go up to the counter for glasses of beer, and joke with Albina, or even dare to pinch her cheeks. He had on several occasions made scenes about this till the landlord had almost forbidden him the place. Albina herself, too, advised him to come as seldom as possible. She considered that as long as she was a barmaid she must be friendly, and not too sensitive to the chaff of the guests; and if it pained him to see this, it was better that he should remain away. And with an ardent glance she added that when she was his wife he would have her all to himself. Heimert had constrained himself to agree to this.

On one of these Sundays it befell that Heimert was startled from his carpentering by the sound of a groan. He went outside and listened; the moaning sounds came from Heppner's quarters. He burst the door open and entered. The sick woman had been left alone. Her sister had gone for a walk, and the sergeant-major was doubtless at a public-house. Such neglect of her had often occurred before; but this time she had suddenly been seized by an attack of pain so severe that she thought she was dying.

To die alone! With no one even to hold her hand; without a ray of light from a living eye to

brighten the dark porch of death!

Between the attacks of pain she called feverishly and breathlessly for her husband: "Otto! Otto! Otto!!"

Heimert ran to her anxiously. He gave her his hand, which she seized and held convulsively, spoke to her soothingly, and wiped the drops of sweat from her brow with his handkerchief.

He quietly gave her time to recover from her exhaustion, then said to her gently: "Frau Heppner, would you like me to send to find your own people?"

She shook her head energetically: "No, no!" and whispered wearily: "But if you would only stay just a little while, Herr Heimert!"

The sergeant nodded, and remained sitting silently beside her.

It was some time before Julie Heppner had the strength to explain to him what had happened to her. While so doing she looked at him more attentively, and was almost frightened by his ugliness. The coarse face with the outstanding ears was made half grotesque, half repellent, by an enormous nose, which was always red. What did it matter that two beautiful, kindly child-like eyes shone from this countenance? Would any one trouble to look for them in the midst of such hideousness?

The invalid remembered she had heard that Heimert was going to be married. In the light of her own unhappiness she thought to herself that this marriage could only turn out well if the man had chosen a woman as ugly as himself, so that in their common misfortune the pair could comfort each other.

As she gradually became able to talk to him she inquired about his bride, and the enamoured swain raved to her unceasingly of Albina's beauty and charm.

Heimert now appeared to her as a fellow-sufferer; only she was about to lay down the heavy burden, and he was but just going to take the load upon his back.

The two talked together as if they had known each other for years; they were nearly always of the same opinion. Finally, the invalid invited the deputy sergeant-major to come over often when she was alone; she would always give him a sign, and he could bring his carpenter's bench with him, the hammering would not disturb her in the least.

After this, Heimert always appeared directly Julie Heppner called him. He gained distraction from his jealous fits in this way, and he thought the sergeant-major's wife a really good woman, who had been unfortunate enough to marry the wrong man, when with another she would perhaps have been happy. The brutality with which Heppner treated the dying woman was revolting to him, and his sympathy with the injured wife gradually inspired him with a positive hatred for the sergeant-major.

The sergeant-major laughed at Heimert. "The Prince with the Nose" he called him, and sneered at his wife about this "lover."

"You two would have suited each other well!" he jeered. "You would have nothing to reproach each other with in the way of beauty!"

One day in passing he looked into the neighbouring quarters, and found the deputy sergeant-major gazing at a cabinet photograph of his betrothed. Heimert, startled, tried quickly to hide the portrait; but Heppner begged to see it.

He had expected to see a girl,—well, something like his wife, or perhaps uglier, for surely it would be impossible for any one else to fall in love with Heimert; but as he took the picture in his hand an involuntary expression of surprise escaped him: "By Jove! Isn't she beautiful!"

From that moment he was always asking Heimert to take him with him to see his sweetheart.

"Why?" Heimert asked suspiciously. "Do you want to cut me out with her?"

Heppner laughed at him. "The devil!" he said. "I have two women in the house myself, and that's more than enough. Surely one may make the acquaintance of a comrade's sweetheart?"

"And," he added craftily, "have you so little confidence in her, then?"

Heimert burst out: "Oh, that's not the reason!"

"Well then," said the other, "you know you won't be able to lock her up and hide her when she is your wife. Where's the harm in my just saying good-day to her?"

The deputy sergeant-major was forced to agree that there was really nothing against it. Moreover he was rather proud of having won such a beautiful girl; he enjoyed seeing the sergeant-major's envious eyes; and finally he said he would take him to Grundmann's the following Monday. Grundmann was the name of the landlord of the tavern in which Albina was

barmaid; and as on Monday business there was at its slackest, they might hope to exchange a few quiet words with the girl.

On the Monday evening appointed he met Heppner on the parade-ground.

Heimert had made himself as smart as possible. He had put on his new extra uniform, which he had meant to keep for his wedding, and had forced his big hands into shiny white kid gloves. The collar of his tunic was very high, and so tight that he could hardly turn his head. Heppner, on the other hand, had only put on his best undress uniform. He was in a very good temper and very talkative, whereas Heimert walked beside him depressed and silent.

They arrived at Grundmann's very opportunely. They were the only guests, and the landlord had no objection to Albina's sitting at their table with them.

Heppner chose a place from which he could gaze undisturbed at the girl's profile. She pleased him. She was just to his taste, this full-bosomed girl with salient hips and rounded arms. In his opinion her face was more than pretty; her eager, passionate eyes, and her mouth with the full, rather pouting lips, on which one longed to plant a big kiss, seemed to him quite beautiful. She wore her dark hair, which was as coarse as a horse's tail, dressed in a new-fashioned way which gave her a certain "individuality"; and, above all, she had some scent about her of a kind that was only used by the most distinguished ladies.

Heppner was annoyed that she noticed him so little. She was quite taken up with her betrothed, who was telling her of the progress made in the preparation of the house, and she only gave Heppner a glance at rare intervals.

At first she did not talk much; but when, in order to say something, he asked her where her home was, she immediately began to relate her whole history.

She came from Prague, and was the daughter of a shoe-maker--or, rather, of a boot and shoe manufacturer--and, moreover, not of an ordinary boot and shoe manufacturer, but of a Court boot and shoe manufacturer by Royal and Imperial appointment, who did not work for just any one, but only for the Archdukes and for the high Bohemian nobility. And she, Albina, had always to write down the figures when her father was taking measures, and so it had come about that a Count Colloredo had fallen in love with her. He had wished to educate and marry her; but she had at last refused because the noble relations of her beloved had threatened to disinherit him if he married the "shoemaker's daughter." She could never have endured causing him to discard his beautiful Thurn and Taxis dragoon's uniform.

Now came a pause in Albina's narrative, which however did not last long. Next, she had fled from her father's house. Why? She kept that a secret. And finally, after many vicissitudes she had found a refuge here, where she was safe from her father. For he had wished later to marry her to a master chimney-sweep, and although the latter was a millionaire she would have none of him.

In reality she was the child of a miserably poor cobbler; and after a stormy youth she had brought her somewhat damaged little ship of life to anchor in the small garrison town at the bar of Grundmann's alehouse.

Heimert waited impatiently for the conclusion of her romance, which he had heard many times before. But if Albina had a chance of telling the story of her life, she became like a freshly wound-up clock, which ticks on inexorably until it runs down.

She simply left unanswered the questions her lover interposed now and then; and when he interrupted her to say that Count Colloredo had been in the Palatine hussars, and not in the Thurn and Taxis dragoons, she said crossly that he had better pay more attention the next time she told him anything. Heppner, on the contrary, who appeared to listen with interest, rose in her favour, and in answer to his questions she launched still further into detail.

And now she looked at him more closely, and took his measure with those bright eyes of hers. But having brought her story up to the present date, she turned once more to Heimert, regarded him tenderly, and said, "Shall I not be happy with him, after having had such hard times in the past?"

A few newly-arrived guests now called her to her duties at the bar, and the two non-commissioned officers remained behind alone at the table. Heimert felt the sergeant-major looking at him, as he thought, with a sneering, incredulous sort of expression. He was embarrassed, and began describing figures on the table with a little beer that had been spilt.

"Well, well," he began at last, "women are always like that. She draws the long bow, of course--as to her origin and so forth."

"Yes," answered Heppner; "girls love doing that."

"But," Heimert continued, "there is some truth in it. Her father is a shoemaker--was, at least, for he is dead now--even if he wasn't a Court shoemaker. And he must have been wealthy. He only left her what he was obliged to, and yet she receives fifty crowns interest monthly. I know that for certain."

"By Jove! that is over forty marks. You certainly are a lucky dog! Why, she's almost rich."

"Well, not quite that. But it is very pleasant, naturally. However, I didn't choose her for that reason. I first heard of it quite indirectly, long after I had proposed."

Heppner was almost overcome with envy as he saw sitting opposite to him this picture of hideousness, this perfect monster, who had succeeded--how, Heaven alone knew!--in winning a beautiful and also a rich woman. For he was obliged to believe that about her income. It was plain that Heimert was not lying.

As a matter of fact the barmaid did receive fifty crowns every month. The money, however, did not come as interest on capital inherited from her father, but was an annuity which a former lover had settled on her: a good-natured, fat tallow-chandler, who had been with great regret obliged to give the youthful Albina Worzuba the go-by, as his wife had caught him tripping. He had sweetened the farewell for Albina with this annuity.

Albina was careful not to reveal this to her future husband. Why should she? She argued that ignorance was bliss, and beyond everything she was weary of the unsettled life she had been leading, now as waitress, now as barmaid, or as something quite different, and she wanted to find rest in an honest marriage. She could attract most men as lovers, but as a husband she could only hope for one who was as simple and as much in love as Heimert. So she had fastened upon him, and she had no intention of endangering her plans by any unpleasant communications. Prague was a long way off; and, moreover, many years had passed since those days, and the money itself could tell no tales as to its source.

Apparently the barmaid would have no more free moments. So at last the two non-commissioned officers rose, paid their bill, and then went up to the bar to say good-night to her.

Now it was that Albina first noticed the full difference between her future husband and the sergeant-major. As the men stood side by side, Heppner was more than a head taller than Heimert. He was strongly built, and, despite a certain fulness, he was well-proportioned; strength, however, untrammelled, powerful, raw strength was his salient characteristic. Heimert's frame, too broad and too short, and crowned by its mask of a comic clown, looked almost deformed by the side of the other.

The girl's eyes rested with unfeigned admiration on Heppner's appearance; and when she finally turned towards her lover, a scornful smile played about her coarse mouth. But in an instant she changed it to a tender expression.

To Heppner she said: "I am glad to have made the acquaintance of one of my future husband's comrades."

"When you are married, Fräulein, we shall be living in the same building," replied Heppner eagerly. "We shall be great friends, shall we not?"

And the beauty raised her eyes to his with a peculiar glance as she answered softly: "Oh yes, I think so."

CHAPTER VI

"For now the time to pack has come,
And love is put away;

Farewell! I hear the roll of drum, And
may no longer stay."

(*Hoffmann von Fallersleben.*)

Towards the end of March Reimers was turning over the pages of the *Weekly Military Gazette* before dinner, when he saw the announcement that his dear friend Senior-lieutenant Gützt was to rejoin his regiment on April 1st. The red order of the Eagle was to be given to him upon the expiration of his work in Berlin.

Gützt to return! Dear old pedantic Gützt, who had so often and so ruthlessly opened his eyes for him! To tell the truth, this friend had almost passed out of his thoughts; yet now he suddenly felt a genuine longing for him.

During the past winter Reimers had grown much more at home in the regiment, feeling as a wanderer returned. He felt himself freer and more light-hearted, and his comrades seemed more congenial. Never had a winter flown by so swiftly; and yet he counted the days till the 1st.

He had made a special resolve to spend his evenings over his books, and had plunged with renewed zeal into his studies for the examination of the Staff College, which had been interrupted by his illness. And then the feeling of loneliness had suddenly returned. But now all would be well, now that Güntz was coming back--Güntz, from whom no difference of rank or age had ever divided him; to whom he could speak straight from the heart, and on whose sympathy he could at all times rely.

Güntz's return was scarcely alluded to by his brother officers. After all there was nothing extraordinary about it; every year some one took up or left a post of the kind he had been filling.

The ladies of the regiment made somewhat more of a stir; for one question, which had previously been theoretically discussed, now became suddenly of burning importance.

Güntz had married in Berlin, *and his bride was a governess*. This much only was known: that she was not even particularly pretty. He had, of course, obtained the requisite official sanction, so that there could not be anything actually against her family; but concerning the reception into their midst of this young person, who had formerly filled a "menial position," the ladies of the regiment felt somewhat troubled.

Frau Lischke laid the case before her husband, and begged him to ask instructions of the colonel.

"H'm," answered the major, "I'll do it; but I don't care for the job. Falkenheim can be pretty sharp-tongued upon occasion."

"Sharp-tongued?" retorted his wife. "My dearest, surely you are more than a match for him there! And there's another matter. While you are about it, you might just mention that stuck-up Reimers. This entire winter he has kept away, quite without excuse, from all society. Just tell the colonel that I don't think that proper in a young officer."

Lischke was not as a rule shy or in awe of his superior officer, but his wife's commission gave him an ill-defined uneasiness, so that he boggled over his errand.

The colonel let him have his say out. Then he began, in his somewhat nervous, quick way:

"My dear major, give my compliments to Frau Lischke, and tell her that young Reimers is preparing for an examination, so that she will understand his seclusion. For my part, Lischke, if Reimers had turned up at every dance of which your wife is patroness, or which she has helped to get up, I should have been surprised. There may be C.O.'s who think differently; for my own part, so long as I have the honour of commanding the regiment, such festivities shall only be obligatory on those youngsters whose manners need touching up. That that is not the case with Reimers does not, I hope, escape the penetration of your excellent wife. That is my official view of the case; as to my personal feeling, which I give Frau Lischke in strict confidence: it is that I wish the devil would take all these everlasting balls and parties!

"With regard to Lieutenant Güntz's wife, I beg you to express to your good lady my very respectful surprise at her question. If the Ministry of War has found no fault with the young lady, then surely the ladies here may be satisfied. Perhaps they are afraid that one who has been a governess may outshine them in wisdom? Well, of course, that may very well be! I do not want to be disagreeable, my dear major; so please make my views known to the ladies as tenderly as you can."

Reimers met Güntz at the station. The dear fellow had grown somewhat stouter. No wonder, considering he had been away from duty for a good year.

As they walked away the elder officer looked keenly at the younger.

"Reimers," he said, delightedly, "you look thoroughly well. African traveller! Boer campaigner! Prisoner in a fortress! Which has suited you best?"

"Probably all three," answered Reimers; "the one counteracted the other."

"Was that so? Am I not the only destroyer of illusions? You must tell me all about everything, won't you?"

"All to *you* certainly."

"That's right. Well, to begin with, how does the garrison air suit you?"

"So-so. And you? How will you like this after Berlin?"

"Oh, all right, I think. If not---Well, we shall see."

For a while the friends were silent; then Güntz was about to speak, when Reimers interrupted him.

"But I must ask you, above all things, how is your wife, and where is she now?"

Güntz looked at him smiling. "She is very well, thanks, and is at the moment with her brother, a parson in Thuringia. But you don't ask after my boy!"

"What? Have you got one?"

"Rather! A fat little cub, as round as a bullet. Ten weeks old. You must help us christen him."

"Güntz, you should have told me."

"Told you what, my son?"

"That you were a father."

"Why, there was time enough. Anyhow, it was in the *Weekly Military*. So it is your own fault if you didn't know. But will you be godfather?"

"Of course, of course, gladly."

"Then next Saturday afternoon at five. Morning dress."

Reimers laughed gaily.

"Since when have you taken to talking like a telegram, Güntz? Are words expensive in Berlin?"

"Expensive? Pooh! Cheap, cheap! A hundred thou-sand for a farthing," broke out the new arrival, with somewhat unaccountable fierceness. His open, friendly face suddenly darkened and took on a grim, bitter expression.

"Well," he said, as they parted, "we shall meet again, very often, I hope. So long, old chap!"

In fact, Reimers became a constant guest at the Güntzes'. He feared at times that he came too often.

"Güntz, old boy," he said, "tell me frankly, am I not a nuisance?"

"How so?" asked his host, sitting up in his easy chair.

"I am afraid I come too often."

Güntz knocked the ash off the end of his cigar, and reassured him; "No, certainly not, old chap. If you did I should not hesitate to tell you."

So it came about that every Sunday at mid-day, and on every Wednesday evening, Reimers found himself at the dinner-table of the snug little villa, Waisenhaus Strasse No. 57.

Frau Kläre Güntz, a little lady with a fresh, pretty face, and bright, clever eyes, called these her "at home" days.

"You see, Fatty," she said to her husband, "I am trying to follow in the footsteps of Frau Lischke."

She lifted her eyebrows and went on, sarcastically: "When you have only been a governess you have to be so very careful. And it's difficult! Sometimes I have my doubts whether I shall ever attain to the standard of Gustava Lischke."

She sighed comically and nodded at her husband.

He threatened her: "Mind what you are about, Kläre. I will not permit disrespect. Gustava!" he added, chuckling, and turned to Reimers: "We were neighbours as children," he explained, "Gustava and I; but now she denies the acquaintance. My old father--God bless him!--was a builder. Gustava's papa dealt in butter and eggs; a worthy, most worthy man. But now, of course, according to the new fashion, they must pile it on, and Gustava's papa was a merchant."

He laughed, and then went on, more bitterly: "If you weren't present, Kläre, I should use a strong expression to set the whole dirty pack in their true light. Gustava is unhappily only a symptom, and one among many. And I tell you, Kläre, if you were to behave like her, then--then---"

"Well, what terrible thing would befall me?" asked the young wife.

Güntz checked himself. He smiled slyly. "Why, then I should make use of the right which the good old law allows me, and administer corporal punishment."

Kläre laughed aloud.

"Anyhow," said she, "the women really aren't as bad as you make them out, Fatty."

The senior-lieutenant would not agree: "Now, now, Kläre, I was within earshot when all the divinities sat together discussing whether you would have hands roughened by "service," by polishing glasses, washing children, and such like."

Kläre was a little vexed. "Well," she cried, "would you have had them eat me up out of affection at the first go-off?"

"That's just what does happen sometimes," said her husband. "The moment Frau Kauerhof first appeared on the scene, a perfect stranger to them all, they threw themselves upon her neck, and hugged and kissed her, as if they had been her adoring sisters. Of course, Frau Kauerhof was a von Lüben, the daughter of a colonel and head of a department in the War Office, and you, my Kläre--shame on you!--were a governess!"

But the young wife insisted more vehemently: "Now do be reasonable!" she cried. "It has really become quite an *idée fixe* with you that I have not been received with due respect. I can only assure you again and again that all the ladies have been most polite and amiable towards me."

Güntz growled on: "Geese, a pack of stupid geese!"

"For shame, Fatty!" Kläre remonstrated.

But he continued to grumble. "Has a single one of them embraced you as they did Frau Kauerhof? Has one of them even kissed you? Has one been really nice and friendly to you?"

"Look here," cried Kläre quite roused, "I don't want any of them to fall on my neck when they scarcely know me. And as it happens, one has been kind to me, very kind indeed!"

"Pooh! Who, then?"

"Frau von Gropphusen!"

"Oh, I am not surprised. I except her. She is not a goose. But she's a crazy creature, all the same."

"Fatty! Don't be abominable! What has the poor woman done to you?"

Güntz rose from his chair. He took a few turns up and down the room to work off the stiffness, and grumbled on: "Done? To me? Nothing, of course. But she's hysterical out and out. That's it, hysterical!"

Kläre warmly took up the defence of the accused woman. "You may be right," she said, "but there's a reason for it."

"Certainly, certainly," answered Güntz. "Her husband is--forgive the coarse expression, Kläre--a regular hog. But an hysterical woman is an utter horror to me."

"I can only feel sorry for Frau von Gropphusen."

"And so do I. But I don't want her to hang on to you."

"She does not hang on to me," answered his wife simply.

But at this moment a subdued wailing was heard, and Kläre instantly hastened from the room.

The men, left alone, dropped into reflection. Neither spoke for a while.

At last Reimers broke the silence.

"I think, Güntz, that you exaggerate a bit. Senseless and silly prejudices are not only to be found in military circles. Anyhow, there's no good in running your head against a brick wall."

"True," assented Güntz. "But if a dung-cart were driven right under my nose, I should have to give it a shove."

He resumed his perambulations of the room, and lapsed for a while into silence.

"Anyhow," he began again, smiling contentedly, "Frau Gropphusen may come to Kläre for consolation if she likes to have her. I am sure my wife is proof against the hysterical bacillus. Eh?"

Before Reimers could answer, Kläre returned, a little flushed. She bore the baby on a pillow, rocking him in her arms.

Güntz answered his own question.

"Yes, yes, she's proof," he said.

Reimers was thoroughly happy in the Gützes' society. The atmosphere of security and candour in which they lived influenced him unawares; it wrought as a useful antidote when his spirit was inclined to soar too high into the realms of the unsubstantial. He was much delighted to find that his friend shared his admiration for his honoured and beloved Falkenheim. Indeed, in this matter, the dry and reserved man sometimes outdid his young fellow-officer.

"There's a *man!*" he would say. "Head and heart, eyes and mouth in the right places! A good fellow. In one word--a man!"

This word was the highest in Gütze's vocabulary. The opposite to it, until his marriage, had been woman. After marriage he naturally excepted Kläre.

How sick he was of the way people went on in Berlin! He could hardly speak too strongly about the weaknesses of certain officers.

Reimers did not hold it necessary to be absolutely blind to the faults of one's superiors and comrades; still, he thought that his friend went a bit too far in his strictures, and he did not conceal his opinion.

"Dear boy," responded Gütze, "why should I not speak freely to you? Do you think it gives me any pleasure that so many of our superiors and comrades do not merit the respect which, as officers, they command? This has nothing to do with their personal character. The only question for me is: are they fit for their profession? If not, they are only a nuisance in it, so far as I can see."

"You used to be less severe."

"Possibly. But when one has rubbed the sleepiness of habit out of one's eyes one sees more clearly and sharply. Besides, take an example. Stuckhardt will be a major soon. Do you consider him fit to lead a division?"

"No, he has already made a terrible mess of his battery. He won't stay on the staff for a year, that's certain."

"Why should he be there at all? I tell you he should never even have been made a captain. What about Gropphusen?"

"Ah! There you are! He has missed his vocation!"

"Why is he still where he is then?" Gütze laughed grimly to himself. "What ought he to have been?"

"A painter," answered Reimers.

The other made a grimace. "Possibly!----Well, thirdly, what of my revered chief, Captain Mohr? What do you think of him?"

"He has already got a knife at his throat. I bet he'll be sent off after the manoeuvres."

"He goes on drinking just as he has ever since I've known him." Gütze sighed deeply. "And I tell you, Reimers, it's no joke to serve under such a man."

Reimers nodded. "I feel with you, old man. And yet half the regiment envies you for being in the fifth battery."

"Pooh!" laughed Gütze bitterly, "there you see them. They would all like to idle under a sot. They just want to be where they think they're least looked after. They may do as they choose; but I want to know what I'm here for. If I have a profession I like to live up to it; I consider myself too good to be merely ornamental. I tell you, Reimers," he went on, "I was thoroughly upset when I joined the battery. The way things go on there you would hardly believe. I wondered at first how it could be kept dark. But there's a regular planned-out system of hurrying things into shape somehow for inspection--fixing up a sort of model village. And as for honour! Well, one must admit that they all stand by one another in the most infernal way, from the respected chief of the battery down to the smallest gunner, so that they'll rattle along somehow. There's a show of some sort of discipline; but really and truly it's just an all-round compromise. A man does a couple of days' work, and earns by that the right of idling all the more shamelessly afterwards. And that I should be let in for this sort of thing! Dear boy, you know how few palpable results, naturally, an officer can show in time of peace; but still it's too much that one should do one's duty with no possible chance of any *kudos*. Old man, it's too bad! I can't stand it. I know this, that if it goes on I shall quit the service, dearly as I love it."

He glanced with deep sorrow at his dark green coat, and strode up and down the room.

"This is my only hope," he went on, with grim satisfaction, "that my beloved captain will soon

succumb to D.T."

Reimers reflected. "You must allow that this battery's unfortunate condition is quite exceptional. Let me make a suggestion. Provoke Mohr to a quarrel! You'll be sure to be backed up. Every one knows he can't control himself when he is drunk. And you can go to Madelung, or, still better, come to us under Wegstetten."

"That's an idea," observed Güntz. "But it won't do. For, in confidence, Falkenheim has let it transpire that in the autumn I shall get my captancy; and probably--indeed certainly--I shall succeed Mohr."

Reimers jumped up, delighted.

"But, dear old chap, then it's all right! You'll bring the fifth out of the mud. You're just the chap to do it! And your reward will be the greater in proportion to the wretched state of affairs now. Jerusalem! What a splendid division it will be! Madelung, Güntz, Wegstetten! The best heads of batteries in the whole corps! Without any flattery, old chap!"

But the other did not join in his rejoicing. "Dear old fellow," he answered, "you may think so. But I confess that it seems to me as if we had got a bit off the right track with our whole military system; as if Madelung's and Wegstetten's and my own work were bound to be labour in vain."

He stopped suddenly. His usually cheerful face had grown careworn and gloomy.

"How do you mean?" asked Reimers.

The other sighed, and answered, "Dear boy, I cannot say more as yet; I have not fully thought it out. I will first make an attempt to settle down to the work here. I promise you, as soon as my own mind is clear, I will tell you honestly what is bothering me."

Reimers suspected moisture in the eyes of his friend, as they clasped hands.

Güntz went on softly: "Dear old boy, it's pretty hard when a man finds, or thinks he finds, that he has devoted his life to a fruitless, hopeless business! What is such a man to do? But it is possible that I am right in my fears--and of that I cannot bear to think."

"What fears do you mean?"

"I can't help myself. I am often forced to remember that we've had a bad time before."

"Before when?"

"Before Jena."

Reimers started. The ominous word struck his pride like a lash. He drew himself up stiffly. "Why not before Sedan?"

The other calmly answered: "Sedan? Jena? Perhaps you are right, perhaps I am. No one knows."

After this conversation Güntz avoided such topics with his friend. If Reimers tried to draw him again on the subject, he answered evasively, "I have told you I must fight it out with myself. Until then I don't want to talk at random."

But for all that he grew calmer and more equable. The biting, sarcastic tone he had adopted gradually disappeared; and it almost seemed as if the mood had been merely a survival of his Berlin experience.

At Easter a small event occurred in the little garrison,

During Holy Week Colonel von Falkenheim took a short leave of absence in order to fetch his daughter Marie home from school at Neuchatel. After Easter she was to come out into society.

Reimers debated whether he ought not to pay his respects to the Falkenheims during the holidays. Most of the unmarried officers had gone away on leave, and on Easter Monday he was alone in the mess-room at the mid-day meal.

Finally he decided to pay his visit that afternoon.

He was not in the least curious about the young lady. He remembered her as Falkenheim's little Marie, three years ago, before she went to school; a pretty, rather slender little girl, with a thick plait of bright gold hair down her back, blushing scarlet when one spoke to her and responding quickly and daintily with the regulation childish curtsey.

She was now just seventeen; still slender, and her little face framed by the same bright golden hair, that seemed almost too great a weight for her head. Beautiful clear grey eyes she had also; and Reimers particularly remarked her delicate straight nose, by the trembling of whose nostrils

one could judge if the little lady were excited about anything. She bore the dignity of being the colonel's daughter with modest pride. She handled the tea-things with the style of an accomplished matron, and led the conversation with a sort of old-fashioned self-possession.

Falkenheim never took his eyes off his child. Sometimes he smiled to himself, as he noted how unconcernedly she did the honours to her first guest, knowing well her secret anxiety to play her new part with success.

When Reimers rose to go, the colonel invited him to supper. The lieutenant accepted with pleasure. He was sure that intercourse with his commander would be of a thousand times more value to him than the dry wisdom of books.

Hitherto when Reimers had supped at the colonel's, after the meal, as they sat smoking, the senior officer would dilate on his reminiscences and experiences.

This time, however, there was a little alteration. Before a young girl the two men could not discuss specially military matters. Nevertheless, Reimers was not bored.

When Fräulein Marie showed symptoms of beginning again in her quaint universal-conversationalist style her father interrupted her.

"Little one," he said, "leave that sort of chatter alone! Keep it for others. Lieutenant Reimers does not care for that kind of thing. And I know him well, I assure you, my child; he is one of my best officers."

The little lady opened her eyes wide on the young soldier. "If papa says that," she said gravely, "I congratulate you, Herr Reimers."

The colonel laughed aloud. Conversation flowed fast and free after this. The young girl could talk brightly of her little life, and asked intelligent questions.

She began confidentially to question her guest about the ladies of the regiment, whereupon Falkenheim said abruptly: "Tell me, Reimers; you often go to the Güntzes', don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course Güntz is an old friend of yours. Do you know, I am much taken by his wife. She seems to me to be amiable, straightforward, sensible. We are neighbours; I should like Marie to see something of her. But they keep themselves to themselves rather, don't they?" "Oh, not altogether. Only Güntz finds ordinary shallow society uncongenial."

"So do I, and so do you; eh, Reimers? But I see what you mean."

Next day Lieutenant Güntz and Frau Kläre called at the colonel's, and regular intercourse soon established itself between the neighbours. Marie von Falkenheim was secretly enraptured with Kläre Güntz and her "sweet baby"; while Kläre took to her heart the fair young girl who had so early lost a mother's love.

From this time the social status of the former governess was completely changed. Frau Lischke invited that "delightful" Frau Güntz to her select coffee parties. But Kläre excused herself on the plea that she was nursing her baby and could not be away from him for more than two hours together.

Later in the year, when the evenings were warmer, and it was tempting to linger in the open air, the neighbours took to meeting together for supper in one garden or the other. The occupants of Waisenhaus Strasse No. 55 and those of No. 57 alternately provided the comestibles.

Reimers was always free of the table. Once he triumphantly contributed a liver sausage with truffles; but he was ruthlessly snubbed by Kläre for bringing such a thing in the dog-days.

The little clique was much censured by the regiment. Such familiar intercourse, it was thought, undermined the authority of the colonel. Nevertheless, people were eager for the goodwill of Frau Güntz.

Thus it came about that Güntz had the satisfaction of seeing his wife one of the most popular ladies of the regiment, and was able to tease her with the new discovery that she was "exclusive, not to say stuck up and proud."

In reality Kläre had only become intimate with two of the ladies. After Marie von Falkenheim she foregathered chiefly with Hannah von Gropphusen.

The latter was a real puzzle to her new friends. She was always alternating in her moods from one extreme to the other. Sometimes she would not appear for weeks at a time; then she would

come down day after day, each time seeming unable to tear herself away. Now she would be full of nervous, overwrought vivacity, and again would sit perfectly silent, staring gloomily before her.

Güntz fled from her presence; he said she made him feel creepy. Once he whispered mysteriously in his wife's ear: "Do you know, I believe she and Gropphusen have committed a murder between them: and this terrible bond holds them together, although they fight like cat and dog."

But Kläre strongly objected to such jokes. "How can you tell what that poor woman may have to bear? There may have been a murder in her history; but it was done by Gropphusen, and on her soul. Joke about something else, Fatty."

The happy young wife entertained the warmest sympathy for the other unhappy one, who always had the look of being pursued by some terrible evil. More than once a sisterly feeling impelled her, not from curiosity, but from genuine sympathy, to put a question to Hannah about her sorrow; but she read in the sombre, hopeless eyes of the sufferer that the burden must be borne alone; so she left Frau von Gropphusen in peace. She listened patiently when the nervous woman talked ceaselessly about a thousand different things, in short, jerky sentences as if to drown some inner voice; neither would Kläre interrupt with a single question the heavy silence in which, at other times, Hannah would sit for hours, watching her as she busied herself with her little housewifely tidings and mendings. It was only in watching this peaceful activity that Frau von Gropphusen recovered her equanimity. Her face would then lose its unnatural fixity of expression, and she would draw a deep breath, as though eased of a heavy burden.

"It is so peaceful here with you, Frau Kläre," she said sometimes. "It does one good."

Güntz shook his head over her weird conduct. One thing gratified him concerning her, however: it was that she admired his little son unreservedly, and could be given no greater treat than to be allowed to hold the boy on her lap. She would sit as though worshipping the child, who, indeed, was no angel, only a quite ordinary, fat, chubby infant. At such times her small finely-chiselled features would light up with a glorious beauty; so that Güntz one day whispered to his wife, "Do you know what the Gropphusen needs? A child!"

And in his open-hearted way he once said jokingly to Hannah: "Wouldn't you like a beautiful boy like that for yourself, dear lady?"

At that Hannah Gropphusen sprang up wildly. Her hands shook so that she could scarcely hold the baby, whom Kläre snatched from her only just in time.

"I, a child?" she cried. "For the love of God, never, never!"

A look of horror was in her eyes. She held her hands before her face as though to shut out something horrible.

Güntz drew back shocked, and stole softly from the room, taking with him the baby, who had set up a mighty howling. Kläre put her arm round the trembling woman, led her to a seat, and soothed her like a child.

Sitting motionless, Frau von Gropphusen listened to the gentle, comforting sound of the words, without taking in their meaning, Suddenly she sprang up and said in a voice of enforced calm:

"Forgive me, dear kind Frau Kläre, for having caused such a disturbance. It is wrong of me not to be able to control myself better. Don't be vexed, or angry with me, but please just forget what has happened."

She began hurriedly to prepare for leaving. Her hands still shook as she pinned on her hat before the mirror.

"Let me go with you, dear Frau von Gropphusen," urged Kläre.

Hannah von Gropphusen, however, was smiling once more; though in sooth on her pallid countenance the smile had something of a ghastly look.

"No, no, Frau Kläre," she assured her; "I am better alone."

Once more saying, "Forgive me, won't you?" she departed.

Güntz meanwhile had not been able to quiet the little screamer, and was glad enough when Kläre took the child from him.

"What is the matter with her?" he asked.

Kläre shrugged her shoulders. "She did not tell me; perhaps she could not. The trouble may be too profound, too terrible."

"You have left her alone?"

"She has gone."

The senior-lieutenant looked out of window. His wife, with the baby in her arms, came and stood beside him.

"See!" he cried. "There she goes! Young, beautiful, rich, fashionable--has she not everything to make her happy?" And shaking his head he added, "Poor, poor woman!"

He vowed to himself not to make depreciatory remarks about the Gropphusen in the future. One thing, however, he felt he must impress on his wife: "Look here, Kläre," he cautioned her, "you won't let her hold the boy often, will you?"

With the returning spring Hannah von Gropphusen seemed to awaken from her depression. She had one great passion, to which she eagerly resorted as soon as the days became fit for it: this was tennis.

In their small garrison she had no real match; the only person who came anywhere near her was Reimers. He had, of course, been absent from the tennis club for a whole year, and she was all the more delighted at the approach of fine weather.

Frau von Gropphusen and Reimers were always the last to leave the ground, when the balls were often hardly discernible in the gathering twilight. She soon found that her opponent had, during his absence, come on very much in his play. At Cairo he had played with English people, acknowledged masters of the game; whilst she herself, through playing with indifferent performers, had lost much of her former facility; so now they were well matched.

Feeling this, Reimers played more easily and surely than of old, and consequently had greater leisure to remark what he had formerly been indifferent to--the beauty and grace of his opponent.

Meeting her during the winter in society, when she was as though bowed down by her secret sorrow, and took little part in the gay life around her, he had thought her looking older. But now, in the budding springtime, in the warm sunshine, animated by the game, she seemed to have bathed in the fountain of youth.

Her tennis costume--with which, of course, she wore no corset, but only a narrow belt--was very becoming: a light blouse, a mouse-coloured skirt, close fitting over the hips and not reaching to her ankles, grey silk stockings, and white suede shoes guiltless of heels.

The ladies of the regiment pronounced this attire "indecent"; though not one of them would have hesitated to dress similarly, if it had suited her as well as it did Frau von Gropphusen. Frau Kauerhof (*née* von Lüben) had indeed once attempted to appear in a like toilet, only her skirt was navy-blue. It was difficult to say wherein the difference consisted,--perhaps her skirt was a little longer than the other's,--but the whole effect was not so successful. And yet Frau Kauerhof was a pretty creature enough; not exactly slim, but rather of a blonde plumpness, and this was somewhat noticeable in her loose shirt. The glances of the young lieutenants dwelt rather insistently thereon. They were also able to make another interesting discovery. Frau Kauerhof's calves began immediately above her ankles. They were very fat calves.

Furthermore, Frau Kauerhof's white shoes advertised the fact that her feet were enormous. This the ladies decided with absolute unanimity; and they begged Frau Wegstetten, the highest in rank among the women tennis-players, to give her a hint.

That lady shrank from the commission. It was unpleasant to offend one whose papa was in the Ministry of War; and the situation might therefore have continued, perhaps to the satisfaction of the younger officers, if a fortunate chance had not brought Kauerhof himself to the tennis-ground.

He escorted his wife chivalrously home, and led her, without a word, to the mirror.

Her starched shirt was crumpled, and wet through with perspiration, also her shoes were trodden all out of shape.

"Dear Marion," he said, "I have no objection to your going to balls as *décolletée* as ever you please, for you are beautiful ..." and he kissed her neck; "but I do beg you not to exhibit yourself like this again."

Marion coloured and answered: "Yes, you're right, Hubby! Now I know why Fröben and Landsberg were staring at me so."

Then she pouted: "But Frau von Gropphusen looked nice dressed like this!"

Her husband answered quietly: "My child, '*quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi.*'"

"What? What does that mean?"

Kauerhof translated gallantly, "You are prettier than the Gropphusen, my Marion; but she is

thinner than you."

For one must be polite to a wife who is by birth a von Lüben, and the daughter of the head of a department in the War Office.

Reimers was not, like his comrades, accustomed to spend the greater part of his leisure in frivolity and flirting. It therefore never occurred to him to conceal his admiration for Frau von Gropphusen.

It often happened that he missed the easiest balls, fascinated in watching the movements and graceful attitudes of his opponent. Her feet, which even in the unflattering tennis-shoes looked small and dainty, seemed merely to skim over the ground like the wings of a passing swallow; and the most daring bounds and leaps, which in others would have been grotesque, she accomplished with the easy agility of a cat.

Reimers asked himself where his eyes had been that all this should hitherto have passed him unnoticed. He thought he had never seen anything so exquisite. But Hannah Gropphusen would scold him when he stood gazing thus in naïve admiration.

"Herr Reimers," she would cry, "how inattentive you are. You must really look after the balls better!"

But when she noted the direction of his admiring glances, a delicate flush would overspread her face and mount to her white brow, on which a single premature furrow was curiously noticeable.

"You see, Herr Reimers," she said, one evening in May, "we are the last again."

The sun had just set. A light mist rising from the river was faintly coloured by the last red rays.

Frau von Gropphusen rested her foot on a garden chair and refastened the strap of her shoe. Reimers stood watching, with his racquet in his hand. The stooping posture, though unusual, was so graceful, that he said simply and with conviction, but without the least passion or sentimentality in his voice: "Dear lady, how wonderfully beautiful you are!"

Hannah von Gropphusen bent closer over her shoe-lace. She wanted to say something in reply just as simple as his own words had been; but she could find nothing except the banal rejoinder: "Please do not flatter me, Herr Reimers!" and her voice rang a little sharply.

They walked silently side by side towards the town, by the footpath across the meadows, and then along a little bit of the high-road until they came to the first houses.

Reimers was under a spell. He could not speak. He listened to the light rapid footfall that accompanied his longer stride to the rhythm of her silk-lined skirt as she walked; and as the evening breeze from the river wafted a faint perfume towards him, he thought of the lovely slender arm he had seen through the transparent material of her sleeve. This perfume must come from that fair soft skin. He felt a sudden longing to kiss the beautiful arms.

Frau von Gropphusen avoided looking at her companion. Once only she stole a glance at him with a shy, questioning, dubious expression. It chanced that Reimers was looking at her. Their eyes met, and parted reluctantly.

At the garden gate he kissed her hand in farewell. She started a little and said with an assumption of gaiety, "Heavens! what can have come to us? On a warm spring evening like this our hands are as cold as ice!"

Reimers hastened homewards, much perturbed in spirit. He was due at the Güntzes' to supper at half-past eight. It had already struck the hour, and he had yet to dress; for the colonel, who would probably be there too, objected to see his officers in mufti, except when shooting or some great sporting occasion was the excuse.

He found everything ready to his hand. Gähler was very satisfactory and most thoughtful, even to setting a bottle of red wine and a carafe of cool spring water on a table. A glass of water with a dash of wine in it was the best thing to quench one's thirst after playing tennis.

He hastily tossed off a glassful. It cooled him wonderfully. He poured out a second and drank it more slowly. The water was so cold as to dew the glass, yet it seemed powerless to quench the fire which consumed his throat, his breast, his head.

He began to dress hurriedly. He had but a few minutes. He was ready but for his coat, when suddenly everything around him seemed to vanish into endless distance. He felt loosed from time and space.

Mechanically he let himself slip into a chair, covering his face with his hands and closing his eyes.

He thought of Hannah von Gropphusen. How beautiful she was! How marvellously beautiful! He thought of that one look she had bestowed on him; of the silent question spoken by her lovely shy eyes. He guessed it to be: "Shall I really be happy once more? Dare I hope it? Is it indeed you who will bring me happiness?" Out of an unfathomable abyss of doubt and misery she appealed to him thus.

How unhappy was this woman! and how beautiful!

The door opened. Gähler came in.

"What do you want?" demanded Reimers.

"Beg pardon, sir," stammered the fellow, "I thought you were ready."

He held in his hand his master's cap and sabre.

"All right, give them to me!"

The lieutenant quickly completed his toilet, and hurried away to Waisenhaus Strasse.

His passion for Frau von Gropphusen increased day by day. He took no pains to combat it. True, his beloved was the wife of another, of a brother-officer; but he did not even in thought desire to draw nearer to her, and, should ever the temptation arise, he believed himself strong enough to resist it.

Indeed, no words passed between them that might not have been overheard by a third party. At their meeting and parting there was no meaning pressure of the hand; only their glances betrayed the secret understanding of a mighty, burning love: the deep sorrow of the one, and the sweet, tender consolation of the other.

Needless to say, the gossips of the garrison were soon busy over such a welcome morsel. Since the Gropphusen's flirtation with Major Schrader a winter ago, she had furnished no cause of scandal. All the busier now were the evil tongues.

It was not long before the subalterns began to make more or less pointed remarks, half jestingly, to Reimers.

Little Dr. von Fröben shook his finger at him, and let fly a solitary shaft: "Aye, aye, still waters run deep!" he said.

Landsberg actually congratulated him. "Happy you!" he cried with mock sorrow, "as for me----" And he proceeded crudely to extol the physical charms of Frau von Gropphusen--"that rattling fine woman," as he called her.

Reimers shut him up sharply.

These attacks ended by opening his eyes to the comparative jejuneness of his own outlook on life.

"You are an extraordinary young idealist," the colonel had said to him not long before; Reimers began to think so too. Concerning a woman whose favours were to be bought, one might think as did Landsberg; but not concerning a lady of social standing. It never occurred to him to think whether Frau von Gropphusen was or was not high-bosomed; he only knew that she was lovely.

He would dearly have liked to knock down that reptile Landsberg. But that would only have caused a scandal, which, for the dear woman's sake, must not be.

He avoided her somewhat. No one should speak ill of her on his account. He absented himself from the tennis-ground, and when he appeared there did not play exclusively with her.

Hannah Gropphusen felt crushed. She did not understand him. What matter if the gossips did amuse themselves at her expense? And with falsehoods, too! She was used to it, and had a sufficiently thick skin not to feel the stings of such insects. Was he going to turn from her for such a reason as this? From her, who would gladly have thrown herself at his feet, saying, "Leave me your love; I only live through you"?

A choking sob clutched at her throat. In order not to feel herself utterly overcome, she went to all the biggest parties, and mingled in the gayest company. She would be talkative and noisy, merely to make him aware of her presence. A wild desire seized her to make him notice her at any cost, even at the risk of wounding him; yes, she wished to wound him.

She flirted outrageously; uttering in shrill, tremulous tones loathsome things which were monstrous in her mouth.

One evening she lingered on the recreation-ground with Reimers and Landsberg, to the latter of whom she, by preference, directed her unnatural merriment during this miserable period--just because she knew that Reimers hated him. And the booby Landsberg was deeply flattered by it.

They were resting a little before turning homewards. Landsberg had thrown himself down on the grass, and was gazing fixedly upwards.

Reimers disapproved of the attitude, thinking it too cavalier altogether, and glowered at him. Unintentionally he followed the direction of his brother-officer's gaze.

Hannah von Gropphusen had seated herself upon a chair, carelessly crossing her legs so that the grey silk stockings were visible from ankle to knee. Presently she became conscious of Landsberg's regard; she moved disdainfully, and slowly rearranged her skirt.

Reimers felt furious. He longed to kick the offending youth. He sprang to his feet. He felt he must break some-thing, destroy something, dash something to pieces. Tremblingly he swung his racquet, as if to hurl it at the fellow's head. But suddenly his arm dropped to his side; he had twisted his wrist. The racquet fell from his hand.

"What's the matter?" asked Frau von Gropphusen.

"Nothing," he answered roughly. "Excuse me, I must say good-night."

He bowed stiffly. All grew dark before his eyes. He saw dimly that the lady had risen.

For a moment she stood perplexed. Then she said in a much softer voice: "But won't you see me home to-night, Herr Reimers?"

"I am at your service," he answered.

Landsberg hastened to take his departure, and the two followed him slowly.

Black clouds lowered overhead; now and then a gust of wind swept over the fields.

Reimers quickened his pace.

Once only Hannah Gropphusen broke the silence: "You have hurt your hand?" she asked.

"Yes--no--I don't know."

It was almost dark when they reached her garden gate.

"Show me your hand," she said gently.

Reimers held it out to her in silence. His wrist was a good deal swollen.

Hannah bent down suddenly and breathed a hasty kiss on the injured member. When she raised her head again tears were running down her cheeks.

Reimers stooped a little. He seized her cool white fingers and kissed them lingeringly. "Hannah!" he murmured.

She tenderly stroked his brow and bent her head sadly. Then he left her.

When he had gone some distance he looked back. All was dark. A flash of lightning shimmered on the horizon. It revealed an indistinct figure, which was instantly swallowed up again by the darkness.

"Nothing much, old man," pronounced the surgeon-major, when he had examined the injury. "You have strained it a bit. A tight bandage and an application of arnica. You can go on duty, but you will not be able to play tennis for the present."

In any case there would have been an end to that, as the order to start for the practice-camp had already been issued.

Reimers learnt from his comrades that Frau von Gropphusen appeared no more at the tennis club. It was said that she was not well and was going away to some watering-place or other. There was much chuckling over the news. "There has been a split," opined the gossips.

Reimers did not care. He knew better.

But the quartette at the supper-table in Waisenhaus Strasse did not seem displeased with the way in which things had turned out.

Formerly, if he came late to supper, and excused himself on the plea of having been detained at tennis, there had been a fatal air of constraint, which would only gradually wear off; sometimes even lasting the whole evening.

Now they received him at once with their old cordiality; they did not believe in his sprain, taking it to be but a convenient pretext. He made as much of it as he could. He showed the swelling; but, to be sure, it had nearly gone down, and he still was not believed.

Finally, an amazing thing happened. Frau Kläre had been taking a turn in the garden one evening with Marie Falkenheim, when she was called in to her baby. On his way out, Reimers encountered the colonel's daughter alone. He said good-night to her politely.

The young girl looked him full in the face with her clear grey eyes, and said: "I am very glad, Lieutenant Reimers, that you have put an end to that hateful gossip. It distressed me, on Frau von Gropphusen's account, and also on yours, to have to hear horrid things said, and not to be able to contradict them."

Reimers bowed and withdrew, in his astonishment forgetting to take leave of Frau Kläre. Marie Falkenheim had spoken so warmly and heartily, had looked at him so kindly and honestly, that he felt quite overcome.

It struck him that the man who should win this maiden for his bride would find through her an assured and tranquil happiness; there was a sense of security in her steady gaze. Yet behind the clear placid eyes of the young girl he saw the sorrowful orbs of the unhappy woman he loved. He saw the heavy tears coursing down her white cheeks, as she stood motionless in the fleeting gleam of the lightning ere she vanished in the darkness of night.

CHAPTER VII

"Now off and away, lads,
With merry sound of horn!"

(Methfessel.)

The lithographed regimental orders for May 31, the Saturday before Whitsuntide, contained the following announcement:

"On June 3, at 6.30 A.M., the regiment will be ready in the Waisenhaus Strasse to march to the practice-camp in the following order: Batteries 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Corps of trumpeters and band.

* * * * *

"On no pretext whatever will leave be granted for Whitsuntide. It is to be duly notified to the troops that their Whitsuntide leave--cancelled for official reasons--may be made good, so far as they deserve it, after the gun-practice.... Night-passes may be granted for Whitsun-Day. (Signed) "VON FALKENHEIN, "Colonel and Commandant."

The news that no leave would be granted for Whitsuntide drew deep curses from many of the recruits. They would have liked to go home and exhibit themselves in uniform to their friends and relations. But what was the good of swearing? they had to submit.

The two friends, Vogt and Klitzing, were much upset in their calculations. They had got on so well together that Vogt had asked his father if he might bring his friend home with him. Still, it was only put off; better luck next time! They did not apply for night-leave on the Sunday, as neither of them found any pleasure in spinning round hot dancing-saloons with any women they could pick up. Weise, on the contrary, was quite at home under such circumstances, and had managed to find himself a sweetheart directly permission was granted the recruits to go into the town. It is true she was neither pretty nor particularly youthful; but then she never failed to pay for all his drinks, and when he had promised to marry her she had even bought him new regimentals.

Vogt had taken a favourable opportunity of begging Sergeant Wiegandt to put him and Klitzing together, when, on the completion of their preliminary training, the men were grouped into detachments. Wiegandt had not only acceded to the request, but had taken them both to serve on his own gun, the sixth; Klitzing, with his sharp eyes, as gun-layer, or No. 2; Vogt as No. 1, whose duty it was to fire.

And now they sat, this Whitsun-Tuesday, side by side on the gun-carriage, with the muzzle of the gun between them; and when Wegstetten called out in his clear, strident voice, "Battery, mount!" Vogt whispered gaily across to Klitzing, "Now we're off!" as the long procession of thirty-six guns and six ammunition-waggons began slowly to move.

It was not half bad to be riding along like this. Certainly, the gunners' seats were not provided

with cushions, and the guns were not mounted on C-springs; but the shaking and jolting were not very great on the smooth high-road, it was only when the wheels crunched over newly-strewn rubble that their seats vibrated roughly under them.

There had, fortunately, been a heavy thundershower on the previous afternoon, and it had washed the roads clear of dust. Now the sun shone mildly, the air was fresh after the rain; what could be better than to get out into the country on such a day? Vogt and Klitzing rolled along contentedly on their hard-seated chariot, between the white-blossoming cherry-trees which bordered the highway.

Their halting place for the night was a large farm, where were quartered the fifth and sixth guns and the ammunition waggon, one sergeant, one trumpeter, two corporals, twenty-one men, and twenty horses. The farmer's entertainment left nothing to be desired. The litter for the beds was thick and soft; clean sheets were laid over the straw; and there were warm blankets for covering. For supper there were two gigantic hams and many other dainties, a meal for the gods; and the noble peasant had even provided beer and cigars. The second day's march had a no less successful ending. Vogt and Klitzing were quartered together on a cottager, and though the poor fellow did not even own a cow, the older men proved right who had told them that the poor were generally better hosts than the rich.

On the third day the regiment was to arrive at the practice camp. The country now became more level. The black soil gradually lightened in tint; green copses gave place to pine-woods; stretches of barren sandy waste land appeared more and more frequently between the cornfields. At last a flat table-land was reached, bounded in the far distance by an immense forest; and on a still nearer approach isolated white houses could be descried on the forest's edge, while on one side a tall water-tower reared itself high above the level ground.

Captain von Wegstetten ordered his men to halt and dismount. The sixth battery had arrived the first.

Further back along the road just traversed and also on a neighbouring highway the other batteries were seen slowly approaching. At length the commandants of the two divisions arrived with their adjutants, and finally the colonel with his staff. He received the reports of the staff-officers, and then after a short interval placed himself at the head of his regiment.

The long line of men, horses and vehicles, with the band preceding them, then entered the encampment. The sentry at the gate had to present arms so incessantly that he became quite exhausted. A considerable time elapsed before the last officer had passed in.

The guns and carriages were taken to the gun-park. The horses were unharnessed, and the knapsacks unfastened from the guns. Then the drivers made their way to the stables, and the gunners to their barracks. The quartermaster had pointed out his place to every one, so that each man had only to take possession of his cupboard and his bed.

The young soldiers, who had never been in camp before, gazed about with much interest. Things, on the whole, looked very inviting. A wide road with broad footpaths on either side traversed the whole camp, almost further than the eye could see, and along it stood the barracks on the left, and the stables on the right. The houses were all alike; in the middle a square one-storied building, and running out from it a wing containing lofty, airy rooms for the men, open to the wooden rafters that supported the slated roof. At the back were covered verandas, in which, during bad weather, instruction could be carried on and the roll called. Beyond these outbuildings began the outskirts of the wood, beautiful stately pines growing thick and close. The resinous scent of pine-needles was wafted into the rooms through the open windows.

"Heinrich," said Vogt to Klitzing, "this is just like a summer holiday for us, isn't it? Isn't this air splendid?"

The clerk stopped his unpacking for a moment and drew in a deep breath of the invigorating odour.

"Oh yes," he answered; "we can do with this all right!"

However, it was not a "summer holiday" by any means, and the two friends found that out soon enough. There was a lot of real hard work to do during these weeks; but it was all done with a good will. Actual gun-practice was a very different thing from that dull work in garrison with blank cartridges.

The magazine where the ammunition was stored lay at some little distance from the other buildings, near the gun-park, and was surrounded by a thick high wall of earth. One realised from this how dangerous were its contents. But the store-men, who gave out the shrapnel-shells and the fuses, went about their work as if regardless of the fact that in each one of these lurked death and destruction. And yet in every shrapnel-shell were a couple of hundred bullets that could easily put a whole company *hors de combat*.

The beginning of the gun-practice did not, however, seem likely to be very dangerous. Only twenty-four shrapnel, *i.e.*, six shots for each gun, were given out next morning. It was a first experience, meant especially for the younger officers, and Lieutenant Landsberg was to

command the battery.

The men were very curious to know what he would make of it. The affected young dandy was extremely unpopular with every one. Besides which, he was clearly not blessed with much intelligence; for at garrison-drill more reproofs and reprimands were showered upon him alone than upon all the rest of the battery put together. Again and again would Wegstetten's trumpet-tones ring across the parade-ground: "Lieutenant Landsberg, you are not in your right place!" "Lieutenant Landsberg, you are allowing too much distance!" The little captain had sworn many a fierce oath as he galloped to and fro on his long-legged "Walküre": "Lieutenant Landsberg! attention, please. What in thunder are you about?" or "Good God, sir! don't go to sleep! Time's getting on!"

And to-day he was to command the whole battery. Wegstetten took the precaution of accompanying the young man himself, so that he might be able to come to the rescue in case of necessity.

He was soon needed. The battery started from the gun-park and left the camp, turning off the road and crossing the heather towards the broad level stretch of the exercise-ground.

Suddenly Landsberg's snapping voice crowed out: "Battery, halt!" and immediately afterwards: "Open with shrapnel!"

The men grinned at one another.

Two or three of the gunners got down and stood there, quite at a loss. They ought to load; yet the word of command, "Prepare for action!" had not been given. And how could they load when the seats and the limber-boxes were still locked, and when the gun was still covered?

The clever lieutenant had forgotten the word of command that should properly have been given before leaving the gun-park. And the best of it was that he didn't even now notice what was wrong.

Wegstetten, close at hand, kept quite still. He had taken his feet out of the stirrups and was swinging his short legs carelessly to and fro. His eyes flashed scorn as he looked at the hapless lieutenant.

"Well, Lieutenant Landsberg," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "if I were one of the men myself I shouldn't know what to do either."

The lieutenant raised his spotlessly gloved hand to his helmet and replied, "Yes, sir." But as yet no solution of the riddle had dawned on him.

Then at last the captain sat upright in his saddle, and his clear voice rang out over the battery: "Prepare for action!"

It put life into the men at once, and all set about their various duties with the utmost zeal.

Wegstetten turned to the subaltern, who stood stupidly looking on, and said, "Well, Lieutenant Landsberg, you may take over the command again now."

Truchsess, the brewer, as No. 4 of gun six, brought out the shrapnel very gingerly. How easily such stuff as that might go off!

The old hands had gruesome tales to tell of accidents that had happened during gun-practice. Once while being loaded, a gun had prematurely exploded backwards, making a great hole through gunner No. 3, right through his chest, a hole just the same size as the bore of the gun. As the corpse was being carried away afterwards the sun shone right through it; so that in the middle of the shadow cast by the body was a bright round spot exactly the same size and shape as the bore of a gun.

The brewer could not help thinking of this as he very cautiously pushed the shrapnel into the bore. Klitzing, however, shoved it vigorously with the rammer, so that its metal casing clinked against the inside of the gun.

"Now then, old fellow, easy on! The thing might go off!" whispered Truchsess.

But Klitzing only smiled, and the brewer sullenly thought to himself, "Well, if that clerk has no use for his life, I have for mine, anyhow!"

Carefully he pushed in the cartridge, and heaved a sigh of relief as the lock slipped back once more. At any rate, it couldn't explode at the back now and hit him.

The battery now started again and went on at an easy trot to the exercise-ground. In the midst of a luxuriant growth of heather they unlimbered. It was a wonderful picture, the guns and the scattered gunners on that peaceful sea of purple. The waves of blossom reached nearly to the axles of the blue wheels and above the knees of the men, and closed over the trail of the gun-carriage as it passed. The men had to make their way through the heather almost as if it had been a wood.

"Open with shrapnel! Straight in front! At the battery before the guide-post at the edge of the wood. Third gun! Two thousand eight hundred!" commanded Lieutenant Landsberg. "Fire from left flank! Fire from left flank!"--that meant that gun six should begin; that of the whole regiment it was to have the honour of firing the first shot in this year's practice.

Klitzing, as gun-layer, set the sight in a twinkling to 2800 yards, got astride the box, and laid the gun in the right direction.

The enemy's battery was not very hard to find. The young officer had not been given too difficult a task. Far away over the heath, where the sand gleamed yellow in the distance, six dark, rather broad patches showed up against the light ground, each surrounded by smaller objects. They were the six guns that were to be attacked, with the dummy men belonging to them. It was Sergeant Wiegandt's duty to verify the aim; he gave a satisfied nod, and then the word of command, "Gun six, fire!"

Upon which the men sprang out of the way of the backward recoil of the carriage, and Vogt, with a jerk of the body, pulled the lanyard and fired.

There was a loud report, and the gun rolled heavily back quite eight paces. In another moment it was moved into its original place again.

After a few seconds, far away on the heath, a light cloud of dust rose into the air, as if a giant's hand had stirred up the sand, and immediately afterwards--almost at the same moment--all the dark patches disappeared in a dense grey cloud of smoke. When this had cleared away, the dummies on the left of the gun had vanished, and the gun itself appeared to have been damaged, as it was leaning over on one side.

The first shot had hit the mark full. This simply showed that excellent aim had been taken. The actual distance had corresponded exactly with the calculation. Still, it caused great satisfaction.

Colonel von Falkenheim, on his big chestnut, was stationed near by. He had been watching the target through his field-glasses, and a scarcely audible exclamation had escaped him as he saw the splinters flying about through the smoke.

Turning to the battery he called out a short "Bravo, gun-layer!"

Wegstetten, who had dismounted near him, smiled. Well, at any rate, battery six was all right, even when commanded by a noodle!

The shooting went on steadily. Now the distance had been ascertained the shrapnels were fired off by means of time-fuses; and they exploded regularly each time over the mark, the little clouds of smoke showing up picturesquely against the dark background of the wood. Over there it was as if heavy raindrops were falling on a dusty road; everywhere little columns of sand were spurting up into the air.

After the first shot the men lost all nervousness. Even Truchsess took hold of the shells quite courageously; and when the twenty-four that had been served out to them were used up, the men would willingly have gone on longer.

In the criticism of the result Landsberg came out well. He had had four good hits from one shrapnel--a very fair result; mainly due, of course, to the luck of the first shot, which by itself would have placed all the men belonging to one of the enemy's guns *hors de combat*.

The lieutenant's face took on a self-satisfied expression, which seemed to say: "Of course from me nothing less could have been expected."

Falkenheim, who always kept a watchful eye on each one of his officers, and who up to that moment had not heard much in favour of this young man, thought it best to take down his pride a little.

"You know, Lieutenant Landsberg," he said, "your commanding officer made things very easy for you. As the youngest officer in the regiment you had the lightest task. Remember that in taking credit to yourself; and let me tell you that they won't build such barn-doors for you to aim at next year!"

Upon which he turned pleasantly to Wegstetten and asked: "Did you ride over and see that target, my dear Wegstetten?--I mean the one that was hit full?"

"Yes, sir; the shrapnel must have exploded almost inside the gun."

"I thought so. Capital thing, the very first shot of the year being such a good one. No one like you for that, Wegstetten!"

The captain smiled, much gratified, and modestly answered, "A bit of good luck, sir!"

But the colonel continued, more seriously: "Well, partly luck, perhaps. Just one thing more, my dear Wegstetten. That gun-layer who made the lucky shot--has he been ill? He looked pretty bad to me--like a perfect death's-head."

Wegstetten gave as many particulars about the man as he himself knew, and Reimers added some information, Landsberg meanwhile standing by in silence.

"It is really you, Lieutenant Landsberg, who ought to be telling me all this," said Falkenheim with some warmth. "You trained the recruits, and therefore ought to know all about them." Then, turning to Wegstetten: "If the man is as capable as I hear," he continued, "you might manage to make things a bit easier for him."

"Yes, sir," the captain hastened to reply. "I had been thinking of employing him in the autumn as assistant clerk."

This was not true. To think of such details so long beforehand was impossible, even for the commander of the most efficient battery in the whole army-corps. But it served its purpose. Falkenheim nodded pleasantly: "Quite right, my dear Wegstetten. You have hit the bull's-eye again! You see one can never deal with men all in a lump; you must take them separately. Some best serve the king with their sturdy arms and legs, but your gun-layer with his eyes and pen." He then raised his hand to his helmet, and the two men parted.

As they all repaired to their respective quarters they had very different thoughts in their minds. Reimers was full of admiration: "What a man is that," thought he, "who, with all his heavy duties, yet occupies himself with the insignificant destiny of a poor devil of a gunner!"

Wegstetten's face wore a rather self-satisfied smile. "One must speak up for oneself, and not hide one's light under a bushel! Better say too much than too little. In doing one's superior officer a small service, one may be doing the greatest of all to oneself."

Landsberg said to himself, with a sneer: "The man prates about that whipper-snapper of a gunner nearly as much as about my splendid firing. And so that's the celebrated Colonel von Falkenheim!"

Next day almost all the men would have liked to go on with the shell-firing; but the subsequent cleaning of the guns was not at all to their taste. The smokeless powder left in the bore of the gun a horrid, sticky slime that must not be allowed to remain there. This meant sousing with clean water again and again, washing out with soft soap, and then going on pumping and working with the mop until the water came out again as clean as it had gone in.

"Now, boys," Sergeant Wiegandt used to say, "if you don't feel inclined to drink the water as it comes out of the gun, then that means it isn't clean enough yet. So go ahead!"

And then the drying afterwards! They had to wrap rags and cloths round the mop until it was so thick that it would scarcely go through the muzzle of the gun. If this were not done the inside edges and corners remained wet; and one spot of rust on the bright metal--well! that would be almost as bad as murder! So they had to push and to twist, to pull and to drag, till the perspiration streamed from their foreheads. Finally the barrel was thinly oiled; and the next day the firing took place once more, and then there was the drudgery of the cleaning all over again.

Yet the men endured these exertions far better than the garrison life. This was partly owing to the variety of the work; but, above all, the greatest torment of a soldier's life had been left behind--that monotonous drilling under which all groaned, and the object of which no one could ever pretend to understand. Even the dullest--to say nothing of Vogt with his simple, sound common-sense--could see that the gun-practice here in the practice-camp was the most important part of the whole training. What the men had already learnt was now found out practically. But where did the parade-marching and all the other display drill come in?

Here was Klitzing, who in the garrison had been looked on as the most feeble soldier of the lot, now all at once distinguishing himself! Vogt shook his head as he thought it over.

He often felt glad that at any rate he was an artilleryman, for others had a much worse time of it. A few days earlier an infantry regiment had moved into the neighbouring barracks; and looking through the palings of their parade-ground they could see the battalions exercising.

There was a yellow, dried-up looking major who was never, never satisfied. He would keep his battalion at it in the sun till past noon; and then after a short pause for refreshment the same cruel business would begin all over again. The devil! How could a couple of hundred men be as symmetrical as a machine?

The artillery-drivers had climbed on to the fence. They were polishing their curbs and chains, and laughed at the spectacle before them. But to Vogt it did not seem amusing. What was the use of making those two hundred men do such childish things there on the parade-ground? Would they ever march into battle like that? He thought of how those dummies had all been riddled by the bullets when a single shrapnel burst in front of them. Why, it would be sheer madness! They would have to crawl, to run, to jump--then to crawl again! That wasn't what they were doing when every morning on the parade-ground one heard a continual tack--tack--tack--tack, as if a thousand telegraph clerks were hard at work. What was the good of all this senseless show, which only aggravated the men?

Their comrades of the infantry looked very far from cheerful, and darted glances full of suppressed hatred at the yellow-faced major. And when, dead-tired, they had finished the drill, and were putting away their guns in the corner, they would curse the very uniform they wore as if it had been a strait-waistcoat.

Certainly it was not necessary to agree in everything with a social-democrat like Weise; but there was no doubt what-ever that he was perfectly right about some things. In the evenings, when the non-commissioned officers were sitting in the canteen, the men took their stools out on the open veranda that looked over the forest; and then Weise would begin to hold forth, his comrades, either smoking or cleaning their clothes and accoutrements, grouped round him listening to his orations. When some of the men, fresh from the country, complained of the hard work there, the endless long hours, and the small pay, he laughed outright.

"Why do you allow your landed-proprietors to treat you so?" he scoffed. "Why are you so stupid? Of course if you won't utter a word of protest you don't deserve anything better."

And he explained how things were managed in his trade, at the factory. If one of the workmen was unfairly treated, or if the pay was considered too small, then they had a thorough good strike. They took care to choose the best possible time for it, when the manufacturers had the most pressing work to do. The trade-union, to which of course they all had to belong, kept blacklegs at a distance, and they went on doggedly righting until new terms had been won. Certainly the workmen did not invariably carry all their demands; but a strike seldom ended without their gaining some solid advantage. Yes, the workers had only to show the world that they were a power; that they were not going to be trampled on for ever; that they intended henceforth to have their share of the profits which they had hitherto been putting into the pockets of the rich, although earned by their own toil and sweat.

Or Weise would reckon how much was spent in one day's gun-practice. Each shot cost about fifteen marks; and the sixth battery alone had fired about a hundred and twenty shots that morning. There were six batteries in each regiment, four regiments in each army-corps, and twenty-three army-corps in the whole of Germany.

"Any-one who likes can reckon it up," said Weise. "In any case the money would be enough to give every poor devil in the whole world one happy day!"

He pulled out a sheet of paper and read from it the sum that Germany spent annually on her army. It made the men open their eyes pretty wide. An incredible sum, truly, of which they could form no clear idea at all.

Sometimes one of them would say! "But look here, old man; suppose there was war, and we had no soldiers?"

"War! war!" said Weise. "What is war, pray? Who is it that makes war? Do you want war? Do you want to have to go and stand up like those targets out there and be hit on the skull or in the belly by the shrapnel?"

"Not I."

"Perhaps you would, Findeisen?"

"I? God damn me--no!"

"Or you, Truchsess?"

The brewer thought a moment, and answered:

"No, certainly not. I wish for peace. But the French might want to fight us, or the Russians."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Weise. "Well, now, think about it a moment. Over there in France are sitting together just such poor simple fellows as we are here. Ask them if they want to let themselves be shot dead in a moment without rhyme or reason? Do you expect them to say yes?"

"No, of course not. But--but--then who is it who really does want war?"

Weise did not speak for a moment, but laughed softly. Then he answered, shrugging his shoulders: "Ah, that I don't know. Probably nobody. So much only is clear: *we* don't want it."

During these conversations, Wolf, the lean gunner of the "old gang," was always careful to hold aloof. He listened to the talk, but never joined in it. When his comrades had gone in to bed, he would stay on, gazing out into the beautiful night of the woods. No one longed as fervently as he did for the end of the term of service. He, who had been wont to grudge every day on which he had done nothing to further the cause of revolution and social-democracy, was forbidden for two long years to allow a word to pass his lips about what lay nearest his heart! Yet he was all the more cautious not to commit any indiscretions that might perhaps entail a prolongation of the hateful restraint.

Hitherto he had had but a vague comprehension of the idea of freedom; now he felt that he grasped it. Freedom! It meant the time after his discharge--the time when he would no longer

wear the soldier's uniform! When, during these weeks, Wolf had been an auditor of Weise's covertly inflammatory speeches, he had longed each time to step forward and speak out too. He knew that his own words would have flowed far more convincingly and more passionately than Weise's. But he knew also that in such case he would only have the greater difficulty in restraining himself afterwards; so he kept silence.

However, the end was attained without his help. It was quite remarkable how after such conversations these peasant lads and the others, who up to now had heard nothing of socialism and labour movements, rapidly assimilated the new and palatable wisdom, although no word of direct propaganda had been spoken. And if this result was so marked in their own corps, where the work was not very irksome or heavy, what must it not be among the infantry over yonder, where any small spark of liking for the soldier's life must be quenched by the deadly monotony of eternal parade-drill!

Not long before, a man had suddenly gone mad in the middle of drill. What was responsible for this calamity? The sun, over-exertion, perhaps an inherited tendency that would in any case sooner or later have resulted in such a catastrophe? No one could say with any certainty. But the men who had seen and heard how the poor fellow writhed and shrieked, gripped their rifles tightly, and the same thought could plainly be read in the eyes of them all.

No wonder that the period of military service was extremely favourable to the spread of social-democracy! Such sensational object-lessons were not necessary; the circumstances of every-day life all pointed towards socialism.

Wolf understood the part that Weise played in the battery. It was always the same. Each batch of recruits was a mixture of men from towns and men from the country. The city-bred, even if fewer in number, immediately established an ascendancy over the country yokels. They were quicker-witted, and their town bringing-up had developed their intelligence more. And just because of this they adapted themselves more easily to the requirements of military service, so that they often made better soldiers than the country recruits with their slower comprehension. Most of them were entirely unaware that they were socialistic agitators; they quite unconsciously imparted to their fellow-soldiers ideas that to them appeared self-evident, but that for the others meant an upheaval of their whole way of thinking.

What was the use of searching every hole and corner of the barracks at regular intervals for socialistic literature? They could confiscate red rosettes and pamphlets; but how could they control transient, intangible thoughts?

On Sundays the camp was as quiet as it was full of life on week-days. The boundary-lines beyond which the men were not allowed to pass without leave, were drawn round a considerable area. Within it were three large villages; and on Sundays their taverns were thronged by soldiers quartered in the camp. The enterprising innkeepers had made ample provision for such crowds of visitors. They had erected wooden platforms in the open air where dancing went on without intermission, regimental bands supplying the music; and the amount of beer consumed in one Sunday was greater than that drunk by the entire village the whole winter through. Of course there were strong patrols set to keep order at the dancing-platforms and licensed houses. As there were too few partners for the soldiers quarrels were of constant occurrence, and were seldom amicably settled; a brawl was the usual result, and at times a regular fight.

It was the custom in these villages to hire maidservants only by the month, as sufficient work could hardly be found for them during the winter; and there were also other members of the female sex--not servants, but ladies who had taken up their summer quarters here. They were the cause of much perplexity to the officers in command of the troops. The soldiers would stand in queues at the doors of these summer residences, like people at a baker's shop in time of famine; and then if any of them were drunk and got a little impatient there was sure to be a row. Censorious tongues passed severe comments on such proceedings. The commanding officers were most anxious to rectify the evil; but they could hardly post sentries at those particular houses, and finally they got over the difficulty by bringing a little moral pressure to bear upon the local authorities. These worthy civilians achieved the desired end by the simple means of administrative expulsions.

As the two comrades were getting ready to go out, Vogt asked the clerk: "Well, Heinrich, what shall we do with ourselves? Shall we go along and drink a glass of beer and look on at the racket for a bit?"

"If you like, Franz," replied Klitzing.

"Then we won't," said Vogt. "You ought to say at once when you don't like a thing. I don't in the least want to go myself, and we can always get beer in the canteen. We'll just walk a bit through the wood as far as the butts, shall we?"

Klitzing assented, and they waited till their comrades were off, then strolled slowly into the cool forest. Troops of men were leaving the camp gates to walk by the hard high road towards the villages that could be seen in the distance. Vogt looked after the cloud of dust they made.

"Can you understand what they see in women?" he asked.

"No, indeed I can't."

"You don't care about women?"

The clerk shook his head. "And you, Franz?" he inquired.

"Not I. At any rate, not yet."

Walking on in the shade of the forest's edge they came at last to the butts. The black, tarred, wooden target had been put up ready for the next day, and cheerfully awaited the terrors of the firing that lay before it. A little to one side of the principal erection a ruined village stood out against the blue of the summer sky. It had been purchased by the Government and left standing to be used for testing the effect of shots upon buildings.

The shells had certainly done their work. Substantial walls had gaping fissures right through them; gables and chimney-stacks had been laid low. Some of the houses seemed to have been set on fire by the shots, and any wood-work spared by the devouring flames had been stolen and carried away by some-one or other. No stairs were left leading to the upper storeys, nor boards to any of the floors. Rafters and beams had been hewn down; doors and windows with their frames had been torn out. On some of the walls rude drawings had been scrawled in paint or red chalk, with facetious inscriptions and obscene jokes; but from most of them the whitewash had fallen, leaving bare the rough masonry. It was a depressing picture of desolation. One could almost imagine that the smell of burning still hung about.

Vogt gazed gloomily at the ruins and said: "And that's what things look like in war! By God, it's true! we must do away with war!"

Klitzing smiled quietly to himself: "Yes, but who'll be the first to begin?" he asked.

The regiment stayed fully three weeks at the practice-camp, and then accomplished the return journey to the garrison in three days.

The two friends were anxiously looking forward to the leave that had been promised the men after the gun-practice. They were to start on the first Saturday in July, and had eight days' leave granted to them. Only very few had been allowed as much, and their captain did not fail to point out in a little speech that this favour was due to their blameless conduct at the practice-camp.

It was one of Wegstetten's little methods, when he found good qualities in his men and wished to spur them on, to make the meagre rewards that the service held out to them appear in a specially brilliant light. Regardless of exaggeration, he spoke of that week's leave as if it were an extremely rare mark of distinction unheard of for years. And on the whole he gained his object. As Vogt and Klitzing stood before their commanding officer blushing with pride, they had the feeling that they must thank him, and promise to go on doing their duty. They only did not know how. At length Vogt plucked up courage and stammered a few words.

Captain von Wegstetten listened kindly. He had soon perceived that he had to do with two worthy, honest lads; and, with his own ends in view, he proceeded to inquire in a condescending way about their homes. When it then came out that the one had invited the other to stay with him, he praised them for their faithful comradeship, and took the first opportunity of relating this instance of the fraternising of town and country to the colonel, who liked such proofs of an individual interest being taken in the soldiers.

The first Saturday in July was a day of excitement for the turnpike-keeper, Friedrich August Vogt. He was rather annoyed with himself for losing his usual calm. Why? because his son--his only son--was coming home for the first time? Really, that was not such an event as to put him beside himself in this way! And then next he blamed himself for having thought it unbecoming an old soldier, and too soft-hearted altogether, to go and fetch his son from the station. He could not remain in the house, so he went to a spot on the highway whence he could watch the railway. He could see the train coming in, and the clouds of white smoke from the engine rising up from behind the station; then he heard the whistle--but still nothing was to be seen of the two holiday-makers. Could Franz be stopping to have a glass of beer? No; now the two men could be seen emerging from the village on to the broad high-road, their helmets and uniform buttons glistening in the sun--it must be they! The turnpike-keeper drew back a little, so that he was out of sight. Why should the boy know that he had been staring the eyes out of his head in order to catch the first glimpse of him?

When Vogt and Klitzing arrived at the house he looked out of the window as if quite by chance. "Ah, here you are!" and with a hearty grip of the hand he bade them both welcome.

But it was no use fighting against it, he could not take his eyes off his son. What a well set-up, vigorous young fellow his Franz had grown! Yet he was still the same good honest lad; that was

written in his face.

And Franz's friend, with his frank open countenance, inspired confidence at once. He looked, to be sure, as if he had never in his life had enough to eat. He must be properly fed up for once. While he was on leave, at any rate, he should not want for anything.

The two gunners settled down very quickly, and nothing could prevent Franz from going round the fields the very first evening while his father milked and fed the cows. He had almost hoped to find something or other left neglected because he had not been there when it was put in hand. But no, his father had allowed nothing to go wrong anywhere.

And now in the company of the two young soldiers the old turnpike-keeper became quite a different creature. He realised suddenly that the quiet, sluggish peasant's blood had not quite replaced in him the old, quick-flowing blood of the soldier. He listened, fascinated, to the tales told by the two gunners about their soldier's life. How things had changed since his time! He could never hear enough about it all.

Then Franz came to tell of his reflections during the gun-practice: how through the fence he had seen the infantry battalion tormented with drill for hours at a time; how the dried-up looking major had foamed with fury; and how the poor devil of a private had been struck down bodily and mentally in the middle of it all.

Old Vogt quietly heard his son out, although he was burning to speak. Then he began: "Look here, youngster, you as a simple soldier can't understand it all. But depend upon it, this drill is the most important thing that every soldier must first be made to learn. For it alone teaches military obedience, soldierly subordination, discipline. It alone can give that unity which preserves a company from utter demoralisation if one of your horrible new-fangled shrapnel bursts among them. But for drill the cowards would turn tail without further ceremony, and take to their heels; and in the end even the brave ones would follow them. It is the drill that teaches them to stay on and stick together."

He held to it, in spite of all his son could say about what he had seen of the kind of drill that the troops were kept at.

"You could not have seen aright," said his father.

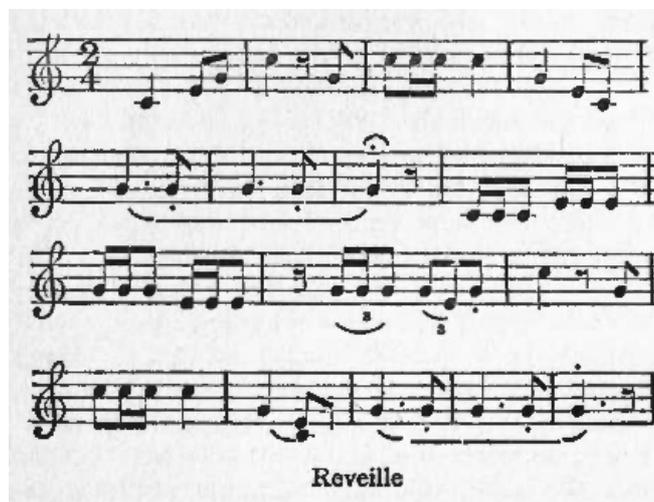
The elder Vogt would not allow his son to put his hand to anything in the afternoons. He always insisted on sending the two young fellows out by themselves.

"Be off with you, youngsters," he would say. "Take a walk, drink a glass of beer somewhere or other--whatever you like. Enjoy your few days of freedom!"

Then the two young men would march off and let the hot sun and the fresh air burn them and brown them. Vogt had shown his friend his favourite spot, whence they could look out over the river to the castle in the neighbouring town. There they lay in the grass.

The peasant felt impelled to get up every now and then. He was restless; he felt that he must keep looking at the fields that lay around them. But the clerk lay quite still in the short grass, and with blinking half-closed eyes gazed up into the summer sky.

CHAPTER VIII



Baron Walther von Frielinghausen was made bombardier on July 1st.

He had now got his foot on the ladder of military distinction, but he felt no special elation at the fact. What signified this little piece of promotion in a career which had now no attraction for him?

Wegstetten had arranged that he should at once begin doing some of the work of a corporal; but this, too, had its inconvenient side. When merely a gunner he had always imagined that he knew better than those uneducated fellows the non-coms.; and he had occasionally looked forward to the moment when he would be put in authority, and would be able to show off some of his knowledge. But now to command had become more difficult than to obey, and there was certainly just as much blame going. One was scolded as if one were a silly boy, and the men always took notice of the fact.

Only one thing caused him pleasant anticipations: he would have riding lessons. But this, too, proved unlike his expectations. Heppner, after his fashion, kept him hard at it. Like every recruit, he had to begin with riding bareback; then after a time came the more difficult task of balancing on the slippery saddle without stirrups; and only after considerable practice would the sergeant-major occasionally allow him to let the stirrups down. There were days on which he had more than twenty falls from his horse; and at last it was always in fear and trembling that he went to riding instruction. Whenever his horse dashed away riderless after a jump, Frielinghausen rejoiced in the few minutes' respite that shortened by that much the hour of his lesson. He could never manage to go over a hurdle with his hands placed on his hips; at every jump they snatched at the horse's mane. Heppner raged over this cowardice; but storm and shout as he would, Frielinghausen's hands were for ever clutching at his only means of safety.

At last the sergeant-major left the long-limbed youth alone in his incompetence. He had an impression that Wegstetten wished to hear good of the bombardier, and after all, in the fire-workers, it would not be necessary for Frielinghausen to be a proficient at riding. But the less Frielinghausen knew about horses the more he boasted of his acquirements, when once the riding instruction had come to an end.

As soon as he was made bombardier he was removed from Room IX. to the non-commissioned officers' quarters.

Wegstetten thought to do his *protégé* a favour by this; but Frielinghausen felt no happier in his new surroundings than in the company of the recruits. The mental atmosphere was hardly more enlightened than that of his former room-mates. The service, horses, and women: these were the chief subjects of conversation. They all appeared to be great riders before the Lord, though had Heppner been questioned in the matter he might have expressed a contrary opinion; but every mounted non-com, thinks it necessary to be a bit of a Munchausen. He would far rather be called a blockhead than be told he cannot ride. Though, of course, Frielinghausen contributed his mite to such conversations, on the whole he felt very much in doubt which he preferred: the narrow interests of the common soldiers in Room IX., or the well-meant rough good nature of the non-commissioned officers. He rather inclined to Room IX.

All this was changed when the non-commissioned officers' room received a new inmate, the one-year volunteer Trautvetter.

Captain von Wegstetten fully intended that his one-year volunteers, like his whole battery, should be distinguished above all the others in the regiment. If they behaved well he was most charming to them; if not, then he was all the more strict, because he considered them young people whose superior education laid them under the greater obligations.

All his labour had been in vain with Trautvetter. The one year volunteer was a ne'er-do-weel, a drunkard, a debauchee, and a useless fool on duty into the bargain. And he had command of

considerable supplies of money, which, being an orphan and of age, he could spend as he pleased.

All means had failed with him: punishment drill, being reported, deprivation of leave, and being put under arrest. So at last Wegstetten decided to send him to live in barracks.

Trautvetter, a bull-necked, square-shouldered man, with a broad chest, took this punishment with great equanimity. He arranged his belongings complacently in his locker and looked calmly round the bare room. His little eyes had a bleary look of perpetual drunkenness, which obscured the hearty, good-humoured expression really natural to them.

It was all one to him where he lived: was there not beer in the canteen? and if one paid for it the canteen-keeper, despite the prohibition, would let one have a case of bottled ale. The non-coms, of course would drink with him; then they would all be a pleasant company together.

He was right in his calculations: none of them could withstand the good cigars and drinks which he distributed freely. Even the sergeant-major took to joining them; such a chance was not to be let slip. But the deputy sergeant-major, Heimert, kept his distance; he was occupied with preparing for his approaching marriage. And Sergeant Wiegandt preferred walking with his sweetheart Frieda in the quiet evenings.

A special relation soon established itself between Frielinghausen and the one-year volunteer. Trautvetter had been a couple of terms at Breslau, and the education they had both received gave them something in common.

Frielinghausen had a good time now. Trautvetter paid for him and let him take part in his amusements and pleasures. It even seemed as though Trautvetter had some honourable feeling towards the young baron, for he sternly refused ever to let him join in the gambling with which the drinking-bouts soon came to be enlivened.

The one-year volunteer had his reasons for this. His luck remained faithful to him with almost puzzling persistency. His little swimming eyes seemed to hypnotise the dealer when they were playing cards, and his big fat hands had nothing to do but to rake in the winnings.

He had not the least scruple in taking money from the sergeant-major and Trumpeter-sergeant Henke, who were usually his adversaries--why else did the fellows play with him? but he did not like winning from Frielinghausen.

When the two non-commissioned officers had lost all their money, Trautvetter had no objection to lending, and let them give him notes-of-hand, which at last amounted to very considerable sums.

He had not, indeed, any real intention of claiming repayment; but these I.O.U.'s were very useful weapons in his hand, and it was not long before the sergeant-major had to dance to his piping.

Every night when an inspection was not expected, Trautvetter and Heppner would slip out of barracks. As soon as the sentinel had gone round the corner, they would creep out of the window, and make off to a neighbouring tavern, where gambling and drinking went on into the early morning hours.

Heppner ground his teeth as he bowed beneath this uneasy yoke; but there was no help for him. He already owed Trautvetter more than a thousand marks; and the one-year volunteer now became less willing to lend, and caused the sergeant-major endless vexation and trouble. He would suddenly demand to be made corporal, or to be given a couple of weeks' leave: demands which it was quite impossible to grant. But if Heppner pointed this out to him, he would flourish the notes-of-hand under the sergeant-major's nose and threaten to lay them before Wegstetten.

Heppner could think of no other way of escape than the chance of a sudden stroke of luck. Of course, however, he needed money in order to go on playing. He himself had no more, and nobody would lend to him.

At last he fell back on the cash-box of the battery. From time to time he replaced a portion of what he had taken, but the deficit nevertheless became greater and greater.

One morning, in the beginning of August, Wegstetten said to him: "Sergeant Heppner, have the one-year volunteers paid their board-money?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Then get your cash-box ready for settling up accounts. I am just going over to headquarters, and you can have the money and the books for me when I return."

Heppner hardly had the strength to reply with the usual "Very good, sir."

More than a hundred marks was missing from the box. Time pressed; Wegstetten might be

back again in half an hour. He went to find Heimert. Heimert was no friend to him, he knew; but he had always been a good comrade.

The deputy sergeant-major was away at the big parade-ground with the pioneers. That was half-an-hour's distance.

Trautvetter, where was Trautvetter?

At last he discovered him in the canteen.

"Trautvetter, you must lend me a hundred marks!" said the sergeant-major breathlessly.

"Must?" asked the one-year volunteer sarcastically. "Must? Not if I know it!"

Heppner had dragged him out of the canteen into the empty vestibule.

"Yes, yes, you must, Trautvetter!" he repeated.

Trautvetter now perceived the disturbed mien of the sergeant-major. Something very particular must have happened, that was clear; and in such case he could not refuse to help. For it was no part of his plan to push this man to extremity.

"What's up?" he asked.

Heppner murmured, with some confusion: "Settling up accounts, all of a sudden--there is some money missing; of course I had meant to replace it."

Trautvetter understood, and was beginning to pull out his purse, but he suddenly hesitated.

"Why, I have got no money left!" he cried in dismay. "Must it be at once? To-morrow afternoon you can have as much as you want."

"No, no, at once! Wegstetten has only just gone over to headquarters for a minute."

"Damnation! What are we to do?"

The sergeant-major believed Trautvetter was doing this on purpose. He became more insistent, and implored: "Trautvetter, for heaven's sake help me just for once! I beg of you! I beg of you! lend me the money!"

With a shrug the volunteer held out his open purse. There were only a few silver pieces in it.

"You can see for yourself, Herr Heppner," he said. "I am not the sort of fellow to leave you in the lurch like that."

But Heppner could not yet believe him. He begged and threatened. At last the great big fellow threw himself on the ground and clung round Trautvetter's knees: "Just this once, just this once!"

The volunteer pushed him roughly away. The sight of the blubbing giant revolted him.

"Stand up, Heppner!" he insisted. "All this is no good. I would give you the money, but God knows I have none at the moment. Let us consider how we can get out of this."

The sergeant-major stood up again, and looked at him in suspense.

Suddenly Trautvetter pointed to the canteen: "He must lend us something," he whispered.

But the canteen-keeper objected to this. Even when Trautvetter offered him ten, twenty marks for the loan, he remained obstinate.

The volunteer struck the counter furiously.

"Pig-headed fool!" he cried. "Will you do it for fifty?"

The canteen-keeper hesitated. He had settled up the day before; there was not much risk for him, and fifty marks----!

"Give me your note-of-hand," he demanded,

And Trautvetter wrote him an I.O.U. for one hundred and fifty marks.

Heppner took the money, and when Wegstetten came into the orderly-room he found the sergeant-major counting over his cash.

This event made a powerful impression on the one-year volunteer. From the moment when Heppner had lain grovelling on the ground before him a thorough change came over Trautvetter. The whole scene had been unspeakably revolting to him; he was seized with a grim horror on his

own account too. Half unconsciously the sight of the big imposing-looking man clamouring and petitioning on his knees made Trautvetter suddenly realise how near he himself stood to a similar degradation.

The next morning he gave the sergeant-major back his notes-of-hand.

Heppner coloured. "Why is this?" he asked. "Perhaps I shall be able to pay them up."

But Trautvetter answered quietly, "No, never mind! I only won the money from you in play, and gambling debts are not legally reclaimable. I ought never to have lent you the money in the first place." Then suddenly Trautvetter assumed a severely respectful manner, and added, "I should like to ask you something, sir; and that is that you would promise me never to play again."

Heppner looked at him, astonished. Was all this irksome dependence on one of his subordinates, this degradation before the whole battery, really to come to an end? He could scarcely believe that any one could be so generous. But he could see that the one-year volunteer was in earnest, not simply making fun of him.

"Yes, I promise you, Trautvetter," he said firmly. "I will not play any more."

And for the moment he meant what he said; he felt that this was the right minute for making good resolutions and turning over a new leaf.

Some days later Wegstetten asked him: "How is the one-year volunteer Trautvetter behaving? I have been quite pleased with him on duty these last few days."

And Heppner answered: "He has been much more steady, sir; there has been no fault to find with him."

The commander of the battery nodded, well pleased.

"You see, sergeant," he said, "my plan has been a success. I think we will let him out of barracks again. You can tell him so."

Trautvetter had also returned all his notes-of-hand to his other debtor, Trumpeter-sergeant Henke.

The cornet-player did not feel constrained to any special feeling of gratitude for this. He had never had the smallest intention of repaying the money, some hedge-lawyer having advised him of the fact that gambling debts were not legally recoverable.

Why therefore should he be grateful?

Lisbeth, on the contrary, his pretty fair-haired wife, was profoundly touched by Trautvetter's generosity.

"Dear, dear!" she sighed, "what a kind good man that volunteer must be, to give away such a lot of money!"

The trumpeter laughed at her: "Silly goose!" he said, "haven't I told you that they were gambling debts, and he could never have claimed them?"

"Well," remarked Lisbeth, "there were others too. Your new uniform was bought with the borrowed money, your beautiful patent leather shoes too, and half-a-dozen pairs of white gloves."

Her husband did not care to remember this: "Hold your tongue!" he growled; but his pretty wife insisted: "No, no, he must be a good kind man!"

"A drunken fat pig, that's what he is!" said Henke. "You can see that at a glance."

"That's as may be," replied Lisbeth calmly; and she proceeded to set forth to her wondering husband a plan she had conceived for increasing the financial resources of the household.

She would do fine washing and ironing for the one-year volunteers; and he, Henke, should arrange it with them.

Henceforth the young wife spent her days over the wash-tub and the ironing-board. She found plenty to do; for the young men liked to have their things brought home by a lovely little person like the trumpeter's wife, in her neat fresh attire.

A special friendship soon established itself between her and Trautvetter. She looked upon the plump volunteer as a good-natured person, who did not, at any rate now, show any of the evil characteristics imputed to him by her husband. He looked rather embarrassed when she thanked him heartily for giving back the notes-of-hand; and as he was acquainted with her husband's weaknesses it came to pass that they often talked about Henke. The woman felt a need of speaking out to some one about her husband, and Trautvetter gave her the best advice he could.

The young woman pleased him with her industrious, intelligent ways. Formerly he would probably have thoughtlessly tried to seduce her; but now he felt an involuntary respect for her diligent activity, and her love for her husband impressed him.

The trumpeter soon became aware that his wife had a certain influence over the one-year volunteer, and he immediately used this discovery to make Lisbeth a means of obtaining further small loans of money.

Lisbeth was ashamed of the deception this entailed upon her; she always refused to undertake the commission, but on each occasion Henke managed to prevail upon her to do so. Then when she brought him the money he would laugh sarcastically. It was capital to have a pretty wife who could manage things so nicely. He had no need even to be jealous; she was helplessly in love with himself!

But in the course of time his wife's eyes were opened. She learnt to examine her husband more closely, and saw through him more clearly every day. How blind she had been! Now that her perceptions were sharpened her fondness suddenly disappeared, and nothing remained but a dim feeling of duty towards him. She would at any rate make good the wrong she had done to Trautvetter in her foolish adoration for her husband, and would not conceal the truth from the one-year volunteer. She said nothing about a new request for money with which Henke had charged her, but confessed to him instead that all he had already given her for housekeeping and such-like had been appropriated by her husband, who had used it to buy himself a gold watch-chain, an extra sword, and silver spurs.

Trautvetter looked down upon her fair head. She had hung down her blushing face and would not look up at him.

"I thought as much," he said.

Without raising her eyes she asked: "Then why did you do it?"

Trautvetter hesitated a moment, then he said gently: "I thought I was doing you a pleasure, Frau Lisbeth."

The young woman looked him full in the face for an instant. Then she stood up quickly, took her washing-basket, and departed.

Henke had been awaiting her at home anxiously. He had just engaged in a love-affair with a music-hall singer, who had been entertaining the country people of the neighbourhood with her ditties during the August cattle-market season. "Countess Miramara" was a great success on the boards, for her costume reached upwards and downwards only just as far as was absolutely necessary; but she repelled the advances of the farmers, though they jingled persuasively the coin they had received in exchange for their oxen and pigs. She preferred to distinguish with her favour the handsome black-bearded trumpeter.

Henke now wanted to show himself a gallant lover. He intended to present the countess with a bracelet.

"Give me the money!" he cried to Lisbeth when she entered.

"I have none," she replied. "Trautvetter won't give me any more."

Henke tugged at his beard. This was a fatal upset to his calculations. What would the countess say if he broke his promise?

He began quietly; "Oh, yes, he'll give you some! You must just be a bit nice to him."

Lisbeth looked surprised. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Well, you women can always manage a man if you only want to, don't you see? Just be really nice to him. It's all the same to me." And he left the room, much put out.

His pretty wife shook her head thoughtfully. What had he meant by "a bit nice"?

Going into the town on an errand she met the one-year volunteer. They walked part of the way together. Lisbeth had forgotten her embarrassment, and chattered away gaily.

Suddenly she remembered her husband's incomprehensible words, and she began, smilingly; "Do you know, Herr Trautvetter, what my husband has just been saying to me, that I was to be really nice to you. Have I not been nice then?"

"What did he mean by that?" Trautvetter asked sharply.

"Well," she laughed, "I ought to have taken back some more money to-day. But I never mean to do that again. And then he said that if I were only really nice to you, you would give me lots of money."

She started, so violently had the man struck his sword upon the ground, and he looked at her

quite red and angry.

"Just like the low brute!" he cried.

"What! What do you mean?"

Trautvetter could not contain his wrath. He blurted out: "Don't you know, Frau Lisbeth, what he meant?--that you should take me for a lover!"

She met his glance with a straight look; then she hung her head, and walked dumbly beside him.

"I will go back," she said suddenly.

He took her hand and begged: "Forgive me, Frau Lisbeth! please!"

She nodded silently and turned back on the road they had just traversed.

In her little sitting-room she sank limply into a chair. The windows were wide open; she heard the rippling of the brook, and the insects humming and buzzing in the big willow. At last she roused herself. She must be certain if Trautvetter was right in his suspicion, and that would need cunning. Her plan was soon made; it was very simple: she need only behave as if she had been following her husband's hint, then he would have to declare himself.

"Henke," she began that evening, "Trautvetter has made a proposal to-day. As soon as he has finished his service he is going to buy a place in the country, far away from here, and he wants me to keep house for him. If you agree, then you shall have a hundred marks a month."

Henke was silent for a time; he was in some doubt what he should say to this. Lisbeth was so queer and cold, almost uncanny; but on the other hand she did not seem to be the least annoyed.

In a tone of would-be resignation he said at last: "Well, Lisbeth, if you don't love me any more, if you think it's for your happiness, and you like to leave me----" he stopped.

His wife was suddenly standing before him, deathly pale. She shook her trembling clasped hands in his face, and spat contemptuously on the boards in front of him. Then she fled from the room.

He looked after her stupefied.

"So she's gone!" he muttered. Well, it was no use being too tragic over it. Either Lisbeth would be reasonable again, or----he was free of her.

There was a third possibility.

Countess Miramara had assured him that he could make an enormous fortune if he would go on the stage as a cornet-player. To-morrow she was going off to Bohemia. Suppose he were to join her? He did not trouble himself about desertion: he had got his papers all right, and desertion was not a crime for which one could be extradited. Austria was a big place and a merry; so the countess asserted. And there was Hungary too.

Really that would be the best thing to do.

Next day Henke was over the border. He had already converted all his property into gold, and only took his trumpet with him. In place of his artilleryman's coat he wore a gorgeous fancy uniform, which showed off to the best advantage the excellences of his person. Evening after evening he performed his most admired pieces.

And he became a favourite with all the ladies.

Frau Lisbeth, however, obtained the dissolution of her marriage on the ground of malicious desertion.

At first she thought of furnishing a little shop in the town and setting up a laundry; but Trautvetter begged her rather to go into service for a time.

"Why?" asked she.

He found some difficulty in answering her. At last he came out with:

"I am very fond of you, Frau Lisbeth; and if you could make up your mind to it I should like to ask you if you would have me."

Lisbeth smiled a little, and then said, "You may ask me that now!"

Her voice sounded honest and friendly.

Trautvetter took her hand in his and said: "Then that's all right!"

But she continued gaily and cheerfully: "Besides, in any case, I should have ended by being your mistress."

"Oh, no!" said Trautvetter. "Under certain circumstances I prefer a wife."

Despite the warmth of the August sun, Julie Heppner grew worse day by day; but this was nothing to her in comparison with the burden of mental suffering which almost overwhelmed her. She watched her husband and sister with a gaze that never faltered. She saw with horror how Ida became less shy of her and abandoned herself more and more to her passion. Nor was this hidden from her husband. He noticed with cynical satisfaction how the young girl's power of resistance diminished. The desired fruit must soon fall into his hands almost of itself.

Soon, under cover of the playful teasing which went on between the sergeant-major and his sister-in-law, even in the presence of the invalid wife, he began to indulge in passionate, lustful touches and covert embraces which brought the blood to the girl's face and made her shiver.

She resented Julie's reproaches with the hard, insensitive egoism of one in love. What! Did this wretched moribund creature still think to claim the man whom she, the fresh, young girl, loved, and who loved her in return?

Julie laughed bitterly to herself. Would it not be best to resign herself to it, to close her eyes, and to await the deliverance of Death?

Oh, no! She could not endure this shameless insult which they both, as it were, hurled in her face. She racked her brain as to how she could revenge herself on them; but in vain. Most terrible of all was it to feel that though still alive she was virtually dead already, as powerless and helpless as a corpse!

Then the worst happened.

The sergeant-major and his sister-in-law were invited to a *fête* which the military society, "The Fellow-Soldiers of 1870-1," were arranging in memory of the battle of St. Privat.

The programme included music, theatricals, and dancing. Towards evening a fanfare of trumpets summoned the guests to the festival-play. Even in the garden under the lime-trees the heat of the summer sun had been great, and in the confined space of the overcrowded hall it became unbearably intense. The rows of chairs were placed much too close together, in order to accommodate the large audience. Once seated, it was impossible to move; one remained wedged in between one's neighbours.

Shortly before the curtain was raised, Heppner and Ida discovered two empty chairs. The sergeant-major sat down first. The narrow space then left on the neighbouring chair was far too small for the girl's fully-developed hips.

Consequently his sister-in-law was almost sitting on his knee. He felt the warmth of her blood and her firm limbs through her thin cotton skirt. They were pressed close to one another in the darkened room. Drops of sweat gathered on their brows, and their breath came gaspingly and with difficulty. But, as if by mutual consent, they did not move a limb. They were hearing nothing but the voice of their blood, and in the close contact they could distinctly feel the pulse-beats.

Neither of them took in a word of the play which was being performed on the stage.

At last the singing of the National Anthem announced the end of the piece. The spectators breathed sighs of relief and pushed patiently and slowly through the narrow doors out into the evening air of the garden, wiping and fanning their hot faces with their handkerchiefs.

Ida looked pale, and sank down exhausted on a chair. "I would rather go home," she said.

"Why not?" he agreed, and held out her jacket for her to put on. But the girl took it from his hand and hung it over her arm. A rush as of fire streamed through her body, making her skin prick and tingle.

Walking silently side by side they left the restaurant garden.

A house stood half-way up the hill, whence two roads led to the barracks: the high-road down through the valley, and a footpath which led to the little wood at the back of the barracks, and then went on further. Heppner chose the footpath.

The evening had not brought coolness. The leaves hung motionless on the branches. The twilight began to give way to night. The girl felt the tepid breeze like a warm bath on her bare neck and arms.

At the edge of the little wood the pair turned and looked back. The lights of the garden gleamed through the darkness. The noise of the merry-making was hardly audible; only a trumpet

and the rumble of a double bass, marking the dance measure, could be heard distinctly.

In the shadow of the trees Heppner put his arm round his sister-in-law's shoulders. She shrank slightly, and shuddered as if at a touch of frost. Pressed closely to each other they walked on slowly, and still in silence. The man's hot hand weighed heavily on the woman's shoulder; his throat was parched; his arms were as if paralysed; he could not turn his head and look her in the face.

They had reached the end of the wood. Fields stretched away on both sides of the path; the darkness of night surrounded them.

In the valley a train was passing. A cloud of sparks streamed from the funnel of the engine; on the dark ground the windows of the lighted carriages threw illuminated squares, which flashed along beside the train and vanished with it in the dim distance of the night. Not a glimmer remained to show the trail of man.

Suddenly the girl stood still, and with a wrench freed her self from the man's arm. She gave a stifled cry, like the wail of one vanquished after a hard struggle--then flung herself on his breast.

After a night of terrifying visions and dreams Julie Heppner had become quieter. She fought against the belief that her horrible suspicions could have become truth. It was too monstrous; they could not have been brutal enough to inflict this last injury on her as she lay dying!

But her doubts became certainties as she observed the altered demeanour of her husband and sister. The restless yearning had vanished. They were more at ease; there was a complete understanding between them; and their glances no longer desired and hungered, but rather told of a happiness already tasted.

From this time the invalid's mind was filled with schemes of vengeance, and she gradually conceived a mad determination to kill the guilty pair. She felt that she had no time to lose. Her life was nearly spent. She could now only take a few tottering steps; and increasing weakness would soon prevent her leaving her bed.

From under her eyelids she watched the girl's every movement. Oh, how she hated her, this healthy, blooming creature, with her splendid stature, her round white arms, and her magnificent bust! How she hated her! Her freshness, her youth, her beauty, her soft young body with which she had seduced the man, which he had caressed!

And Ida never suspected that vengeance was imminent, that death was near her--nearer even than to the dying woman herself!

The sands ran unceasingly through the hour-glass of the nearly expiring life. Constant and violent attacks of coughing kept the invalid from sleep, until the staff-surgeon prescribed morphia for her in fairly large doses. The poor woman was near death; why should not her last days be lightened, her last sufferings relieved? He cautioned the sergeant-major as to the danger of the drug, warning him to be careful in pouring out the doses.

Julie did not know how to praise the staff-surgeon enough; the rest was such a wonderful refreshment. True that on awaking her limbs felt rather heavy; but at the same time she felt the strengthening effect of the long undisturbed night's sleep. Sometimes she even thought she might begin to hope again; and when she felt particularly well she regained a faint desire for life. That would indeed be the most perfect vengeance, if she could live to spite them both, perhaps for years!

Then her illness once more overcame her; she despaired anew, and hourly planned revenge.

One morning, as she lay on her bed in a kind of stupor, she tried to recall the events of the night. Something had happened which she had seen vaguely through the veil of her torpor. Despite her drowsiness, she had been frightened, horrified by it; yet afterwards the incident had vanished from her memory, and now she was endeavouring to bring back the faint trace into consciousness.

It was just before she had fallen completely asleep, when her senses were becoming dulled, and the final action of the morphia was about to set in, that a slight cough had brought her back from the void, partially arousing her. While in this condition she had perceived that Otto, her husband, had softly raised himself in bed. Sitting up he had listened awhile, then had crept cautiously towards her, and had remained standing by her bed for a long time.

Now she remembered: she had been horribly afraid that he would do her some injury; that with his big strong hands he would take her by the throat and strangle her. She was far too weak to resist him; indeed, she had felt that she had not even the strength to cry out. But nothing of this had happened. He had only stood there motionless by her bedside, looking into her face. She had felt his gaze through eyelids that had closed with fatigue. Then she had gradually sunk into

sleep; and just at the very last she fancied she had been aware that her husband was moving away from her bed.

She pressed her hands to her brow as if to prevent the thoughts from escaping. She closed her eyes and forced herself to live again through the events of the night. At last they came back to her, and the memory struck her like a stinging lash, so that she cowered on her bed, clutching the coverlet with her hands, and biting her handkerchief to keep herself from shrieking with horror and hatred.

When he left her side her husband had turned towards the door--towards the door beyond which her sister slept. And thus it was that the shameless pair took advantage of that sleep for which she, poor invalid, had been so thankful! Even this relief, this wretched remnant of happiness, they embittered for her!

Never again should the healing, sleep-giving drug cross her lips, to give the opportunity for such abominations! Never! Not if it cost her her life! For that life was no longer worth having.

But stay! She would dissemble; would appear to take the drug and then pretend to go to sleep, in order to gain a chance of revenging herself on the adulterers how, she did not know; but it must be soon. In two days the regiment would be off to the autumn manœuvres, and by that time her vengeance must be consummated; she felt her strength would not last much longer.

On the following morning there was much work and bustle going forward in the battery, as early the next day they were to start for the manœuvres. The sergeant-major had barely time to throw together the few things that he intended to take with him.

"Ida," he shouted through the door, "cut some bread and butter for my breakfast, and send it over to me in the orderly-room."

Julie was as usual on the sofa, which was pushed close up to the table. Her sister was sitting doing some needlework.

Rather annoyed at the interruption Ida got up, and fetched bread and butter out of the kitchen. With a large bread-knife she cut two slices, buttered them, and carried them off.

The bread and the knife had been left lying close to the edge of the table. The knife swayed a moment on the round crust, then it slipped slowly off the loaf, and fell flat upon the rug in which the invalid was wrapped.

At first Julie let it lie there unnoticed; Ida could take it away when she returned. Suddenly, however, an inspiration, as it were, flashed through her mind. It was fate that this knife should have fallen on her sofa; it was to be the instrument of her revenge! She took it quickly in her blanched hand and examined it. It had a sharp, pointed blade, fit to go through flesh and bone; it seemed to have been freshly sharpened. She felt the edge, and in so doing cut her finger slightly. A few drops of blood spurted on to the shining steel, and near them were the marks left by the bread which it had cut. Julie felt as though she could not take her eyes off the blade.

But she heard the outer door close, and swiftly hid the knife under her coverings.

Ida came in, and began to get her own breakfast. She looked about the table.

"Have you the bread-knife, Julie?" she asked. "It was certainly here."

The invalid answered sullenly: "I?--No."

"Didn't you see it lying here, Julie?" Ida asked again. "Just here on the bread?"

"No," replied the invalid, "It wasn't there. I should have seen it if it had been. Perhaps you took it with you to the orderly-room by mistake."

"Perhaps I did," said Ida; and in the afternoon she asked her brother-in-law: "Otto, can you tell me whether I left the bread-knife lying in the orderly-room this morning?"

The sergeant-major answered: "Perhaps so. I'll see." After which nothing more was said about the missing knife.

Julie Heppner felt strangely strong and well as she held the formidable weapon in her hand. Now at last the hour had come in which she would be revenged for years of suffering, and for the accumulated disgrace of her married life. And she regarded her husband and sister with triumphant glances, as two victims who must fall under her hand without chance of escape.

There was so much to pack up and arrange during the evening that no one thought of giving the invalid her morphia.

"Otto, will you give me the medicine?" she requested at last. "I can prepare it for myself."

The sergeant-major started, and glanced at his sister-in-law, smiling cynically. The devil! In all this silly excitement they might have sacrificed the last night before their long separation, if the

very person they were deceiving had not herself come to the rescue.

Ida smiled back at him.

He gave the bottle and a spoon to his wife with a "Mind you don't take too much." But he thought to himself, "Perhaps she will take a little more than is ordered, and so sleep the sounder."

Then he went back to his sister-in-law and the packing.

"There!" said Julie, as she held out the spoon. "I believe I did take just a little more than usual. Ida, will you help me to bed? I begin to feel tired already!"

Just then it struck ten o'clock. The tattoo sounded.

"So late already?" exclaimed the sergeant-major. "I must be off at once with this to the baggage-waggon."

He took up his box and turned to go. In the doorway he paused once more and said, "I shall only just go through the battery and then come back to bed, for I must be up betimes in the morning."

The sick woman lay waiting. She had taken the knife with her into the bedroom hidden under her shawl, and now held it grasped convulsively in her hand.

Close by in the sitting-room her sister was bustling about. The door had remained half open, so that her movements and occupations could be plainly perceived from the bedroom. At last she undressed herself hurriedly, as if forced to hasten.

Through the half opened door she called softly into the dark bedroom, "Julie, are you asleep?"

Then again, louder and more insistently, "Julie, are you asleep?"

She stood listening awhile at the door, and then got into bed. The door was still open and the sick woman heard how restlessly she tossed about.

An hour later the sergeant-major opened the outer door. He took his spurred boots off in the corridor, and slipped cautiously into the bedroom.

Once more came a whispered, "Julie, are you asleep?" and the woman felt as if she could have laughed aloud at the fools who let themselves be thus led by the nose.

Heppner stripped his uniform off rapidly. Then he moved again to the side of her bed and listened--as on that other night.

The invalid lay motionless.

The deceived wife suffered the tortures of the damned; and it seemed to her that her agony must be as eternal as hell itself. She clutched so hard at the knife-handle that her nails were driven into her flesh, and she bit her lips until they bled to keep herself from shrieking with frenzy. A thousand times she thought that morning must be breaking; yet still the shameless pair were together.

At last came an end to the horror.

The woman was asleep already when the man left her. She did not reply to the farewell which he whispered to her from the door. Then he lay down, breathing heavily, and in a moment had fallen into a deep sleep.

Julie waited a little while. Then she got up, her husband's snores and heavy breathing drowning the slight noise of her movements. Now she was standing with her bare feet on the boards. She had the knife in her right hand.

Which of the two should she punish first?

She must kill them both, that was certain. But before she died that shameless creature should know the truth. A flood of abusive words, the most obscene and filthy she could conjure up, lay on her tongue. She would shriek them into the ears of her dying victims, would shout for joy, would exult over them! Oh, how she would triumph! After all the shame, after all the sorrow, she would at last remain the conqueror!

She dragged herself along by the bed carefully. With trembling steps she crossed the threshold and went into the sitting-room. The feeble light of breaking day struggled in, just clearly enough to enable her to distinguish things. The room looked dreary, clothing was strewn about, the chairs were out of their places, and the remains of the evening meal were still on the table. A moist heat pervaded this scene of disorder. The suffocating air seemed laden with a

sense of the horrible, unnatural crime.

The sick woman staggered. There was a mist before her eyes. But with an effort she pulled herself together and moved towards the bed.

Her sister was asleep, her face hidden by her loosened hair and pressed into the pillow.

Suddenly she stirred, and as she stretched herself slowly the coverlet fell rustling to the ground.

In the dim light her white skin gleamed.

The woman fixed her burning eyes on this beauty. Suddenly a mad smile distorted her lips, and she raised the knife. She would plunge the blade into her sister's adulterous bosom; and thus deal out justice, measure for measure.

But there came a rush of blood to her throat that choked her. She swayed, and grasped at the empty air with clutching fingers. The knife slipped from her relaxing hand and clanged on the floor. The dying woman collapsed with a dull thud.

The sleeping girl turned over lazily.

"Be quiet, Otto!" she murmured.

Suddenly she gave a shriek of horror, rushed into the bedroom, and shook the man, who could hardly be aroused from his sleep.

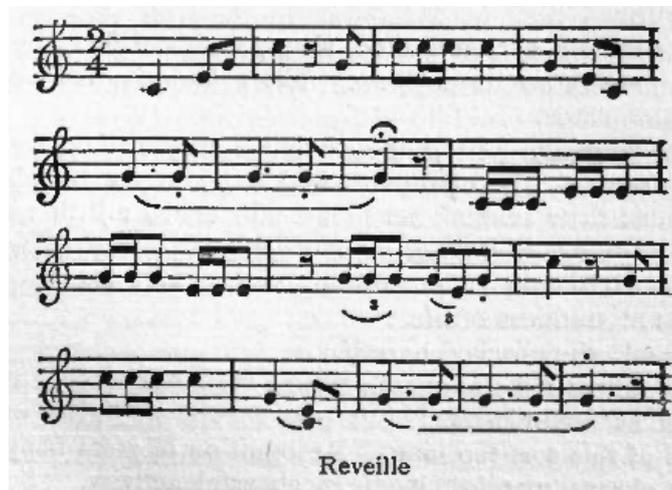
He followed her, still half dazed.

Julie Heppner lay dead, bathed in her own blood.

The husband and sister gazed at her horror-stricken, and shuddered as they saw the knife lie gleaming near the corpse.

Death had passed over them.

Outside the trumpeter on duty blew the joyful fanfare of the reveille:--



CHAPTER IX

"The bullets are all of iron and lead;
But it's not every bullet will strike a man dead."

(Old Soldier-song.)

Kläre Gütz was nursing her child. Through the thick drooping branches of the pear-tree the sun

shone on the mother's breast and on the infant's little round head. She bent over him with a happy smile, and held him close.

Sheltered on one side by a high wall, and on the other by the thick leafage, the little garden seemed a haven of joy and peace far removed from all turmoil and tumult of the outside world. The stillness of the summer morning reigned unbroken.

A few more sucks, and then, sleepy and satisfied, the little head sank back on its cushion. Kläre laid the baby-boy in his perambulator.

In the heavenly quiet of this secluded corner of the garden, in the presence of her sleeping child, a picture of health, and from whose lusty sucking her breast still ached a little: in the fulness of this bliss she felt so overwhelmed with thankfulness that she could not help shedding a few holy tears of joy over the blessedness of life.

Suddenly she checked herself.

Kläre Güntz did not exactly regard such moments of tender emotion as inadmissible; but one should not give way to feelings of this sort too long. Recognition of great happiness should always manifest itself in cheerful activity. So she sat up, and began stitching energetically.

But the work was almost mechanical. Like Cæsar, Kläre Güntz could do two things at once: mend, darn, sew, or anything else of the kind, and think at the same time.

She was anxious about her husband,

Not on account of his health; she tended and cared for him too wisely, with her housewifely watchfulness and love. But he, who usually stood so firmly before the world, was suffering now from inward uncertainty. His moods were unequal; and sometimes the cheerful, determined man would be quite overcome by irresolute depression.

This depression was connected with the service. Kläre had found that out at once. The eternal disputes with a disagreeable superior were probably to blame. For Captain Mohr, who feared a rival and a successor in the senior-lieutenant, opposed tooth and nail every improved regulation that Güntz endeavoured to introduce in the battery, thus causing endless discussion and unpleasantness.

At last Frau Kläre had made a move. She came to the conclusion that she must appeal to the colonel, who at once agreed to her request that Güntz should be transferred, and Kläre was not a little proud of her success. In reality, however, she was only responsible for it in the very smallest degree.

True, Falkenhein had heard her attentively, whereas he usually only listened to ladies out of pure courtesy. He had a very high opinion of this clever, capable woman. But he would have refused even her request without hesitation had he not himself been convinced of the necessity for the measure demanded. The discipline of the fifth battery, loose enough already, suffered more and more from the constant friction between the two officers. He regarded Mohr as a very harmful element in the service. The captain, through some outside influence--a very influential relative of high position, it was said--had managed so far to retain his post; but he, as colonel of the regiment, would see to it that the undesirable officer should receive his dismissal in the spring at latest. And meanwhile Güntz must be transferred from the fifth battery. It fell out conveniently that Wegstetten should be ordered away just then to the Austrian manœuvres. Güntz was put in charge of the sixth battery; and the affair had a perfectly natural appearance, since the command properly fell to the senior-lieutenant of the regiment.

Güntz had no idea of his wife's little intrigue. He assumed his new position with fresh courage, and it seemed to please him; but nevertheless he did not regain his former happy balance.

Something still troubled him; and the young wife, pleased as she was at her successful assumption of the good fairy's part, was again at her wits' end to discover the cause.

The fact was that Güntz felt himself daily less and less satisfied with an officer's career, and he almost began to believe that he had missed his vocation. It was very hard to realise this only after he had devoted the twelve best years of his life to soldiering. But he did not think it was yet too late to make a decisive change, and he was earnestly elaborating a plan to send in his resignation and devote all his time to mastering the technique of engineering, his former favourite study.

He now determined to command the battery for a year, and then to decide definitely whether to adopt this course or no.

On August 15 he took over the command of the sixth battery. He felt easier in the more congenial atmosphere of his new department; yet his full zest for a soldier's life did not return.

Wegstetten's battery seemed to be in excellent order; the only exception being Lieutenant Landsberg. That young man had positively raved with joy when Wegstetten's temporary absence

was announced. The captain's hand had pressed heavily on him, and Landsberg thought that now he would be able to live his life more as he pleased. Senior-lieutenant Güntz, who was to be in command, was after all virtually his equal, and it was quite impossible that he should be as strict about duty as the full-blown captain of a battery.

So he at once began to behave with a self-satisfied independence which under Wegstetten's rule would have been regarded simply as high treason. He did not appear punctually on parade, and sometimes he would remain away altogether, even when it was his week to be on duty.

But Güntz shook off his doubts and depression of spirits, and said to Reimers:

"Look here, my boy, I shall have to make that Landsberg eat humble-pie; there's more than one way of doing it. The worst of it is, though, that the fellow is not an exception, but just a representative of the whole species of decorative officers; and in the end it will be little enough use if one of them is brought to book for once in a way. Directly a more lenient officer is in command the whole thing will begin over again. And just consider the prospect, my dear boy; if this slack, unenthusiastic crew increases in number, what will happen then? Now and then, perhaps, one of them gains a little sense by the time he is promoted to captain. With the greater number the chances are that during the ten or more years that they are subalterns, utter superficiality will have become their rule in life; from which, despite responsibility, they are unable to break loose, and according to which, therefore, they act. Then, when they are found to be good for nothing, they are either retired, and eat the unearned bread of pensioners (unearned, of course, only in such cases as theirs), or, if they have a cousin or great-uncle anywhere, who can put in a good word for them, or if they belong to the best families, or if they are very religious--why, then God Almighty intervenes, and the scandal waxes still grosser; for the useless captains become staff-officers."

Reimers tried to reply, but Güntz waived off his objection with an impatient gesture, and continued: "As to the young officer of whom we are speaking, the disinclination which he manifests for the actual duties of his profession is a fact, and, unfortunately distinctly typical. I assure you that most of our lieutenants look at their life and work from the point of view of mere schoolboys. They lounge about, do just the duty they are positively obliged to do, laugh in their sleeves if they get rowed, and swear at every short hour demanded by the service. Nothing but continuous lazing! Then in the end, every one who has not been arrested for some piece of sheer stupidity is made captain,--of course always supposing he has not been positively dishonest, or done something criminal."

Reimers interrupted him: "Come, you know, the thing's not quite so simple as all that!"

But Güntz replied: "Oh yes, it is! To master the elementary formulae according to which the service is regulated, sufficiently to satisfy the mere requirements of inspection--that is child's play. And yet on that the superior has to found his judgment! But to work them out so thoroughly that one has them at one's finger-ends at any moment and on every emergency (for that alone can prove their efficiency) that is really difficult, demanding long and exhaustive study. And who has the patience or the inclination to do it? Everything is sacrificed to making a good show at the reviews. If only one has been able to cut a good figure then, one has got out of it well! A teacher must have good and bad pupils in his class, of course; but woe to the commander of a battery who is disgraced by having a bad officer under him! He has not been able to educate him! So, instead of an incapable man being got rid of when he deserves it, an enormous amount of pains and trouble is wasted on him--absolutely wasted! Disgusting love of show! Instead of our holding forth everlastingly to these young people about upholding the honour of their position in the eyes of the world, they should rather have it brought home to them that they ought to win their own self-respect by honest and conscientious attention to duty."

"You exaggerate!" murmured Reimers.

"I wish indeed that I did!" rejoined Güntz. "But just you go to every individual brother-subaltern and say: Is drilling recruits a pleasure to you? Do you get up early, determined to work hard all day and to endeavour to train good soldiers for the king? or, do you on awakening growl that the devil may take the whole dirty pack of recruits?"

"Why don't you rather ask with what thoughts they awake during gun-practice and the manœuvres?"

"Because the one depends upon the other, my dear fellow. Without the training of recruits there would be no gun-practice and no manœuvres. It is just as if we were military teachers. Well, gun-practice is to a certain extent an examination for the men; while the manœuvres, as you know, don't teach the men anything new, but are rather a test for the higher officers. But the teacher who only wants to make a show at the examination, and who does not expend all the enthusiasm and inspiration of his calling upon the teaching itself,--I have no use for him!"

"You really are unjust!" exclaimed Reimers.

"Well, perhaps so----"

"You see, you allow it yourself!"

"But in a different way from what you mean. I say that the subalterns themselves are only in part answerable for their faults, the other part of the responsibility is borne by the entire system."

"What system?"

"Why, the system of our entire army service, of our military education."

"Has it not been tested in three campaigns?"

Güntz was silent for a time, and then he answered, turning away: "Yes, certainly. But you are not unaware of the fact that a system can go on being tested until the moment when it collapses?"

"And anyhow," he continued, "all this refers to private thoughts of my own, about which I can't tell you just yet. I am now going to make the final experiment, and then I shall have to decide."

"What?"

"Whether I remain an officer or not."

This struck Reimers like a blow. "Güntz, you are mad!" he cried.

His friend shook his head gravely, and said, "We shall see."

Meanwhile, Güntz coolly took up the glove which Landsberg in his presumption had thrown down. He had decided that, if possible, he would only meet the young man's impudence with the weapons which stood at his command as the head of the battery.

One day Güntz had ordered Landsberg to superintend the checking of the stores ordered by the regiment, and found him instead fast asleep and carefully covered up on a sofa. This was a gross breach of duty; for according to the rules the officer in charge should have himself supervised the checking of the stores by one of the sergeants. But this was not all; Landsberg had had gunners posted on the watch, so that he should not be surprised by his commanding officer, and that was misappropriation of the service staff.

When called to order, he coolly excused himself: "I beg your pardon, sir; but I really thought it could not matter much about a few dozen horseshoe nails more or less."

Güntz felt it would have been trouble wasted to explain to the lieutenant how it was perfectly possible that the lack of "a few dozen horseshoe nails" might be the cause of a battery's immobility in time of need. He simply rebuked him briefly and sharply.

Landsberg took the punishment in strictly correct style. But a most unreasonable anger gleamed in his eyes. He made up his mind in all seriousness that he would complain of Güntz, and tried to get his fellow-subaltern, Reimers, to associate himself with him. Reimers, however, refused politely and decidedly, and moreover spoke to Landsberg for his good, strongly advising him to submit to discipline and amend his behaviour.

Landsberg was apparently convinced, and for a time his behaviour rarely gave occasion for blame. But in the circle of the younger officers he let fall dark insinuations that he would be revenged for the "insult" which the hateful martinet Güntz had inflicted on him. He gradually worked up a genuine hatred of Güntz, and this hatred took an important place in his previously empty life. He vowed Güntz must stand in front of his pistol, even if it cost him his officer's sword-knot. With every reprimand this fury increased, till Landsberg determined to pick a quarrel with Güntz and somehow positively insult him, when a duel would be unavoidable.

At last an accident brought things to a climax.

The officers of the second division of the regiment were in the habit of going occasionally to the Auer, a lonely forest tavern, during the summer months, to play skittles. The Auer was about an hour's distance from the garrison, and lay nearly in the middle of the pine forest, which extended over the mountains and beyond the frontier. The younger men bicycled there and back, while their elders either rode or drove. Major Schrader arranged these excursions, and bore the expenses himself. They were partly intended to provide opportunities for personal intercourse between him and his officers.

He declared himself a lover of rural life, and the party always fell in with country ways quite contentedly. Pilsener beer was the tippie, or, at most, a little brandy or gin; and in the way of food, fresh eggs and butter, black country bread and strong ham, played the principal parts. Scandal-mongers of course wanted to know whether, the Auer's landlady had been a former sweetheart of the major's, and Schrader defended himself laughingly against the insinuation; although he need not have been ashamed of the dignified, buxom woman, so scrupulously neat and clean. It certainly was a fact that no one ever saw the landlord of the Auer, and that the landlady's two smart boys, who helped so cheerfully in picking up the skittles, bore a striking resemblance to the major.

It was in the courtyard of the Auer tavern, when, after one of these excursions of Major Schrader's, they were getting their bicycles out of the shed, that Landsberg's rancour broke out.

He had not been thinking about his grievances at the moment. He had preferred a stronger drink than the light beer, had almost emptied a half bottle of gin, and was more inclined for sleep than for anything else, so that he did not find his bicycle quickly. Guntz made some harmless chaffing remark, and a violent quarrel broke out.

Finally Guntz turned away, shrugging his shoulders. He considered that Landsberg was drunk. But the lieutenant suddenly ran after him and aimed a blow at him, striking him on the arm. The other men at once threw themselves between the two, and held Landsberg fast. The young fellow, perfectly mad with rage, kicked out with his feet and literally foamed at the mouth.

Schrader had him taken home in a carriage by his adjutant and Captain Madelung. To Reimers he said: "My dear Reimers, you will see that your friend Guntz goes home quietly, won't you?" And Reimers replied: "Yes, sir."

Guntz signed to his friend to remain behind. From the dark skittle-alley they could watch their comrades starting for the town, all much depressed by the untoward occurrence, speaking in undertones, and accompanying their whispered words with restrained gestures.

For a few minutes Guntz walked silently up and down the gravel-strewn skittle-alley. Reimers sat down in a small arbour, where the empty barrel still lay upon a bed of ice. When Guntz stood still, Reimers could hear the drops of the melting ice falling into the earthen basin. Otherwise all was silent, until the steps on the crunching gravel approached once more.

"I think we can go now," said Guntz, in his calm voice, which only sounded a little harder than usual.

Reimers answered: "All right, if you like."

"Yes. Let us go."

In the courtyard the senior-lieutenant suddenly stood still. "The devil! I am horribly thirsty!" he said, clearing his throat.

"Shall I fetch you a glass of beer from the bar?" suggested Reimers.

"No, don't bother. Water will do me more good," replied Guntz.

He returned to the arbour, fetched a glass, and went to the well. The pump creaked discordantly in the stillness of the night.

In the moonlight Reimers saw how his friend drank the clear water with eager gulps, filled the glass again, and again emptied it.

Then they went towards the shed in which the bicycles had been stored.

"That was delicious water," said Guntz, with a sigh of satisfaction. "The strength of the forest and of the earth!"

The shed was badly lighted by a miserable oil lamp. The two machines were leaning against the wall. Outside was a third--Landsberg's. Guntz pushed it in under cover.

"It would be a pity," he said, "for the night dew to spoil the nickel."

They wheeled their bicycles slowly through the gate, and as they were starting Guntz said: "Look here, dear boy; will you go to Landsberg early to-morrow morning and take him a challenge? I will see about the announcement to the court of honour myself."

Reimers answered simply, "Yes." And then he added: "But what are the conditions?"

The senior-lieutenant considered for a moment.

"Oh, well," he said at last, "the court of honour will decide as to that. Meanwhile, say fifteen paces, and three exchanges of shots."

"Right."

"Well, off then! But look out, it's horribly dark."

The two friends rode in silence until they reached the garden gate of Guntz's house. The senior-lieutenant would have said a mere brief farewell, but Reimers held him fast.

"Guntz," he said, "I can't help thinking that a challenge on grounds connected with the service is incorrect. And--I believe that it is so in the present instance."

"Yes," replied Guntz, "the private reason is undoubtedly connected with the service. Landsberg wishes to revenge himself because I reprimanded him sharply. But overtly the affair

has arisen quite otherwise. I have no alternative but to challenge him."

"Yes, you are right," acknowledged Reimers. He stood awhile leaning against his bicycle, deep in thought, until Gützt pressed his hand, and said, "Good night, dear boy!"

And Reimers answered, "Good-night, my dear Gützt." Gützt put his bicycle carefully away, and then quietly went upstairs. During the summer months, when his duty sometimes began at five o'clock or even earlier, he occupied a small bedroom next to the larger one in which his wife and child slept. But the door of communication between the two rooms was always open.

In a few rapid movements he took off his sword and his spurred boots. Then he went to the door of the bedroom and listened in the darkness. A slight breeze came from the garden and moved the lowered window-blind with the regularity of a pendulum. Somewhere in the grass a cricket was chirping; and through the slight noises the deep contented breathing of the two sleepers could be heard, slow and deep the mother's, and the child's soft and light.

Gützt leant against the lintel and listened lovingly to the sweet, regular sounds. This room contained a world of happiness for him; and the breathing of his sleeping dear ones was to him the most priceless music.

Suddenly he shivered in the warm August air. An over-powering fatigue almost paralysed his limbs, and one single horrible thought filled his mind.

Wearily he pulled off his clothes, and was soon wrapped in heavy sleep.

The court of honour endorsed the challenge but it modified the terms, arranging that instead of three interchanges of shots there should be two, at fifteen paces. The duel was to take place early the next morning, at half-past five, on the pistol-practice ground of the regiment.

After Reimers had presented the challenge to Landsberg, he made all the necessary arrangements to act as his friend's second. He whispered the time and the place to Gützt while at the table in the orderly-room signing despatches.

The senior-lieutenant nodded curtly, and answered: "Right; I'll speak to you later."

Sergeant-major Heppner approached him, and said: "At what time to-morrow morning do you wish the battery to be ready for the tactical exercises, sir?"

Gützt was at once on the spot. He signed the order and leant back.

"To-morrow? H'm!" he murmured.

The duel was to take place at half-past five. He considered; in a quarter of an hour one could easily cover the short distance between the shooting-ground and the barracks.

"Six sharp," he then answered decisively.

Heppner replied: "Yes, sir, six o'clock;" and wrote the time in the order-book.

"Yes, six o'clock," repeated Gützt.

If it were no longer possible for him, then Reimers would command the battery.

It was Wednesday, the day on which Reimers was engaged to dine with the Gütztes. He would have excused himself, so that his friend should devote himself undisturbed to his wife and child, but Gützt refused: "Nothing of the kind, my boy. Why, Kläre might smell a rat! No, no! you must come. But you'll have to put on another expression, you know!"

So Reimers went, but left unusually early, and when he returned to his quarters Gähler handed him a letter from Falkenheim.

The colonel wrote as follows:

"MY DEAR REIMERS,--I return from Kühren about eleven o'clock, and I beg of you to look me up this evening without fail. "Yours, "v. F."

Here was a glimmer of hope! Perhaps this wretched duel might yet be avoided! The colonel of a regiment had in certain cases the right to suspend the judgment of the court of honour, and to refer the matter directly to the throne for a decision.

Frankly, Reimers could not think on what, in this case, such interference could be based. The affair seemed just as clear and distinct as could well be; a verbal quarrel whence resulted the actual insult, which, though not serious, left not the smallest loophole for a revocation. The duel seemed utterly inevitable.

Falkenheim was already waiting for him. The firm, clear-headed man was in a state of almost feverish excitement. He walked restlessly up and down the room, constantly buttoning and unbuttoning a button of his coat.

"Thank you for coming, my dear Reimers," he said in a voice of forced steadiness, and speaking in jerky sentences. "Tell me, you are his second to-morrow, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Reimers.

"It is a good thing that you will be there. Yes, it is a good thing. I--I felt I must speak to you about it. It is true that a commander should come to his decisions alone, and I have done that--but now I must speak to some-one. I have not been to Kühren; I sent the carriage away, and have been walking in the forest for a long time, and alone. This duel--it is a mistake, a terrible mistake; that's certain. But my hands are tied. I can do nothing to prevent it. And yet if things go badly, I shall be partially responsible. My best officer, one of the best, most excellent of men, against a lazy ne'er-do-weel! God knows that laws are sometimes utterly unreasonable, and many of our ideas are equally senseless. I have racked my brains to find a way out of this difficulty, and it seems impossible. I know that Landsberg's real reason is military antagonism; but despite that, I dare not interfere."

The colonel stopped suddenly right in front of the lieu-tenant, and looking him squarely in the eyes, asked: "Do you really think that Gütntz's honour is affected?"

Reimers was silent. A "yes" seemed to him quite contrary to reason, and yet he could not say "no."

Falkenheim had again begun to walk up and down the room, not awaiting a reply.

At last he turned again to Reimers.

"Well, the matter must take its course," he said, in a somewhat calmer tone. "One thing, however, I ask you to do for me. Directly all is over to-morrow, will you come and tell me--quite privately? I shall hear officially from Kauerhof. He's to be umpire, isn't he? And be quick, won't you, even if all has gone well?--a 'three-cross' ride!"[A]

[Footnote A: The necessary speed in conveying military despatches is indicated by crosses. Thus, one cross signifies walking and trotting alternately; two crosses, a quick trot; and three crosses, as fast as the strength of the horse will permit.]

He held the lieutenant's hand in his, and pressed it warmly. His depression seemed to have partly passed away.

"But you must not break your neck," he concluded, smiling slightly. "And now let us hope for a happy meeting!"

In passing Reimers glanced at the Gütntzes' villa. It was all in darkness, save for the window of his friend's study on the ground floor, whence a light was still gleaming.

Within, Gütntz sat at his writing-table, with several sheets of paper lying before him. For more than an hour he had been staring at the white sheets and reflecting.

Shortly after ten Kläre had fed her baby; and then, the sleeping child tenderly clasped in her arms, she had gone up-stairs. Her husband had watched her through the half-open door, and the nursery-lullaby with which she hummed the child to sleep sounded in his ears for long after.

Now he sat there, not knowing whether he would ever again see his wife's honest, sensible eyes, or the droll, wondering gaze of his child.

A hard battle was going on within him, and once or twice he raised his hand as if to push a heavy weight from his brow.

The cuckoo-clock in the corner by the stove cuckooed twelve times, and then from without sounded the deep, full tone of the parish-church clock. The new day had begun.

With a strong effort Gütntz raised himself, bent over the white leaves, and with swift-moving pen filled page after page.

He had decided to send in his resignation.

The request should go up to the regiment before the duel, and now he was explaining to Reimers the reasons which had decided him to take this sudden step. To Reimers alone. But if he wished he might show the letter to the colonel. The opinion of any one else was immaterial to him.

At the outset he begged his friend not to think that he had withdrawn from the duel out of cowardice. He could point to his whole previous life in support of this--the life of a quiet, resolute man, always consistent with his principles. And, after all, Reimers knew and trusted him.

This duel was utterly senseless, brought about as it had been by a laughably trivial occurrence; and, moreover, it was in the highest degree unfair, despite the fact that both duellists would face each other under similar conditions, with similar weapons, and with the same sun and the same wind. It was unfair, because the stakes were of such totally unequal

value. A man in his prime, who had done good work in his profession and promised to do still more, must pit himself against an irresponsible young fellow, who up to the present had shirked everything serious. And then Güntz's position as husband and father must be compared with his opponent's irregular life. An absolute cypher was opposed to a number that counted; and, moreover, to a number doubled in its capacity.

Güntz said roundly that he regarded his life as too valuable to be thrown into the balance of this quarrel.

Then he went more into detail with regard to the doubts which for weeks had been harassing him and driving him towards the decision to renounce his right to wear the uniform of an officer; the strong doubts as to whether, under existing conditions, German officers were not undertaking work of no benefit to the future.

He did not mean to say that the calling of an officer was an altogether unproductive vocation. The yearly training of a large number of soldiers, who supported the credit of the kingdom, and thereby insured peace, was, no doubt, a positive factor in both political and social life.

But was this bulwark, which year by year was rebuilt and strengthened anew, really secure enough to withstand storms and assaults?

That was just what he doubted.

The organisation of the German army rested on foundations which had been laid nearly a hundred years ago. Prussian institutions, tested by many victories, had been transferred to the new empire, and were still continued. Since the great war they had never seriously been put to the proof; and during the three last decades they had only been altered in the most trifling details. In three long decades! And in one of those decades the world at large had advanced as much as in the whole previous century!

The system of the military training of the men, evolved in an age of patriarchal bureaucratic government, had remained pedantically the same, counting on an ever-present patriotism. Meanwhile, in place of the previous overwhelming preponderance of country recruits, a fresh element had now been introduced: the strong social-democratic tendencies of the industrial workers, who, it is true, did not compose the majority of the contingents, but who, with their highly-developed intelligence, always exerted a very powerful influence.

Now, instead of turning this highly-developed intelligence to good account, they bound it hand and foot on the rack of an everlasting drill, which could not have been more soullessly mechanical in the time of Frederick the Great. And they expected this purely mechanical drill to hold together men from whom all joyful spontaneity was taken by the stiff, wooden formalism of their duty, and not a few of whom cherished the very opposite of patriotism in their breasts! Drill was to maintain discipline among them? It held them together as an iron hoop holds together a cask, the dry staves of which would fall asunder at the first kick!

Confronting the men stood their officers, who, although many of them actuated by the most honourable intentions, were quite incompetent to guide the recruits to a convinced and conscious obedience, a voluntary patriotism. The officer, as a consequence of his origin or education, was separated by a veritable abyss from the sensations and thoughts of the common soldier; and, on the other hand, the soldier was unable to understand the spirit in which he was treated by the officer. It thus came about that the officer for the most part had a pretty low opinion of the privates, while the private did not fail to form his own conclusions as to the officers.

The constancy with which the German corps of officers clung to the old principles of army organisation was worthy of a better cause. Pinning their faith to their glorious traditions, all criticism was set down as malicious gossip, even if it came from their own midst. To an ideal of such doubtful value they devoted their industry and strength. And it was strange how little the analogy of the miserable year 1806 shook military self-confidence, despite the startling points of resemblance. Now, as then, the complaint was of the one-sided reactionary training of the officers, which must separate them from the forward movement of the people; now, as then, there was a kind of hidebound narrow-mindedness, too often degenerating into overweening self-conceit, making them a laughing-stock to civilians; and, finally, now as then, there were the same stiff, wooden regulations, the mechanical drill, which, despite all personal bravery, failed utterly before the convinced enthusiastic onrush of the revolutionary army. But worse than defeat in battles was the cowardly capitulation of strongholds which ensued. The commanders of those days certainly understood how to command the evolutions of a battalion, how to direct a parade march, and how to ensure that all pigtailed were of the regulation length; but despite all the drill and all the pedantry, they remained strangers to the inspiration which inaugurated a new era of military service--the new patriotism, the love of one's country. They had stood in a strongly personal relationship to their king but it no longer sufficed to save them. They had shouted "Long live the king!" thousands of times; yet they betrayed the king when they presumed he had lost because they knew no better.

They had *played* too long at being soldiers to be able really to be soldiers.

Subsequently such men as Scharnhorst, Boyen, and Gneisenau directed the military service

into the new paths of allegiance to the nation; a work which was crowned by the unexampled successes of the years 1870-71. But since that epoch, while the foundation of the system--the people themselves--had with each new year altered and progressed in every relation of life, yet the system itself had remained unchanged, and the German officer's devotion to duty, similarly unchanged, was largely wasted by being directed into worn-out channels.

Again, it must be deeply deplored that promotions were no longer due to military efficiency alone, but also to victories achieved at the courts of princes. To this circumstance, opening up, as it did, an anything but reassuring view of the good faith of the authorities, was to be added yet another, also tending to undermine the soundness of the army: the ever-increasing luxury apparent in military circles. Of necessity, and in the true interests of the army, the best material in the corps of officers--the members of the old noble and gentle "army nobility"--were careful to shun this vice. These officers, whose families had often served the king as soldiers for four or five generations, held fast to a Spartan simplicity of life, and to the old Prussian independence of material comforts, and with them were all those who regarded their vocation as something loftier than an amusement. Otherwise, a most unsoldierlike luxury was spreading unhindered in all directions, causing the young subalterns especially to neglect their duties, and rendering them in great measure absolutely unfit for real hard work and privations. And despite the numerous orders levelled against them, these tendencies continued to increase, because of the lack of a good example in high quarters.

The plain and simple uniform in which so many great victories had been won no longer sufficed. New embellishments medals, cords, trimmings, or what not were eternally being devised. As though such mere external trumpery could create anew the now waning love for military service!

In what striking contrast stood the magnificent goblets of delicate porcelain and other costly materials, in which the officers of the Chinese Expedition offered champagne to their French comrades, to that broken-footed glass cup out of which--and in abominably bad wine--King William drank to the victors of St. Privat!

All became clear to Guntz as he wrote, and he felt as though a heavy burden were being lifted from his shoulders.

He concluded: "I can no longer regard as valuable the work which as an officer it is my duty to perform, and have therefore decided to resign my commission. Although I am only one small wheel in a large and complicated machine, I have still the right to give my opinion; and I am making use of that right because I recognise that the mechanical power which drives this machine is threatened with paralysis, and will, in my view, infallibly succumb unless there is an entire reconstruction of the whole fabric. That, I fear, is not to be expected within any reasonable time."

He laid down his pen, and looked thoughtfully at the closely written sheets.

Everything that he had set down had been well considered and frequently thought over; but was it right, after all, to send in his application just at this moment? Was it right for him to break the vow he had made to himself that he would test himself carefully, that he would pass a year in command of the battery before making his final decision? Ought he not to stand by the calling to which his life had been dedicated, until he could resign quite voluntarily, fully convinced, and without any extraneous considerations? Without, for instance, the danger of losing his life through the custom of this calling--a custom, just or unjust, but which at any rate was in operation and perfectly well known to him?

The lamp under the green shade began to burn less brightly, and flickered with a quick hissing sound. The hands of the cuckoo-clock pointed to half-past four.

Guntz got up and stretched himself. He walked firmly to the window, pushed the curtains far back, and opened both sides of the casement.

Outside the warm summer's night was giving place to the dawn of day. A cool morning breeze blew into the room, fluttering the curtains, and extinguishing the lamp's weak flame. It cooled the man's eyes and filled his lungs with fresh air.

Guntz drew himself up. He returned to the writing-table, placed the loose leaves carefully in order, and locked them in a drawer.

Right or wrong he would keep his word.

He scribbled a few words on a sheet of paper: "My Kläre, I love you unspeakably. You and the boy. Be brave!"

He glanced round to see where he should lay the paper. In the end he folded it up, and put it under a meteoric stone, shaped like a fungus, which during their honeymoon he had found on the sand-dunes of the Heligoland coast.

The servant knocked, and brought in the coffee. He had found the senior-lieutenant's bed untouched, and his face showed his surprise.

The coffee was too hot, but the water in the carafe was deliciously cold. Gütntz damped his handkerchief and wiped the ravages of the night from his brow and eyes.

Then he went again to the window and the refreshing morning breeze. He was in good spirits. He felt as if nothing untoward could happen to him that day.

There was a sound of hoofs in the street outside. The groom had brought the brown mare. He held the animal before the garden gate and carefully took a piece of straw out of her mane.

Gütntz told him to walk her quietly up and down. He must wait for Reimers, who would be sure to come directly.

Soon in between the measured paces of the led horse came the sound of a quicker step. Gütntz recognised the fidgety trot for that of Reimers horse "Jay." He went out of the house and through the iron gate into the street.

"Morning, my boy!" he said, and offered his hand to Reimers. Then he mounted, and both trotted down the street in silence.

Once outside the town Gütntz let his mare slow down. "We are in plenty of time," he said.

Suddenly he stopped and listened. A horse's trot and the rumbling of a carriage could be heard coming from the town.

"The others," said the senior-lieutenant. "Let us get on."

The pistol practice-ground lay half way up the incline upon a shelf-like terrace of the hillside, a smooth grassy space, surrounded on both sides by high bushes; at the lower end there was a shed built of strong boards, in which tools and targets were stored.

Gütntz and Reimers dismounted at the shed, and fastened up their horses by the bridle. Reimers pressed his friend's hand once more, gazing at him with anxious eyes. He could not speak.

They stood side by side on the edge of the terrace, whence they could look down upon the country road in the valley below. A carriage was approaching, followed by three riders: Landsberg, little Dr. von Fröben, his second, and Gretzschel, who was brought chiefly to look after the horses.

The carriage stopped at the foot of the hill. Kauerhof got out, with the pistol cases in his hand, and after him the surgeon-major and his assistant, both with instrument cases. The three other men rode slowly behind them up the steep incline.

Before the shed, brief polite greetings were exchanged, Gretzschel remaining there with the horses.

There was a singular expression of shyness on the faces of all. One might have fancied that these men were assembled for some guilty purpose. Gütntz alone looked frank and unembarrassed.

The prescribed attempts at reconciliation were unsuccessful. Gütntz shook his head in refusal.

Then Kauerhof began to measure the distance. He had long legs, and he made the fifteen paces as lengthy as possible.

Just at this moment the sun rose above the mountains on the other side of the valley.

Kauerhof loaded the pistols, and the seconds carried them to their principals. Gütntz nodded cheerfully to Reimers as he took his weapon.

The umpire then took up his position and convinced himself with a glance that all was prepared. The duellists were standing at their marked lines, the seconds at a little distance alongside of them. He took out his watch, and glancing at it said: "I shall count: ready, one, then three seconds; two, and again three seconds; then, stop! Between one and stop, the gentlemen may fire."

He glanced round once more. The four officers stood motionless in the clear light of the sun, Landsberg sideways, Gütntz with his broad chest facing his opponent. The junior surgeon wiped the moisture from his brow; Andreae tugged nervously at his hair.

The umpire counted.

Landsberg raised his pistol at once and fired. Gütntz heard the bullet whizz past on his left. He had directed his barrel a little to the side of his opponent's shoulder, and pressed the trigger. The shot missed fire. He had forgotten to cock the pistol.

The second attempt at reconciliation was also unsuccessful.

Again Kauerhof gave the word.

Güntz saw Landsberg's pistol aimed directly at his breast. Then Landsberg looked up, and for the hundredth part of a second caught his opponent's gaze.

Landsberg's aim was unerringly directed on his man, when suddenly his hand began to shake, and he fired blindly, just as he heard Güntz's bullet whistle past him.

Güntz stood unharmed, a happy smile on his good-natured, open face.

Reimers hastened up to him and seized his hand. He would have liked to throw his arms round the dear fellow's neck.

Now the reconciliation took place, and when the opponents shook hands Landsberg's glance fell before the honest eyes of the senior-lieutenant.

All traces of embarrassment vanished from the men's faces. There were sighs of relief, and hearty congratulations; the two doctors packed up their grisly instruments again; all were anxious to get away, and to report the fortunate result of the duel to their comrades. Reimers was on his horse and already starting off at a trot, when Güntz called to him: "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

And Reimers shouted back gaily: "The colonel's waiting. 'Three crosses,' my orders say!"

The senior-lieutenant rode slowly down. He himself had plenty of time to spare. It was only ten minutes after the half hour, and it was not until six o'clock that he was due at the tactical exercises.

The carriage and the three riders overtook him. Dr. von Fröben and Gretzschel greeted him with candid joy in their faces; Landsberg was a little stiff. The surgeon-major blew him a kiss from the carriage. Güntz responded cordially, and continued at his leisurely pace.

The colonel was looking out into the street from his high summer-house in the garden. Reimers recognised him from a distance, and as nothing better occurred to him he took off his cap and waved it in the air.

Falkenheim checked him energetically when he was preparing to dismount. "Stay where you are! Stay where you are!" he cried. "So all has gone well?"

"Yes, sir," answered Reimers, still out of breath with his quick ride.

The colonel heaved a sigh of relief.

"I am glad; very, very glad!" he said.

In the barrack-yard Gähler was waiting for his master. He handed him his helmet and bandolier and took the forage-cap in exchange.

The battery was ready to move on. Reimers set his horse to a short gallop and rode up to Güntz. "I beg to report myself, sir," he said. Güntz nodded to him smilingly, and gave the words of command in his clear, resonant voice.

In the midst of the exercises two riders suddenly approached from the town. At first it was difficult to recognise them in the thick dust; but Sergeant-major Heppner announced that he saw the colonel's big sorrel horse. It was in fact the colonel and his adjutant.

Güntz galloped up to them and gave his report.

Falkenheim thanked him.

"I only wanted to watch you for a little," he said simply. And his eyes shone joyfully on seeing the officer he had learnt to love stand unhurt before him.

He approached the battery and greeted them with his powerful voice: "Good morning, sixth battery!"

And the many-voiced reply was shouted back: "Good morning, sir!"

Falkenheim rode slowly along the ranks, taking stock of everything with his sharp eyes; then he spoke: "Senior-lieutenant Güntz, be kind enough to continue!"

It was a lucky day. Everything went like clockwork; there was not a hitch, not the smallest oversight.

At the conclusion of the exercises the colonel ordered the officers and non-commissioned officers to come to him. His criticism contained nothing but approbation, and he crowned his praise by saying: "I rejoice that the sixth battery, though under new leadership, has again proved

its excellence. And I am proud of commanding a regiment to which belong such admirable officers and non-commissioned officers and such a faultlessly trained battery."

He shook hands with Güntz, and whispered to him softly: "I rejoice doubly--threefold--a hundredfold, my dear Güntz."

Güntz gave the order to march.

He rode thoughtfully beside Reimers at the head of the battery. The colonel's unstinted praise was a great joy to him; but besides that he had found a still higher prize: for the first time during many months he had a heartfelt conviction of his vocation as an officer. He had done his duty this morning as if rejuvenated; all doubts had left him, and it did not seem as if a tinge of bitterness remained behind.

He thought of all those written sheets which he had locked in his desk during the night. When had he found his way through the wood? At the writing-table, or here in the rye-stubble in which the tracks of the gun-carriage wheels had made deep ruts?

Well, in any case he had done right not to break away suddenly from the time of probation on which he himself had determined; for it was certainly strange how a calm, steady man, such as he believed himself to be, could be so swayed backwards and forwards in opposite directions in such a short time. During the night he had been firmly resolved to retire; a few hours later this step seemed an impossibility to him.

Was there really so little, then, in his imagined calmness and steadfastness?

But he was glad that the time of probation, though not shortened, would, on the other hand, not have to be extended. He would command the battery for a year; by then he must have made his decision.

And for to-day he was determined to put no check on his joy and good humour.

Frau Kläre wondered at her husband, who would not leave her a moment in peace with his teasing and nonsense, and even waked the baby up from a sound sleep.

And Güntz stood beaming before the mother and child, laughing heartily at the angry howl set up by his little son, and lighted his cigar with a spill until the whole piece of paper was reduced to a cinder.

He had made that spill out of the farewell note he had placed under the fungus-like letterweight.

CHAPTER X

"Morning red, morning red,
Light me to my dying bed!"

(*Hauff.*)

Room IX. was still to remain "aristocratic"--as Weise satirically remarked--even after Baron Walther von Frielinghausen had moved over to the non-commissioned officers' quarters. A few days before the regiment left for the manœuvres, Count Egon Plettau arrived and took possession of Frielinghausen's locker.

All kinds of wild reports had been circulating in the battery about Plettau. Judging from these he appeared to be a perfect terror. A lieutenant who had had his ears boxed, and a sergeant who had been flung against a wall, played the chief part in these reports. But, as a matter of fact, of the whole battery only Heppner and the senior non-commissioned officers knew the mad count personally, and during the five years' detention in a fortress that Plettau had had to undergo, two sets of recruits had already come and gone without having made his acquaintance.

The inmates of Room IX. expected to see a pale man, bent and bowed with long imprisonment; but the new comrade bore a tolerably healthy appearance, and had a good-tempered, friendly face.

The count was handled very tenderly by the non-commissioned officers. They had received an intimation that as far as their duty permitted they were to do all they could to enable this child of

misfortune at last to complete his military service.

Count Egon Plettau received these attentions with calm complacency. "Children," he used to say--for so it was his habit to address his comrades--"people know quite well that they owe me respect. To have been eight years accomplishing a two-years' term of service, and not to have finished it yet--that is a performance that cannot be sufficiently appreciated. Really, I ought to be shown at a fair! Strive, therefore, to follow my example!"

He looked forward to the manœuvres with a real and almost child-like pleasure; for, in spite of his eight years' service, he had never taken part in them. "Something" had always come in the way.

Even Güntz had often to bite his lips to keep himself from laughing at Plettau's absurdities. He, too, had been curious to make the acquaintance of the notorious gunner-count, and he, too, was agreeably surprised. Plettau seemed to him to be a very good fellow, terribly frivolous, no doubt, but not bad by any means. He was glad to find he had not been mistaken in his judgment: viewed impartially, the cause of Plettau's first two acts of insubordination had been malice on the part of his superior almost amounting to cruelty; and even the last five years had been added to his term of imprisonment simply because he had knocked down a sergeant who was proved to have ill-treated a comrade. All things considered, the gay placidity of temper with which the count had borne his fate was really remarkable.

For the autumn manœuvres the men and horses were all redistributed to serve the various guns. Vogt and Klitzing remained in their places, and for the rest gun six was served as follows:

Gun Six.

		(Horses)
Gun-leader	Corporal Vertler	Christine
Lead-driver	Driver Nowack	Zenobia, Egon
Centre-driver	Driver Inoslavsky	Viper, Eidechse
Wheel-driver	Bombardier Sickel	Turk, Cavalier
Gunners	Count Plettau, Wolf, Truchsess, Klitzing, Vogt.	

The leader of the third column was Ensign Gysinger, who had just joined the regiment from the Military Academy, and had exchanged with Lieutenant Landsberg, transferred to the first battery. Heimert had for the first time taken over the distribution of the horses. But when Heppner saw how the six horses for gun six had been placed, he shook his head.

"That won't do," said he to Heimert. "The lead and centre horses are all right, but the wheel-driver must have another beast under him. The Turk is too old; especially as gun six has always the longest way to go on the march."

"That's just what I told the captain," put in Heimert. "It's all Wegstetten's doing. I wanted Cyrus for the wheel, and old Turk for the baggage-waggon, but as the other five are light bays, Wegstetten insisted on having the Turk, That's why he has put Sickel on him, our best driver. He thought *he'd* make him go at any rate, if the worst came to the worst."

Heppner remained thoughtful. At last he said, "Yes; but then old Turk hasn't much more go left in him. Don't you think we could arrange it differently?" "No," answered the deputy sergeant-major; "you know that when Wegstetten has once got a thing into his head there's nothing more to be done."

The sergeant-major shrugged his shoulders. "We two, at any rate," he said, "won't have the responsibility. I only hope it will turn out all right! We've got some damned hilly country for the manœuvres this time, as it happens. One part lies close to the frontier, and is over 2000 feet high. Downright mountain-artillery I call it!" he growled in conclusion. But it was impossible to oppose the express orders of the captain.

On August 30 the battery was ready in the barrack square at six o'clock in the morning to start for the manœuvres.

Shortly after reveille various rumours had been current in the stables and in the barrack-rooms that something had happened at the Heppners'; and just as the men were getting into their places the news spread from one to the other that the sergeant-major's wife was dead. As this was a private and personal matter, it could not give cause for the slightest delay. Heppner, of course, remained at home for the funeral, and Kämpchen meanwhile took over his duties as sergeant-major. However, it considerably damped the spirits of the men in setting out; and a fine rain which began to fall did not tend to restore their good humour. The sixth battery marched just behind the corps of trumpeters; but the inspiriting strains of the Hohenfriedberger March were entirely out of harmony with the moody faces of the men and the dismal weather.

Klitzing again sat next to Vogt on the limber of gun six. How unlike the day on which they had started for the gun-practice at Whitsuntide!

"It's a bad beginning," said he to his friend; and half to himself he added, "Who knows how it will end?"

The rain gradually became heavier, and at the first halt the colonel ordered the men to put on their cloaks. The gunners, huddled up in their seats, kept fairly dry; but the riders got their high boots full of water, so that as they went up and down in their saddles their feet splashed with a sound like butter in a churn. During the longest halt the drivers lay on their backs in the grass, and as they stretched their legs up in the air, the water trickled down out of their boots in streams.

The manœuvres began, and continued their course, one day very much like another, only the scene changing. The brigade would assemble in the early morning. Cavalry scouts told off for the purpose, had generally gone on in advance and sent back their reports. These hussars or Uhlans were marvellously clever fellows, who never failed to find out the enemy. Then the advance-guard was set in motion, and after a certain time the main body followed. The batteries were usually ordered to the front during the march. If they reached the scene of action unnoticed by the enemy and wanted to open fire upon him unawares, the men had to crawl almost on all-fours in line; then there was a mad gallop forwards over hedges and ditches when they found themselves within range of the hostile fire; and when the gunners were almost jolted out of their seats the men of the infantry would burst into loud peals of laughter as they lay sideways on the ground. It was all very well for them to laugh then; but when the manœuvres were over, and they were on the march back to their quarters, they cast envious glances at the artillerymen as they took their seats and were driven home on their hard-seated chariots.

In the skirmishes, too, during the manœuvres, it was the artillery who got the best of it. The infantry had to be always on the march, then firing off their blank cartridges either stooping or lying down, and at last making a bayonet charge on the disorganised foe. The batteries, on the other hand, generally remained in the same position, and only now and then fired a shot, reserving their ammunition for doings on a larger scale during the last few days of the manœuvres. In this way they had a splendid view of the fighting, and could quietly look on as the dark lines of rifles approached nearer and nearer; or when an officer commanding a squadron of cavalry, thirsting for fame, made an impossible, but very daring attack.

On off-days Vogt lent a sturdy helping hand in gathering in the harvest. It delighted him to be able, as of old, to reach up and put the sheaves on the top of the well-loaded waggons, and to find that he could still wield a scythe with the same vigorous strokes, mowing the scanty second crop of grass on the mountain meadows just as close to the ground as ever. While Klitzing lay down after his exertions and rested his weary limbs, Vogt would spend hours over such field-work; and the fatigue after this heaven-blest labour was far more grateful to him than the idle, lazy time a soldier often enjoys directly the arduous period of his early training is over. In the evenings after bugle-call, out he would go again to mow a strip of grass before dusk; and when returning, scythe on shoulder to the court-yard of his quarters, he would sometimes quite forget that he still wore the uniform of a soldier.

The sight of the various couples who, lovingly entwined, promenaded the green lanes, suddenly appearing and as suddenly disappearing behind the thick hedges, would recall him to actuality. He would then bethink him how odd it seemed that he himself cared so little about womenfolk. Now and then a pretty fresh girl would take his fancy, and he might have liked well enough to take her face between his hands and give her a hearty kiss; but he was too bashful, and he felt no desire to put himself under the tutelage of the painted ladies of the garrison town who smiled so engagingly at all the lads. The rough village maidens suited him better; but one evening he had an experience which raised grave doubts in his mind as to the virtue of even those rustic beauties.

A woman's voice shrieking for help had suddenly resounded from a little shady hollow not far from where Vogt was strolling, smoking his evening pipe. He instantly ran forward, crying out in clear tones the first words that came into his head: "Halt! halt! Who goes there?" Drawing nearer he saw first a couple of soldiers in hasty flight through the trees, and afterwards a curious something which he could not at once make out.

When he came closer he discovered that some of his comrades had been playing off one of their jokes upon a village girl. They had gathered up her skirts above her head and tied them together with string; this they called "making a tulip." She was running round in a comical enough fashion, her lower limbs being entirely exposed, as she wore no under-clothes; while her arms and the upper part of her body were imprisoned in the woollen skirts, whence issued her muffled protests.

Vogt said, very politely: "Wait; I will set you free;" and pulling out his knife, cut the string, whereupon the petticoats fell down, and a touselled head made its appearance. The girl hid her face in her hands, as if ashamed; but through her fingers she peeped expectantly up at the soldier. Then she let her hands fall, making manifest her hard and coarse but yet undeniable beauty; and her rather large, full mouth smiled tenderly at the gunner.

But the doughty champion stood dumb and unresponsive; so after a moment the girl swung sharply round, muttering "Stupid ass!" and departed through the gathering dusk.

It was on the Monday of the third week after leaving the garrison that the two divisions of the army-corps began manœuvring against each other. The troops, now doubled in number, presented a gay and lively picture as they assembled at the meeting-place in the brilliant sunshine. Summer seemed to have returned that day for a short while, so hot were the rays that poured down upon the earth from the deep-blue vault of heaven. The heat, however, was not oppressive, modified as it was by the cool mountain breezes.

The sixth battery of the 80th Regiment, Eastern Division Field Artillery, had been told off to join the advance-guard, and was awaiting the signal to start. Gunners and drivers stood behind the guns, or close to the horses, all ready to mount at the word of command. Vogt was lost in amazement at Klitzing's demeanour, for he had never seen his friend in such high spirits. His eyes shone and his cheeks were slightly flushed. Vogt thought to himself what a good-looking fellow the clerk was with this touch of animation. His appearance had certainly been much improved by soldiering. Vogt was quite pleased; shaking his finger good-naturedly at him, "Hullo, Heinrich!" he asked, "haven't you been liquoring up a bit on the sly? or is this one of your lucky days?"

And Klitzing answered, "Ah! I feel to-day--I don't know myself how I feel. I feel so strong, so well--I that am usually so shaky, I feel as if some great piece of luck were going to happen to me to-day. Do you know, if I had ever felt like this at home I should have bought a lottery ticket and should certainly have won the biggest prize!"

"Well," rejoined Vogt, "mind you don't miss the opportunity the next time such a day comes!"

The clerk shook his head. "Ah, no!" he returned; "such days only come once, and then never again. I shall just have to give up the Great Prize and die a poor devil. But it's good to feel so jolly for once!"

He took Vogt by the shoulders and looked into his face with happy eyes.

Suddenly, a gruff voice called out from beyond the horses: "You fellows have far too good a time of it! I don't know what you're always grinning about!"

Bombardier Sickel was looking round at them with a surly expression, and he shook his head contemptuously. He, being a driver, did not think much of the gunners. What an easy life fellows like them had! While he--what had he not got to see to? He went up to his team and looked anxiously at Turk, the horse he was to ride. With drooping head the gelding stood there limp and spiritless. He had refused his food that morning. What could one do mounted on a sick wheeler? Sickel had told the gun-leader about this; but it was too late to replace the horse, as the baggage-waggon was already under weigh. Poor Turk must do for to-day somehow.

The advance-guard began to move, a battalion of infantry in front, then the battery, and behind it the two other battalions of the regiment. They made their way upwards from the bottom of the valley along a moderately steep road, on each side of which was very hilly ground.

They had proceeded for about an hour or more when at last the cavalry-scouts bringing further orders were seen returning; coming not from in front but from the left, down a hill covered with undergrowth. They seemed in a great hurry, and their horses were covered with foam. The fore-most portion of the advance-guard at once, therefore, wheeled round, and leaving the road took the nearest way up the hill: a steep zig-zag, and a stiff piece of work. The gun-teams strained every muscle and took short, quick steps, trying to overcome the weight of the guns. Sergeant-major Heppner, who was riding behind the last gun, growled out: "I tell you, it's downright mountain artillery, this!" and he trotted a few steps on in front to find out how the Turk was getting on. The light bay was panting with exhaustion and dripping with sweat. Heppner scratched his head: little more could be expected of the poor beast that day. But worse was to come.

The battery had scarcely accomplished the climb up the hill when the order came to form line. A gentle slope of even ground had still to be covered, and the battery was to get into position as

quickly as possible behind the crest of the hill. The words of command rang out in quick succession: "Trot!" and "Gallop!" The ensign wheeled his column much too far to the right, just where the lie of the land was steepest; and Corporal Vertler, the leader of gun six, thinking it too near, took a circuit twice as great as was necessary. To get to the crest of the hill in this way was utterly impossible.

Heppner looked anxiously across. With swift determination he gave over his duties as sergeant-major to Sergeant Wiegandt, then galloped to the right flank to try and mend matters somehow if possible. But the disaster had already begun.

Gun six had from a gallop dropped into a trot, and from a trot into a walk. At last the six horses could not drag the gun one inch further.

The ground was covered with smooth coarse grass that gave the horses very little foothold. Trembling and snorting, the animals just managed to support the weight of the gun, while, straining forwards and pawing the ground, they tried to get a firmer footing. The gunners had got down, and grasping the spokes of the wheels did what they could to assist.

The sergeant-major kept close by and tried especially to egg on the wheel-driver.

"Buck up, Sickel!" he cried. "Show us what you can make of this! You want to be thought our best driver, and you can't get up a little hill like this! Get on! Put your back into it!"

The bombardier almost hung on the Turk's neck so as to release the weight on his haunches, while the gun actually moved forward two or three fractions of an inch. But suddenly Turk's hind legs gave way under him, the animal collapsed and slid down upon the slippery ground.

The jerk caused by the fall made the other five horses also lose their hold. They began to tread backwards.

"Put on the dag-chain!" roared Heppner.

Vogt darted forward, quick as lightning, and slung the chain on the spokes of the wheel. It bore the strain for a moment, then there was a sharp metallic sound: the chain had snapped.

The gun began to roll down the hill, faster and faster, dragging the six powerless horses behind it. One after the other they stumbled, slipped down, and were whirled away, kicking wildly, or entangled in the drag-ropes.

The sergeant-major swore a terrible oath when he saw what had happened. Springing from his horse he threw the reins to Plettau, who was standing near, and ran down the hill. Chance had prevented the worst from happening. At the upper edge of the precipice there was a hollow where formerly stones may have been broken after having been quarried below; the surface was now level, and here the gun had come to a standstill.

But the scene was terrible enough. The six horses lay together in a heap. Again and again they tried to raise themselves, but in such close proximity one hindered the other. Amidst the panting and snorting of the frantic animals could be heard the groans of Sickel, who was lying somewhere under one of them.

Heppner had recovered his self-possession in a moment. He called the four gunners to him, and was himself the first to jump down into the hollow. Vertler, the gun-leader, was close by on his horse, but scarcely seemed able to grasp what had happened. Heppner caught sight of Sickel at once. He lay with his left leg under the Turk's body, and was shielding himself behind the neck of the gelding to avoid being struck by the hoofs of the centre horse, who was kicking furiously.

"Here! Vogt and Truchsess!" commanded Heppner. "We'll pull him out." They grasped the bombardier under the arms and tried to drag him out from under the horse. But it was not so easy, and at the very moment when they stooped for a second attempt, one of the lead horses made a sudden movement which knocked Vogt down. The gunner got entangled in the drag-ropes and could not get up again.

Eidechse, the centre horse, again began to kick. She had a yawning wound in the buttock from which the blood streamed, and she writhed, mad with pain. Lying on her back she turned herself to and fro, and the gleaming iron shoes flashed nearer and nearer to Vogt's head, at last striking him so that his helmet flew off and the blood gushed from beneath his fair, close-cropped hair.

Klitzing saw the increasing peril, and of a sudden flung himself blindly beneath the infuriated, plunging hoofs.

Like lightning it had flashed across his brain how Vogt had once shed his blood for him. Was not this the time to show his gratitude? This was perhaps the object of his existence to save the life of that other, stronger than he. And was not this his lucky day? He felt in him the strength of a giant. Yes, he would stop those terrible hoofs until his friend could get free. And in an ecstasy of confidence he threw himself like a shield between his friend and danger.

The next moment he had received a furious kick in the side. He was hurled to a distance, and

fell lifeless to the ground.

Vogt in the meanwhile had freed himself and risen quickly, only to turn faint a moment later. He sat down on the hill-side and supported his aching head in his hands.

Again the sergeant-major swore violently. In despair he looked up for a moment from the terrible medley and noted the gun-leader still staring down into the hollow with vacant eyes.

"You fellow!" he shouted, "it's no time to go to sleep, at any rate!" With admirable clearness he gave his orders: "Ride as fast as your beast will go, and fetch the doctor and the veterinary surgeon! And ambulance-orderlies as well!" And immediately afterwards he added: "And send the team belonging to gun five here, and report the mess we're in!" For the service must not suffer, and the gun should be brought up to the line of fire as soon as possible.

The corporal galloped away and was soon out of sight.

Heppner now approached the entangled heap of bodies from the other side. He then set himself to extricate the lead horses from the different parts of the harness that trammelled them, and helped them to get up. They appeared to be uninjured, shook themselves and moved restlessly to and fro. He made the lead-driver take them to one side, and then turned to the centre horses. Inoslavsky gave him a helping hand. The near centre horse was uninjured, but Eidechse had a gaping wound in the buttock. Wolf had to hold her by the snaffle, and found it difficult to manage her. The near wheeler got up readily; but the Turk, beneath whose body Sickel was writhing in agony, was badly hurt. The near hind fetlock seemed to be crushed. At last the gelding managed to raise himself a little on his fore-legs, and at the same moment Truchsess dragged out the wheel-driver from under the saddle. Sickel made a weak attempt to stand up, but fell back in a swoon.

The sergeant-major wiped the perspiration from his brow. Damnation! That had been a bad piece of work! He looked round him: three men and two horses knocked out of time. Well, it might have been even worse.

Klitzing's was the most serious case. The clerk still lay there motionless, and only the blood-stained froth at his mouth, stirring as he breathed, showed there was still life in the motionless body. The sergeant-major went up to the unconscious man and carefully placed his head on the haversack. He had never been able to endure this sickly fellow, but, by Jove, what he had done that day was first-class! It was grand! Would he never recover from his swoon? Heppner took a brandy-flask from his saddle-bag, and gently moistened the gunner's forehead with the spirit. He tried to force a drop between his lips, but in vain; there was no sound or movement in response.

The sergeant-major looked impatiently for some sign of the doctor's arrival. The other two wounded men seemed in less serious case. The bombardier regained consciousness as the brandy touched his lips; he took a good mouthful, and answered the sergeant-major's question as to his condition with: "All right, sir. Only my left leg feels a bit queer. I must have given it a wrench."

Vogt even tried to stand up and assume the regulation attitude in speaking to the sergeant-major but he staggered back again, and said faintly that his head was going round, otherwise there was nothing wrong with him.

From the heights above was now heard the sound of horses' hoofs and the clanking of harness. It was Corporal Vertler with the team belonging to gun five; he announced that a trumpeter had gone to find a doctor, and that the ambulance-orderlies would soon be here.

The sergeant-major had now no more time to bestow on the wounded men, who could be left to wait for the doctor. He busied himself with the harnessing of the gun.

Vogt leaned against the slope of the hill, resting his dizzy head in his hands.

The blood trickled through his fingers and dropped upon his knees. Although he tried to think it all over, he could not understand what had happened to him. The horse had kicked him on the forehead--that much he was able to recollect, and he also clearly remembered that afterwards he had again seen the hoof coming in his direction; but from that moment his memory was a blank.

Sliding and slipping, the hospital-orderly now came hurrying down the hill. He saw that three men were lying there; two of them had their eyes open, but not the third, so he addressed himself to the latter. He gave him ether to smell, tried to administer a stimulant, and moistened his forehead. He unfastened and opened his coat and shirt, and slapped the palms of his hands. All in vain; but at least the poor devil still breathed, though with a gurgling and rattling in his chest.

The orderly then turned to the two others. He gave Vogt a piece of medicated cotton-wool to press on his wound, put the bottle of cordial to his lips and made him drink. Vogt took a good mouthful; the liquid tasted acid and refreshing, and cleared his head wonderfully.

Sickel declined the draught with impatience. "Get away with your slops, you bone-breaker!" he said; "but if you've got any brandy I'll have it."

The hospital-orderly had none. "Well, what's the matter with you, then?" he asked.

"Something's wrong with my pins," answered the driver, and pointed to his leg.

"Is that it?" said the orderly. "You don't seem very bad on the whole. But what's wrong with this one? I can't get him to come to," and he pointed to the motionless form of Klitzing.

"Perhaps cold water would bring him round," said Sickel. "Down there to the left there must be a stream. You can hear it running."

"Then I'll just go down there," returned the orderly. He laid the bottle of cordial at Vogt's feet and climbed down through the brushwood.

Vogt slowly raised his head and looked about him in surprise. The draught had revived him wonderfully. Where was he? A horse was standing near him bleeding from a gaping wound in the flank. Not far off lay one of his comrades stretched out like a corpse, and pale as death, with eyes closed and blood-stained froth on his lips. Why, it was Klitzing! He clutched at his forehead, and all at once the curtain that had clouded his memory parted. He realised what had happened after he had seen the hoof coming in the direction of his skull. A dark body had thrown itself between him and the glistening iron--and then the blow had been struck. There had been a terrible, hollow sound, and then--then that body had been hurled into the air.

Suddenly he understood it all: Klitzing had sacrificed himself for him, his friend had saved him from the death-dealing blow of that iron-shod hoof, and there he now lay upon the grass, pale, unconscious--perhaps dead.

At this moment the unconscious man's eyelids opened at last with difficulty, his dull gaze went searching round, then rested upon Vogt with an expression of boundless devotion. Vogt darted to the clerk's side, threw himself down, and took the pale face between his hands.

"Heinrich!" he cried. "My dear good Heinrich! What have you done for me?"

Bright tears ran down his cheeks, and through his sobs he could only stammer again and again: "Heinrich! my dear good fellow!"

Klitzing tried to speak. His lips moved slightly, but no word came from them. A feeble hand was raised to his friend's shoulder, stroked it languidly, then fell heavily back. Again the eyes closed and remained shut, although Vogt went on earnestly begging and praying: "Heinrich! Heinrich! Tell me what is the matter! Can't I help you?"

Sickel gazed thoughtfully at the two friends. He remembered the moment of departure, and how gay and merry the two gunners had been together. Suddenly he turned his head to one side and listened.

"The doctor is coming," he said.

Immediately afterwards the portly assistant medical-officer, Rademacher, came down into the hollow. "Well, what is the matter here?" he asked.

He turned first of all to the driver, but Sickel motioned him away; "Excuse me, sir, but there's plenty of time for me. The other man there needs you more."

Rademacher bent down over Klitzing. When he saw the blood-stained froth on the lips his face involuntarily put on a grave expression. He laid his ear to the chest and listened for a long time.

"What happened to the man?" he inquired.

Vogt pointed to Eidechse, who was gazing across at them with dull eyes, and answered: "She kicked him in the chest."

"Badly?"

"Yes, sir. He threw himself between, so that I should not be kicked again."

The fat doctor looked up surprised. This was an unusually touching incident in the rough life of a soldier. He saw the tears in the young man's honest eyes, and he understood.

"Then you were great friends?"

"Yes, sir. And--and--how is he now?"

Rademacher looked hesitatingly down at the mortally wounded man, and answered evasively: "Well--we must wait and see."

Once more he listened to the breathing, then stood up. According to his diagnosis the injured man had but a few hours to live, at the most--perhaps even only minutes.

"Has he recovered consciousness at all?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; but only for a very short time."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"But what's wrong with you?" he said, turning to the bombardier.

"My leg's rather queer, sir. Old Turk fell on it, and it's sprained, I suppose. But I expect you can soon put it right, sir."

Rademacher removed the driver's riding-trousers with the aid of the hospital-orderly.

His examination was soon over.

"You have a double fracture of the thigh," he said. "But we'll soon set it for you."

Sickel listened open-mouthed.

"Then I shall be ready to leave when I get my discharge?" he inquired.

The medical officer smiled. "No, my friend, it will take from four to six weeks."

This was too much for the driver, and he grumbled loudly. He would cheerfully have been more hurt, although, as it was, he had had a narrow shave--but not to be able to get his discharge--it was hard lines indeed!

Meanwhile the ambulance-orderly had put a bandage round Vogt's head. Rademacher gazed thoughtfully down on Klitzing. At last he turned away; it was a hopeless case. He sent the trumpeter, who had come with him for an ambulance-waggon. He had seen one standing in the road not far off.

Restlessly he walked up and down, trying to shorten the time of waiting. Every time he passed the clerk he looked at the lips through which still came that heavy breathing. It was a perfect marvel that the man still lived. Three ribs were broken, and they had wounded the lung so severely that a violent hæmorrhage had ensued.

Four stretcher-bearers came down the hill at last, carrying two stretchers. Klitzing was first placed on one of them.

"Where is he to go?" asked the foremost stretcher-bearer. Rademacher considered a moment, and then answered:

"Up yonder, right on the brow of the hill, there's a farm, manor-house, or something of the sort. Take him there. On my responsibility."

The stretcher-bearers set out, Vogt joining them. The doctor had nodded assent to his beseeching glance.

Sickel was just going to be carried away when two veterinary surgeons arrived to look after the injured horses.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the driver, "but I should like so much to know what's wrong with my beast."

Rademacher told the stretcher-bearers to wait. The case of the horse was diagnosed as quickly as that of the rider. The vet. raised himself and said to his colleague: "The off hind-pastern is fractured."

"Can anything be done?" asked the driver.

The other shrugged his shoulders: "No, it's all up with him," he said.

Sickel looked across at the Turk. "Poor old fellow!" he muttered to himself. Then he made them carry him up to the bay's head, and gently took hold of the tuft of hair on his forehead, caressing him. Turk raised himself with difficulty, and rubbed his nose against his driver's leg. Then the bombardier turned himself impatiently on to the other side, and cried to the stretcher-bearers to make haste. "Now get me away quickly!" Turk gazed after the stretcher with his large, mournful eyes, and as it disappeared behind the edge of the declivity he snorted piteously.

Soon after the hollow was just as peaceful and deserted as it had been early that morning, with blackbirds building their nests in the wild luxuriance of the beech-trees. But the grass and the bushes were trampled down everywhere; the spot looked like the scene of a fight, and in the middle of the battle-field lay the carcase of poor Turk. Late that evening some soldiers came with lifting apparatus and took the ponderous dead beast to the nearest knacker's yard.

When Vogt and the stretcher-bearers had climbed to the top of the hill and saw the building to which the doctor had directed them, they stopped short. Dr. Rademacher had spoken of a manor-house or farm; but what they saw before them looked more like a castle. However, as there was not another roof to be seen near or far, they could not be making any mistake.

The stretcher-bearers looked through a gate surmounted by a count's coronet, and saw the

front door of the building. Not a sign of life was anywhere visible. Vogt pulled the bell; but a considerable time elapsed before there was any movement on the other side of the grating. Just as he was about to ring a second time, a white-haired old woman appeared on the threshold of the door at the top of the front steps. She was dressed like any other old peasant woman of the neighbourhood. She walked slowly to the gate along the paved pathway, a bunch of keys in her hand.

One of the soldiers addressed her:

"Tell us, please, can you give this man here a bed, and let us have one for another as well? They have both met with an accident, and for the present cannot be moved any further."

The old woman looked at the unconscious corpse-like form on the stretcher for a time without speaking, then said, in a tranquil voice:

"Oh, yes, there is room enough here."

She unlocked the gate, and let Vogt and the stretcher-bearers in.

"Where is the other?" she then asked; and the soldier answered: "He will soon follow."

The woman nodded silently. She locked the gate behind them, and then turned towards a wing of the building. The stretcher-bearer, walking close behind her, whispered: "This one won't be a burden to you long. The end must soon come." Again the old woman gazed thoughtfully at the face that looked so deathly pale on the grey linen cushion of the stretcher. She hesitated; then all at once she turned right round and went up the front steps of the main building. "We can find him a bed here," she murmured. The three soldiers stepped into a lofty hall. A softened, mellow light from without fell through a stained-glass window, and the floor was paved with shining tiles, on which the soldiers' nail-studded boots clattered discordantly. Vogt and the other two men opened their eyes in wonder; but the woman went on further, threw wide open two high folding-doors, and ushered them into a spacious room. "I will bring sheets," she said, and did not herself enter.

The stretcher-bearers put down their burden and gave a deep breath, gazing round them in surprise. The room was square. The bright daylight streamed in through two windows that reached to the ceiling. The floor was beautifully inlaid with wood of different colours, and carved oak panelling covered the walls. Against a side wall stood a broad, low bed, over which a faded quilted silk coverlet was spread, and there was a carved wooden canopy fixed to the wall above, from which curtains had formerly hung. The design of the wood-work was surmounted by a royal crown.

The old woman soon returned with a pair of fine snow-white linen sheets.

"He's to go in there?" asked the soldier, pointing to this bed of state. She assented with a nod of the head, and made haste to prepare the bed, which she had ready in a few moments.

The loud, clear sound of the bell was heard once more. "That's the other one," said the soldier; and the woman left the room with her quiet, shuffling steps.

The two stretcher-bearers now began to undress Klitzing with their practised hands, and the clerk was soon lying beneath the silken coverlet, the royal crown over his head. Then one of the men asked: "What shall we do now?" and the other answered: "Well, we'd better go back to the ambulance waggon, anyhow. The doctor will have arrived by this time. You can stop here," he said to Vogt, and they left the two friends alone.

Vogt had been standing still in the middle of the room, his head feeling quite clear again; but suddenly once more all became dark before his eyes, and he had to sit down on one of the huge armchairs that stood against the wall. Was this not all a bad dream? There on the white pillow lay Klitzing, still unconscious, looking more dead than alive. Vogt went and knelt down beside him, and pressed his hot face against the cool silk of the coverlet. Would his faithful friend never wake again, not even for a moment, so that he might thank him? But Klitzing's eyelids remained closed, and there was no movement of the body, only the rapid, stertorous breathing.

The shrill sound of the bell broke the silence for the third time, and immediately after the senior staff-surgeon, Andreae, entered the room, followed by Dr. Rademacher and a hospital orderly. He gave a rapid glance of surprise at the unusual surroundings, and went at once to the bed.

Vogt had risen at his entrance. Andreae nodded to him, and pointing to Klitzing, asked: "Has he never recovered consciousness?"

"No, sir."

The medical-officer then bent his head to the injured man's chest, and listened to his breathing for some time. Finally he felt his pulse. The hand fell back as if lifeless upon the coverlet.

"Unfortunately you are right," he said to Rademacher; and as the other looked questioningly at him he added, shrugging his shoulders, "Nothing can be done."

So saying he went up to Vogt, and laid his hand kindly upon the young man's arm: "Dr. Rademacher has told me," he said, "how the poor fellow sacrificed himself for your sake. It grieves me very much to have to say it, but I cannot hide the truth from you. Your friend has indeed given his life for yours; he has but a short time to live."

Vogt remained fixed in the stiff soldierly attitude he had assumed; otherwise he felt he would have fallen to the ground. "Then, sir," he stammered, "will he never wake up again?"

"That no one can tell," answered the surgeon. "I hardly think so."

"But I may stay with him?"

"Yes, certainly. You are quartered here for to-night. You yourself are invalided in any case, and to-morrow your friend will not last till then, I fear, probably not even till this evening. So pull yourself together, my man, and be proud that you have had such a brave fellow for a friend. Friendship even unto death! There are not many like that nowadays. God knows, I wish we could help the poor fellow!"

Andreae was quite affected by the unusual circumstances of the case; but he had other duties, and dared not indulge his feelings. He drew himself up, and continued in firm tones: "We must dress your wound for you too, Vogt; but first I ought to set the driver's leg."

"We must go," he said, turning to the others; "the gunner will remain with his comrade for the present."

Vogt followed the doctor with his eyes. When the door closed he turned them towards the pale face of his dear friend. It was true then? Klitzing had given his life for him. And no one could do anything to help. There was a hot sensation in his throat, and then at last his sorrow found relief in a flood of tears.

After a time he looked again at his friend. How white he looked as he lay there! And how thin the face appeared against the white sheet! Klitzing had indeed refined, distinguished-looking features, and one could easily take him for a real gentleman lying in that magnificent bed, if the shabby dust-covered uniform were not hanging over the back of the chair close by. Vogt remembered how he had sometimes teased his friend about his sickly pallor; he racked his brains to think whether he had not wounded his feelings in other ways, and reproached himself for every harsh word he could remember using towards Klitzing. How much more friendly and affectionate he might often have been!

The doctors left the castle at last, having given the hospital-orderly the necessary instructions to carry out during their absence. As Rademacher was the medical officer on duty, he went the rounds once more before leaving; and Vogt, whose head had been re-banded and who had scarcely thought of meat and drink, now took some milk-soup at his desire.

Nerve-exhaustion and loss of blood soon made themselves felt. Ensnconcing himself on a hard sofa that stood at the head of Klitzing's bed, he fell into a heavy sleep.

The sound of voices roused him. He opened his eyes, and it was a considerable time before he realised where he was. Again the voices spoke. A conversation was evidently going on in the garden outside between two people, a man and a woman. Vogt went to the window and looked out. Close to the wall of the house vegetables had been planted. A bearded man was digging the beds with a spade; the old woman was assisting him by breaking up the clods of earth with a hoe.

"But I can't understand, mother," said the man, "why you gave him the Princes' Room."

The old woman stopped her work for a moment and leant upon the handle of her hoe. Then in her quiet monotonous voice she replied: "They told me he would soon die, and the dead are the greatest kings on earth. They are free. They have no more desires, no more cares. No one can help or harm them any more."

The son said nothing, and both worked on busily.

Without thinking what he was doing Vogt watched them for a time at their digging and hoeing, and when he turned back into the room the heavy atmosphere of the long unventilated apartment gave him a momentary sense of oppression.

But in the meantime something had happened, something that made him suddenly stand still, speechless. Klitzing had awakened.

The sick man had moved his head to one side; his eyes were wide open, and he was looking through the long window. His gaze wandered till it rested on his friend, and apparently recognising him brightened with intense pleasure; then it returned to the picture framed by the window. Undazzled, his eyes looked out upon the radiance of the setting sun, already half below the horizon. The face of the dying man was lighted up by quiet happiness. He stood on the

threshold of Paradise, and seemed already to behold it in that fair vision of distant landscape bathed in the departing glow of daylight. The sun's rays kissed the eyes of the dying man, and he appeared to live but by their light. He gazed fixedly on the vanishing disk until it sank out of sight. When he could see it no longer an expression of fear passed over his countenance, as though he dreaded the darkness and sought something that had disappeared from view.

Then he closed his eyes, and found Paradise.

CHAPTER XI

"Reservists they may rest,
Reservists may rest;
And if reservists rest may have,
Then may reservists rest."

(Song of the Reserve.)

Thursday, September 19th, four P.M., was fixed for the funeral of Gunner Heinrich Karl Klitzing, "accidentally killed on September 16th, and to be buried in the nearest convenient churchyard." The order ended with the words; "The cost of the funeral shall be provisionally defrayed by the regiment."

During the intervening three days the manœuvring force had moved on to the plain, so that they lay at a distance of nearly fifteen miles from the castle. On foot this would mean a march of four hours, and it was therefore impossible to allow many of the men to take part in the funeral. On Wednesday evening the sergeant read out the order that "those who wished to attend the ceremony, and felt able to undertake the fatiguing march there and back, should come forward."

The men looked grave. Nearly all of them would have liked to show this last sign of respect to the comrade who had died so honourable a death; but to be on their feet for eight hours, and that after the fatigue of the manœuvres, was too much.

Only three gave in their names: Count Plettau, Wolf, and Truchsess,

Senior-lieutenant Güntz looked surprised. He had never expected it from the first two, and such a decision from the fat brewer certainly showed great devotion. But, in any case, their intentions were excellent, and so they must have their way.

He himself would see to Vogt, who was again on duty, the wound on his forehead covered with plaster; the gunner should ride on the box of his own carnage. For he, as the officer commanding the battery, Reimers as its lieutenant, and the sergeant-major, were, in a way, obliged to attend the funeral. Besides these, Sergeant Wiegandt was to go with them as representative of the other non-commissioned officers; while head-quarters Colonel Falkenheim and Major Schrader had notified their intention of being present with their adjutants.

At the end of one of the wings of the castle there was a small room arranged as a chapel, and an enclosure which adjoined the park was used as a graveyard.

A fine drizzle was falling, so the short service was held in the chapel.

Nothing was lacking in the obsequies of the poor clerk. The major, from his private means, had doubled the sum to be spent on the funeral, A beautiful oak coffin therefore stood in the centre of the little chapel, covered with the wreaths sent by the battery comrades of the dead man, by Schrader on the part of the division, and by Falkenheim on that of the regiment. They were thick wreaths of laurel, adorned with simple ribbon bows. The white-haired widow of the keeper of the castle had also picked all the flowers she could find still spared by autumn, and had made wreaths of many-coloured asters and dahlias, with which she had decorated the coffin, somewhat fantastically. While rummaging in the attics, she had found in some corner a chest, forgotten for perhaps a hundred years, full of old-fashioned moulded candles, and with these she had filled two many-branched candelabra.

The pastor stood at the head of the coffin and began the service; behind him the sexton had taken up his position with folded hands. On either side sat the officers and men, holding their helmets on their knees and looking on with serious countenances. The old woman knelt crouching on a prie-dieu, and hid her face in her hands. When the pastor had pronounced a final "Amen," the four gunners raised the coffin on their shoulders and bore it to the little graveyard. The sexton preceded the coffin, and behind it followed, in order, the pastor, the two staff officers,

Güntz and Reimers, the two adjutants, Heppner and Wiegandt, and last came the woman and her son.

At the grave the pastor pronounced the blessing and prayed. Then the four soldiers lifted the coffin up by the black straps, the sexton removed the supporting boards, and the dead man was slowly lowered to his place of rest.

The colonel now stepped forward and spoke a few simple words in remembrance of the dead. He recalled his genuine loyalty to his comrades, proved even by his death, and pronounced happy that prince and that country in whose army so brave a soldier was counted.

Every man present threw three handfuls of earth on the coffin, and the funeral was at an end.

The little procession left the graveyard at a quicker pace than when it came. Vogt remained alone at the graveside.

The carriage drove up, but Vogt was still missing, and they had to fetch him from the grave. As he sat on the box, he looked back wistfully at the spot where his dear friend lay buried.

The last day of the manœuvres had come. A light mist which veiled the autumn sun made the heat bearable. The exercises ended in the early forenoon, and, after a final parade, the troops marched off to their garrisons. The infantry were despatched in long railway-trains, while the mounted branches of the service covered the ground by moderate marches. The 80th regiment was lucky; its garrison could be reached by a four hours' march.

In order to avoid the inevitable stoppages of an immoderately long marching column, the colonel had appointed different roads for the separate batteries, and had fixed on a meeting-place at a short distance from the barracks, whence they could march in together.

The sixth battery had trotted down a slight incline on the high road, and afterwards climbed the next rise at a slow pace. The horses no longer tugged at their traces. They drew the guns patiently and bravely, but with subdued spirits. Sergeant Heppner looked on thoughtfully; the animals were certainly more used up this time than on former occasions of the kind. Their sleek sides had fallen in; and a couple of them looked very rough in the coat, too. This in addition to the facts that away somewhere in a bone-mill poor old Turk's bones had perhaps already been ground into dust, and that Eidechse was not exactly improved by that gigantic wound in the buttock, which had been sewn up by the farrier with innumerable stitches.

But this was all because the officers would not listen to such an experienced counsellor as himself. His contention against Wegstetten in pronouncing the six light bays too weak to drag gun six had indeed been proved correct. That, of course, afforded him a certain amount of satisfaction; but to have one horse dead and another disfigured was paying too high a price for it!

They had now reached the top of the ridge, and the barracks could be descried far below in the valley. There was plenty of time before the rendezvous, so the battery might still keep to their easy pace. Nevertheless, the time of the march was gradually accelerated the horses of course could not yet scent the nearness of their stables; but the men were impatient, and involuntarily urged the animals on. Having once seen the barracks, they wanted to be home as soon as possible.

Half of them, it was true, were only to sleep one more night within these walls; then they would doff the green coat and be once more their own masters. To these men it felt as if their time of service had ended with the parade which closed the manœuvres. When they had marched past the commanding general they had still been soldiers; but if now they received orders, they would not carry them out with the prompt, alert movements to which they had been trained during the last two years. They took things more leisurely now. The drill which had been thrashed into them already began to be forgotten; only a perfunctory obedience remained.

It was as though a spirit of revolt had taken possession of the men. There were many among them who had never thought of concerning themselves with the aims of Social-Democracy; who might perhaps have returned to their ploughs and their spades in a docile and dutiful spirit. But now it dawned upon them all at once how the little they as soldiers had been obliged to learn had been made quite unnecessarily difficult for them. They stripped off, like a troublesome strait-waistcoat, the superfluity of petty rules to which they had been subjected; and the recognition of the needless compulsion they had so long endured produced, as its inevitable consequence, a violent reaction, which quite naturally manifested itself in a hasty change of opinion. Many of those who, on their discharge the next morning, would have to join in the cheers for the Emperor and the King, had, no doubt, already on their lips the socialist song which would be sung after midnight in the taverns of their native places.

And the rest, who, from either stupidity or laziness, were not completely converted to such political views, were nevertheless not entirely free from their influence. There would remain in their minds some vestige of these ideas, and this seed would be carried back by the peasant lads to their remote villages, where the new wisdom from the city would bring forth fruit an hundredfold, sounding as it did so pleasantly to the ear. And yet the mighty lords of the soil

wondered at the growth of the socialist vote among the purely agricultural electorate! Of course it continued to grow and to increase every year, because the army, under its present conditions simply constituted a school of Social-Democracy.

Vogt sat on his gun-carriage and cast sad glances at the man next to him, who had taken Klitzing's place: the blue-collared hospital-orderly. On the outward march his friend had been his neighbour, and the talk between them had been hearty, merry, and familiar; it had been almost snug on the gun-carriage. But now that dear old comrade lay away there in the hills, and Vogt had to shift for himself during this last year of his service. He kept thinking how lonely it would be for him now in the barracks with the excitement of the autumn manœuvres a thing of the past, and with the monotonous winter work beginning again.

Above, on the limber, Wolf sat between Truchsess and Plettau. The nearer the wished-for day of freedom approached the more nervous Wolf became. He tried not even to think of life after his discharge, always fearing that some slip might still occur to detain him longer in his fetters. There was now only this one last day and this one last night to endure--then he would be free. He felt as if now he might dare to breathe freely. What could possibly happen amiss? There was no more duty, merely the formal giving up of his kit. Then he would take his certificate of discharge and would be able to go wherever he wished.

And so it came about that Wolf was filled with joy as they passed in through the barrack gates.

That very afternoon the men whose time was expired handed over their packing materials and all that could be spared of their outfit and uniform, only retaining the suit they had on. Of course, until the morning of the day of their discharge, they remained soldiers; but it was impossible to keep up the usual discipline, and the authorities gave every one, from first to last, a loose rein.

After the orders of the day had been read, the half-demoralised crew dispersed themselves through the town. They stood at the doors of houses, clasping servant-maids round the waist. When a superior officer passed by they assumed the regulation attitude slowly and carelessly, and the officers and non-commissioned officers took pains not to see the incipient insubordination. Rebellious phrases passed from mouth to mouth, and many a one boasted how he would thrash this or that corporal or sergeant--when once he was in civilian dress.

"When once one is in civilian dress"--that seemed to be the noisy pass-word given out for the evening. It was as though these swaggering men could no longer endure the last hardly perceptible signs of the discipline to which they had so long obediently submitted; as though this evening would end in open mutiny.

Wolf took no part in these noisy demonstrations; he was perhaps the only reservist in the whole regiment who held aloof. He could not stand the noise and the drunkenness. The whole of that free afternoon he stayed in the barrack-room, dreaming away comfortably, and looking at the first-year men, who now, when the "old gang" had left, would suddenly have about twice as much to do as hitherto. If a non-commissioned officer crossed the threshold, he jumped up and stood at attention, quickly and accurately, just as he had done at any time during these last two years. Why not still continue to play the comedy for these few remaining hours, after having been an actor so long?

With almost affectionate zeal he cleaned and polished the accoutrements he had to hand over; and he had the satisfaction of having his kit held up as an example by Sergeant Keyser, his former enemy, to others who gave in things insufficiently cleaned. The sergeant, it is true, promptly ceased his praises when, seeing the name marked on the various articles, he realised who the exemplary gunner was; however, that was no matter.

After the orders of the day had been read, Wolf walked restlessly up and down the courtyard of the barracks. Would this day never end? The sun had set behind the heights in the west some time since, but a dull glow still overspread that part of the sky. He quitted the barracks by the back gate and walked round the great quadrangle of the drill-ground. The vast space had been freshly strewn with that fine coke refuse which, in the wet seasons of the year, works up into such an ugly black slush. In an absent-minded way he stirred the loose grit with the toe of his boot, then smoothed the surface with the sole, and dug little channels in it.

When he looked up from this amusement it was growing dark; and then the last evening was succeeded by the last night. Most of the men slept the heavy sleep of drunkenness; Wolf never closed his eyes. He heard every stroke of the clock, and the intervening half-hours seemed to him of infinite duration.

Half an hour before the reveille he rose. A cold sponge waked him up thoroughly, and after this sleepless night he felt a thousand times fresher and stronger than at other times after enjoying his full share of rest. He opened the window of the bathroom, and let the cool air of the grey morning fan his chest. A fine autumn day was dawning for this feast-day of freedom, so long desired. A thin haze still veiled the prospect, but was retiring shyly before the approach of the conquering sun.

With sparkling eyes he gazed over the opposite roofs towards the hills, from behind which the

lord of day must soon emerge. He stood erect and stretched his arms out wide.

Now for the first time he dared to believe in his happiness.

He took his civilian clothes from the chest as if they had been precious treasures. The trumpet was just sounding the reveille while he dressed himself. The white shirt, the clean collar, the comfortable jacket, and the soft slouched hat--how light they were and how easily they fitted! Another sign that this cramping restraint was at an end!

He stood there ready, as his comrades came yawning and rough-headed from the dormitory. They looked at him in surprise.

"You're in a damned hurry," said one of them. And Wolf answered gaily, "Yes, indeed, I've waited long enough!"

Now came the last falling into line as a soldier, and the handing over of the clothing and kit which had been used at the last.

Sergeant Keyser went into each room and superintended the counting over of the separate articles. Then he threw them over the arm of a gunner who was to carry them to the kit-room.

He had intentionally left Wolf's room to the last, and had despatched all the other reservists before him. For he meant to pay out the socialist fellow who had let him in for six weeks' arrest; Wolf should have to wait about as long as possible before being finally released from military discipline.

At last, however, his turn came. He counted out just the right number of articles; the buttons of the jacket shone again, and not a rent was to be found anywhere. He folded the trousers and beat them with his hand--not a particle of dust rose from them. The leather things also were unimpeachable, and the boots were in the exact regulation condition--not brightly polished, but merely rubbed over with grease to prevent the leather from drying up.

Keyser muttered a surly "all right," and turning away threw the things over Findeisen's arm and put the boots into his hand. But the gunner, who was already holding four pairs by the tags, let them fall to the ground.

Sergeant Keyser picked them up, scolding furiously. The dust from the floor had stuck in thick streaks on the greasy leather.

Then a bright idea occurred to the sergeant. He held the boots up before Findeisen's face and bellowed at him, "Lick that off, you swine!"

It was not really meant literally, that was plain; but an ungovernable fury began to glow in his eyes.

Findeisen had drawn back. He ground his teeth and looked defiance straight into the sergeant's eyes.

This maddened Keyser. His face became purple with passion, and again he hissed out, "Dog, lick it at once!"

Suddenly the resolute spirit of opposition died out of Findeisen's eyes. The strong, broad-shouldered man bowed as if under the lash; he became pale as death, and actually touched the boot with his tongue.

The sergeant rubbed the leather roughly over his face, leaving patches of dirt and grease on the skin. Then he turned and looked Wolf straight in the eyes. "Do you see that, fellow?" the triumphant challenging look seemed to say: "Your comrade must abase himself to the level of the beasts, if we so will it,--we, who have the power!"

Wolf hit him full in the face with his clenched fist.

The sergeant staggered. He uttered a gurgling cry and tried to throw himself upon the reservist.

Then something unexpected happened, taking place so suddenly and so quickly that afterwards Wolf was hardly able to picture it. Findeisen had thrown to the ground all that he carried--the boots and the outfit. In a flash he seized the sergeant, held him raised for an instant in his powerful arms, and then flung him head forwards against the wall.

The skull struck the wall with a dull thud, and the body fell heavily to the ground.

There was a cry of "Stop that!" Deputy sergeant-major Heimert rushed through the doorway and flung himself upon Findeisen. The gunner defended himself wildly, hitting, biting, and scratching; he felt that he was fighting for his life, but Heimert was a match for him.

Others soon came, too,--non-commissioned officers and men. They dragged the raving soldier to the ground and bound him.

Wolf stood motionless, and let them tie his arms behind his back. His head was in a whirl, and it all seemed a confused dream.

It really was quite ludicrous that his first dream, of happy release from the service, should have such a horrible sequel. This was certainly a nightmare.

He shook his head and tugged at the cords which bound his hands, trying to awake from the hideous delusion. The cords pressed deeper into the flesh, and the pain brought him back to reality.

He gazed round, not trusting his eyes.

This was indeed the old dormitory in which he had slept these two years. A lot of people were standing together and speaking with excited gestures. The air was thick with dust, as if from a fight; and just by the press, near a bundle of clothing, lay a man, his arms tied behind his back, his face deadly pale, and his chest heaving. It was Findeisen. And four soldiers were lifting another--Sergeant Keyser--who lay stretched out by the wall near the window. The sergeant's face was quite white, and his limbs hung limply down from his body.

"He's done for!" said the voice of Sergeant-major Heppner. "Carry him to his room and lay him on his bed."

And four soldiers carried the dead man past Wolf out through the door.

The sergeant-major sent away the other loitering gunners, and only the non-commissioned officers remained in the room with the two bound men.

Heppner stepped up to Wolf and looked him over from head to foot.

"Your fine civilian clothes, my lad," he said, "will have to lie a bit longer in the chest."

He picked out Wolf's things from the bundles scattered about the room, and threw them over the reservist's shoulders.

"There," he said mockingly, "that will suit your complexion better. And what'll suit you best of all is a convict's grey suit. In the meantime, just get yourself up as a gunner again, my son."

He ordered two of the non-commissioned officers to put Wolf and Findeisen under arrest.

"Look out!" he warned the corporals. "These two scoundrels are capable of anything. And if they utter a word, then you know why you've got swords dangling at your sides!"

The two prisoners were led across the yard to the guard-house. The reservists were just collecting before the barracks. Most of them went about arm in arm, and in their uproarious spirits made passes in the air with their betassled walking-sticks.

As the little procession passed the noisy crowd, the merry songs ceased. The reservists, taken aback, stepped aside, and amid startled whispers looked after the prisoners.

Findeisen walked with bowed head. They had put his cap on right over his forehead, so that he could hardly see from under it. Wolf looked straight ahead, but walked as if in a fog. He saw nothing of what was passing before him, and stumbled as he stepped across a gutter.

The corporal on guard was going to unlock two contiguous cells for the prisoners, but one of the men in charge of them objected.

"They might communicate with each other by knocking or somehow," he said. "Better lock them up as far apart as possible."

So Wolf was put into the cell nearest to the road, and Findeisen into one at the other end of the corridor.

The corporal placed the reservist's uniform on a stool, and near by the pair of boots which had caused the dispute, still bearing traces of dust.

"Change your clothes quickly," he said. "I must take back your plain clothes with me at once."

But Wolf stood there motionless.

He heard the key turn in the lock without realising what was happening. Then the steps retreated from his door, once more the great bunch of keys jingled, another door was opened, creaked unwillingly on its hinges, and was slammed to and locked.

The voices of the non-commissioned officers resounded in the stone-paved corridor as they returned to the guard-room.

"What have the fellows done?" asked the soldier on guard.

The answer was almost lost behind a corner of the passage: "Murder--Sergeant Keyser."

The reservist still stood motionless beside the stool. He was trying in vain to think why he was here. What was he doing here, when it was to-day that he was at last released from the hated discipline? He passed his hand over his eyes, as if to remove something that was covering them, and mechanically he pressed down the latch of the door.

It was indeed true; he was locked in.

Again the key sounded in the lock, and the corporal on guard entered. Behind him a gunner brought a jug of water into the cell, set it down, and at once retired.

"Why haven't you changed yet?" asked the corporal.

The reservist stared at him blankly, without comprehension.

"Damnation!" thundered his superior. "Change your clothes this moment, do you hear?"

And Wolf sat down obediently on the stool. Automatically he took off his coat and trousers, undid his collar, and pulled off his shoes. Then he took off his hat also; and in the same mechanical way dressed himself again in uniform.

The corporal had bidden him a couple of times to make haste, and now he threw the civilian clothes over his arm.

"Everything must be taken away from you," he said as he went.

Wolf nodded, and dully looked on. Once he moved as though to seize at something--the corporal's fingers were not clean, and were dirtying his white collar; he might at least hold it by the edge--but the outstretched hand sank back languidly.

Such behaviour made the corporal look serious. When in the guard-room he handed over the clothes to the non-commissioned officer who had brought in the prisoners, he pointed with his thumb back over his shoulder, and said: "That fellow there's not quite right in his head."

"Do you think not?" asked the other.

"Yes, I do. So I took away his braces, and now at least he can't hang himself."

Wolf had involuntarily stood at attention as the corporal left the cell, and when the door closed he put forward his right foot and relaxed his position just as if the order "Stand at ease" had been given.

He looked down at his worn uniform, the green cloth of which was grey and threadbare, while the madder-red facings had faded to a dirty pink. The well-polished buttons shone, and a darker patch in a corner of the tunic showed up clearly against the shabby material.

By that patch he recognised the coat which he had worn for two endless years, and which he still wore; and all at once he understood his fate.

Under the horror of the revelation he broke down. He sank helplessly on the stool, and hid his face in his hands.

He was still incapable of ordered thought. Only one thing could he grasp, that his dream of freedom lay shattered and destroyed before him. This single, fearful, desperate certainty so entirely filled his mind, that his capacity for other thought seemed paralysed. His senses received external impressions, but did not transmit them to the brain.

Wolf's cell was situated in the outermost corner of the guard-house. At a distance of about ten paces the high-road ran past the brick wall, which was none too thick. Besides this, a small pane of the window was open; so that the crunching of the wheels as they turned on the freshly-laid metalling, the encouragements of the drivers to their horses, and the cracking of the whips, could be distinctly heard. Even the steps of the passers-by were audible, and a word here and there of their conversation.

Wolf still sat upon the stool. All these noises reached his ear, but he paid no heed to them.

Suddenly he raised his head.

An indistinct sound of distant singing came in snatches through the little window, borne by gusts of wind. Nearer and nearer it approached. Now the singers seemed to be turning a corner, their measured tread became audible, and their hearty voices rang out:

"Reservists they may rest,
Reservists may rest,
And if reservists rest may have,
Then may reservists rest."

The song of the reservists who were leaving the barracks and marching to the station.

From time to time the rough joke of some passing wit interrupted the song. Then the reservists would break out into a loud laugh and call back some still more spicy retort. But they always took up their jingling refrain, repeating the childish words again and again, and jogging along clumsily, keeping time to the song.

Wolf heard the harsh sounds gradually retreating, till finally they died away in the direction of the town.

Once more he buried his face in his hands.

When at last he sat up again, he had conquered himself. He had determined to wage war against fate.

Upright and with firm steps he paced up and down his cell. He thought over everything that could serve for his defence: how he had held himself in check, so as not in any way to prolong by his own fault his time of service; how he had even looked on quietly when Findeisen obeyed the sergeant's humiliating order; but how Keyser's provocative look had made his blood boil and had driven him to his unlucky deed. He had, it is true, raised his hand against a superior; but the sight of the gunner licking the dust off the boots had seemed to him an insult to humanity itself.

The judges would not be able to disregard this, and at least they would judge his offence leniently. Even if their outlook on life were diametrically opposed to his own, surely in pronouncing their verdict on him that could not prevent their taking into consideration the purity of his motives.

And he thought out a speech of defence which must penetrate the hearts of the judges, a speech full of eloquent, inspiring words about that dignity of man which none should wound with impunity, and about that justifiable wrath which is not only excusable, but even praiseworthy.

He intoxicated himself with his thoughts. Hope dazzled him, and already he saw himself acquitted. He piled up argument after argument, and planned artistically-turned periods and effective antitheses, concluding his apology with a sublime appeal to the sense of justice of his judges.

The hours passed. He paced incessantly up and down the narrow cell, with a glowing face and sparkling eyes. The bowl of food which had been brought in for his dinner stood untouched. What had he to do with food and drink? He was contending for something higher--for his freedom.

In the afternoon he was taken before the officer who was to conduct the inquiry, who had been summoned by telegraph from the divisional head-quarters.

The proceedings took place in barrack-room VII. of the sixth battery, the scene of the fatal incident. At the table sat the presiding officer, a stout man, whose head rose red and swollen above his tight collar. He had a couple of sheets of paper before him, and while interrogating constantly fidgeted with a pencil. A clerk waited with pen to paper.

The hearing began.

Findeisen, when questioned, maintained a stubborn silence. The examining officer tried by reasoning and by scolding to get something out of him; the gunner remained dumb. He kept his eyes on the ground, from time to time glancing furtively at the door. But two non-commissioned officers were posted on the threshold.

Wolf gave an accurate and connected account of what had occurred. The clerk's pen flew swiftly over the paper. Then the examining officer read the report aloud. "Is that correct?" he asked Wolf. "Yes, sir."

He turned to Findeisen: "I ask you also, is that correct? If you have any objection to make, out with it! For as it stands, the account is not exactly favourable to you. Therefore I ask you if you have anything to say against this version?"

Then Findeisen gave his first answer during the proceedings, he shook his head.

"Nothing, then?" asked the examining officer. The gunner repeated, "Nothing."

Deputy sergeant-major Heimert, as the only witness, had nothing else to depose beyond what Wolf had already said: and Findeisen again persisted in his silence.

After this, the officer closed the judicial examination. He gave orders that Wolf should be conducted back to his cell, while Findeisen was to be confronted with the corpse of the sergeant.

Keyser's death had resulted from fracture of the skull, due to its forcible impact against the wall. The medical report, however, stated that fatal consequences had resulted on account of the unusual thinness of the skull.

The two orderlies took Findeisen between them and escorted him to the infirmary. Wolf went with the soldier on guard diagonally across the yard back to the guard-house. He mounted the steps composedly. Before the door he stopped for a moment, drew the fresh air deep into his

lungs, and looked all round him. Then he was locked into his cell again.

The examination had opened his eyes; he had been on quite a wrong tack when he had hoped to convince his judges by a fiery speech. In the midst of this cold calm procedure, his words would sound distorted and fantastic, and his eloquent tongue would fail him. The views of these men were separated from his by an impassable gulf. However good a will they might have, they were absolutely incapable of understanding him.

No, he would undergo his examination quietly and without any attempt at eloquence. Would not the naked facts speak loudly enough in his favour?

He no longer had any hope of an acquittal. On the contrary, he knew he would be condemned; but his punishment could not be severe. He called to memory all the similar cases that he had known. They had almost always resulted in less than a year of imprisonment. It was true that in none of these had there been an actual assault on the person of a superior, such as he had committed. But could that make a very great difference?

On the whole he thought it most likely that he would get off with about six months, and he already began to arm himself with patience to bear the hundred and eighty dreary days. It was quite certain that even one hundred and eighty days must have an end.

Suddenly he felt hungry, greedily hungry, and he hastily attacked the food he had hitherto left untouched. The meat lay in the cold gravy surrounded by congealed fat. The first mouthful gave him a strong feeling of disgust; nevertheless, he swallowed the meat down quickly, and finished the gravy to the last drop.

It was soon disposed of, and then he began to take stock of his surroundings: the grey walls, the water jug, and the stool in the corner; the plank bed, strapped up to the wall during the day. The grated window was high above the ground; but he could reach it by standing on his stool. Even that, however, was not of much use; for all view was cut off by a wooden screen, so arranged that the light only penetrated from above, and he had to twist his head considerably in order to catch the least glimpse of the sky.

Wolf remained in this cramped position as if fascinated, gazing upward, with his cheek against the cold stone of the wall. Grey clouds were passing over the tiny bit of sky visible to him. Occasionally the whole of the narrow space was filled in with a clear deep blue.

One of the panes of the window was open, admitting a breath of fresh pure air. It seemed to the prisoner that without this mouthful of free air he would not be able to breathe, and he pressed his face against the woodwork of the window as if suffocating.

Gradually it grew dark outside. The wind rose, and a few heavy drops of rain pattered on the boards of the screen. In the yard outside the trumpeter sounded the call to stable-duty. The poor fellow in the narrow cell remembered that this evening he should have rejoined the circle of his socialist comrades. Instead of which, here he was twisting his neck to see even a little bit of the sky, rather than the ghastly grey walls of his prison.

As the evening went on even that comfort failed. Everything was grey in the grey light around him.

As a gust of damp air blew in he once more drew a deep breath and got down from the stool.

Within the cell it was quite dark; but suddenly a square of light appeared in the door,—the little window through which the prisoner could be observed from without. The gas had been lit in the corridor, and the unsteady light of the unprotected, flickering jet penetrated the gloom of the cell.

At the same moment the corporal on guard appeared on the threshold. He brought with him the third of a loaf of bread, and he proceeded to let down the bed from the wall.

"Shall I shut the window?" he asked.

Wolf answered hastily, "No, no, sir."

The corporal nodded, looked round once more to see if everything was in order, and quitted the cell, turning the key twice in the lock.

The reservist heard him go along the passage to Findeisen's cell. Shortly after, the click of the spurs was again audible passing his door, and then everything was as still as before.

Wolf lay on the bed and munched hard lumps of bread, from time to time taking a drink of water. After that he fell into a soothing reverie, more and more forgetting his position, till at last he settled himself down comfortably on the hard wood, and fell fast asleep.

In the middle of the night he began to feel very cold. Instinctively he tried not to awake, as if even in sleep he knew how comfortless his surroundings were. He thrust his hands up his coat-sleeves and curled himself up on the bed; but at last the cold waked him completely.

More benumbing still than the frost of the autumn night was the consciousness of his misery. He shivered with cold, and yet could not rouse himself sufficiently to get up.

In the darkness of the night, the clear light of the hopes which had so heartened him grew pale. An unspeakable fear assailed him that he might be condemned to long years of imprisonment, and the darkness which engulfed him now seemed like a symbol of that terrible time,—an endless horror.

Through the window could be heard the monotonous pouring of the rain. The night wind was caught in the wooden screen, sent a damp breath into the cell, and swept on with a low moan.

In the intervals between these sounds, Wolf thought he could hear an indistinct scraping and scratching. From time to time it ceased, then began again. Could it be rats in the drain under the cell?

In the morning he started up suddenly. The key was thrust hastily into the lock, and the door opened violently. The corporal on guard appeared on the threshold.

"Is *this* one here, at any rate?" he cried.

The dawn only lighted the cell faintly; but he could make out the form of the prisoner, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank God!" he said. "I am spared that, anyhow. They aren't both gone."

He called a gunner in, and searched every corner with a lantern.

While he was on his knees lighting the space under the bed, the gunner whispered furtively to Wolf, "The other man has escaped."

At first the reservist did not understand. Escaped? How was that possible?

He looked round the cell, and was unable to imagine how any one could escape from such a place.

Suddenly he remembered the scratching and scraping in the night, and his eyes sought for some tool with which it might be possible to break a hole through a wall. He noticed the strong iron trestles which supported the bed when it was let down; it might perhaps be done with one of them. But no. Up by the window the thickness of the wall could be seen; it must be close on twenty inches.

And yet Findeisen had escaped!

Necessity had quickened the wits of the dull lad, and had made him inventive. When they confronted him with the corpse of the sergeant, he realised that he had committed a murder; and from that moment he felt his head no longer safe on his shoulders. The fear of death lent him a subtlety of which he would never otherwise have been capable.

He had, as Wolf guessed, used the iron bed support as an implement. He had at once recognised that it would be impossible to break through the principal external wall; the other walls, however, might be expected to be considerably less strong, and they sounded hollower when he tapped them. Findeisen knew that one of them merely divided his cell from another, and so was useless for his purpose. But beyond the other wall lay a shed in which the fire-engine was kept. Its window, he knew, was only covered with wire-netting, and opened on to a field.

And as soon as all was quiet in the guard-house he had set to work, listening anxiously in the direction of the corridor during the pauses of his boring and levering. The wall was only the length of a brick thick, and after the first stone had been broken out bit by bit, it cost but little labour to widen the hole enough to let a man pass.

The night sentinels declared that they had not remarked anything unusual. Besides, they had an excuse in the regulations; for in such pouring rain they were permitted to take shelter in the sentry-boxes. So it was not even known when the prisoner had escaped.

A warrant for his arrest was sent out, but in vain. Gunner Findeisen had disappeared.

Later during the same morning on which Findeisen, avoiding all frequented paths, had slipped away through undergrowth and thickets to the frontier, Wolf, a prisoner awaiting trial, was removed to the house of detention in the capital.

The train in which he and the soldier who guarded him travelled passed another at an intermediate station. Reservists were looking out of every carriage; men from every branch of the service were mixed together, and all were alike in the wildness of their spirits.

The two trains started again at the same moment, and the reservists began to sing:

"Reservists they may rest,
Reservists may rest,

And if reservists rest may have.
Then may reservists rest."

Wolf kept his eyes fixed on the dusty floor of the compartment.

As the song died away in the distance, he lifted his head courageously. The bright light of day gave him new confidence. Looked at from a truly enlightened standpoint, and regarded fully and clearly, his act had indeed been of the most excusable kind.

Perhaps in six months he would be free again.

A week later, Gunner Heinrich Wilhelm Wolf, of the Sixth Battery, 80th Regiment, Eastern Division Field Artillery, was condemned by the military tribunal of the 42nd Division, for actual bodily assault on a superior officer, to three years' imprisonment.

CHAPTER XII

Sergeant-Major Heppner married his sister-in-law[A] Ida very quietly during Christmas week. It was quite necessary, unless there was to be a christening before the wedding.

[Footnote A: Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is legal in Germany.--*Translator.*]

The terrible death of his wife had somewhat chastened the coarse recklessness of the man's bearing. Throughout the autumn and far into the winter he seemed entirely changed. He restrained himself, his harsh voice being seldom heard in the corridors of the barracks; and he attended scrupulously to his duties, so that the inner wheels of the battery ran smoothly in perfect order.

Captain von Wegstetten sometimes took himself to task. He could not but be pleased with his sergeant-major, and yet he could not quite overcome the antipathy he had hitherto felt for Heppner. The certain degree of intimacy that otherwise might be expected to arise from their common care of the new recruits appeared to him quite impossible. He could not bring himself to feel complete confidence in Heppner's uprightness.

The sergeant-major, however, was unaware of anything lacking in their relations; when he felt he had discharged his duty thoroughly his heart glowed with satisfaction, and he resolved never to fall back into his old follies.

He felt very awkward about his compulsory marriage; but happily no one seemed to think the worse of him for it. People considered it natural enough that a healthy young couple under one roof, with only a dying woman between them, should have been carried away by their passion.

The peace which now reigned in his dwelling seemed to him something unwonted and delightful. He began to change his manner of life completely, and, instead of frequenting public-houses, spent his evenings cosily at home. In order to save fuel, Ida had made the kitchen more habitable; and the sergeant-major, luxuriously ensconced in Julie's armchair, would watch the fire glowing through the stove door, and Ida bustling about her household tasks. Then, before turning in, he had to go once more through the stables, between the ranks of sleeping horses, the stable-guard emerging from the darkness of some corner to make his report. The sharp frosty air of the nights, after the moist aromatic warmth of the stables, would make the sergeant-major shiver and draw his cloak closer around him. He would settle himself anew by the stove, watching his young wife, whose quick, clever hands were busy with baby-clothes; and at such moments, tired by an honest day's work, Heppner felt himself to be a thoroughly good fellow.

During the course of the summer, Albina Worzuba had been brought home as a bride by Deputy sergeant-major Heimert, to the Schumanns' old quarters next door.

The married life of the young pair began happily. Albina was brimming over with affection for her husband, and Heimert felt he could not show his wife too much attention.

Ere long Frau Heimert played a leading *rôle* in the little world of the barracks. The wives of the non-commissioned officers listened more or less dubiously to the romantic tale of her origin, and envied her the all-powerful money at her disposal. For not only did she give one pure coffee

from the bean,--no chicory mixture,--but she was also extremely fashionable in her attire, rustling about in silk-lined skirts, so that folk turned to look as she passed them. The good women considered her gowns altogether too noticeable. And such undergarments as she possessed! Red and yellow silk chemises and drawers, trimmed with the finest lace. Such lovely jewellery, too! Yes, indeed, Frau Heimert must come of well-to-do people. That was obvious in everything belonging to her, her house, her clothes, her linen. Her expensive musk scent penetrated even into the men's quarters.

Albina accepted the honour paid her with the airs of a little queen. She spared neither her good coffee nor her good nature; she wore her dresses, which she said came from one of the leading firms, with an easy grace. In reality, she bought them from an old "friend," part of whose business it was to be always in the latest Paris mode.

The non-coms.' wives envied Frau Heimert's taste, and tried to copy her manner and deportment. Only the fair-haired little Berlin seamstress, Frieda, Sergeant Wiegandt's sweetheart, found fault with her. Once at the non-commissioned officers' summer fête, that young person--who, by-the-by, was almost suspected of being a red-hot little social-democrat--saw Albina, and had the courage to declare, "That creature?--Otto, she's a---no! I won't soil my mouth with the dirty word. But I know that sort of truck! In some matters you men are just as blind and as stupid as new-born kittens."

Seeing Albina surrounded by lieutenants and non-coms., dancing first with one and then with another, Frieda grew quite excited.

"Otto," cried she, "if you dare to dance with that baggage, all is over between us. It's like flies buzzing about a sugar-cake."

Wiegandt had fully intended to dance the next dance with Frau Heimert; but he dutifully abandoned the idea, and conducted Frieda into a secluded little plantation, where other couples wandered lovingly entwined like themselves.

They chatted about the future, which now lay plain before them. Wiegandt had not again signed on, and by the following autumn he would have a good position in the town-police, with thirteen hundred marks a year, free quarters, and a hundred and twenty marks allowance for clothes. The burgo-master of the little town, being a senior-lieutenant of the reserve, had been present at the performance of some exercises by the sixth battery, and had personally chosen out his man. Wegstetten was furious at losing his best non-commissioned officer, and pressed Wiegandt to stick to the flag; but the sergeant was not to be prevailed upon, for he was impatient now to quit the service. With such a noble competency in view, therefore, he might well venture on marriage.

"All right, even when the children come," he whispered to his sweetheart; and Frieda nodded sagaciously, whispering back: "They'll come, sure enough!"

Albina Heimert never noticed that such a humble and inconspicuous little person gave her the go-by. As the wife of the deputy sergeant-major, she felt herself at last on firm solid ground. She carried her head high in the barrack-yard, and ordered her house with a fine matronly dignity.

She met the admiring glances of her neighbours, even if only prompted by some matter of domestic economy, with an indescribable little smile. No word might be spoken, but it would be quite evident that she was gratified by the admiration. It was Venus triumphing over Mars.

The person who was least affected by the beautiful Frau Heimert's charms was, curiously enough, Sergeant Heppner. Once, when Albina chanced to meet him in the corridor, she said: "When I first met you, Herr Heppner--you remember that day at Grundmann's--you were perfectly different--ever so much smarter and livelier! Really, I almost think you must be ageing, Herr Heppner!" And she burst into a shrill, affected laugh, which rang rather unpleasantly in his ears.

As Heppner sat in his armchair by the stove he contrasted his pretty, healthy, buxom Ida with the woman next door, and would be seized with a veritable horror of the all-pervasive odour of the scent she used.

He would make a disdainful grimace when Albina, in a huge hat, rustled past him, and would greet her carelessly, almost discourteously.

But with the spring the old spirit of restlessness possessed the sergeant-major.

Ida was expecting her confinement in May, and had no thoughts but for the child. Heppner began to marvel at himself for having been so domestic all the winter. Surely his limbs must have been benumbed and this brain addled! He really must rouse himself now and get a few new ideas into his head. So he easily slipped back into his old wild ways of life, and could less and less understand how he had come to live otherwise during so many months.

His former boon-companions welcomed him back joyfully, and it was not long before he was once more at cards with them. The promise he had given to Trautvetter he should construe after his own views; he would be careful to keep within bounds, under all circumstances.

It happened, nevertheless, that he lost at times; and to meet such little reverses he was obliged to borrow from the battery cash-box, for Ida kept a tight hand on the purse-strings, and he could not bring himself to cut down her housekeeping money. Of course, to balance these bad days there were runs of good luck, when he had a considerable surplus; but, like a true gambler, he did not set his winnings against his losses, considering them as so much pure gain, which enabled him to indulge in extravagances. He made new holes in order to stop up the old ones.

About this time Frau Albina Heimert spoke to him again one day.

"Thank heaven!" she said. "You seem to have roused up a bit, Herr Heppner! I quite began to fear you were becoming a hopeless rustic."

The sergeant-major watched her thoughtfully as, with her provoking little air, she disappeared into her own quarters.

The devil! How utterly absurd! He had actually positively disliked this beautiful creature all the winter! He was astonished at his own bad taste. Before him stood his wife on the kitchen hearth, her figure rendered shapeless by her advanced state of pregnancy. And he had once thought her prettier than Albina!

From this time he began to show Frau Heimert small attentions. He would walk with her if they met in the barrack-yard, would carry her parcels, or stand aside politely to let her precede him up the stairs, and then open the door for her. He would inquire earnestly after her health; and once, when she complained of a headache, he brought her all sorts of remedies, besides enjoining the men to be very quiet and to tread softly as they passed her door.

But Albina played the prude. She received the sergeant-major's attentions very coolly, and cut short his conversational efforts so as to excite him the more. At the same time her mockingly triumphant and provocative glances would contradict the virtuous compression of her lips.

Heppner did not at all despair. Unobtrusively he gradually multiplied the proofs of his gallantry; and by slow degrees the object of his attentions suffered her demeanour towards him to soften.

Suddenly Heimert noticed their intercourse, and, stirred by suspicious jealousy, tried hard to put a stop to it. But was that possible? The deputy sergeant-major was often detained for hours at the exercise-ground half a mile away. Heppner, as sergeant-major, could order it so; and thus he and Albina could be together undisturbed as often and as long as they pleased.

Heimert would learn from the other men who had been on duty at the barracks what Heppner had been about during the morning. He always tried to find out stealthily and without exciting comment; but his comrades knew very well what was up, and enjoyed playing on the jealousy of the young husband.

At last the deputy sergeant-major hit on a curious plan. This was to bring the two together in his presence. He thought that if there really was a secret understanding between them they would betray themselves in a moment of thoughtlessness. So he invited Heppner to drop in now and then, in a neighbourly way, for a cigar and a bottle of beer.

The sergeant-major accepted. Once or twice he brought Ida with him; then, as the time for her lying-in approached, he came alone.

Heimert watched them closely; every word, every movement, almost every look. But his suspicions were not justified. Heppner was polite, easy, and perfectly unconstrained; while Albina chatted easily and naturally, and accepted the homage of their guest with a kind of haughty tranquillity. Towards her husband she displayed quite unusual tenderness, so long as the sergeant-major was present.

Heimert was somewhat reassured by this. When Heppner rose to take leave Heimert would fling his arm confidently about Albina's waist, with a gesture which seemed to say: "You see, my wife is my own. I have her and hold her, and you won't get her, however much you may covet her. That's the right of possession. And so it will be, no matter how much you may hate and envy me. And when you have gone I shall claim my rights, and this woman must obey my will."

The sergeant-major read this defiance plainly in Heimert's face, and it had the effect of causing him to swear inwardly that he would seduce his comrade's wife.

In the middle of May Ida bore a child,—a fat, strong, healthy boy, weighing nine pounds. A splendid weight for a new-born baby!

At first the sergeant-major rather fancied himself as a father. Every one said that the fine boy was his living image. Certainly there was no need to be ashamed of being seen with such a child. Of course this son of his should be a soldier, an artilleryman. He should learn to ride as soon as he could sit on the saddle, and woe to him if he showed any fear!

Ida was happy beyond measure, and there could not have been a tenderer or more careful mother. Motherhood awoke in her much that had hitherto been unapparent in her somewhat

stolid nature.

Heppner thought her little occupations silly and tiresome. The first sight of his boy at the healthy young mother's breast seemed to him charming enough. But before long he was continually scolding Ida for her over-indulgence of the child, telling her he would grow up a milksop, always hanging on to his mother's skirts.

And it soon bored him to be much with the child. If one wanted to rest the youngster was sure to start whining and squalling or if one felt inclined to play with him, to tickle his fat sides and toss him in the air, he was certain to have just dropped off to sleep, and Ida would stand sentinel over him, not suffering him to be disturbed at any price. She, indeed, seemed now to be nothing but mother, and to have forgotten altogether that she was also a wife.

Heppner consequently redoubled his attentions to Frau Heimert.

Albina could not endure little children, and took no interest whatever in his remarkable baby. This he thought rather stupid of her; nevertheless the Bohemian girl completely turned his head.

Uninvited, he constantly dropped in now on the Heimerts "to smoke a cigar with the deputy sergeant-major," as he said. Almost shamelessly he pursued his object, grossly flattering Albina, and making risky jokes with her.

Heimert sat by nearly choking with rage. He hardly knew why he did not seize the seducer by the throat. But the culprits would have a complete defence ready. Was it not all mere harmless jesting? Whatever anguish of jealousy he might feel, he must wait for fuller evidence.

And into the midst of the laughter would come through the thin walls now the cry of the infant, and then the low singing of Ida as she lulled her little one to sleep.

Albina wished to enjoy her revenge to the full. During the winter the sergeant-major had treated her as a cast-off love; he should suffer awhile for that. She exercised all her arts to augment his pain; it gave her a half fearful, half delicious pleasure to note his impatience.

One evening Heppner seized an opportunity when he imagined himself alone with her. He caught her head in his hands almost savagely and pressed a wild, passionate kiss on her lips. Albina's defiant resolution broke down; she returned his kiss with equal passion.

Heimert, standing in the dark kitchen, screened by the door, saw it all.

He had been to fetch a bottle of beer, now he suddenly re-entered the room.

"There's no beer, Albina," he said; "you must have been mistaken."

He sat down slowly at the table, and drummed gently with his fingers on a plate. The guilty pair were as if stunned by the fervour of their embrace; though little suspecting that the betrayed husband had witnessed it. They did not respond to his remark, and seemed lost to time and space. Neither did they notice that a long, oppressive silence had fallen on them, that the lamp was burning low, and the room darkening.

At last Heimert drew out his watch. "It's time to go to bed," he said; "we've got to get up tomorrow morning."

Heppner and Albina awoke suddenly from their entranced condition, and the sergeant-major hastened to say good night.

Quickly Albina prepared for bed. Usually she went through many ceremonies with a view to preserving her beauty: she rubbed her skin with lanoline, or sprinkled it with powder, to keep it soft and smooth; she spread a perfumed emollient on her hands, afterwards drawing on gloves to prevent them from losing their whiteness with rough work. But to-night she merely loosened her hair, and was between the sheets in a trice.

Heimert lay sleepless. Hour after hour he heard strike; the short May night seemed to him an eternity.

The woman beside him had sunk into a deep slumber. Now and then her breathing quickened, and she gave almost a gasp, flinging herself about as though in a troubled dream.

With the dawn of morning Heimert came to a decision. He would not allow himself to believe in Albina's guilt. He had noticed that when Heppner threw his arm around her she had shrunk from him. (This was true enough; Albina had winced; but it was on account of her artistically dressed hair.) She had submitted, he forced himself to think, in the paralysis of surprise. In such a case Heppner, no doubt, would have scolded his wife for not confessing. By right she ought certainly to have told her husband. But Heimert found a thousand excuses for her. Albina knew his jealousy, and desired, possibly, to avoid scandal, which would have been inevitable had she told him. Or perhaps she would speak to him about it after she had thought it over quietly by herself. Or, again, she might intend to deal with the sergeant-major in her own way. Or, once more, perhaps she was just beginning to yield to the temptation.

That was as might be. Anyhow, the affront was there: his wife had been insulted, and he, Heimert, must obtain satisfaction. He would set about it quite quietly, so as to avoid the gossip; but between men such an injury must mean a duel.

The officers always acted on that principle, and what was right for them must be right for the non-coms., who also wore swords at their sides. But all the ceremonial of a court of honour and seconds was not necessary among common folk like Heppner and himself. Alone, without witnesses, as man to man they would fight it out.

Heimert thought at first of selecting swords as the weapons; but their swords were not sharpened, and it might attract attention if he had them put in order. Besides, he thought it more becoming to use pistols when such a weighty matter as the honour of a husband was in question.

It was a piece of good luck that some years before he had picked up a couple of live cartridges after a shooting-practice.

Now he handled the little things with a grim satisfaction. They were not quite so small as those of the infantry, for the regulation revolver had a range of ten millimetres. The brass cases had grown a little dull, so he rubbed them until they shone.

Nothing more was wanting. The duel could take place.

The only remaining difficulties were locality and time; but concerning these also Heimert soon decided. Sloping up behind the barracks, the road led straight to an open bit of overhanging ground. There could not be a better spot. And of course the affair could only take place at night. He consulted the calendar: in two days there would be a full moon, so they would have light enough to see each other clearly at ten paces. The moon rose shortly before ten o'clock; she would be high in the heavens by midnight.

At daybreak the deputy sergeant-major went about his duty, cool and punctual as usual, only taking pains to avoid meeting Heppner. He did not wish to see him until the evening,--or, better still, till night,--so that the duel might follow immediately upon their interview. He knew the sergeant-major would not flinch, but would fall in with his arrangements. Heppner was no coward.

Albina behaved just as usual during the day, and said nothing to her husband about the kiss. But that, of course, made no difference to Heimert's plans. He learned from the stablemen that Heppner would be at the White Horse with Blechschmidt, the sergeant-major of the fifth, that evening. That was capital. He would catch him as he came home, and the affair would be arranged in two minutes.

Heimert ate his supper in silence. Albina imagined that he had had words with the captain or somebody, and did not bother him with questions. After she had cleared the table, she sat down to read the sensational *feuilleton* of the local daily paper, eating pralines all the while. Then she performed her evening toilet and went to bed. It was not yet nine o'clock; but that did not matter. She liked lying in bed.

On the stroke of nine Heimert heard the sergeant-major go out. In the corridor he caught some of the men larking about without their caps, and rebuked them sharply. Then he clanked down the stairs, and all was still.

Heimert carried the lamp to the table in the window and sat down to write. In order to pass the time until Heppner should return, he was going to check the shoeing account in his register by the entries in the ordnance books. In his slow, neat handwriting he inscribed one careful entry after another, and became so absorbed by his task that he never even heard the tattoo. When he looked up from the books it was already past eleven; but that was all right, for the sergeant-major was safe not to be going home till midnight.

Heimert opened the window and looked out. It had rained during the day, and now all nature seemed to be sprouting and budding. The odour of the young fresh green things was wafted in by a breath of wind, which gently swayed the cotton curtains. Forest and hills were illuminated by the brilliant moonlight; and like a white ribbon the foot-path climbed the steep ascent behind the barracks, till it lost itself in the shadows of a thicket. On the grassy slope stood a group of young birches, their white stems gleaming, and their shimmering leaves--still wet from the rain--shining as though made of silver.

Heimert gazed at it all with no thought for the beauty of the May night. He was glad that the moon shone so brightly, as he would be able to see his man with ease in such a light.

He fetched his revolver, and returning to the window looked across at the notice-board opposite, which threatened trespassers in the barracks or parade-ground with "a fine of sixty marks or five days' imprisonment." The white-lettered notice-board was fixed to the trunk of a beech-tree by a huge nail, and at the head of this nail Heimert took careful aim.

Satisfied, he laid down the pistol and returned to the table. But almost immediately he jumped up again and took a light out into the corridor. Yes, Heppner's revolver was in its usual place on the rack. He took the weapon with him into the kitchen, and sat down once more. Just midnight!

The twelve strokes were sounding slowly from the great clock of the barracks.

Heimert still waited. After a little his head sank down on the table, and he fell asleep.

At half-past two Heppner came home. He had had a run of bad luck at the White Horse, had lost over a hundred marks, and that amount was now missing from the battery cash-box. He was quite overcome by this sudden misfortune. As if stunned he groped his way home to the barracks, scarcely seeing where he was going, stumbling at times over his sword, or entangling himself with his spurs.

When he rang at the gate for admittance he was ready to fly into a passion. He thought he had not heard the ringing of the bell, and he began to rage at somebody's carelessness in not having a broken bell mended on the instant. But the corporal on guard opened to him; so the bell was all right, and the sound must have escaped him. He stumbled over the threshold.

The corporal gazed after him in astonishment. Was the sergeant-major asleep or awake? He had staggered past with wide-open, staring eyes, like a sleep-walker. Perhaps he was simply drunk.

In the passage Heimert came to meet him. He looked distraught, as though just awakened out of sleep. He beckoned Heppner into the kitchen. Heppner entered and shut the door behind him. The light blinded him; he blinked stupidly, and thought he saw in the lamp-light two shining revolvers lying on the table.

"You kissed my wife yesterday," said Heimert, in a half whisper. "Isn't that so?"

Heppner nodded. "Yes, yes." What had the silly fellow got in his head? Of course he had kissed the woman; and he meant to do it again, and again too.

"And so you have got to fight it out with me," continued the other. "Man against man. Are you agreed?"

Again the sergeant-major nodded stolidly. Why not? Their betters acted thus.

"Shall we settle the thing now at once?"

Heppner nodded for the third time. It was all one to him, so long as he could get to rest at last.

Heimert took up the two revolvers in one of his big hands; with the other he pointed over his shoulder out of the window.

"We'll go up there," he said. "There's plenty of room there. And we'll take our own two revolvers with us. Look here! I will load them, each with one cartridge."

Under Heppner's eyes he placed the cartridges in the chambers of the revolvers, the shining brass gleaming beside the dull steel. He gripped the pistols by the barrel, and held out the butt-ends to the sergeant-major.

"Now choose," he said.

Heppner languidly took with his right hand the revolver which the other was holding in his left. Heimert held the remaining pistol in the lamp light, and read off the number.

"I have got yours," he said, "and you have mine. And now we'll wait till the sentry has gone round the corner."

He leant out of the window cautiously, and took a look round. The moon was in the zenith; houses, trees, and bushes cast but short shadows. The sentinel was strolling along by the hedge of the jumping-ground. His sword was in the scabbard, and he had buried his hands deep in his breeches-pockets. Every now and then the lubberly fellow would whistle a stave, or stand still and kick a stone from his path, or gape so loudly that the moon shone into his open mouth. At last he disappeared round a corner of the buildings.

"Now!" whispered Heimert. "You go first, but take off your sword."

Obediently Heppner unbuckled his belt and laid it down. He pushed the revolver carefully into his coat-pocket, and swung himself out of the window. The deputy sergeant-major extinguished the lamp and followed him.

Side by side, like two good friends, the two men climbed the path that led up the hill-side; Heimert striding on with quiet even pace, and Heppner, with unsteady knees and panting breast, trying involuntarily to keep step with the other man.

They vanished into the deep shadow of the wood, and after a short time stepped out again into the bright moonlight above. The moon was almost exactly overhead.

The deputy sergeant-major went thoughtfully along the path till he arrived at the spot where the ascent ceased and the ground became quite level.

"This is the best place, I think," he said. With the spurred heel of his riding-boot he drew a deep furrow in the clayey soil.

"Will you stand here?" he said to the sergeant-major. Without a word Heppner walked up to the mark. He carefully placed his feet with the toes against the marked line. Heimert went on another ten paces, not the leaping strides that are usually taken in arranging a duel, but fairly long ordinary paces.

At the tenth he paused, and again dug his heel into the earth.

The two men stood opposite to each other, separated by the terribly narrow interval of scarcely nine yards.

"Cock your pistol, Heppner!" cried Heimert to him. And the sergeant-major did as the other desired. He seemed quite unaware of its being a matter of life and death; he moved as in a dream.

Suddenly Heimert let out a curse. A difficulty had presented itself at the last moment, and threatened to upset his whole plan.

How were they to shoot?

By counting, of course. He had intended to count "one," then, after a couple of seconds by his watch, "two," and then again, after another couple of seconds, "three." Between "one" and "three" they were to fire. But, damn it all! how could he take aim if he was holding the watch in his hand and counting the seconds on the dial?

Irresolutely he looked down at his watch. This was like a bad joke, and perfectly maddening.

Suddenly an idea came to him. The minute-hand showed just two minutes to the hour. In two minutes then the barrack clock would strike three. That would be as good as counting.

In a clear voice he called out to his opponent: "Listen to what I say, Heppner. In two minutes the clock down there will strike three times. At the first stroke we must lift our revolvers, before that they must be pointed to the ground. Between the first and the third strokes we may fire, but not after the third. Do you understand, and are you agreed?"

For the first time the sergeant-major made an articulate sound. "All right," he said. His voice sounded husky, and he cleared his throat.

"Very good," said Heimert; "then it's all settled."

He took up his position, and looked coolly before him. The moon shone down from a clear sky. A single light cloud floated against the dark background, looking like a little white skiff.

Heppner watched the cloud. He tried to think how he came to be in this place, up on the hill in the wood, in the middle of the night, like this. He could not quite make it out. More than all there weighed on him a leaden feeling of weariness. He would have liked to throw himself down on the bare earth.

The seconds dragged on slowly.

Suddenly a night-bird screamed loudly from a neighbouring tree-top, and immediately afterwards sounded the first stroke of the hour.

The sergeant-major pulled himself up. With suddenly awakened senses he looked about him. Opposite him stood Heimert with his revolver, and he himself felt the butt-end of a weapon in his right hand.

But this was all madness. It was a crime. He wanted to cry out, "Stop!" This folly was impossible. If anything happened to him he was lost. There was money missing from the battery cash-box; at least he must put that right.

Then came the second stroke. Stop! Stop! Why was his tongue tied?

Heimert saw him draw himself up. He thought his adversary was going to fire, and he raised his revolver hastily. His forefinger pressed the trigger. The sound of the shot echoed through the air, and almost simultaneously the clock struck for the third time.

Heppner remained a moment standing. His revolver rattled to the ground, his left hand clutched at his breast. Then the tall upright figure lurched forward, and fell like a lifeless mass. A violent shudder ran through the limbs; the body contracted, stretched itself again, turned over on itself, and fell on its back.

Then all was still.

Heimert stood in his place. The hand with the revolver had slowly sunk, and hung down limply. His glance wandered from the corpse to the boundary line at his feet. He had not stepped

over it. Everything was according to order.

At last he aroused himself from his stupor. He forced himself to pass the little furrow in the ground, and went towards his opponent. His footsteps were heavy and uncertain; it felt to him as if his soles adhered to the earth.

The sergeant-major was dead; there was no doubt about that. On the left breast were a slight blood-stain and a quite diminutive hole. His head was thrown back. The wide-open eyes of the dead man stared into the moonlight.

Heimert gently closed the eyelids. He paused for a time beside the corpse with folded hands, and softly muttered the Lord's prayer. Then he began to descend the hill.

But he seemed to bethink himself of something. He dived again through the shadow of the trees and knelt beside the sergeant-major. With great care he laid his own discharged revolver in place of the loaded weapon which Heppner had dropped.

When he stood up again a shifty, vague, cunning expression passed over his face.

Between the white stems of the young birch-trees he looked out for the sentry, who must have heard the shot. Redoubled precautions would be necessary in regaining the barracks.

The sentry was staring fixedly up into the woods hence he had heard the firing. With his head still turned towards the heights he walked up to the gates, and waited to be relieved. When the bombardier and the relieving sentry appeared he made his announcement. He pointed several times to the wood. The bombardier shrugged his shoulders and asked questions; finally he disappeared through the gateway with the sentry who had been relieved. The gates clanged together, and the keys rattled as the lock was turned.

The new sentry listened awhile to his comrades' retreating steps; then he strolled along his beat at a leisurely pace, occasionally looking up the hill. He took his time, but at last he turned the corner of the officers' quarters.

Heimert made use of the opportunity. He ran hastily down the pathway to the barracks. He drew himself up with the aid of the lightning-conductor till his feet reached the top of the wall, and soon after was standing, breathing heavily, in his own kitchen.

A moonbeam fell on something shining that leant against a kitchen chair. It was Heppner's sword. Heimert took it up and carefully hung it on its nail in the passage.

For a moment he stood listening. The Heppner baby was crying; the soothing murmurs of its mother could be plainly heard: "Sh, sh!"

He stepped back on tiptoe, drew the door gently to, and began hastily to undress. Then he lay down quietly in bed, taking pains not to make the bedstead creak.

His precautions were superfluous; Albina slept soundly. An earthquake would hardly have awakened her.

The deputy sergeant-major lay and listened. He could only hear the beating of his own heart, and through the wall the muffled sound of the child's crying.

"Widow and orphan," he thought.

The wailing voice subsided by degrees. The child had fallen asleep, or the mother had taken it to her breast.

Its father was lying up there on the hill-side, his huge body blocking the pathway.

Schellhorn, the fat paymaster of the regiment, whom Surgeon-major Andreae sent every spring to Carlsbad for a cure, found the corpse during his early morning constitutional.

He hastened to the barracks and gave the alarm.

After all particulars had been noted, the dead man was carried away. Four gunners bore the heavy body down the hill on a stretcher, and laid it on the bed in the Heppners' dwelling, the poor wife looking on with bewildered eyes.

There was no doubt as to the case being one of suicide. The direction of the shot, as shown by the post-mortem examination, was not against this theory; but the most unmistakable proof lay in the motive for the deed, which was only too clear. From the various cash-boxes under the charge of the deceased one hundred and twenty marks were missing.

Sergeant-major Heppner, in dread of this being discovered, had shot himself.

The colonel, Major Schrader, and Captain von Wegstetten unanimously decided to hush up the

affair, in view of the certain censure of the higher authorities; and Schrader replaced the missing sum without more ado.

Heppner's gambling companions were seriously warned.

Sergeant-major Blechs Schmidt, who was most to blame, received an official intimation that he must not count upon a further term of service.

Finally the widow was informed that her husband had committed suicide in a moment of temporary mental aberration.

A few days after the funeral Heimert was installed in Heppner's place.

It gave him an immense deal of trouble to fulfil his new duties, and yet no man could have set himself to the task more zealously and conscientiously.

Captain von Wegstetten sometimes raged with impatience when his new sergeant-major could not meet his requirements. Mere indications and suggestions were not sufficient for the dull and somewhat limited understanding of Heimert. Every detail had to be pointed out to him and explained at length; but once he comprehended them he showed himself capable of carrying out orders punctually and carefully.

From the time of his promotion Heimert troubled himself little about Albina. His behaviour towards her became shy and odd; he avoided as much as possible being alone with her. He preferred to sit at his desk in the orderly-room, while she on her side felt no regret in being relieved from the too particular attentions of her unloved husband.

Käppchen came to the conclusion that the sergeant-major must have a screw loose somewhere. Heimert exhibited certain strange whims. He would become perfectly furious if the many-coloured penholder which Heppner had used were offered him, and he strictly forbade the corporal ever to put it on his desk. Käppchen would sometimes for fun hand him this penholder "by mistake" if a signature were wanted in a hurry. The sergeant-major looked so comic with his blazing eyes and crimson face, his nose shining reddest of all.

But the days were always too long for the sergeant-major. Even his writing came at last to an end, and there was still time left on his hands. He was not long in finding an occupation.

In the mounted exercises he had hitherto led the third column, but as sergeant-major he now had to take an entirely different place in the formation. His work was, as a matter of fact, much easier than formerly; but he seemed to find it twice as difficult to understand. He often did not know where he ought to be, and when Wegstetten found fault with him he took it much to heart. What sort of an impression would it give, if even the sergeant-major did not know his work, the senior non-commissioned officer of the battery?

When he went over his book, puzzling out the regulations with his fingers in his ears, his thoughts seemed to become more and more wildly confused. He could form no clear picture of all these evolutions. He therefore took his pen-knife, and with endless trouble made little wooden figures, roughly representing the guns, the ammunition waggons, and the individual mounted men. He coloured these figures so that they might be perfectly distinguishable: the commander of the battery, the leader of the column, the sergeant-major, the trumpeter, and the corporal in the rear. And then he made them exercise on the table, advance and retire, form into line, and wheel round; but his chief care was always to keep the yellow-striped sergeant-major in his right position.

Soon Wegstetten had no complaint to make of his sergeant-major, but Heimert still went on playing with his little figures. For these wooden guns and horsemen he was now the commander of the battery, and he would not be contented till his miniature troop was brought to as great a state of perfection as reigned under the captain of the sixth battery.

Albina shook her head over her husband's conduct. The man was ill, of that she was convinced. She spoke to him once of consulting the doctor, but Heimert repulsed her roughly.

"Thank God!" he said; "there's nothing the matter with me. I wish everybody were as healthy as I am!"

After this she left him in peace. In her opinion some insidious disease was advancing upon him, and sooner or later the trouble would break out.

Heimert's appetite began to fail at last; he hardly ate any-thing. He had always been extremely ugly, but people now shrank back at the sight of his face. His eyes had become sunken, and had acquired an unnatural brilliancy, while his hideous nose jutted out prominently from the middle of his ashy countenance.

Albina sighed. What sort of show could one make with a husband like that? It was fortunate that he kept out of the way so much.

But the time began to hang very heavy on her hands. From sheer ennui she took to having her hair curled.

The barber who shaved the sergeant-major every morning had already offered his services, commenting in a most flattering manner on the magnificent hair which he said she did not show off to the best advantage.

Albina had hitherto passed him proudly by. She despised barbers. But now she began to observe him more closely. He appeared to her a polite, agreeable, young man; he was good-looking too, even elegant. And he was entertaining. He could tell her the most interesting things about all sorts of people.

"You see, madam," he used to say, "a barber is one of the family almost. He sees people in *déshabille*, as it were. And sometimes one learns all manner of strange things. Of course the honour of the profession forbids gossiping. But there is no harm in repeating little trifling occurrences. Don't you think so? It amuses one's clients; and that is quite permissible."

Albina entirely agreed with him.

Here was at least a man with whom one could have some rational conversation.

During the exercises one morning the captain came riding up to the sergeant-major.

"You must go back home at once, Heimert," he cried. "The major wants the regulations that were in force at the last manœuvres. Look them out, and send them over to the division at once, will you?"

"Now, at once?" asked Heimert.

"Yes, yes! Make haste and get them!"

The sergeant-major hastened back to the barracks. With helmet on head and sword by his side he set off at once on the quest. He gave Käppchen the regulations to carry over to the orderly-room of the division, and he himself returned home.

In the bedroom he found Albina and the barber together.

The shameless woman had felt so secure that she had not even troubled to bolt the door.

Her gallant lover disappeared through the window like a shot.

Albina was not so quick. Heimert seized hold of her and dragged her through the doorway just as she was, clad only in a dressing-jacket and a thin petticoat.

The jacket tore in his hands. Then he seized her by her thick hair. She screamed, but he pushed her before him down the passage.

A heavy riding-whip was hanging on a nail; as he passed he tore it down, and the leathern thong descended in furious blows on the woman's head, and on her bare shoulders and bosom.

She gave a loud yell of pain. The few men who had remained away from the exercises came running, and stared open-mouthed. The whip made deep red marks on the smooth skin, and the shrieks of the woman became more and more piercing. But Heimert drove her down the steps into the barrack-yard. She stumbled, and lost a shoe. No matter! on she must go!

If she stopped for a moment the whip lashed round her feet, her ankles, her knees. She cowered, shrieking. With outstretched arms she tried to parry the blows. Her husband pulled her upright; she staggered, but was again dragged along by her hair under the pressure of that remorseless hand. The blood ran from her shoulders, but the blows still rained down like hail.

At last, on reaching the back gate the iron grip was loosened. One last furious stroke tore her garments and dyed the white linen red. She stood there for a moment, with bleeding hands pressed to her head, with shut eyes and trembling knees.

Suddenly she realised that she was free, and with wild leaps she fled towards the forest. On the slope of the hill she turned. Her bare skin gleamed in the bright sunshine, and her dishevelled hair hung down over her brow. She shook her naked arms with furious gestures towards the sergeant-major, and screamed a hideous curse in his face. Then she disappeared into the wood.

Heimert looked after her with a dull expression of countenance, till no trace of her white garments was to be seen among the green bushes. Then he returned home with firm footsteps.

Wegstetten gave orders that the sergeant-major should not be disturbed that day. Under such

circumstances a man had better be left to himself. But when Heimert did not put in an appearance next morning, Kämpchen was sent to look him up.

The battery-clerk came back much disturbed, and announced: "Excuse me, sir, I think the sergeant-major's gone mad."

"Mad? You are mad yourself, man!" was the captain's reply; and he went in person to the sergeant-major's quarters.

Heimert was sitting at the table, his little wooden guns and horsemen before him. With smiling looks he was drilling them, giving the words of command in a soft voice.

He did not seem to recognise the commander of his battery, but gazed stupidly at Wegstetten when he spoke to him.

"Don't you know me, sergeant-major?" asked the captain.

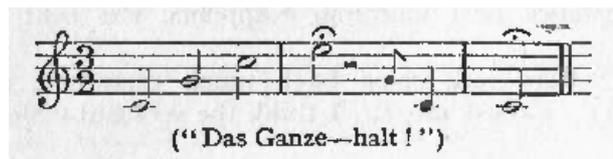
Heimert smiled at him, and pointed to the little horses.

"I ask you, Sergeant-major Heimert, don't you know your captain?" demanded Wegstetten once more.

The sergeant-major shook his head, grinning. Then he set to work again, and the guns were made to advance, each at an equal distance from the other, with the leaders of the columns and the mounted men all in their places.

Heimert was taken to the lunatic asylum of the district. In general he was a very manageable patient, and it was only if a woman approached him that he began to rave. His greatest delight was to play with some wooden toys that were given him,—mimic guns and mounted soldiers of all descriptions.

CHAPTER XIII



Shortly before Christmas Senior-lieutenant Güntz was promoted to be captain, and was placed in command of the fifth battery, *vice* Captain Mohr, discharged from the service for incompetence.

New brooms sweep clean, and Güntz set to work with ardour at the difficult task of bringing order and efficiency into the neglected troop. By means of stringent discipline, and even severity, he succeeded in this more easily than he himself had expected, and soon began to notice with satisfaction that his labour was gradually bearing fruit.

After a time the fifth battery could be ranged alongside the pattern fourth and sixth batteries. Major Schrader rubbed his hands cheerfully: to have three such excellent officers commanding batteries in one division at the same time was indeed unusual good fortune, and he well knew how to make use of them.

At the spring inspection he received a string of compliments at least a yard long from the commander of the brigade, and in his joy showered thanks upon Güntz for having helped him to achieve such a success. Güntz himself was greatly pleased that the inspection had gone so smoothly. He had not been sure that this would be so, as he did not feel his battery quite well enough in hand even yet.

"Yes, it went off tolerably, didn't it, sir?" he replied modestly.

"Faultlessly! faultlessly!" said the major.

"Well, sir, it was partly good luck. The officer in command of a battery is right in the middle of it all, and sees lots of things which look as if they might go wrong. Then some happy accident occurs, and the situation is saved."

The major, however, seemed to have something more on his mind, and stood stroking his whiskers in embarrassment.

"Certainly, certainly," he answered. "A man must have good luck, or he will have bad! But your merit is there all the same, my dear Gützt."

And then he continued, rather haltingly: "And therefore, you know, it is all the more painful to me. But there is something more behind. These superior officers never seem to give unstinted praise."

Gützt's hand went up to his helmet, and he said, in a level voice: "Of course I am at your orders, sir."

"No, no, my dear Gützt," said Schrader, deprecatingly; "the colonel is kind enough to undertake the unpleasant part of my duty for me, and I am glad of it; for it would have been very much against the grain with me. Well, well! just you go quietly to the colonel, and don't worry about it at all. Thank you, my dear Gützt. Good morning, good morning!"

He turned towards his quarters, and from the steps nodded in friendly fashion to the captain.

Gützt did feel a little anxious about the interview which lay before him. He was conscious of having performed his duty to the best of his ability. But heaven knows what commanding officers won't sometimes get their backs up about!

Colonel von Falkenheim received him very cordially.

"My dear friend," he said, "I congratulate you! You could not have wished for a better *début* as the youngest officer in command of a battery."

"Thank you very much, sir," replied Gützt; and then went straight to the point about the mysterious affair. His curiosity was surely pardonable.

"Excuse me, sir," he continued, "Major Schrader informs me that---"

Falkenheim interrupted him: "Yes, quite right. You will take it to heart, but you must know that our esteemed brigadier has still something *in petto*. As you have heard, he was highly satisfied with your direction of your battery to-day; but he considers that in regard to discipline you do not seem to be quite at home yet in your new position."

This was just what Gützt had not expected. He had imagined his best work to have been precisely in this direction.

Falkenheim smiled at his puzzled look as he asked for further explanation, and shrugging his shoulders went on: "Yes, so the general said, But, my dear Gützt, I have only formally repeated this to you as I was commanded to do so. Now let us talk it over as colleagues. I can understand your astonishment, and you will soon be more puzzled than ever. The reason the general gives for his strictures is that there has been so much punishment in your battery--more than double as much as in the fourth and the sixth together."

Gützt restrained a gesture of impatient surprise. This was rather beyond a joke!

"But, sir," he said, "you know under what circumstances I took command!"

"Know? why, of course I do!" answered Falkenheim; "and of course I explained to him. But he regarded my description as exaggerated. I may tell you in confidence that he belongs to the very clique who managed to keep Mohr in the service so long. And he regards his opinion as infallible--namely, that too many punishments in a troop are the consequence of a lack of discipline. He considers that a certain similarity in the punishment-registers of the batteries should be aimed at unconditionally. Otherwise unfavourable conclusions as to the capability of individual captains must be drawn, he says."

Gützt was honestly indignant, and when anything struck him as unjust, it never mattered to him in whose presence he was; he must speak his mind, even to his colonel.

"Pardon me, sir," he began, "but the general has surely lost sight of the fact that for similar results similar previous conditions are necessary. I consider, with all respect, that even in normal batteries the material on which we have to work is different; and that in the very same battery perhaps the new year's recruits may effect an enormous difference in the punishment-register. To say nothing of such circumstances as there were in my case. If my punishment-register were *not* greater than those of the fourth and sixth batteries, then that would reflect unfavourably upon me. And I most respectfully hope that it is not a more important matter to the general to receive punishment-registers of the same length, than that the discipline of a battery should suffer." Almost out of breath, he added! "Pardon me, sir, I beg!"

Falkenheim had become very serious.

"I take nothing you have said amiss, my dear Guntz," he replied. "I cannot but admit that you are perfectly right. And exactly what you have just argued I myself said very plainly to the general, very plainly indeed. He became damnably cold to me at the end of it."

The colonel paused, and smiled a little to himself as he thought over the conversation. The general had been nearly bursting with rage, and would not have permitted such opposition from any one else to go unpunished. But Falkenheim was a recognised favourite of the old monarch; he had been the king's hunting-companion for days together, and was surer in his position than even the general in his. So he could not cut up too rough.

"Nevertheless," continued the colonel more cheerfully, "he regarded it as desirable that a greater similarity should gradually be obtained."

Guntz answered firmly: "Forgive me, sir, I cannot promise the general this in anticipation. I could not bring it into harmony with my conception of the duty of an officer."

"Good," answered Falkenheim. "You have given me that answer as your friend and colleague. As your commander, I have perfect confidence that you will do all you can that is useful and desirable for the king's service, and that in this sense you will accede to the general's wish."

Guntz bowed, and answered: "Certainly, sir."

In the orderly-room he asked the sergeant-major whether Zampa had been exercised that day.

"Not yet, sir."

"Then please have him saddled, and I will take him out for a little myself."

He rode down towards the valley. Yonder on the left among the fresh green plantations lay the pistol-practice ground, on which a few months ago his duel with Lieutenant Landsberg had taken place. He thought less of that episode itself than of the night before it, during which he had written down his reasons for contemplating resignation.

To-day he felt himself enriched by a fresh argument.

Deuce take it! Was not this passion for similarity enough to madden one? Must everything be tainted by this damned, regular, grinding drill, this parade-march sort of principle? Must things everywhere run smoothly and according to rule, just in order that the authorities might be convinced of the excellence of the whole system?

So even the punishment-register should be carefully edited! No one must lift his head above his fellows! It was really laughable. Teachers might have bad pupils; but it seemed to be against the rules for the captain of a battery to have bad soldiers in his troop!

Luckily for him, he happened to be in very favourable circumstances. He had a colonel who stood up for him, and who could dare to express a difference of opinion from his superior officer, because he himself chanced to be in the good books of the king. So that this affair would pass by all right and do nobody any harm. But what would have happened if the colonel himself had felt uncertain of his position? Would he have found the moral courage to oppose his influential superior, even if only by a modest remonstrance? Would he not rather, for the sake of his career, have said, merely: "Certainly, sir!"

And then the pressure would have gone on downwards; and among a hundred captains there were certainly but few who, in the struggle between their better knowledge and their future career, would remain true to their convictions. Most of them would bring the punishment-register up to the "desirable" regularity, and just do as best they could with the bad elements in their batteries: the men who sneered at all discipline, and whom nevertheless their captain dared not punish properly; who spoil the good soldiers, and increased the dislike of the reservists for the service. Otherwise the punishment-register might exceed the average demanded, and "that would cause unfavourable conclusions as to the discipline of the battery and the capability of the captain."

Guntz rode slowly back along the grassy lane. He looked around him. Yonder the white walls of the barracks gleamed in the sunshine; a fresh wind gently shook the budding branches, and all around everything was sprouting, filled with the vigour of youth. He guided his horse carefully round a patch of primroses, which covered the whole width of the path with a sheet of yellow blossoms.

He bade dull care begone. Could he not at any time quit the service directly he became convinced of its ineffectiveness? To-day's experience was simply a fresh weight in the scales of his doubt.

He had once more determined to apply all his strength to the solution of a problem, which had been in his mind even at the time of his employment in Berlin.

There seemed to him no doubt that the French field-artillery with its anti-recoil construction

had gained a great advantage over all other armies; an advantage which could only be prejudiced if the utility of the invention were proved on the field of battle to be less than was expected. Up to the present time the French gun-carriage had only been tested on a small scale in peace manoeuvres, and it had not been absolutely demonstrated that its construction would stand the continuous high pressure of a campaign. He was now absorbed in a scheme for simplifying and strengthening the anti-recoil attachments in such a way that they would keep in working order under the severest test. And at the same time he had been directing his attention to the steel shields used in the French field-artillery for the protection of the men who served the guns. German military authorities were for the most part opposed to the introduction of this method of protection; but the shield seemed to him very worthy of adoption. In the battles of the future the percentage of probable losses must be computed quite mathematically; and it would be a great advantage if, by virtue of the shield, a large number of the combatants could be considered safe. The opponents of the measure gave it as their opinion that the men would shirk quitting the protection of the shield; or that, at any rate, they would take aim so hurriedly that their accuracy must necessarily suffer. Well, one might equally well argue that the infantry would refuse to leave their trenches. The other objection was more convincing: shooting would become too difficult if this steel shield were associated with the anti-recoil construction. It was a question of mobility; therefore Guntz set to work to find out some method of lightening the gun. Why should the gun-carriage be loaded with such a large quantity of ammunition as was customary--more, probably, than would ever be needed? He was constructing the model of a carriage in which the quantity of ammunition carried was to be diminished by one-third; so that the extra weight of the anti-recoil construction and the steel shield should be more than counterbalanced.

When he was in Berlin he had gone into the details of his invention with the head of a large Rhenish gun-foundry. This man proposed that Guntz should send in his resignation and enter the service of the firm at a handsome salary. Guntz at that time was not prepared to decide in the matter; but at the close of the interview the manager had said: "Who knows? perhaps we shall see each other again."

Had the man been right?

In any case, Guntz felt strong enough to make his own way through life.

The servant took his horse from him at the garden gate.

"Well, did it go off all right?" asked Kläre.

The captain answered, "Yes, first-rate." He did not conceal the "but," however. The calm good sense of his wife always helped him to test his own impressions. Kläre was, indeed, a woman whose like was not to be found in the whole world; a woman who had been created just for him.

She had her own methods in everything. If, at dinner, her husband were worried with thoughts of the black sheep in his battery, and would keep introducing such topics at their comfortable board, then she would snub him quite severely. But when he came to her with his real doubts and anxieties she was ever ready to comfort and advise him. She knew all about his plan of testing himself for a year in the command of a battery; and sometimes she was inclined to advise him to shorten the period of probation. She was shrewd enough to foresee that within a year and a day he would have discarded his officer's uniform.

Lieutenant Reimers continued as hitherto to be a welcome guest in the Guntz household.

He had realised that his frequent visits were in no way a bother to his friend; and when Frau Kläre, with the amiability of a careful hostess, considered his little idiosyncrasies of taste, he could but protest feebly: "Really, dear lady, you spoil me too much! What shall I do if, for instance, I have to go to the Staff College next year?"

To Guntz he once said, "I must say that in contemplating you and your wife, one realises what a half-man a bachelor is."

The stout captain laughed good-naturedly.

"Kläre," he shouted to his wife, who was just coming into the room, "it appears that I wasn't making a mistake when I chose you for my wife."

"How's that, my Fatty?" asked his wife.

"Reimers has just been saying that the sight of our wedded life gives him an appetite for matrimony. What do you say to that?"

"A very sensible remark, Herr Reimers," laughed Kläre.

Reimers blushed a little and rejoined: "Well, then, I shall soon go bride-hunting. For your advice is always good, dear lady."

"Now then, flatterer!" growled Guntz. "Don't make my wife conceited."

But when Reimers had bidden them good-bye he said to Kläre: "I really believe it would be a

most sensible thing for Reimers to marry; he is not the sort to become a mere mess-house or tavern *habitué*. He ought to go about and study the daughters of our country a little."

"Why go about? There's good enough near at hand," said Frau Kläre.

The captain looked up: "Eh?"

Smilingly his wife pointed over her shoulder to the neighbouring villa.

"Marie Falkenhein?" asked Güntz.

Frau Kläre nodded.

"You don't want to earn a match-maker's reward, do you, now?" inquired her husband.

"Oh, Fatty, darling! don't you know me better than that?" his wife protested. "No, no, nothing of the sort! But seriously, I do mean that those two young people would suit each other very well. With regard to Marie, I know positively this much, she thinks Reimers very nice; and that is, at any rate, something to go on, until our dear Reimers opens his eyes."

"But let him open them quite by himself, please; no assistance, I do beg!" the captain interrupted.

"Of course, Fatty, quite by himself."

"But, Kläre, how about that episode of the Gropphusen? That was a bit off the rails, wasn't it?"

"Nothing of the kind. Nothing but a mere passing flirtation."

Güntz shook his head thoughtfully.

"No, Kläre," he replied. "I understand Reimers. He would never have anything to do with mere passing flirtations. It is just the dear fellow's misfortune that he takes everything so damned seriously. It went pretty deep with him that time with the Gropphusen; you can believe me as to that."

"Still, one does not cling for all eternity to such a useless sort of business."

Güntz was not quite convinced.

"Well, we must hope not," he said. "And, really, the two would suit each other excellently."

Walking up and down the room he continued: "Yes, in all respects. Reimers has an income of about seventy thousand marks, and the colonel would certainly be able to give his daughter a bit of money without having to pinch himself. I should say about twenty thousand. True, he is no Cræsus; but then he will soon be made a general. Our dear Reimers will have to keep his passion for books in check. Yes, yes! The thing would answer admirably."

He stood still and knocked the ash off his cigar.

"Why are you laughing, you sly little woman?" he asked, glancing down at her.

"How funny you are, Fatty!" Kläre answered. "You accuse me quite sternly of the worst intentions, and then you make plan after plan, and even begin to reckon up their joint income!"

But Güntz parried the accusation gallantly:

"Just another compliment for you, my Kläre. Only happy couples try to bring about other marriages."

A short time afterwards, without any prompting from the Güntzes, Reimers said to his stout friend: "Güntz, doesn't it strike you that Mariechen Falkenhein is a very nice girl?"

Güntz leant back in his chair reflectively, and answered: "A nice girl? how do you mean? Certainly she has a pretty face, her eyes are especially sweet, and she has a good figure. Just a little too slight. For my taste, of course I mean."

"No," replied Reimers, "I don't mean that so much. Certainly she is pretty. But, after all, that's a secondary matter. I mean more the effect of her personality. There seems to be something so sure, so comfortable, so restful about her. Don't you think so?"

"Well, you know, I have not made such detailed observations. But I daresay you are right. And I should say that she will make a splendid wife some day. Quick and accurate, without a trace of superficiality, with a strong instinct for housewifely order; a simple, clear, shrewd intellect--the man who wins her for his wife will be a lucky fellow!"

Reimers unconsciously drew himself up a little, and he said doubtfully:

"But surely she is still much too young."

"Not a bit," replied Güntz. "She will be eighteen in the autumn, and she is not even engaged yet. And after that there would be the betrothal time of the educated European--not less than six months. Well, that would bring her nearly up to twenty, and at twenty a woman in our geographical area is quite eligible for marriage."

Reimers appeared to meditate upon this. Finally, however, he only replied by a prolonged "H'm," and dropped the subject.

But the ladies of the regiment had soon a fresh subject for gossip. Lieutenant Reimers was paying his addresses to Marie Falkenheim. There was no doubt that his intentions were serious. Well, he had no rivals to fear. Falkenheim was poor every one knew that. He could have very little income beyond his pay. And his daughter? Oh, yes, she was a pretty, graceful creature; but she was not brilliantly beautiful, and therefore could not have any very great expectations. No question of anything beyond just a suitable and satisfactory marriage in the service.

From this time onward the matter was almost regarded as settled; and in the garrison gossip Marie von Falkenheim and Lieutenant Reimers were soon spoken of as though their betrothal had been already announced.

Naturally the interesting news was eagerly carried to Frau von Gropphusen, and she was narrowly watched for the effect of the communication; but nothing could be detected. No flinching, no pauses in the conversation, no alteration in the expression of her face or of her voice. What a pity that there was no theatre in the town, when they so thoroughly enjoyed such little dramas!

Hannah Gropphusen did not discontinue her visits to Frau Güntz. She came neither more rarely nor more frequently. She seemed to have regained self-control.

Frau Kläre's birthday was celebrated in the arbour of the Falkenheims' garden, by the second *Maibowle* of the season. They had drunk to the health of the birthday-queen, and were just sitting down again when there was the tinkle of a bicycle-bell outside in the street. The soft sound of the quick wheels came nearer, and just in front of the garden there was the thud of a light pair of feet jumping to the ground.

A clear voice, which would have sounded merry, but that for the moment it seemed a little breathless, called up to the arbour: "Hurrah! hurrah! And for the third time hurrah! Can one get anything to drink here?"

Güntz hurried to the balustrade.

"My dear lady!" he exclaimed astonished. "Certainly you can! There's still lots left."

He turned round: "Pardon me, sir, but here's Frau von Gropphusen."

Falkenheim went quickly to his side: "Do give us the pleasure of your company, dear Frau von Gropphusen. I will have your bicycle taken in at once."

He went to the gate and conducted Frau von Gropphusen to the arbour. Güntz had already placed a chair at the table for her and poured out a glass of *Maibowle*.

"Who rides so late through night and wind?" asked Kläre merrily, holding out her hand cordially to the new arrival.

Hannah Gropphusen greeted the festive circle with a bright smile, and replied: "Do forgive me, Colonel von Falkenheim. The lights and the festivity in your arbour were too inviting." She raised her glass, and drank to Kläre Güntz: "To your happiness, dear Frau Kläre, from the bottom of my heart."

"I have been delayed at Frau von Stuckardt's," she then said; "or, rather, Frau von Stuckardt would not let me leave."

"Stuckardt told me," interrupted the colonel, "that his wife was not well."

"Yes, she has got the old pain in her face back again, which no doctor can relieve, and that was why I had to stay so long. I had to keep my hands on her cheeks. She says I have soothing hands and can do her good."

Reimers looked across at her. She was sitting a little in the shadow, so that her white straw hat and light blouse stood out distinctly. On her bosom sparkled a small diamond. Only the tip of her foot was visible in the lamplight, a beautiful, narrow, elegantly-shod foot, which was swinging rapidly backwards and forwards.

To avoid catching her eye, Reimers turned to Marie Falkenheim, his neighbour. The *Maibowle* had got into his head a little. He chatted away cheerfully, the young girl listening with flushed cheeks and radiant eyes, and answering laughingly from time to time. They neither of them noticed that meanwhile Frau von Gropphusen had emptied her glass and was preparing to go.

"Many thanks," she said. "I was nearly fainting. The *Maibowle* has done me good. But it's getting late; I must go home."

"Of course they are expecting you at home?" asked Falkenheim.

Hannah Gropphusen laughed rather bitterly.

"Expecting me?" she replied. "Who? Oh no, I don't suppose my husband is at home. But pray, colonel, don't punish him for that!"

This was rather painful. However, Frau von Gropphusen afterwards said good-bye to them so simply and naturally that no one thought anything more about it.

The colonel accompanied her to the gate, and the four in the arbour went over to the balustrade. Güntz had put his arm tenderly round Frau Kläre, and Reimers was standing beside Marie Falkenheim. They watched Hannah Gropphusen mount her bicycle and ride slowly away. She turned round in the saddle, waved her right hand, and shouted out a laughing "Good-night."

A little further along she looked back, and the white-gloved hand waved again, but they could no longer distinguish her features.

Then the rushing wheels disappeared in the darkness.

Frau von Gropphusen rode quietly home.

The servant was waiting at the door. He took the machine from her, asking if she would take tea.

"No," she answered. "I have had it. You can clear the things away."

She threw herself on the couch in her room just as she was, in her bicycling costume. She drew up the rug and wrapped herself in it.

And Hannah Gropphusen lay thus till far into the night, staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness of the room.

A few days later Marie Falkenheim came through the garden gate to Kläre Güntz's house.

"Kläre," she said, "I am going into the town to inquire after Frau von Stuckardt. Would you like me to call in at the chemist's and tell him he is to send you the sugar-of-milk for the baby?"

Frau Kläre took stock of the young girl, and shook her finger at her laughingly.

"Mariechen! Mariechen!" she said. "I never would have believed you could become such an accomplished hypocrite, my child."

Marie turned crimson.

"Yes, yes," continued Kläre. "Because you have heard me call vanity a vice, you were ashamed to show off your new dress and hat to me. But you hadn't quite the heart to pass by your old friend's house. Isn't that the way of it?"

The young girl nodded, her face scarlet.

Kläre stroked her cheek caressingly, and went on: "You silly little goose! But really, you know, when one's as pretty as you are, a little vanity is excusable. And now tell me, where in the world did you get these things?"

"Oh, Kläre," replied the girl, "not here, of course. Frau von Gropphusen went with me and helped me to choose them. I can tell you, Kläre, she does understand such things."

The young woman stood in front of her friend and looked her over from head to foot. It would have been impossible to find any costume which lent itself more happily to Marie's dainty appearance than this of some light-grey soft silken material, trimmed with white, and with a little hat to match, the shape of which softly emphasised the delicate beauty of the young face.

Kläre gave the girl a hearty kiss, and said: "You are as pretty as a picture, little one. Quite lovely. Well, and what did the stern father say to all this?"

Marie was quite flushed with pride. "At first he said, 'By Jove!'" she answered. "Then I made him give me a kiss; and next he got quite anxious and wanted to know whether I hadn't been running into debt. I had to swear to him that the whole turn-out didn't cost me more than what he had given me for it."

"And is that the truth, dear child?"

"Well, I had just to add four marks from my pocket-money."

Kläre shook her head smilingly. "Dear, dear! So young and already so depraved! Hypocrisy and perjury! Well, at least it is worth it."

Frau von Gropphusen now made quite a business of helping Marie von Falkenheim about her clothes. Hannah's slender hands were quicker and cleverer than those of the deftest maid, and she knew how to transform the young girl's plain boarding-school frocks into something quite pretty and original.

She did all this with a soft motherly tenderness, hardly in accordance with her own youthfulness. Marie Falkenhien's school-girl stiffness disappeared gradually, and a dainty young woman blossomed out.

"By Jove!" said Güntz to Frau Kläre. "How Mariechen is coming on! She is getting a deuced pretty little girl!"

And Reimers looked at the young girl with eyes which no longer contained the brotherly indifference of past months.

Shortly before the departure of the troops for the practice-camp the regimental adjutant, Senior-lieutenant Kauerhof, had a fall from his horse, and injured one of the tendons of his knee-joint. This would probably keep him away from duty for about six weeks, so Lieutenant Reimers was appointed to take his work. Being the eldest lieutenant in the regiment his promotion to senior-lieutenant was expected any day.

The young officer was in the seventh heaven of delight at this mark of distinction. He embarked on his new duties with boundless and untiring zeal. He almost divined the wishes of Falkenheim; and sometimes it was not even necessary to give explicit directions as to the manner in which this or that order was to be carried out. The colonel knew that Reimers, with his powers of intuition, would do the right thing.

Falkenheim could not imagine a more painstaking adjutant, nor one who, when off duty, on the march, or at the practice-camp, could have looked after his colonel's comfort with more tender consideration. He had noticed that Reimers had of late paid his daughter attention, and the idea of some day entrusting his child to the care of this excellent young man--already like a beloved son to him--gave him real pleasure. This gratifying prospect made him more unreserved than was usually his custom. It was well known that the colonel was not exactly delighted with the hundred and one innovations that had been introduced into the army at the accession of the young emperor. And now, feeling that he could trust his acting adjutant implicitly, and that not a word of misrepresentation or misconstruction would ever reach the ears of any evil-disposed person, he freely unburdened his mind of the cares and anxieties that weighed upon it.

Some of these confidential communications struck Reimers with amazement. He had expected to find in Falkenheim an officer who would entirely dissipate all the doubts that Güntz had awakened in his mind; and now he discovered that this honoured superior also was filled with the gravest views as to the thoroughness and efficiency of the organisation of the German army. The more important of these conversations he noted down each evening in the following manner:--

June 2nd.

The colonel happened to talk about the supply of officers for the German army. In his opinion, the best material to draw from is the so-called "army nobility"--that is to say, those families (not necessarily noble) members of which have in many successive generations been German officers--German meaning Prussian, Saxon, Hanoverian, &c.--(examples: the colonel himself, Wegstetten, and also my humble self). These families are mostly of moderate means, and often intermarry. That conscientious devotion to their calling as officers is thus ingrained in their flesh and blood must be self-evident. It is born in them; and by their simple, austere up-bringing, with their profession ever in view, they become thoroughly imbued with it. But there is a danger that in such a mental atmosphere their range of observation may be so restricted that they cannot view the life of the world around them with intelligence or comprehension. Therefore it is of immense importance that the corps of German officers should be strengthened by the infusion of fresh blood from the middle and lower-middle classes, whose members, having been brought up and educated according to modern ideas, are of great service to the other officers in enlarging their range of view. They provide unprejudiced minds and clear intellects capable of dealing with the more advanced technical problems of modern warfare (Güntz, for instance).

The most! unsatisfactory material consists of those officers who, on account of inherited wealth, look upon their profession as a kind of sport, attractive, abounding in superficial honours, and for that reason very agreeable. They generally spring from well-to-do middle-class families (Landsberg), or, in the smart regiments of Guards, from the families of large landed proprietors and wealthy manufacturers. These latter are apt to regard court ball-rooms and racecourses as more important fields of action than drill-grounds and barracks. They are wholly without ambition, because they only intend to spend a few years in the army, and then retire to the comforts of private life on their own estates. They are neither good officers because to be that

demands a man's whole attention and energies; nor, subsequently, good citizens--because the proper management of a large estate needs training and experience, which cannot be acquired during their years of military life.

"Yet sometimes these very officers become generals in command, or something of the sort!" said he. "That's the worst of it!"

June 3rd.

The colonel continued the conversation of yesterday. We talked about the aristocracy and the middle-class in the army. He admits without hesitation that the middle-class element is despised, from the staff-officers downwards, owing to causes originating in the reflected glory of the old personal relations between the monarch and his feudal lords, now somewhat modified by the indiscriminate giving of titles--the acceptance of which titles, moreover, on the part of the middle-classes, he utterly condemns. He wound up by saying: "If only it were always members of the aristocracy who were really the most efficient, and attained the highest eminence!"

Just as the colonel had argued before that there was danger of one-sidedness from the prevailing influence of the "army nobility," he now pointed out that, on the other hand, an advantage arose: a kind of accumulation of specific military qualities of a bodily as well as of a mental kind. He may be quite right.

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June 6th.

Yesterday and to-day the Crown Prince lunched at the mess. He came for these two days in order to inspect the regiment of dragoons here, which belongs to his brigade. An amiable, good-tempered fellow (although our cooking did not give him entire satisfaction), and one who likes to sit over his wine a little.

As we rode after dinner his Highness told us some most racy and amusing stories in capital style. Then the conversation turned upon questions of tactics during the last campaign, and at this juncture the colonel became quite grave. These visits of exalted personages to regimental officers, which are to a certain extent of a social character, may, he says, bring about serious consequences. Such exalted persons are apt to regard any intellectual cypher as a great military genius if he happens to be an agreeable and versatile talker, and then the military authorities have not always the courage to disturb the preconceived notions of their sovereign. Result: Society-generals for dinners and balls; after whom rank next the petticoat-generals. And then he referred to the female ascendancy in the reign of the third Napoleon.

June 11th.

There is in the Reuss regiment of infantry an amusing little adjutant, Senior-lieutenant Schreck. He was with the expedition in China, and for that was awarded a medal. He is never to be seen without his little red and yellow ribbon. In fun the colonel asked him: "Have you got a ribbon like that on your night-shirt too?"

"You are pleased to jest, sir!" answered the little fellow indignantly, from the back of his long-legged bay mare.

"After all," said Falkenheim to me later, "I was just as proud of my first medal in the year 1870!"

"But this deluge of orders," he continued, "that was showered upon the China Expedition leads to a lot of self-delusion. It magnifies an insignificant event to an unnatural degree. Trivial successes stand out as if they were great victories, and cause exaggerated notions of individual infallibility. This was exactly what happened in the Dutch campaign of 1787, upon which followed the disasters of Valmy and Jena."

Jena!----Güntz said that too. Moreover, the colonel does not deny that the Expedition achieved all possible success. But he considers most objectionable that self-asserting propensity to boast about it associated as it so often is with an unctuous piety. "Of course," he said, "it's only one of the signs of the times; and it is just these times that don't please me. All this outward show in religion is detestable. It was just so in Berlin and Potsdam in the time of Bischoffswerder and Woellner."

That again was before--Jena.

June 13th.

For the first time the colonel asked me about my experiences in the South African War. He was reminded of it because a lieutenant belonging to the South-West African Defence Corps happened to call upon him at the practice-camp. I could only say that I had brought away with me

from the Transvaal an unspeakable abhorrence of war.

"Of war in general?" asked Falkenheim.

"Yes, indeed," I answered; and then it suddenly struck me what a preposterous reply this was for an officer to make. I qualified the assertion by saying I had assisted at the most unfortunate period of the Boer War, during the panic that followed Cronje's capture, and had got to know only the seamy side of warfare: demolished farms, trampled-down fields, no real steady fighting, scarcely any skirmishing even, but just one continual rout.

The colonel listened to my torrent of words in silence. Then at last--"Good God!" he said, "a thoughtful man *must* detest war--all war. But it does not do to be sentimental. Sentimentality in this matter is synonymous with stupidity." He spoke of this for a long time, then about other topics, and finally wound up by saying: "There are many such enigmas in this world that must remain unsolved for the present, and with which men are yet forced to deal in a practical manner, even at the risk of making mistakes. So that we just have to choose a sensible middle course. We must be neither too superficial nor too profound. And above all, we must not think too much!" Unfortunately, I am not the man for such compromises.

June 16th.

The colonel lunched with me in the canteen, sitting on benches in the middle of the wood; our fare being bread, sausage, and some excellent lager-beer. Close by were several one-year volunteers, and two or three non-commissioned officers with them. They looked uncomfortable, for they are forbidden to be on familiar terms with the non-commissioned officers. The colonel, however, did not mind it much.

"I believe," he said, "that it cannot always be avoided." Then he spoke of the one-year volunteer system, which in his opinion is a two-edged sword. It furnishes most efficient reserve-officers,--it has that advantage, certainly. But the drawbacks are as follows:

It is apt to demoralise the non-commissioned officers. True, bribery is strictly forbidden; but that is a mere empty form, a prohibition which is daily infringed, such infringement being purposely overlooked, whether for good or evil. The non-commissioned officer then ceases to depend on his pay alone; and that puts temptations to dishonourable conduct before many a perhaps otherwise conscientious man, besides inevitably engendering dissatisfaction with his profession. Furthermore, the one-year volunteer system takes away just those men who, with their higher intelligence and culture, might most effectually oppose the socialistic propaganda that goes on in the ranks, and who might in a certain sense exert an enlightening influence on those around them. The colonel regards all prohibitions and regulations against the inroads of the revolutionary spirit in the army as more or less futile. The only practicable expedient is the influence over the privates of thoroughly trustworthy elements in their midst. The fact that the one-year volunteers live in barracks among the privates certainly makes severe demands on the patriotism of the younger ones; but then it renders careful surveillance possible, and affords a valuable insight into the life of the common soldier, into his ways of thinking and his views of the world in general. Falkenheim maintains that for the same reason this arrangement, although in some respects inconvenient, is highly desirable for the *avantageur* as a future officer. The French military authorities, who have lately instituted a similar system, have, in his opinion, done perfectly right.

The hardships of the life serve both to sift out the incapables, and to produce officers who are more mature, more manly, and who do not look upon their inferiors as utter aliens.

The inspection of the regimental shooting went off without a hitch. In his subsequent criticism the general spoke of the pleasure it invariably afforded him to inspect the 80th Regiment of the Eastern Division Field-Artillery,--a pleasure of which he had never been disappointed. He ended by saying: "I congratulate both the regiment and yourself, Colonel von Falkenheim. The regiment, because it has such an excellent commanding officer at its head; and you, because you have made your regiment such a splendid body of men." Hardly a very brilliant or very witty remark, this; but it sounded pleasantly, and one could not reasonably expect higher praise.

Falkenheim was in the best of good humours. "Come, Reimers," he said after lunch, when he had accompanied the general to his carriage, "We'll give my two bays a little exercise. They've had none yet to-day."

The two officers started off at an easy trot towards the butts, chatting as they went.

"Here's something that will interest you, my dear Reimers," said the colonel presently. "Wednesday, the day we arrive home, is your day to go to the Güntzes. Mariechen has written to say there will be a surprise in the evening--vegetables of her own growing and poultry of her own rearing. The child makes one's mouth water, after our fare at the mess! The ladies promise us asparagus, home-bred chickens, new potatoes, salad, rhubarb shape, and a bowl of strawberries, too--everything home-grown. They drew lots as to which of the fowls were to be sacrificed, and are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the men, because not one of the kitchenmaids will consent to wring the neck of a chicken. My daughter also thanks you very much for your kind message; and

I was to give you her kind remembrances, and to thank you heartily for taking such excellent care of her old papa." Reimers thanked him in a low voice.

"It is wonderful," continued Falkenheim pleasantly, "what a change a little creature like that girlie of mine can make in one's home. It used to be quite immaterial to me where I slept whether here, in barracks, or in my own house. After my dear wife died I never cared to be at home. And now this little girl makes things so pleasant again that I once more enjoy being within my own four walls."

The lieutenant did not think this at all extraordinary. And as the colonel went on chatting gaily about his little daughter, Reimers, so silent hitherto, became quite talkative. Falkenheim turned and glanced at him now and then. The young man threw his heart and soul into his subject, and his eyes shone as he related various little instances of Marie Falkenheim's amiability and charm.

Suddenly Reimers paused. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask the colonel at once for this jewel of a girl. It would, indeed, be the most natural end to their conversation, and he felt sure that he would meet with no rebuff. But then he had not meant to approach the colonel on the subject so long as he was a mere simple lieutenant. He would at least wait for his promotion to senior-lieutenant. Therefore he held back the proposal he had so nearly made.

It fell out that the very next day an official telegram arrived, promoting Reimers to the rank of senior-lieutenant. Colonel von Falkenheim was the first to congratulate his acting adjutant, and it astonished him that an event of the kind, bound to occur in the natural order of things, should throw the sedate Reimers into such a state of excitement.

The new senior-lieutenant, too, was surprised at himself, having hitherto imagined that he regarded such externals with considerable equanimity. The delight with which he now fastened the stars upon his epaulettes was little less than that with which, seven years earlier, he had attached the epaulettes themselves to his uniform, feeling himself the happiest man in the whole world.

When Senior-lieutenant Reimers reported himself to the colonel, Falkenheim made him an unexpected proposition.

"My dear Reimers," said he, "you know that Kauerhof is now the eldest senior-lieutenant in the regiment. Before he gets his captaincy he will have to return to ordinary duty for a time, and I must therefore look about for another adjutant. So I thought of you, my dear Reimers. You have been so entirely satisfactory as acting adjutant that I cannot wish for a better man. But what do you think of it yourself?"

Reddening with pride and pleasure, Reimers replied: "If you are kind enough to think me worthy of such a mark of distinction, sir, I can only promise to do my best."

The colonel nodded, and continued: "I can well believe in your good intentions. But now, how about the Staff College?"

"Under these circumstances," replied Reimers quickly, "I will of course gladly give up the Staff College."

"That's just what you shall not do!" returned Falkenheim. "You shall go to the Staff College. It is my wish, in your own interests and in that of your career, my dear Reimers. Perhaps the matter could be arranged by your postponing your examination for a little while. You will probably in any case have to wait patiently for quite six years to come before you get the command of a battery. Be my adjutant for the first two years of that period, and then go in for your examination. By that time I shall probably be no longer in the regiment. Well, what do you say?"

Reimers agreed with pleasure. There seemed nothing but good fortune for him that day. Apparently all his wishes were to be fulfilled. Would it not perhaps be best to propose at once for the hand of Mariechen? Was not this just the right moment, after receiving such a conspicuous proof of Falkenheim's esteem and goodwill? But finally a piece of pure punctilio prevented him from carrying out his intentions. It was not at all correct to make a proposal of marriage at the time of receiving an official notification.

At luncheon that day it was continually, "Your health, Reimers!" "Good luck to you, Reimers!" or the orderly would be at his elbow with a message: "Captain Blank, or Lieutenant So-and-so, would like to drink a glass of wine with you, sir." And Reimers pledged his friends gaily across the table. He had invited Guntz and little Dr. von Fröben to a bottle of champagne, and grew more reckless as time went on. When lights were brought for the cigars Guntz said to him: "You're a bit screwed, my boy. You'd better go and sleep it off."

But Reimers had become exceedingly jovial. "Oh, it's nothing at all!" he declared. "I'm going for my ride now. It was postponed on account of the announcements to-day."

"That'll do nicely, my son," said Güntz; "that will put you right again." And he looked on smiling as the new senior-lieutenant swung himself into the saddle. The first attempt miscarried, and even the successful one was accomplished with difficulty; but the rider sat firmly enough in his seat when he got there and Dorothy had no tricks. Güntz waved merrily to his friend as he turned off into the forest.

The mare's hoofs sank deep into the soft sand; she soon allowed herself to fall into a lazy pace, and Reimers did not press her. Dorothy stretched out her neck and drew the bridle through her rider's fingers; he let it hang loose.

Reimers now became aware for the first time that the glasses and half-glasses in which he had answered his friends' congratulations must have amounted to a considerable number. If he tried to concentrate his thoughts on any particular subject, they slipped away from him in the most perverse manner. He reflected vaguely that this was the kind of mood in which he had of old committed all manner of pleasant follies and youthful indiscretions. And why not? Was he not young, and a free man?

How delightful was this solitude after the noise and smoke of the mess-room! It was now about six o'clock, and a heavenly June evening. The sun was still high, but the heat was no longer oppressive; the air felt soft and caressing. The dense forest on either hand was wrapped in stillness; no sound penetrated between the slender stems of the trees; the horse's tread in the soft sand made only a slight swishing noise.

At a crossing of the ways the mare came to a standstill, stretching out her nose towards a narrower lane, and snuffing the air. Finally she turned off the sandy road on to a grassy bridle-path. Reimers gave her her head; this was probably a short cut to the neighbouring village.

Now the wood became thinner. Cleared patches or young plantations alternated with the groups of tall pine-trees, and presently a fairly large meadow appeared on the left. The hay had already been carried; but in one corner the last remains of the crop had been collected and heaped together. This little haycock exhaled a penetrating fragrance, the essence of forest, grass, and sunshine, which the mare sniffed at longingly.

Suddenly there came over Reimers an irresistible desire to stretch himself out in the hay and rest there for a little. Without further thought he dismounted, pushed some hay to the mare with his foot, passed the bridle round the trunk of a pine that stood solitary at the edge of the field, and threw himself down on the soft grass. He pillowed his head on his cap, and buried himself deep in his rustling couch. He drew out along stalk and chewed at it; it still retained the sweet grassy taste. Thin wisps fell across his face, and between them he looked up into the blue sky, lazy and contented. Perfect stillness reigned around him; only as from time to time he turned his head the dry grass crackled and rustled, sounding in his ears like the snapping of twigs and branches.

At last his eyes became painful from staring so long into the dazzling blue of heaven. He shut them; all now was red instead of blue, and to lie with closed lids was grateful and delicious after the blinding light. He cast one sleepy glance at the mare. She stood there flicking her sides with her tail, and kept trying vainly to get some hay from the ground into her bit-encumbered mouth. He thought of slackening the curb for the poor beast, but was too lazy to stir.

While he was dozing off it seemed to him as if something light and fluttering passed him by; and for a moment he became aware of another perfume added to the scent of the hay--something faint, yet distinct. But he kept his eyes closed; nothing external mattered to him.

Reimers was awakened by a gentle pricking and tickling. It felt as though a wisp of hay were passing lightly over his mouth, backwards and forwards. He snatched at it, and a long stalk remained in his hand. His eyes were slightly dazzled; he was gazing straight at the sun, already considerably lower in the sky.

Lazily he looked around him. Thank goodness, the mare was still there, her head turned towards him, her ears pricked attentively.

And here--close beside him? A woman sat there; a dainty little figure, dressed in some light silken fabric, on her fashionably-curled golden hair an enormous straw hat, above which nodded brilliant scarlet poppies. She sat with her back to him, and was trying to pick out the longest stalk from a tuft of grass that grew at the edge of the meadow.

Reimers rubbed his eyes. Devil take it all! was he still dreaming? A subtle odour came wafting from the rustling silk of her attire, a breath of depravity, as though hailing from the corrupt life of some big city; a bewildering, insinuating atmosphere, that had of a sudden overpowered the delicious freshness of hay and pine-trees.

He shut his eyes dizzily. His senses were still somewhat dazed from his potations; he could not rouse himself to a clear awakening.

The woman turned towards him. A charming, rather bold face bent down over him, and a pair

of hot, eager lips were pressed to his. And Reimers, after the space of years behind him, was once again in that mood in which he had of yore committed acts of folly.

A few weeks later Senior-lieutenant Reimers had a consultation with the surgeon-major, Dr. Andreae.

"What you tell me, doctor," he said at the end, "is very much like a death-sentence, so far as a man's domestic happiness is concerned. He must never hope to found a family?"

"No," replied Andreae; "a decent man does not marry under such circumstances. If he does, he commits a crime, consciously or unconsciously, not only upon a woman, but upon his children."

"Thank you, doctor." And Reimers would have taken leave, but Andreae stopped him at the door.

"I beg of you, my dear Reimers," he said, "not to take too tragic a view of your case. I assure you, many men in like circumstances make out a very tolerable existence. Among the younger men of the present generation the average is enormously high, though fortunately most cases are not so serious as yours. Quite alarmingly high, the average, to us doctors.

"But after all, life is not entirely concerned with this one relation to the other sex. Those who find themselves cut off from domestic happiness in this particular are often most excellent officers. In peace they can devote themselves entirely to their profession without other distractions; so that it benefits somewhat, as does the Catholic Church by the services of her celibate priesthood. And in active warfare it seems to me that such men must enjoy something of the fatalism of Islam. All is not lost, my dear fellow! I hear everywhere the greatest praise of your capacity and talents as an officer. So be brave, and throw the others as mere ballast behind you. You have a guiding star in your profession--is it not so?"

Reimers nodded.

"You are right, doctor," he said, "and I am much obliged to you."

He looked weary and broken as he went out at the door. In a thoughtless moment he had destroyed his one chance of happiness. That moment he must expiate, and he knew he was strong enough to bear the burden.

But it seemed to him that it was not this alone that had decided his fate. He felt as though a grey veil had descended over his whole future; even over all that in his imagination had elevated him above the more sordid chances of destiny.

Could this be because that star to which the doctor had pointed him was losing its brilliancy?

Gloomily he trod the woodland path to the town. Down below in a field behind the barracks an old sergeant was giving the assistant trumpeters a lesson. The lads blew forth a horribly ill-tuned unison. Then the sergeant set his own trumpet to his lips, and the notes of the dismissal rang clearly through the air:--



Notes of the Dismissal

The signal that in the manœuvres indicated the close of each evolution.

CHAPTER XIV

After eighteen months of service Gustav Weise was made bombardier. Captain von Wegstetten

thought this would now be a safe experiment with the erstwhile social-democrat.

But more non-commissioned officers were still required.

Sergeant Wiegandt had gone away on April 1: Wegstetten's best non-com., and now the blissful husband of the beaming Frieda. He would have been made deputy sergeant-major very shortly; but not even this prospect had been sufficient to retain him. At Michaelmas two more non-commissioned officers would obtain their discharge; Heppner was dead; Heimert was in a mad-house; there were strange faces everywhere, instead of the old tried experienced men. And even so there were not enough of them.

In this embarrassment Wegstetten bethought himself of Vogt. He was an honest steady lad, on whom one could depend. All his superiors praised him, and, besides, he had good blood in his veins, inherited from his father, the brave old sergeant, with his iron cross and his medal for bravery.

Vogt did not prove to be particularly willing. Every plough in its furrow, every mower deftly at work, awakened in him longings for his old agricultural pursuits. He wore his uniform with a good grace; there was no help for it, and grumbling would have only made the life harder. But to stay on longer than necessary--for that he had no hankering.

Wegstetten knew how to tackle his men. He talked glibly to the gunner about the honour and distinction to be won as a non-commissioned officer, not forgetting to observe how much the father at home would rejoice to see the son following in his footsteps.

Vogt asked his father's advice, and the turnpike-keeper wrote back: "Jump at your captain's offer, my lad. As an old soldier, I am very glad to think of my boy as a non-commissioned officer. Never mind about me. The pleasure you give me will make me young and strong, so that I shall be able to keep the place going till you come home again at last."

So Vogt signed on for another year.

But directly he found himself committed he began to regret his decision.

He had been very lonely in the battery since his comrade Klitzing's death. He had not felt inclined to strike up a friendship with any one else; none of them were quite his sort. Despite his good nature, Truchsess was a lazy obtuse kind of fellow. Count Plettau, to be sure, was different; for though one never quite knew whether he was in jest or earnest, still one could have something like rational conversation with him. And Plettau took a real interest in the sturdy peasant lad, in whom he recognised an outlook on life so different from his own as to fill him with constant amazement. He told Vogt about the peasants of his own Westphalian home, who in many cases had lived on their land from generation to generation, and knew no higher source of pride than to call themselves peasant-farmers.

Then Vogt's eyes would brighten up. These men of the red mother-earth were people after his own heart.

"Yes," he said, "so it should be everywhere in Germany:

Peasant farm by peasant farm,
Then shall none have hunger or harm!"

Vogt was grateful to the count for talking to him so sensibly and kindly; but still things were totally changed: he could not find any one to replace his faithful friend Klitzing. The poor fellow felt more and more lonely every day.

In addition to this he had many vexations to bear when on duty. Captain von Wegstetten and Lieutenant Reimers, who certainly both knew their business well, had always shown themselves satisfied with him; but a new senior-lieutenant was imported into the battery, a certain Brettschneider, who was always pulling Vogt up and finding fault with him.

Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider came from the Staff College, and the non-commissioned officers whispered it about that he was considered no end of a swell. Well, he might be clever and smart enough; but, nevertheless, the new officer was not infallible. When the exercises were going on he could make mistakes like every one else. One thing was certain: he was tremendously well-set-up. He always stood as straight and stiff as a ramrod, and he could scarcely turn his carefully groomed head, so high was his collar! Moreover, his pink, clean-shaven face never for one moment lost its expression of haughty disdain. The men avoided him as far as they could, for one seldom came near him without being called back and found fault with; and everybody--non-coms. and all--felt exasperated by the young man's conceited behaviour.

Devil take the fellow! Wegstetten and Reimers certainly did not make themselves cheap with the men. But when things were going right, they always had time for a word of praise and an appreciative smile. Even the sharp eyes of little Wegstetten could look quite good-humoured on occasion. But Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider always remained stand-offish, looking as if he had swallowed a poker.

All this incensed our honest Vogt. Of course it was true--confound it! that a soldier was only doing his duty; still, one is but human, and one deserves a little recognition for hard and faithful service. And isn't that the right way to knit a lasting bond between officers and men, one that should prove valuable when hard times come?

During the gun-practice Vogt had been several times called over the coals by Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider. The bombardier did his duty in a cheerful spirit, and sometimes let fall half-audible jokes and chaff for his comrades' benefit. This much annoyed the officer in question, and he spiced his rebuke with the remark that he didn't know how a man who couldn't observe the first rudiments of discipline could aspire to being a non-commissioned officer!

Vogt laid this scolding to heart. He had meant no harm when he had called out "Hurry up!" to that dilatory old Truchsess. On the other hand, it could not be denied that Brettschneider was in the right: they were forbidden to speak unless it was absolutely necessary, and "necessary" his admonition had certainly not been.

Nevertheless, a bitter feeling of having been unjustly treated remained in Vogt's mind.

When they came back from the practice-camp he rejoiced to be once more doing ordinary drill; for at this he knew he was especially good, particularly in the gun-drill. He would be able now to show the senior-lieutenant what a capable fellow he was. And this time they would have to be more than usually particular over the exercises; the colonel himself was going to review the sixth battery.

The mantling and dismantling of the guns needed great promptitude and dexterity. Imaginary accidents were therefore said to have happened, and the men keenly competed together to see who should remedy them most quickly and satisfactorily.

The pole of Vogt's gun was supposed to be broken. In a second he had put on the spare iron bands that should in reality be fixed with nails, and then he wound coil after coil of stout rope round the join, till the pole was as if held in a strong web of cordage, and would be more likely to break in a new place than to give way again where it had broken before.

He had just finished this piece of work, when a gunner came running to say that the off-wheel of the gun-carriage had been destroyed by a shot, and must be replaced by a new one.

This was a serious piece of business. Three men would have to hold the heavy carriage while the two others fixed the scarcely less heavy wheel on to the axle. To make things worse, that blockhead Truchsess had hurt himself in removing the wheel that had been "destroyed," so that only four men were left. Vogt rolled up the spare wheel, but it was almost impossible to fix it; the heavy wheel was too cumbersome for a single man.

The sweat ran in streams down Vogt's forehead into his eyes, making them smart terribly; but he would not give up, and at last with a tremendous effort managed to lift the wheel into place and slide it on to the axle. There was nothing to do now but to run the linch-pin through the axle and screw on the nave to keep all safe. This he did with trembling fingers.

Vogt raised himself. Thank God! Neither of the other five guns had got as far as his, and yet his had been the heaviest job. He told his men to keep still, and ran over to Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider to report the completion of his task.

Brettschneider was standing at the edge of the parade-ground in the shade of the baggage-shed, talking to Senior-lieutenant Reimers.

It was only while he was running that Vogt first noticed how severely he had strained himself. His heart hammered as though it would burst from his body, and his legs were trembling. With the back of his hand he wiped the sweat from his brow, and drew himself up in the prescribed fashion as he reported: "Gun six ready, sir. Pole mended and spare wheel fixed."

As through a mist he saw that Senior-lieutenant Reimers was smiling a little, probably at his over-heated appearance. Then suddenly he heard the sharp high voice of Brettschneider.

"Please stand in a more respectful attitude, Bombardier Vogt, when you have something to say to me," the voice snapped out.

Vogt pulled himself up and repeated his announcement.

But now the senior-lieutenant began to correct him and find fault with him: he was to put his right shoulder higher, his cap was not straight, he must place the tip of his little finger on his trouser-seam, and put his feet wider apart.

"Straighten your knees!" commanded he at last.

Vogt felt how his legs were trembling. He might have been able to obey; but he was at the end of his patience.

Brettschneider again and in a louder tone commanded: "Bombardier Vogt, straighten your knees!"

But Vogt did not care; a mad resentment surged up in him. He would not obey this idiot at any price. He raised his head, and looked the officer straight in the face with eyes full of open mutiny.

Brettschneider shouted again: "Bombardier Vogt, I order you to straighten your knees. Do you know that you are being guilty of disobedience to orders, and that that is a military crime?"

But Bombardier Vogt remained unmoved, with his mutinous eyes fixed on the senior-lieutenant.

Brettschneider waited a few seconds, then he called quietly to one of the corporals: "Put Bombardier Vogt under arrest!"

The corporal looked blankly, first at Brettschneider, then at Vogt.

The senior-lieutenant repeated his order, whereupon the corporal took the bombardier by his right arm and marched away with him through the gate into the courtyard of the barrack.

When they were out of hearing, Reimers turned to his companion: "Were you not a little hard on him, Brettschneider?"

The clean-shaven face turned towards him languidly, and Brettschneider asked coolly: "How do you mean, my dear fellow?"

"Well, you must know yourself!" pursued Reimers. "The man had just done a good piece of work, he came running to you and expected a word of recognition,--he deserved it, Brettschneider,--and you let him be taken off like that! I don't think that's the way to make men love their work."

"One must preserve discipline, and prevent these rascals from getting thoroughly demoralised."

Reimers shrugged his shoulders. "Vogt was the best soldier in the whole battery," he declared.

"Then the battery is in a bad way!" retorted Brettschneider impatiently. "The man commits an undeniable piece of disobedience before your eyes and you defend him? I am much obliged!" Brettschneider put on his haughtiest expression, smiled with the utmost politeness, and said amiably: "You must confess, my dear Reimers, that I am entitled to my own opinion about the matter."

In Room IX. that evening the conversation was of a heated description. Truchsess swore that he would not put up with that low fellow, that Brettschneider. All of them were furious with the stuck-up young man; and though they had hitherto gone through their duty without much fuss or grumbling, they were now filled with a thorough repugnance for the soldier's uniform and a perfect hatred for military life in which one had to knuckle under to idiots like that. You half killed yourself and what did you get by it? More kicks than halfpence, or perhaps you even get clapped into prison!

"Keep your hair on, brewer!" said Count Plettau to Truchsess; and putting on a superior tone: "We don't understand all this, you see! this is the higher kind of patriotism! Lieutenant Brettschneider ought to have a medal, instead of being blamed by such as you!"

He also was beside himself with rage over the exasperating piece of folly he had witnessed. Hang it all! if he had not been so seriously concerned to get to the end of his long years of service he would certainly have put a spoke in the wheel of this young gentleman, the senior-lieutenant. But no; that would be too foolish. Only a few days more and he would be free at last; he could not play tricks with his chances.

Suddenly he laughed aloud.

"You keep your mouths shut, boys!" he said, "otherwise you may get into trouble yourselves. But don't worry! When I have got over the next few days I'll give the senior-lieutenant the lesson he wants!"

The turnpike-keeper, Friedrich August Vogt, was gazing in surprise on a letter which the postman had just pushed in at the little window. The superscription was in the hand-writing of his son, but the post-mark bore the name of the capital.

What was the boy doing there? He had written nothing as to any prospective change. Well, the letter itself must explain.

At first the old man could not understand the written words. He read them through a second and a third time. At last he comprehended what had happened. He sat on his chair as if paralysed, and read the last page of the letter over and over again without attaching any meaning to it.

His son wrote from the prison where he was now detained as a prisoner awaiting trial. He related all that had passed straightforwardly and without excusing himself.

"To-day I have been shown the charge against me," he concluded. "It is a case of wilful disobedience before all the other men. I believe it is an offence that is rather severely punished, and I know, too, that I am not without blame. But perhaps, dear father, you will not condemn me altogether; perhaps you will be able to imagine what my feelings must have been. For your sake alone I ought to have been able to control myself, and I beg you to forgive me for not having done so."

The turnpike-keeper jumped up suddenly from his chair. He flung the letter violently down on the table and struck it with his fist. He felt full of uncontrollable anger against this boy, who had brought shame upon him in his old age at the end of an honourable and blameless life. And why? because my gentleman did not choose to obey orders! because he had chosen to feel injured! A soldier to feel himself "injured" by the blame of his superior! So these were the new-fangled times of no discipline and no respect for one's betters!

And this was the reward of his trouble in bringing up the boy to be loyal and true: that he had now got a son in prison! When the neighbours asked: "Your son is in the artillery, isn't he?" he must reply: "Oh, no; he was once! Now he is carting sand." "What! carting sand?" "Oh, yes; he is carting sand, dressed in a grey shirt, and with a lot of other gentlemen in a long row. Oh, very honourable gentlemen, all of them! A thief on one side of him, and on the other a person who did not quite know the difference between mine and thine." "Your son!" "My son, neighbour."

The turnpike-keeper seized the letter again to see how the thing went exactly.

Nice sort of business this! There it was right enough: "Wilful disobedience before all the other men!" Nothing else was to be made of it.

But this Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider--by God!--he was not one of the right sort, if the boy was telling the truth. With all due respect for an officer, he seemed to be a perfect popinjay. There were people like that here and there who were ready to burst with pride and conceit, and who looked upon an inferior as scarcely a human being.

And again he snatched up the letter.

What the boy wrote was all very clear and straightforward honestly and truthfully put. One could not help believing what was there on the paper; and, of course, it was easy to understand how the thing had come about. After all, every man has his feelings, whether he be a gunner or a senior-lieutenant. The devil! he himself would have done exactly as Franz did; though, of course, in his case life in a charity-school had made him used to giving in to people. But the boy had always been so independent, no one could help feeling for him.

And after all, when one looked at it rightly, it was a clumsy thing for Lieutenant Brettschneider to have done, and his son's fault had been the outcome of an unfortunate set of circumstances--not a very serious fault either, though the poor lad would have to pay for it dearly enough!

Wilful disobedience--what sort of punishment would there be for that? It had such an imposing, ceremonious sound! He racked his brains to think whom he could ask about it. But there was no one in the village who would be of any use.

After a sleepless night he rose from his bed with his decision made. He milked the cow, and asked a neighbour to see to the animals during the day. Then he put on his old-fashioned black Sunday coat and the top hat which he only wore on great occasions, such as the king's birthday. On his breast he fastened his medal and cross. Over all he wore his old cloak, and he put some pieces of bread and sausage in his pocket. He was ready for travelling.

On the way to the station he passed a field of barley. It was ripe for cutting, and he had meant to begin reaping that morning. But what did it matter about the barley? He had got to see after his boy and petition for him. He would go straight to the right person: he would go to the garrison and seek out the head of his son's battery, Captain von Wegstetten.

Throughout the whole journey he was alone in the railway carriage; other people did not travel so early. He looked stupidly out of the window. It was all one to him to-day what the fields looked like and how the harvest was getting on. He could only think of what he should say for his boy. Perhaps it was still possible to make them give up the charge against him.

In the capital he sat for an hour and a half in the waiting-room, waiting for his train. He got a cup of coffee, and ate his breakfast from the provisions in his pocket.

It was close and hot in the big room. He felt uncomfortable in such an atmosphere, as every one must do who is accustomed to work in the open air, and at last he threw back his cloak to relieve his oppression. People stared at his medals, nudged one another, and would not take their eyes off him, looking curious but respectful.

The turnpike-keeper sighed and buttoned his cloak again. Oh, if people only knew in what trouble he was!

It was just eight o'clock when he reached the garrison town. Of course that was somewhat early to be making such a visit as his; but he had no time to lose, and he knew that an officer must always begin the day early.

The porter at the station did not know where Captain von Wegstetten lived. But the turnpike-keeper had a piece of luck: outside the station he met a gunner, who readily told him the address--"11 Markt Strasse, up two flights of stairs"--and showed him the way to go.

The two flights of stairs tried the old man sorely. He had to wait on the first landing in order to get his breath. "Have I grown old all of a sudden?" he asked himself in surprise.

A soldier in a red coat opened the door to him.

"Is the captain at home?" asked the turnpike-keeper.

"Sorry, but he's not," answered the lad.

"Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"That would be no good. The captain's gone away--to a court-martial."

The turnpike-keeper started violently.

"Is the court-martial on Bombardier Vogt?" he asked.

The soldier answered in the affirmative, and inquired in surprise, "Who are you, then?"

"Vogt's father. I--I wanted to talk to the captain about my son. But it is too late, I see."

He turned about, saying, "Thank you all the same," and went towards the stairs. In the dark he missed the first step and stumbled; the lad ran after him. He led the old man to the banister and said, "Take care you don't fall; it is rather dark here. And you know, Herr Vogt, the men of the battery all say it is a mean shame, what's happened to Vogt, a mean shame."

But the turnpike-keeper did not seem to understand him. He only nodded and said, "Thank you, thank you," and tramped slowly down the stairs in his heavy boots.

Whilst Friedrich August Vogt waited for his train in the station of the little garrison town, the trial of his son was taking place before the military court of the district.

There was no doubt about the circumstances of the case. The two eye-witnesses, Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider and Senior-lieutenant Reimers, were unanimous on the subject, and the accused gave his assent to the correctness of the particulars.

The trial would therefore have come to an end very quickly had there not been a number of witnesses for the accused.

Captain von Wegstetten, as head of the battery; Captain Güntz, who had commanded it during Wegstetten's temporary absence; Senior-lieutenant Reimers and Lieutenant Landsberg, as officers in the battery; the sergeant-major and other non-commissioned officers: all united in giving Vogt the very best possible character. Wegstetten had had a violent altercation with Brettschneider, not only from personal feeling for the bombardier, but also from annoyance that his best candidate for a non-commissioned officer's post was lost to him through a piece of such tactless mismanagement. Brettschneider had complained about this reprimand, but no notice had been taken of his complaint, and that in itself spoke volumes for the accused. Güntz and Reimers were very warm in their praise of Vogt, and even Lieutenant Landsberg remembered the man as being particularly willing and diligent on duty.

Things looked favourable for the accused.

One of the officers present, a captain of the pioneers, asked Vogt: "You had just been working very hard, had you not? had fixed the heavy wheel single-handed, and had run very fast to tell Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider?--were you not very much exhausted and out of breath?"

"Yes, sir."

"I mean, you were rather over-tired and your eyes were dazed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you did not quite know what you were doing?"

The accused hesitated a moment.

Wegstetten and Reimers had remained in the room. The former moved restlessly from one foot to the other. If Vogt were only to say "Yes," then the whole thing would be put down to a temporary aberration of mind due to hurry and fatigue, and the affair would end with his acquittal.

But the bombardier answered: "No, sir, I knew quite well what I was doing."

Now that was honest, but distinctly stupid.

The countenance of the prosecutor lightened up. He was a very young man, with many scars on his face. He sat stiffly on his chair, tightly buttoned into an immaculate brand-new uniform; and hitherto he had been regarding with a bored expression a silver bangle that he wore on his right wrist.

The hearing of witnesses was at an end. The president of the court-martial, a fat, good-humoured man of mature years, asked: "Is there anything that you wish to say, Bombardier Vogt?"

"No, thank you, sir."

"You acknowledge your guilt, then?"

"Yes, sir."

But the president wanted to give the man a chance, and asked another question, to which an affirmative answer would be a matter of course.

"But you are sorry for your conduct?" he asked.

The accused, however, again hesitated. Naturally every one expected him to say "yes," so that people were not listening very attentively. But when this "yes" did not appear to be forthcoming, all eyes were suddenly fixed upon Vogt.

"No," said he firmly.

The president looked amazed. "You cannot have understood me," he said. "I asked you if you were not sorry for your conduct?"

But the answer came, clear and decided: "No, I cannot be sorry."

Every one present looked dumfounded. Wegstetten thrust his sword angrily against the ground. God in heaven! was the fellow an ass? Now his fate was sealed!

Those who were assisting at the court-martial looked indignant; the chief of them, a major of dragoons, tapped impatiently on the table with his gold pencil-case, and gave a condemnatory shake of his head. The youngest of his colleagues, a senior-lieutenant in the grenadiers, twirled his moustache briskly; the expression of his face said plainly: "Just wait a bit! we'll give you a lesson!"

The public prosecutor beamed. He rose with an air of triumph, and demanded, "having full regard for all the extenuating circumstances of the case, but also in consideration of the obstinate persistence of the accused in his offence," a punishment of nine months' imprisonment.

Vogt turned as pale as death when he heard these words. This was impossible! It could not, it ought not to be!

The court was not long in coming to its decision, and its judgment was read out by the president in a quiet even tone of voice.

The accused hung on his lips with anxious expectation. At last, after all the formalities, came the verdict: "five months' imprisonment." He leant against the railing that separated him from his judges. The wood gave a creak. Long after the fat gentleman had sat down again Vogt went on listening. Surely something more was coming; some mitigation of this terrible sentence? But the trial was at an end.

The condemned man was taken away by a non-commissioned officer; he walked with unsteady steps, his eyes staring into vacancy. In the passage outside he caught sight of Wegstetten. The captain was talking to an old man in civilian clothes. Vogt felt a thrill when he saw the white hair that surrounded the old man's face. But it was only after he had gone round the next corner of the passage that the recognition struck him: great God, it was his father!

Involuntarily he stopped and tried to turn back; but the non-com, took his arm and pushed him forward, not roughly, yet in such fashion that the prisoner gave up his attempt.

"You fool, you!" said his companion; "if you had said you were quite sick with shame for your silly behaviour, you'd have got off with a month!"

After endless questions the turnpike-keeper had managed to find his way to the court-house of the army-corps. He had been wandering through street after street; the busy traffic of the capital had made his head spin, and he was tired to death with this unwonted tramping over hard stone pavements.

He had arrived before the court-room door just as the witnesses were leaving. He had recognised Captain von Wegstetten immediately--his boy had so often described the little man with his gigantic red moustache and sparkling eyes--and he was not afraid of addressing him on the spot.

Wegstetten was at first not particularly pleased at this encounter; but the honest troubled face of the old soldier touched him, and he listened patiently.

The turnpike-keeper had not much to say; it only amounted to an earnest representation of how well-conducted his son had always hitherto been; of how glad he had been to be a soldier; and he ended with a bitter lamentation that all this should have happened to such a good, brave lad; the boy must have gone clean out of his senses. The old man said it all with the most touching self-restraint. He took great pains to preserve a soldierly bearing, and omitted none of the customary tokens of respect, just as if he had been still clad in his old sergeant's uniform, and standing before an officer of the most severe type. Yet all the time the tears ran down his weather-beaten furrowed cheeks and his snow-white beard, and as he tried to draw up his bent shoulders the medals clinked together on his breast.

Wegstetten had but little comfort for the poor old man. He told him how favourably all the witnesses had spoken of his son, both officers and non-commissioned officers; how he as captain of the battery had always been glad to have such a capable man under him; and how the whole wretched business had come about through the mismanagement of an officer who had only lately returned to the regiment.

The face of the turnpike-keeper lighted up as he listened to the captain's words. He breathed again. Thank God! things could not go so badly with the boy. A few weeks under arrest--and the affair would be at an end.

But Wegstetten proceeded to tell him of the continued obstinacy of his son, and at last was forced to impart to the old man the severe sentence that had been passed.

Five months' imprisonment! It struck the old turnpike-keeper like a blow. He staggered, and the captain was obliged to support him. But the weakness soon passed, and Vogt begged the officer's pardon. He could not, however, listen to Wegstetten's explanation of the harsh verdict. This was a terrible, a crying piece of injustice; on the one side was an offence, a perfectly trivial offence, committed by a brave well-behaved soldier (as by common consent his boy had been pronounced), who had been driven into it moreover by the "mismanagement" of his superior; and on the other side was this heavy punishment of five months' imprisonment! The disproportion between crime and sentence was incomprehensible to his mind.

He walked in silence beside Wegstetten, who was speaking to him earnestly the while. At the door of the court-house the old man stood still and saluted, meaning to take leave of the captain.

Then the officer asked him: "Would you not like to speak to your son? I will get you a permit."

"Thank you, sir," said the turnpike-keeper, "if you would have the kindness, sir."

This was soon done. Wegstetten exchanged a few words with the superintendent of the military prison and returned with the pass. He himself conducted the old man to the gate of the prison building.

"Don't take all this too hard, Herr Vogt," he said in farewell. "Your son has committed an excusable offence, and has been very severely but not unjustly punished. He remains an honourable soldier all the same."

"Yes, sir," answered the turnpike-keeper. He looked darkly after the little officer. What sort of talk was that? Was it any comfort to be told that his boy was not a dishonourable rascal? He knew himself what his boy was; none knew better! Bravery and honour, that was Franz all over. Nobody need tell him that.

And the poor lad had been punished as if he had stolen something! Many thieves, indeed, got off easier. They had condemned his boy to a dishonourable punishment,--and why? because he had too much sense of honour!

He rang violently at the entrance gate of the prison. A sentry opened the door, took the permit, and ushered him into the waiting-room. "I will tell the inspector you are here," he said, and left the room.

After a few moments the door of the waiting-room opened again and an inspector appeared on the threshold, a dried-up looking man with a leathery complexion. He looked at the permit through his spectacles, and turned curious eyes towards the medals on the breast of the veteran. He shook his head deprecatingly, and called out an order from the door.

Shortly afterwards a grenadier announced: "Bombardier Vogt is here, sir."

"Let him come in," said the inspector. Then he turned away, and stood looking out of the window.

Franz Vogt went quietly up to his father and looked into his face with his frank honest eyes.

"Good-day, father," he said simply.

The turnpike-keeper took his son's hand in both his own. The tears came into his eyes and he looked at him as through a veil. Thank God, the boy still wore his artillery uniform! The old man was spared the sight of him in the grey prison garb.

As the father was silent the son began to speak. He described in his plain hearty way how the whole unfortunate business had played itself out, and related truthfully everything that was in his own favour, while acknowledging his fault without further excuse. "Do you know, father," he concluded, "what the sentence is?"

The turnpike-keeper nodded. Franz cast his eyes down and said in a troubled voice: "It seems to me very hard, father."

He felt a spasmodic pressure of his hand, and his father nodded his head in assent.

"The corporal said I had only myself to thank for it," the prisoner went on. "They asked me if I was sorry, and I said 'no.' The corporal said that was stupid. But I couldn't say otherwise. And I should have to say the same if they asked me again."

Then the turnpike-keeper opened his mouth for the first time since he had entered the room.

"You were *right!*" he said, so loudly and emphatically that the inspector at the window started and gave a warning cough.

Now that he had seen his son again, this brave honest lad, a change seemed to have come over the old man. The boy had been a willing dutiful soldier, everybody said so, and yet they were going to shut him up in prison for five long months, all because of a piece of fiddle-faddle! Devil take them all! What was the use of being a good soldier? And at a stroke every trace disappeared of the obedient and respectful old sergeant who had worn the uniform so proudly; he was peasant pure and simple, hard-headed and stiff-necked, a peasant who would stand up for what he thought right and defend it through thick and thin.

"You are *right*" he said, "and you were right all along."

But the son was more discriminating than the father, even though the punishment affected himself.

"You are not in earnest, father," he remonstrated; "I know I was in fault. But the punishment is too hard, even so; and I can appeal."

The turnpike-keeper laughed softly.

"Yes, you can be a fool," he said, "and get yourself into a worse mess! No, boy, if you take my advice you will leave appealing alone. If they have been unjust to you then you must put up with the injustice proudly, it won't last for ever! but never beg for justice!"

Franz Vogt looked disappointed. He had hoped that the higher courts might mitigate his sentence, but his father's advice must be best.

The inspector turned round from the window. The visitor's time was up.

Once more the son regarded with loving pride the venerable appearance of his father.

"Why, you have put on all your medals, father!" he said, smiling a little.

"Yes," replied the turnpike-keeper. "I put on all my medals when I came to see you." And, in a loud voice, that the inspector might hear, he repeated: "I put them on for you, my dear good boy, and for you only." And for the first time in his life he embraced his son, took the boy's head between his hands, and kissed him on the forehead. Franz Vogt felt the trembling of the old man's lips, and choked back his own tears. As the warder was taking him back down the long passage he looked round once more. His father was just going out of the door, and a ray of sunlight fell on the venerable white head. Then the folding-doors closed, and shut in the grey twilight of the corridor.

The villagers had always regarded the turnpike-keeper as rather an eccentric person; but henceforth they began to look upon him as downright crazy. The old widow who had hitherto done his housekeeping was the first to spread this rumour.

The old man took to shutting himself up more and more. Nobody was ever allowed to cross his threshold.

The peasants, however, let him go his way. Every one has a right to do as he likes; and the turnpike-keeper's manner of life was beginning to be looked on as a matter of course, when suddenly he drew upon himself universal attention.

There was to be a fresh election for the Reichstag in the district, the conservative candidate's victory having been disallowed. He had only been successful after a second ballot, in which the votes of the two parties had held the balance almost even; and the election had just been declared null and void, in consequence of the protest made by the social-democrats. The two rival parties, social-democrats and conservatives, were now preparing anew for battle. Every single vote was of consequence, and canvassing went on busily. Election literature flooded the constituency; it was thrown in at open windows and pushed under door-sills.

The turnpike-keeper had hitherto always placed himself at the disposal of the conservative candidate.

The conservative party liked to display names of the "small people" of the neighbourhood on the list of their supporters, in addition to signatures of councillors of state, burgomasters, landlords, &c.

And now suddenly Friedrich August Vogt came and demanded to have his name taken off the list.

The president of the election committee, a cavalry officer in the reserve and the lord of the manor, attempted to make him reconsider his determination. He wanted to know the reasons for this sudden change of conviction, and asked pathetically if the old soldier was going to be unfaithful at this time of day to the motto: "God, King, and Country"? Vogt stuck to his demand, but he declined to give any reasons.

On the day of the election the turnpike-keeper was troubled with a feverish unrest. Ten times and more he put on his hat and stood at the house door with his big stick in his hand, but he always turned back again.

The polling was to end at six o'clock. Shortly before that hour he strung himself up to a resolve. He left the house hastily, and hurried to the ale-house, in the garden of which the polling-booth had been erected.

Before the door stood the two men who were distributing voting-papers. Tired with their day's work, they were leaning against the paling in front of the tavern. One of them, employed by the conservatives, was a superannuated farm labourer from the manor; the socialist was an invalided stonemason, who had lost a leg in consequence of a fall from some scaffolding. They were chatting together in a friendly fashion, notwithstanding the antagonism of their employers.

The one-legged man did not even give himself the trouble to offer Vogt one of his voting-papers. Everybody knew old Vogt. The blood of an old soldier ran in his veins, he was conservative to the bone.

The farm labourer held out a conservative voting-paper, and said:

"You are nearly too late, Herr Vogt. Here is your vote."

But the turnpike-keeper turned away with a lowering look. He stretched out his hand to the other man and demanded a voting-paper, with which the stonemason hastened to furnish him; and Friedrich August Vogt stumped heavily up the steps into the polling-station.

The magistrate of the district was taking charge of the proceedings. Beside him sat the schoolmaster of the church schools, and the inspector of the manor. A few peasants and a workman from the fire-clay factory, his clothes covered with lime, were standing about.

The schoolmaster announced the name: "Vogt, Friedrich August, retired turnpike-keeper, registered number 41."

The old man stretched out the folded voting-paper with a hesitating movement; the magistrate took it and placed it in the tin-box which served as a receptacle for the votes. He nodded familiarly to the elector; this was a certain vote for the conservatives.

But the turnpike-keeper did not respond to the greeting. He stood stiffly by the table looking at the box that contained the voting-papers; suddenly his erect figure seemed to collapse, and the old man slunk out of the polling-station almost like an evil-doer.

The results of the election were known in the village by seven o'clock. One hundred and fifty-three votes had been registered: seventy-seven for the social-democrats, seventy-six for the conservatives. It was the first time there had been a socialist majority in this place. The social-democrats had, therefore, every reason for rejoicing. They sat in the little inn at the end of the village, which was only able to maintain itself through the political disagreements of the villagers,

and drank success to their party in the ultimate result of the election throughout the whole constituency. The peasants in the bar of the big inn were not less hopeful; they comforted themselves by declaring that the result in such a small place was of no real consequence. Nevertheless, it was a disgrace to think that there were now in the village more red revolutionists than loyal subjects.

The morning of August the 10th dawned bright and glorious; the day on which Plettau, after so many long years, came once more under the jurisdiction of civil law. It was one of those mornings when it is a joy to be a soldier; when every wearer of the uniform feels heartily thankful that his day's work is to be done out in God's free open world of nature, and not behind a desk or in some overheated factory.

The inspection of the battery was fixed for half-past seven. Lieutenant Brettschneider had had his men out since six, and had already robbed them of their last remnants of good temper. Here he had discovered a helmet the polish of which was not bright enough to please him, there a coat the sleeves of which were too long; or he had waxed wroth over some head of hair that he considered insufficiently cropped. And all this, while "stand at attention" was the order; so that the men got cramp in their legs, and sneezing fits from staring the whole time in the face of the morning sun.

At last the battery was drawn up on the parade-ground, and Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider was ready to do himself credit. The colonel was seen slowly approaching, accompanied by Major Schrader on one side, and by Captain von Wegstetten on the other. Brettschneider hastened towards them to report that the battery was in position.

The colonel received his announcement graciously. "Let the men stand at ease," he commanded. And when Brettschneider had called out the order, he returned to his place to begin the parade.

Then occurred something very startling.

A shout was heard: "Holdrio, hoho!" And then again: "Holdrio--yoho-hoho o!" And again a third time: "Holdrio-yoho-yoho-hoho--o--o!"

The yodel was evidently sounding from the slope of the opposite hill. Every one looked that way; and, behold, on the hillside appeared the figure of Count Egon Plettau, still dressed as for his discharge, in the grey drill trousers and much-patched coat.

He waved his cap to the battery; then he lowered his hands, while the eyes of the onlookers followed in suspense his every movement.

He let down the grey drill trousers; and there in the full blaze of the morning sunshine he went through a certain performance which even the Scythians--suggesting though they did to Greek art the original conception of the centaur--could certainly not have achieved without descending from horseback.

If Plettau, like Janus, had had eyes in the back of his head, down below in the parade-ground he would have seen an array of wide-open eyes and gaping mouths.

After a short interval he arose, picked up a big piece of white cardboard from the ground, and pointed to it as he brandished it in the air. Then he laid it down again, and once more he yodelled gaily: "Holdrio-yoho-yoho-hoho--o--o!" He then bowed politely, and vanished precipitately among the bushes.

Down on the parade-ground every one was speechless. The men looked sheepish; they longed to burst into peals of laughter, but were afraid of getting into trouble. So they took great pains not to commit themselves, and tried to look as if something perfectly ordinary had been happening.

Wegstetten was beside himself with anger and resentment. "I beg you will allow me, sir," he said to the colonel, "to send a couple of non-commissioned officers to arrest that fellow. This is an unheard-of insult to the whole army--a scandal a disgrace!"

Falkenheim's lips twitched. He, too, thought this piece of impudence quite beyond a joke. But he held the same opinion as did the Grand Duke of Oldenburg concerning *l'èse-majesté*: that the insult of a fool is no insult.

"Be calm, my dear Wegstetten," he said. "Let your count take himself off. But you had better just send some one up there--one of the non-coms, upon whom you can rely--to fetch down that placard before any of the men can get hold of it. Who knows what impertinence the fellow may not have scrawled?"

Corporal von Frielinghausen was charged with the mission, and ascended the hillside. The exercises were begun meanwhile.

Frielinghausen found the piece of cardboard neatly placed against a bank beside the last traces of Count Egon Plettau. Carrying the placard with its back carefully turned to the battery, he descended the slope again, and returned to the three officers. With the tips of his fingers the colonel took the document from him. The inscription was short enough:

"Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider," cried Major Schrader suddenly, "please be good enough to come here for a moment."

Brettschneider advanced in haste: "You called me, sir?"

Schrader pointed to the placard. "A few words in elucidation of the demonstration up yonder!" he said, shaking with suppressed laughter.

On the cardboard was neatly written in gigantic letters, coloured artistically with red and blue: "A farewell greeting to Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider!"

"A reminiscence of 'Ekkehard,'" said the colonel. "This Count Plettau has read a certain amount. One must give the devil his due!"

But Major Schrader, who in his leisure hours occupied himself with modern literature, who had seen "Die Weber" and "Seine Kleine" in Berlin, and was even acquainted with "Rosenmontag," murmured softly to himself; "A farewell to the regiment!"

CHAPTER XV

"Freedom, that I sing--"

(*Von Schenkendorf.*)

In August Corporal von Frielinghausen was ordered to the Fire-workers' College in Berlin. The young fellow made a good appearance in his neat uniform; his figure had filled out and become more manly, and on his upper lip a slight moustache had begun to show. But his bronzed visage had retained the old frank boyish expression, and altogether he was a fine-looking lad, after whom the women already turned to gaze.

After two years had passed, his friends received a formal notification of his marriage; it was sent with the greetings of Baron Walther von Frielinghausen and Baroness Minna Victoria von Frielinghausen, *née* Kettke.

Frielinghausen had obtained his discharge from the army. Minna Victoria was the only child and heiress of the manager of a large place of entertainment, and Baron Walther von Frielinghausen played the part of manager in place of his father-in-law, the rather impossible Papa Willy Kettke. He went about attired in an unimpeachable black coat, and with a well-bred little bow would himself usher into their places any specially distinguished-looking guests. Then he would stand with the air of a young prince in the neighbourhood of the bar, and the waiters and cooks, barmaids and kitchenmaids, had a mighty respect for him. He waxed portly in figure, and Minna Victoria often felt herself obliged to call him over the coals for paying too much attention to some one of the elegant ladies who patronised the establishment.

The sixth battery of the 80th regiment, Eastern Division of the Field Artillery, had occasion, however, to send another non-commissioned officer to the Fire-workers' College--Gustav Weise.

Captain von Wegstetten was very well pleased with Weise; he considered he had made him a permanent convert to the cause of king and country, But Weise was rather inclined to domineer over his subordinates--which was not what might have been expected of a former social-democrat--and on that account his captain had hit upon the idea of persuading him to be a fire-worker. The non-commissioned officer had a clear head, and it might be hoped he would make a career for himself.

Under these circumstances Weise began more and more to curse the day when he had had tattooed upon his arm that ridiculous jingle about Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. It caused him serious annoyance if one of his comrades noticed a scrap of the motto peeping out from under his sleeve, and wanted to see the whole inscription.

One day when he was out walking in the town he noticed on a door a brass plate bearing the

announcement: "Dr. Büchsenstein, specialist in skin diseases, &c." It occurred to him that this gentleman might be of assistance to him, and he put in an appearance at the hour of consultation.

The little dark-haired doctor could not entirely restrain his intense amusement when the patient bared his arm and came out with the request that the tattooing might be scraped away.

"Well, my good man," he said, "I can't do that for you! You can't have it scraped away! Anyhow, you're wearing the sleeve of the king's uniform over the watchword of revolution; and if you want to do more, you can put on a thick coating of lanoline and dust it with rice-powder. Then nobody will see it."

"Thank you, doctor," said Weise, standing up. "What do I owe you for your trouble?"

"Nothing at all, my man!" said the little doctor, laughing. "It's been no trouble; only a pleasure!"

And the non-commissioned officer went off to the nearest druggist's, where he bought the largest tube of lanoline in the shop and half a pound of rice-powder.

The military prisoner Wolf could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his former comrade Vogt dressed in the grey prison clothes. The prisoners had been ordered out for open-air work and were standing in the corridor, but at some distance from each other; it was quite impossible to get nearer together, and speaking was strictly forbidden. The guard stepped into their places around the little band, and it was as usual well rubbed into the minds of the latter that these armed sentries carried loaded weapons, and were not supposed to hold their hands in any case of attempted escape. "Halt!" would be called three times, and they would fire if the word of command were not obeyed. The non-commissioned officer in command made this announcement, and then the doors were unlocked and thrown open.

Out in the yard the sunlight only touched the upper storey of one of the wings, and within the high walls the air felt icy cold. As from the bottom of a shaft they looked up to the clear sky overhead, and then stepped out into the real sunshine and felt the warmth of the bright rays.

During the time of the autumn manoeuvres, and until the early part of the new year, the enormous parade-ground was deserted. The drilling of the troops went on in the barrack-yard, and it was only after the inspection of recruits was completed that exercises took place in the big ground.

The prisoners were ordered to get the place tidy for the spring and repair any damages that had occurred during the summer. The principal work, however, was the banking up of a high obstacle wall, and beyond it to dig a deep ditch; both for use in the artillery driving-exercises. This was an unspeakably fatiguing business. The soil, to a depth of several feet, consisted of light fine sand. In this they stood ankle deep, loading their wheelbarrows; yet the ditch never seemed to grow any deeper, nor the wall any higher. It was like working with water which continually flowed in again.

Whilst work was going on it was easy for one man to approach another. When Vogt and Wolf passed each other for the first time, one pushing his wheelbarrow before him, the other trotting with his empty barrow down into the ditch, they exchanged melancholy nods. Later it came about that they were standing next each other shovelling the loose sand into their barrows. True, speaking was forbidden; but it was possible to murmur words almost without moving the lips, yet so as to be perfectly intelligible.

"How do you come to be here?" was Wolf's first question.

Vogt related his story, often interrupted by the progress of their work; but when he had deposited his barrowful up above, he always managed to return to the neighbourhood of his erstwhile comrade in the regiment, and at last he had told the whole history of his crime.

Wolf gave a short bitter laugh. He was heartily sorry for this poor fellow, but was not this a new example of the fact that socialists had no need to work hard at propaganda? The ripe fruit was ready to drop into their laps without any co-operation of their own. This Vogt, the bravest of soldiers, the most amenable of men, fitted for a post in the royal body-guard, was wheeling his barrow here amongst thieves and ruffians of all sorts. And beside him the blood-red social-democrat!

And then he listened as Vogt went on to tell of his other acquaintances in the battery; each day, of course, his narrative was interrupted, and sometimes they had only time for a few words.

Weise had been promoted to be non-commissioned officer! That everlasting chatterer, who only owed it to his gift of the gab that he had been able to boast of himself as confidential agent of his union!

Was not this a topsy-turvy world?

But no. Weise fitted his position to a nicety. His fluent adaptability was in its right place. Little Captain von Wegstetten would have no non-commissioned officer under him better calculated to satisfy his desires than Gustav Weise. If he had remained a social-democrat, thought Wolf to himself, he would simply have been a pliant tool in the hands of some stronger member of the party. He was not to be relied on either here or there.

How different was Vogt, the peasant! Honour and steadfast faith looked out of his quiet grey eyes. Wolf began to take him in hand.

The echoes of those hastily whispered words as to the great injustice and oppression of the present, and the glorious equality and freedom of the future, rang the clearer and the more insistently for being awakened within the walls of a prison. Two men, who could with a clear conscience acquit themselves of any guilty intention, were here herding with common criminals and carting sand like them.

The peasant yielded this point at once. Wolf and he were both being punished unjustly. And the world was full of injustice.

"Then you belong to us," said Wolf.

"How do you mean?" asked Vogt. "To you?"

"Why, you are a social-democrat!"

"Am I?" said Vogt. "Perhaps. I don't know."

"If you think like that you must be."

"Well, but I don't want a revolution, or anything of the kind; though it is all the same to me whether we have a king or a republic. I only want to have my work, and to do it as I like, and to be left alone."

"The one leads to the other," said Wolf. "If things are to become better there must be a different form of government."

He went on further to speak of the brotherhood which should include all nations of the earth, so that there should be no more war and no more soldiers. Who else was it but the princes and rulers that hindered the coming of this fair unity of hearts? The people certainly desired ever-enduring peace. The oppressive sense of captivity stirred him to eloquence that fired his own imagination, and finally even inflamed the sober judgment of Vogt.

The peasant nodded: "Yes, yes. That would be fine!"

He could form no clear picture of that brilliant future. All men brothers? No more quarrelling and no more war? No one who would give orders to others? No one who would demand taxes and rent? Was this really possible?

But the other man spoke in such a convinced manner, he seemed so certain, that there was hardly room for doubt. And these were the aims of those social-democrats of whom people were so afraid, thinking they wanted to destroy and annihilate everything!

Of course they were right. Everything would be better then, and more beautiful. And to work for that would be worth one's trouble! One could give one's life for it if need be.

They were on the way back to the prison after their work. Vogt and Wolf stepped along side by side in the ranks. The long lean man seemed to be merely skin and bone; his cheeks had fallen in, the grey prison clothes hung loosely on his limbs. But his eyes glowed and sparkled as though with an inward fever, and a proud smile was on his lips. Vogt nodded to him. The gesture was the expression of a solemn vow.

The troop of prisoners arrived at the gate. A heavy shower of rain drove them to take shelter in the arched doorway, and they stood pressed closely together waiting for the door to open.

Suddenly Vogt felt Wolf's hand seize his own in a firm grip.

"I think we are now at one about this, comrade?" he heard him whisper. And the peasant returned the strong pressure, and answered, "Yes, comrade."

Each day in prison resembled every other; they passed slowly by like a chain of exactly equal links.

When the ground became frozen and neither spade nor pickaxe could be used, the prisoners were given straw mats to plait or sacks to sew.

Then Vogt used to swear to himself. "Damn it all! Why didn't I straighten my knees? What did it matter to me that the lieutenant had such a stuck-up way with him?" Thank God the first three

months of the five had passed by, and in January he would return to the garrison. Then there would be two more months to serve; till in March, in the first days of spring, he would be free.

But before that, when December was just beginning, bad news came to him from outside.

His father was dead. And, worse still, he was already buried when the son first heard of the occurrence. But that had been the old man's wish.

It all sounded like an old story, this that was told to the military prisoner Vogt, as he stood in the office by the superintendent of the prison, a little sickly-looking captain of infantry.

The village-elder from home had come himself all this long way to inform the son of his father's death. There he stood, big, fat, and strong, in his sheepskin cloak; a freer breath of air seemed to have come in with him, and he related all there was to tell. It was not even certain when the turnpike-keeper had died.

With the departure of summer the old man had seemed gradually to decay. In spite of that, however, he steadily refused to have any one to help him; and when the cold weather put a stop to work in the field he was seen no more by the neighbours.

The little house looked lifeless with its closed shutters, and only the thin line of smoke which ascended from the chimney at morning and midday betrayed the presence of a living creature.

Then came the hard frost at the beginning of winter. The boy who daily fetched away the milk that Vogt sold reported one day that the pitcher of milk had not been left in the yard for him as usual. But there was nothing extraordinary about that. Perhaps the queer old man had wanted to make butter. The peasants thought it was just some new fancy of his. At midday some one drove past the turnpike-keeper's house, taking corn to the mill, and observed that no smoke was coming from the chimney. Why had old Vogt got no fire? Even if he didn't want to cook food for himself, the cows ought to have their warm meal. On his way home the same peasant heard the cows mooing incessantly in a troubled manner, and he related all this at the ale-house in the evening.

Then the villagers put their heads together. Possibly the old turnpike-keeper was really ill. The more curious among the neighbours left the warm parlour of the inn, and tramped along the high-road in the biting east wind. They knocked at the door of the turnpike-keeper's little house, and tapped on the window shutters. Nothing could be heard but the sighing of the wind; and at last they turned away homewards. But next morning the milk-pitcher was still absent, and there was no smoke from the chimney. The village-elder was then informed. He ordered out the gendarme, and sent a locksmith to force the door. Half the village went after them and crowded round the turnpike-keeper's cottage, so that the gendarme had some trouble in keeping the women and children at a distance.

The village-elder banged on the door with his fist and rattled the handle. "Herr Vogt!" he cried, "Herr Vogt! open the door!" And again: "Herr Vogt! turnpike-keeper! open the door!" Then the gendarme, an old comrade in arms of the turnpike-keeper, called loudly; "August! open the door! or let us know if you are ill!"

All was silent. The shutters were closed; the whole house seemed asleep.

Only the lowing of the cows sounded from their stable, and the rattling of their chains, as if they had heard the cries that could not awaken their old master.

Then the village-elder turned to the locksmith: "We must break the door open."

The lock was soon forced, but the door would only open an inch or two; an iron bar had been fixed across it, but that was soon lifted.

A couple of young men were posted at the door to keep out the crowd, which thronged around the house in silent breathless curiosity.

The two officials stepped into the passage. The gendarme pushed the kitchen-door open; the room was cold as ice. On the hearth a handful of broken sticks had been placed, and the match-box lay beside them ready for kindling the fire.

The front room was darkened by the closed shutters, and a close smell as from a vault met them when the door was opened. There sat the turnpike-keeper at the table dead. His head had fallen forward; the body sat stiff and stark in the narrow arm-chair, and his hand, which had evidently been supporting his chin, was still raised, stiffened by the paralysis of death and by the icy cold. Papers of various kinds were spread out before the dead man: account-books, and gilt-edged testimonials dating from the turnpike-keeper's time in the army. Beside these were cardboard boxes filled with money, each neatly labelled: "Money for milk," "Money for corn," "Money for cattle." The old man had evidently taken them out of a cash-box which stood open before him, and at the bottom of which lay his medals and cross of honour.

The gendarme laid his hand on the shoulder of the dead man and said: "You were just looking at your cross again, old comrade, were you, and then you fell asleep?"

The two men put the money and the papers back into the cash-box, which the village-elder placed in a cupboard that stood open. This he locked, and took possession of the key.

"There is something else," cried the gendarme suddenly; and he pointed to a folded paper lying on a little table by the door.

"My last will and testament. To be opened immediately," was written on the document in the rather shaky but distinct handwriting of the turnpike-keeper. The "immediately" was underlined three times.

Well, the injunction was plain enough; and the two officials did not hesitate to comply with it. They had the legal right to do so, and besides they were extremely curious.

The paper was not even sealed up. It contained nothing at all extraordinary. Old Vogt desired in case of his death that the crippled neighbour who had sometimes helped him to look after the place should keep everything in order until his son returned from his military service. He was to have the money obtained from the sale of the milk as a reward for his trouble. Then the will continued: "Everything I have belongs, of course, to my dear son Franz. The expenses of my burying are to be defrayed from the money contained in the box labelled 'funeral money.' I wish to have a very simple funeral, and desire particularly that my son shall only be informed of my death after the ceremony is over, in case it should happen before February 3rd next year."

"We shook our heads over that," said the village-elder to Franz. "It seemed so funny that he should have fixed upon a date." He coughed and went on in an embarrassed way. "Now of course we know that your father did not want us to hear of your--misfortune, at least as long as he was still above ground. Well, well, it has not been so bad after all, according to what your captain told me."

The superintendent of the prison cut him short rather nervously: "That has nothing to do with the case, sir, has it?"

Thereupon the peasant proceeded with his narrative. After they had left the dead man, of course the first thing was to see to the cows. The pigs had eaten all the straw in their sty and the poultry had rushed like mad things upon the grain that was given them.

Everything was in order, and he, the village-elder, would see to it that it was kept so. Besides, old Wackwitz was an honest, stupid sort of fellow; he was quite to be trusted.

For the funeral, of course, everything had been arranged according to the dead man's desire. But the old sergeant was not buried without having the three salutes fired over his grave. And the lord of the manor, in his uniform, with two old warriors of 1870-71, headed the procession of mourners.

Franz Vogt sat on the bench in his dark cell and wept hot tears for his father's death. The poor fellow had indeed grounds for lamenting his fate. Death had taken from him first his friend and then his father. Was he always to be lonely?

During the frosty days of winter Vogt had hardly set eyes upon his regimental comrade Wolf. But now a few days of damp weather brought the severe frost prematurely to an end. There was a sudden change one night at the end of January, and next morning the smiling sun beamed down from a clear blue sky upon the surprised, drowsy earth.

The military prisoners at once began their daily work again upon the big parade-ground. The snow had to be removed before it could melt and settle in pools upon the ground they had so carefully levelled. In the grey morning twilight, therefore, a little troop of prisoners, with old cloaks over their prison clothes, were set to work as usual, surrounded by the armed sentries.

For Vogt and Wolf it was a meeting after a long separation. The peasant recounted the particulars of his father's death; not without a certain pride in the unusual circumstances under which the old man had met his end in self-appointed loneliness.

"A true man to the last!" said Wolf. But he could not even press his friend's hand in sympathy.

Then Vogt began to speak of the day of release. For him that would soon come. He knew that every word must cut his comrade to the heart, for poor Wolf had still to endure long years of martyrdom in prison; but he could not help it. He could not restrain himself from expressing the great joy that filled his breast. He counted the hours and the minutes as they passed, and could scarcely sleep at night.

Vogt walked with uplifted head and bright eyes; he handled his spade with cheerful zeal, and pushed his heavily-loaded wheelbarrow energetically. Would he not be a free man in a few days?

But Wolf compressed his lips together, and the brighter the sunshine the darker grew the cloud on his brow. His cheeks had fallen in more and more, and at the slightest exertion the sweat poured down his thin face. He looked ready to break down, and his eyes glowed with a

feverish light.

"I shall never last it out," he whispered to Vogt one morning. "I shall go all to pieces. I would rather break away altogether and escape."

"You are mad," said Vogt. "Do you not see the sentries? You would not be able to get a hundred yards away."

Wolf looked at him. The chance of escape out of this narrow circle was indeed small. But he stuck to his project, adding: "What does it matter if I am shot down? Would that not be better than going on in this way for three more long years?"

Of a sudden his plan appeared to him in a new light. If his flight were unsuccessful, if a sentry's bullet put a stop to it, would he not equally have suffered for his opinions? Would not this bloody sacrifice to the cause of revolution win new adherents? And would that not be better in the end than if he got free and lived out a painful existence in some foreign country?

Though formerly he had longed to be free at any price, death now shone before him as a desirable goal. Better that than to be crippled merely.

Next day he whispered to Vogt, "Next time that the Jägers are on duty I shall try it."

Vogt shook his head emphatically with a gesture of protest. His comrade must have gone clean out of his wits. And why should Wolf want to make the attempt just when the Jägers were mounting guard, the troops that were most proficient in shooting? It looked as if he were courting death.

The kind-hearted fellow set it before himself to dissuade his comrade from his intention. It would never do to let such a brave man commit suicide in a fit of despair. But he must manage it soon; in five days he himself would be free, and before that Wolf must give him his promise to abstain from his folly. Unfortunately the Jägers would be mounting guard the very next day.

As he pushed his loaded wheelbarrow before him he sought to meet Wolf's eyes; his comrade also had just filled his barrow. Vogt passed close by him, and signed to Wolf to come with him. But Wolf purposely remained behind and shook his head, smiling.

Soon afterwards they were called in. The prisoners put away their tools and their barrows, and Vogt stood waiting in the half-dark shed till the others were ready.

Suddenly he felt his hand gripped, and Wolf whispered in his ear: "Farewell, comrade, and keep true!"

Next minute the tall lean man had glided past him, and others had crowded between; it was impossible to get near him again.

On their way back to the prison he again intercepted a glance from Wolf. His comrade looked cheerful and triumphant, like one who has shaken off a heavy burden, and sees his future lie clear before him.

The guard that came on duty next morning in the parade-ground wore the green Jäger uniform. One of the sentries, a smart young fellow with a carefully waxed black moustache and quick eyes, had on his breast the mark of distinction for shooting. He was doing this duty evidently for the first time, and he looked the prisoners up and down with a curious glance, as if they were some queer sort of wild beast. Then he took up his position, and marched stiffly beside the procession as they left the gate.

A thin mist covered the broad expanse of the big ground, but the sun soon dispelled the damp vapour, and shone down warm and unclouded.

Vogt looked anxiously at Wolf. But his comrade seemed to have given up his intention; he was bending diligently over his work, and had not even taken his place in the outside rank of workers, but was digging busily among the others. At a little distance from the prisoners the sentries strolled up and down their beat.

Presently an orderly from head-quarters came riding by on a dark-brown horse, which he was making step high in a stately manner as if on parade.

The Jäger with the black moustache held his gun negligently on his shoulder and looked on with an interested expression. It was very boring to be always watching the prisoners messing about in the dirt.

Suddenly a lean figure detached itself from the little group of workmen--it was Wolf. With long strides he fled behind the sentry in the direction of the forest. The Jäger had not even remarked his flight, and it was only the cry of the sergeant that drew his attention.

Then he hastily took the gun from his shoulder, made ready to fire, and cried the first "Halt!"

Wolf ran on without stopping. Then something happened which decidedly bettered the

chances of the fugitive: the mounted orderly felt called upon to give chase. He set his horse to a gallop and dashed after the escaping prisoner.

Wolf heard the hoofs behind him and glanced round hastily. The rider was between himself and the sentry. Only a few more steps and he would be in the forest and under cover, if the horse did not reach him before that. At a stroke the despairing wish for a martyr's death had vanished. He no longer wished to die; he wanted to live and be free. Freedom was awaiting him, there in the forest towards which his hurrying feet were carrying him. How would they ever be able to find him in that thick labyrinth of young pine-trees? He would break through the undergrowth at the forest's edge and take a lateral direction; then he would lie crouching on the ground and let the bullets whistle over his head.

From behind him sounded the second "Halt!" The sentry's voice rang more sharply and insistently.

Yes, shout as you like! He was only a few paces from the forest's edge; a little ditch separated it from the parade-ground, but it was only about a yard wide and easy to leap.

Wolfs plan was made.

He knew that the forest extended to the outskirts of the town. The first houses of the suburb were built among the trees. Workmen dwelt there--iron-founders and metal-workers--members of his party. They or some compassionate woman would certainly give the fugitive some cast-off clothes, and then he thought he could make for the frontier.

From behind came the third warning "Halt!"

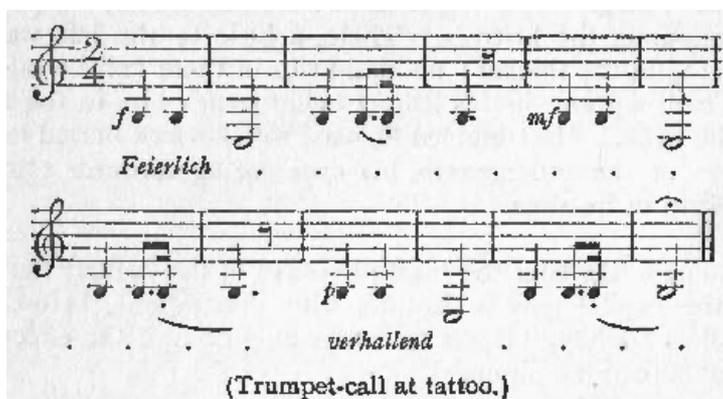
The mounted orderly had apparently perceived the hopelessness of his efforts, and had reined in his horse; the sound of hoofs was no more to be heard. Now for the ditch!

He sprang. He thought he could smell already the powerful odour of the fir-trees. There, a little to the left, was an opening in the thicket; he could slip in there and be safe.

Then, midway in his leap, a bullet struck him in the nape of the neck. He stumbled forward with his face buried in the haven of the undergrowth, his eyes gazing forwards towards the land of freedom.

Some weeks later the head physician of the military hospital in the capital gave a lecture, with illustrations, before the Medical Society, "Upon an interesting case of the effects of small bore ammunition."

CHAPTER XVI



Senior-Lieutenant Reimers sought an interview with his colonel, and frankly confided his trouble to him. In a sad, hopeless voice he told the whole story, concealing nothing.

There was, in fact, nothing to hide. The thoughtless behaviour which had had such serious consequences was in itself one of those offences which society looks upon as venial. But he reproached himself chiefly with the breach of faith towards Marie Falkenheim, to whom he considered himself to have been virtually betrothed, in allowing himself to be carried away by the

impulse of a moment's folly.

When Reimers had finished the colonel sat for a long time silent. He leant his cheek on his hand and looked gloomily before him. During this confidential interview his daughter had not been alluded to in a single syllable, but in every word that the young officer spoke sounded an echo of painful regret for a much-desired happiness now lost to him. Of a sudden those fair prospects that the colonel had thought based on such a solid foundation had fallen to the ground. It was a bitter grief to him to see the pleasant vision destroyed, and he knew that a heavy sorrow was in store for his child.

At last he broke the silence.

"My poor boy," he said, "I wish I knew what I could say to comfort you, for I do not want to reproach you. You have enough to bear already in payment for a moment of thoughtlessness. You have gambled away one of your best chances of earthly happiness. Nevertheless, be brave; set your teeth and do not let your feelings overcome you. You have a proud and honourable calling, and have a real vocation for it. Let that be your consolation." His voice broke off short, trembling with inward emotion.

Reimers murmured in some confusion: "I am very much obliged to you, sir." And the two men sat for awhile opposite each other in silence.

"After this," the colonel continued with some hesitation and difficulty, "you will probably wish to get away for a change. I therefore advise you to go up for the winter examination at the Staff College. There is no doubt about your getting through. The work will prevent you from brooding over your thoughts, and afterwards there will be Berlin and entire change of surroundings. All that will be helpful to you."

Falkenheim's voice became softer, and shielding his eyes with his hand, he continued in a scarcely audible whisper: "It would be advisable that you should withdraw a little from society; and of course to any unavoidable questions it will be necessary to invent an answer of some sort. It seems to me it will be best to say that your old lung-trouble obliges you to take certain precautions. Is that agreed?"

With a sob the senior-lieutenant stammered out, "You have always been like a father to me, sir."

He had stood up and was about to depart without another word. Then suddenly the colonel took him in his arms. This seasoned, clear-headed man had great difficulty in restraining his emotion.

"I have long looked on you as a son, Reimers," he said. "And that all this has turned out so differently from my expectations is a grief to me, a very great grief. I cannot tell you how great."

Reimers took his departure. The colonel looked after him till the portière fell.

Whose fault was it that the young man left the room with hanging head and miserable face, instead of with the beaming eyes of an accepted lover? Whose fault was it that the happiness of two young people had thus been shattered to pieces?

The colonel sat down before his writing-table and let his clenched fist fall in helpless anger upon the desk. He had not even the satisfaction of being able to direct his wrath against anybody or anything. The fault lay in something uncalled-for and apparently unavoidable, an evil, and at the same time necessary, outcome of the existing order of things.

Then he began to reflect. How should he break the bad news to Mariechen? By many little scarcely noticeable signs he had become convinced that she loved the unfortunate young officer. There was a delicate understanding, an unspoken engagement, between the two. How should he explain to her Reimers' sudden withdrawal?

This talk about the examination at the Staff College, and Reimers' necessary care of his health, was not sufficient to break off an honourable attachment. He must rather think of some means for effecting a permanent, even if painful, cure, and put an end once for all to his daughter's dream of love.

The colonel made out a regular plan of campaign. Among his relations there had been a cousin, Otto von Krewesmühlen, the owner of a large property in Franconia. The poor wretch had passed more of his lifetime in Meran and Cannes than on his own estate; but he had married in spite of that for the sake of the entail, and unfortunately had married an acquaintance in the Riviera who also was not on the shores of the Mediterranean solely for pleasure. Two boys had been born to them, but Otto von Krewesmühlen had not long survived their birth. The eldest child had followed the father not only in the entail but also in the manner of his death, and the widow and the second son were only like two feeble flames which the wind of life permits out of charity still to flicker for a while.

This cousin must serve to point the moral for his poor Mariechen, and help her to forget her young love in as painless a manner as possible. It happened fortunately that Marie kept up a

correspondence with her Franconian relations.

"I had something to ask you, Mariechen," began Falkenheim at supper. "Oh yes, of course; have you had any more news from your Aunt Krewesmühlen?"

"No, father," answered the girl, "not since the last letter, which you remember."

"I do not recollect quite well. Where was she then?"

"At Cannes, I think. Or it might have been San Remo."

"They have gone back again then?"

"Yes, unfortunately. And my aunt wrote in perfect despair."

The desired point had been reached; but his carefully-thought-out plan now seemed to the colonel inexpressibly clumsy and cruel. Nevertheless, he could not let the opportunity go by.

"I am really very much grieved," he said. His voice sounded to himself hollow and flat, like an ill-tuned instrument. But he went on speaking painfully and with difficulty, whilst his fingers kept clutching his collar. "As a matter of fact, Otto von Krewesmühlen committed a crime in marrying at all. He is responsible for an enormous amount of trouble and sorrow. He would have done a better and a nobler thing if he had renounced the idea of happiness in marriage. We cannot but ask ourselves: Was not this marriage simply a source of misery?"

He stopped. Marie looked at him thoughtfully.

Everything was very still in the lofty dining room. The colonel felt as if his words must re-echo like a trumpet-call from the walls, and he lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"Of course it requires strength and self-control to give everything up when one is in love. But an honourable man should have both; he is equally to be pitied and respected. And imagine, Mariechen, dear Mariechen--one of our best friends--Senior-lieutenant Reimers--that's how it is with him--just as with poor Otto Krewesmühlen; but he--will renounce his happiness. He is a brave man."

Falkenheim breathed more freely. Thank God! the mischief was out.

He looked anxiously across at Marie. Her face had become as white as the table-cloth. He was afraid she might faint. But no, the child pulled herself together; the trembling hand laid down the fork, which rattled gently against the plate and fell on the table.

The colonel went round the table softly to his daughter and stroked her fair golden hair with a gentle hand. Marie's shoulders began to heave, and suddenly she threw herself on his breast, weeping bitterly. The colonel was not quite sure what was the best way to meet this outburst. He did not like to touch too pointedly upon the cause of his child's grief. Then he fell back on a method with which he had quieted Marie in days of old, before she had ever gone to school.

When the motherless child was weeping her heart out over some trouble that had possessed her, even when she was quite a big school-girl, he would take her in his arms and carry her up and down the room, consoling and comforting her, till the wild sobbing ceased at last. She was now nearly twenty years of age; but the old method might still be effective. Unresisting she let him take her in his arms, and leaned her face against her father's cheek; bright tears ran down from his own eyes as he whispered to her over and over again: "Yes, cry, my little girl; cry, Mariechen!"

And the first great sorrow of the woman calmed itself, even as had the school-girl's trivial griefs. The colonel carried his daughter tenderly to her room and laid her down on the sofa. With a shy gesture she buried her face in the cushion. Once more the father's hand passed lightly over her brow, then he went out on tip-toe. Time must be the physician that would heal this wound.

Falkenheim listened for a second at the door: Mariechen was still weeping; but he could hope that the tempest would subside. That tearful outburst, uncontrolled as it was, showed still the unruly grief of a child. The blow that strikes deepest into the heart and embitters a whole lifetime is otherwise met and parried, with a grim, silent, enduring pain. Traces of such pain he had seen in Reimers' hopeless eyes; for his child he might expect a cure.

The best thing would be to take Marie away into entirely new surroundings.

As usual, each year during the partridge-shooting, the colonel one day received an invitation to join the royal party. At breakfast the old king asked him: "Well, Falkenheim, what do you say? That longlegged Friesen in the War Office has obtained command of the Lusatian brigade. How would you like to be chief of the department?"

The colonel hesitated with his answer.

"I know quite well," the old gentleman went on, "that you have a disinclination for anything that smells of the office, even though fifteen hundred others would lick their lips over it."

"Your Majesty is very good," said Falkenheim. "I will do whatever your Majesty desires."

The king looked at him searchingly.

"Really?" he said.

"Certainly, your Majesty. Only, if you will allow me to say so, not for too long a period!"

"Very well, very well!--till you get the command of my household brigade."

His Majesty was holding in his hand a silver cup full of corn-brandy. "Your health, Falkenheim!" he said. "I look forward to having you by me at court."

The appointment was gazetted after the manœuvres on October 1.

There was certainly no officer in the regiment, even excepting Captain Gütz and Senior-lieutenant Reimers, who did not hear of Falkenheim's prospective departure with real regret. But that did not last long; some one's departure must always be taking place in military life. How else would room be made for successors? And besides, without this appointment in the War Office, the colonel would in any case have obtained his brigade in another two years, and the regiment would have had to do without him. It was much more important now for the officers to know who was to be their new chief.

Major Mohbrinck was appointed to command the regiment; he had hitherto commanded the mounted division of the artillery guard. He was an unknown quantity in the Eastern Division, for he belonged to a different army-corps; but military gossip gave a not very favourable account of him.

Little Dr. von Fröben received from an old chum of his, who was in the mounted division, a telegram which ran thus: "Hymn No. 521." The hymn indicated is the translation of the Ambrosian hymn of praise, commencing: "Lord God, we praise thee; Lord God, we thank thee."

Well, this was a piece of subaltern wit.

It was more significant that Captain von Wegstetten had a letter from his brother-in-law, the head of the first mounted battery, also written in a remarkably Ambrosian vein. "I can tell you"--it ran--"we two heads of batteries thank God on our knees that we are rid of Mohbrinck. My joy thereat is no doubt damped somewhat by my brotherly sympathy for you in having now to put up with that scourge of God. However--you can keep calm, as I might have done. We sit too tight in our places for him; thanks to our favourable relations with the powers that be. Mohbrinck only seeks out absolutely defenceless victims whereon to prove his capacity. He considers it a commander's chief task in time of peace 'to purify the army from all incapable people.' In confidence, he should himself have been purified away first of all. As those who know assert, he has always from the first made it his business to shove aside any one who stood in front of him. We of the cavalry heartily wish never to set eyes on him again."

Mohbrinck arrived.

He was overflowing with graciousness, and expressed his sense of "his good fortune in having to devote his poor efforts (supported of course by such able assistants) to so excellently trained a regiment."

The speech with which he greeted the regiment held the happy mean between theatrical gush and a sermon. It was adorned with pompous imagery, and contained numerous eulogiums of the reigning family. "Christian humility" and "God's assistance" played a great part therein, and it dealt rude thrusts at those who waged war in secret upon the sup-porters of throne and altar. The acidulated vituperative voice of the major gave the whole performance an indescribably comical effect; the bold artillerymen, standing at attention, got stiff necks, aching knees, and dizzy heads from listening so long to these flowers of speech.

After this Major Mohbrinck had all the officers of the regiment brought up and introduced to him.

One thing was to be noted: he had a nice perception for everything that was useful and paying. He had taken care to be well instructed in all particulars before his arrival in the garrison.

He seemed at once to be hand in glove with the adjutant, Kauerhof. This was, of course, because the adjutant's wife, Marion Kauerhof, *née* von Lüben, was the daughter of an important personage in the War Office. The adjutant presented the other men according to their seniority in rank. First came the two majors. Lischke received a studiously polite greeting; Schrader was far

more graciously treated--was not the smart bachelor a notable waltzer at court balls? He was often commanded to dance with the princesses, and, people said, regaled the royal ladies with many little stories which they would never otherwise have had a chance of hearing.

Next approached Staff-Captain von Stuckhardt. He found himself very coolly received by the new chief. What was the use of troubling much with any one who was known to be a predestined dead man? Stuckhardt stepped back feeling considerably snubbed.

Träger, Gropphusen, and Heuschkel got rather neutral pressures of the hand; Gropphusen, perhaps, being of noble family, was greeted rather more warmly than the others.

Kauerhof proceeded with his introductions: "And now, sir, here is the head of our sixth battery, Captain von Wegstetten."

Mohbrinck twisted his lips into a honied smile. For Wegstetten had a cousin, about seven times removed, who was something of a celebrity, not so much on account of his martial exploits as because he was ninety-eight years of age, the oldest soldier in the army, and a former adjutant-general of his late Majesty. Uncle Ehrenfried, dried up like a mummy, had some difficulty in even sitting upright in his wheel-chair; and for years it had been impossible to carry on an articulate conversation with him. But his immense age lent a certain *cachet* to his nephew, the chief of the sixth battery. If the mummy were really to attain his century, or were to die on some marked day--a royal birthday or funeral--the services of a Wegstetten to the reigning family would show in a dazzling light, the reflection of which could not be disregarded by an acute man like Mohbrinck.

Little Wegstetten smiled a contented smile under his big red moustache. Before a commanding officer like this he felt he had no cause to tremble.

"Captain Madelung, head of the fourth battery," proceeded Kauerhof.

Mohbrinck greeted him with something like effusion: "Ah!" he cried, "our celebrated warrior from China. I am delighted--delighted--to have the honour of meeting you." He put on a rallying expression: "But you must not go to the Far East now, my dear sir. I hear you have just made happy domestic arrangements that will keep you at home."

Madelung bowed; just before the manœuvres he had married the eldest maid-of-honour.

The youngest captain of the regiment, Güntz, was now presented. Major Mohbrinck assumed his would-be-agreeable smile, and said jokingly: "Dear, dear! our youngest captain, and so stout already!"

Güntz looked at him. Well, of course he was not exactly one of the slim ones, but why should this rather uncomplimentary remark be fired in his face?

Major Schrader saved him the trouble of answering. He patted him good-humouredly on the back, and said: "Well, yes, he has got something of a corporation, like Dr. Luther; but that does not prevent him from shining brilliantly in the constellation of my commanders of batteries."

Mohbrinck turned to him, and remarked sweetly; "Oh, I should never have suggested such a thing, my dear sir. I am quite well aware of the merits of Captain Güntz." And he touched Güntz's little red eagle; his own breast was still undecorated.

It was the common talk of the army that the 80th Regiment, Eastern Division, Field Artillery, had, under Falkenheim's command, become a perfect pattern to all the troops. It would therefore have seemed most expedient to carry on the methods of its former chief. But Mohbrinck considered that to do so would make him appear an officer without military distinction or views of his own. He posed as having studied to a nicety every little whim and peculiarity of the major-general commanding the brigade, and had made up his mind that at the review his regiment should have no fault found with it, not even if for months everything more important should be set aside in order to drill into the men every little fancy of the brigadier.

"I tell you, sir, I have heard the last word of the major-general on this subject or that," was his ever-recurring refrain.

Throughout the batteries this caused a certain sense of nervous insecurity. The captains were instructed to lay stress on all manner of insignificant details, and it was difficult to get on with the regular training. Only such remarkably active and circumspect officers as Wegstetten and Madelung could manage to satisfy both claims upon them: their ordinary military duties, and the merely personal likes and dislikes of the commander of the regiment and the brigadier. Gropphusen let his battery go as it pleased; he was in one of his wild fits. But Träger and Heuschkel quite lost their heads. Was the new commander going to turn the world upside down? And yet they had thought they were fairly good at their work; Falkenheim himself had told them so from time to time.

Güntz got sick of the whole affair. Under Mohbrinck's system the battery might cut a very

dashing figure before the commander of the brigade at the review, and yet be worth the devil only knew how little in sober reality. Guntz, for his part, would not bother about it; it was his business to train capable soldiers for his king and country, but not for Major Mohbrinck and Major-general Hausperg.

Captain Guntz had commanded the battery for a year; his time of probation was over. Already he had brought his plans to such a point that he could lay them in practical shape before the directors of the gun-foundry in the Rhine provinces.

After serious counsel with Frau Kläre, he concluded his letter to the manager with the following sentence: "Therefore I beg you, sir, to give my work your most serious consideration. In case you find my plans workable, please remember that I should be very glad personally to superintend the carrying of them out."

"Fatty," said Frau Kläre, "that last sentence is shockingly expressed!"

Guntz sat before his letter and looked down reflectively at his signature--"Guntz, captain commanding the sixth battery in the 80th Regiment, Eastern Division, Field Artillery."

"Do you know, my Kläre," he said, "I don't quite like the look of it myself."

The answer to this letter was very long in coming, unreasonably long, Kläre thought. Her husband comforted her: "Do you think people can come to a decision in a week about a matter over which I pondered for many years?"

At last came a letter bearing the stamp of the gun-foundry.

Guntz was just changing his coat for his smoking-jacket. He skimmed through the document, and read aloud to Kläre the most important phrase: "... plans extremely promising, ... their construction must certainly be undertaken at once."

Then followed a most dazzling proposal for Guntz to enter the factory and occupy a leading position there. Compared with the modest pay of a captain, the suggested salary of fifteen thousand marks seemed positively fabulous.

Frau Kläre's was an eminently practical nature, and she had often lamented over the miserable income on which the claims of an officer's position made such serious inroads; but now these words escaped her: "Good God, Fatty! Isn't that far too much?"

Guntz had not heard her exclamation. He had just taken off his coat; he held it for a moment in his hand and stroked the epaulettes caressingly. Then he hung it carefully over the back of a chair.

"Of course I shall accept," he said, in a voice which was meant to be calm, but in which strong emotion was evident. "I hope I shall be able to serve my country and my king better than I could in that dear old coat."

Kläre stretched out her hand to him in silence; then she went softly out of the room. It is better for a man to have that sort of thing out with himself alone.

What might have taken an enormous expenditure of time and writing proved, as a matter of fact, to be very simply and easily accomplished. Captain Guntz sent in his papers, and they were accepted before Easter.

At the farewell dinner, Major Mohbrinck spoke of the heartfelt concern with which the regiment must lose such a charming companion and promising officer, and of the good wishes with which all the officers would follow him to his new and important sphere of activity. All this came from the heart. Who could know whether, as retired lieutenant-colonel or colonel, a man holding such a post in a gun-foundry might not be a very useful acquaintance?

When Guntz took his departure from the little station he had got over all his regrets. He only left behind one man for whom he cared--Reimers.

He looked out of the window of the railway-carriage and saw his friend standing on the narrow platform, gazing after the departing train. That thin face, with its sad eyes, became by degrees undistinguishable, and at last he could hardly recognise the slender, slightly bent figure.

He waved his handkerchief for the last time; but his friend probably did not see, for he stood motionless.

Then the train ran round a corner of rock; the carriage swayed slightly, and the little station was out of sight. Guntz sat back sighing in his corner. He had been able to give his friend no consolation, and only one piece of good advice--to work.

Little Dr. von Fröben accompanied Senior-lieutenant Reimers to the examinations at the Staff College.

"One can only be plucked," he said in excuse when he was teased about his presumption. Of course if he compared his knowledge with that of his companion, Reimers, his candidature seemed to himself an unwarrantable piece of bravado. And Reimers went on studying with an indefatigable, almost feverish energy.

"My dear Reimers," said the little doctor, "there will be nothing more for you to learn at the Staff College, if you work like this. You had better slack off, dear boy!"

Reimers smiled a little half-heartedly. The good progress he was making gave him no joy. He no longer prosecuted his studies with the inspired devotion that had formerly possessed him; and only the strong feeling of duty, which had become habitual with him, spurred him on to further efforts. He often said to himself: "After all, what is the good of it?"

There was no sign of any obstacle in his path; despite all that had happened he was in a very fair way to achieve a distinguished military career. But he could not rid himself of an oppressive feeling that all his labour was in vain.

And then again after a moment of hopeless depression he would be possessed anew by the old fair vision, his enthusiasm for the wonderful German army, to belong to which had been his pride and his salvation. With eyes full of rapture he pored over the pages of the military history, and for the thousandth time followed the army on its path of conquest.

Then suddenly he checked himself. Was the army of to-day, of which he was a member, really that old victorious army?

Güntz had handed over to him the justification for his resignation which he had written out before the duel with Landsberg. It had been unnecessary to add or to erase anything.

Reimers had often in old days wished to have his friend's opinions in black and white before him, in order to overthrow them singly, point by point, brilliantly to overthrow them. He now held in his hand Güntz's views, succinctly and definitely expressed; but whither had flown his former keen spirit? He could no longer summon up the old impetuous dash with which he had meant to fall upon his opponent's arguments one after another, raze them to the ground and trample them underfoot like the entrenchments and fortifications in some mock combat.

He compared Güntz's statement with the notes he had taken of his conversations with Falkenheim, during the short period of his adjutancy. There was much in which they agreed, and this agreement staggered him. Here were two men of fundamentally different nature whose judgment concurred; both of them were distinguished by clarity of perception and exhaustive knowledge of the circumstances with which they were dealing, and both were entitled to their opinions by a past record that excluded all idea of bias.

Were they both right, then? The one with his vague uneasiness, the other with his heavy disquietude?

Reimers could not dismiss the doubts of these two men. At most he might reply to Güntz that this unsatisfactory state of affairs was not so widespread as his friend asserted.

This inclination to outward show was a universal sign of the times, and was not confined to Germany. In France a cavalry charge had been made upon the grand stand where the President was seated beside the Tsar. Was that not more theatrical than some of the impossible evolutions undertaken in the German manœuvres?

But to this consolation was opposed the old teaching of experience, that a nation in extremity is capable of the most unheard-of exertions in reparation of its errors. The cheerful self-sacrifice of Prussia in 1813 was almost without parallel in the history of the world; and yet the sensitive, heavily-chastened French nation was effecting a similar arduous work, the more striking by reason of its long persistence.

France had, besides, this advantage; in actual fact a great number of the French people, through an artificially nourished feeling of embitterment, were keen for war with their eastern neighbour. Germans, on the contrary, thought no more of the "hereditary enemy" of 1870; in the progress of science and the development of art they felt themselves closely connected with France. Germany had linked herself to France that they might march together arm-in-arm in the forefront of civilisation.

Germany *desired* peace. It was not exactly that the German had become unwarlike; but, because of his Teutonic thoroughness and sobriety, he was deeply impressed with the necessity and utility of peace, as the most truly rational condition of things. Once the danger of vengeance from the west had blown over, any and every war would have been unpopular in Germany, except perhaps one with England, which, as a naval war, would less immediately affect the masses of the people, and everybody in Germany held the conviction that warlike developments would never arise from an irresistible outbreak of popular feeling, but only from political or dynastic mismanagement.

In this way--that is, as a failing in warlike ardour--did Reimers account for the want of patriotism which Guntz pointed to as the most significant inward danger of the present military system.

Reimers had never interested himself particularly in parliamentary or political controversies,--an officer should hold aloof from such matters,--he was therefore not inclined to lay so much stress as his friend did on the influence of revolutionary politicians.

The evil was great enough without that. Was not an army that went into the field without enthusiasm beaten beforehand? And the thoughts suggested to him by the reflections of the colonel and of his friend all pointed to a similar conclusion. They seemed to stand like warning signposts beside the road on which the German army was marching; and all, all, bore upon their outstretched pointing arms the ominous word--Jena.

The sinister idea haunted Reimers like a ghost. If he sat down to his books it was there; and it fell across his vision like a dark shadow when the sun shone its bravest on the imposing array of the batteries at exercise.

His old friends had gone far away; and if Reimers looked into his own mind he was obliged to admit that he could not greatly regret this. It was indeed better so. The delightful intimate relations between himself and those dear people had already been destroyed by scarcely perceptible degrees.

The thought of Marie Falkenheim weighed on him the least heavily. When he had once got over the first bitter sorrow at his ill fortune he thought of her, strangely enough, with no desperate longing, but rather with a feeling of shame. The young girl did not represent the immediate necessity of his life which he now found lacking. That lay in a different sphere.

For this reason he was glad that Falkenheim and Guntz had left the garrison. No one should be there to see how the guiding star which he had followed so ardently all his days was now setting in diminished glory: no one should be by when his whole life suffered shipwreck.

The regiment was now under orders to march to the practice-camp. A few days before the departure Reimers ordered his man to bring him his portmanteau.

He wanted to see if the faithful old trunk, which had accompanied him on all his travels, was still in proper condition. It needed no attention.

"Shall I take off the labels?" asked his servant. "Then perhaps, I could freshen it up a little with varnish."

The trunk displayed a vast number of hotel and luggage labels. His journey to Egypt, in particular, had left brightly-coloured traces.

Reimers stood buried in thought. Suddenly he observed the waiting servant.

"Yes, of course," he said; "see to it."

He had been thinking of his return from that long furlough.

What renewed vigour he had then felt in every limb! With what exhilaration he had set foot on the quay at Hamburg, his first step on German soil after a whole long year in foreign lands! He would have liked to fall on the neck of the first gunner he met; and he could hardly wait for the moment when he might again don the unpretending coat that outshone in his eyes the most gorgeous robe of state in the world, attired in which he might again perform the dear old wearisome duty.

Were those high hopes to end in this sordid fashion?

He recollected how, amidst the jubilation of his home-coming, he had been disquieted by a presentiment of evil, a visionary dream that now confronted him in such cruel reality.

It was during his first visit to Frau von Gropphusen that the shadow had fallen upon him. He saw the room again before him in the dim light from its darkened window, and it seemed to him filled with gloom and hopelessness.

The suffering woman lay wearily on the big sofa under the picture of the "Blue Boy." She drew up the silken covering with her fair white hands, leant her chin on her knees, and gazed at him with her wonderful sad eyes.

Suddenly he became aware of the reason why he only thought of Marie Falkenheim with gentle resignation, with that fugitive feeling which seemed to himself scarcely compatible with grief for a real attachment: he had never ceased to love Hannah Gropphusen.

Had his eyes been struck with blindness?

His passion now revived in him as with the throes of an intermittent fever. His spirit was free from all other prepossession. Enthusiasm for his country, for his calling, had been driven out of him. His whole being was defenceless against the might of this love, and he was carried away by it as on the wings of a tempest.

He now only lived in the thought of Hannah Gropphusen. How long was it since he had seen her last?

He had to go far back in his memory to the beginning of the past winter. She had been the fairest at one of the first balls of the season. Her face had shone with seductive charm; a black dress, glittering with sequins, had enveloped her slender form, leaving bare the tender whiteness of her arms and shoulders. She bore the palm of beauty, and every one had acknowledged her sovereignty. And as he had sat idly in one of the most distant rooms, a morose observer of the gay throng, she had come gliding up to him like some dazzling messenger of joy. She had spoken to him, few words only and on indifferent topics, with a hasty, excited voice; but in her eyes had been once more that expression of utter self-abandonment which had made him so happy on their return from the tennis-ground during the previous spring.

He had stood before her, his shoulders bowed beneath his adverse fate, and had not dared to raise his eyes to hers.

Since the night of that ball, Frau von Gropphusen had been absent for the whole winter; she had gone on a visit to her parents, after (so the gossips whispered) a terrible scene with her husband. And on this occasion even the women had taken the side of their own sex. For Gropphusen had been getting wilder and wilder; it could hardly fail that legal proceedings would before very long be undertaken against him for his scandalous behaviour.

The injured wife had returned only a few days ago, probably for a last painful attempt to preserve appearances. Gropphusen himself would be leaving the garrison for the gun-practice, and she would at least remain there during that time; but she did not go out, and nobody had yet seen her face to face.

Reimers was possessed with a restless impatience to meet the woman he loved; he had wasted too much time already to brook delay.

Then again he was thrown into dull inaction by an agonising doubt. How could he think of approaching Hannah Gropphusen--he, a marked man, a condemned man? He set it before himself a thousand times, and dinned it into his own ears: he desired nothing, he wanted nothing but to be allowed to live in her soothing presence. He racked his brains to discover a pretext for visiting her but could find none. He directed his goings from day to day so as to pass by the Gropphusen villa as often as possible. He sauntered near the house by the hour together, possessed by the foolish hope of catching sight of his beloved. Perhaps she would come to the window to breathe the fresh air of the night, to cool her burning forehead in the soft breeze, or to refresh her tear-stained eyes with a sight of the starry heaven.

He waited in vain.

On the morning of their march to the practice-camp, Captain von Gropphusen, the head of the second battery, was missing.

Major Lischke sent his adjutant to the Gropphusens' villa to ask for news. The lieutenant came back with the answer that Captain von Gropphusen had as usual gone to town the evening before, and had not yet returned.

Lischke grumbled. "The dissipated scoundrel has missed the early train, of course. He might at least have telegraphed."

Naturally Gropphusen could not be waited for. Senior-lieutenant Frommelt took charge of the battery, and the regiment set off on its march.

But even at their first halting-place the missing man failed to put in an appearance, and now came some enlightenment as to his proceedings.

The police had made a raid upon the club to which Gropphusen belonged. Rumours were spread abroad of unlawful and immoral practices carried on there. A certain number of the members, Gropphusen among them, had managed to escape; the rest were already in custody.

Thereanent the regiment received an official letter, in which it was pointed out to the authorities that Captain von Gropphusen was accused of desertion, and was to be reported at once in case of his reappearance. This was, of course, only a matter of form, for Gropphusen had no doubt left the kingdom long before.

Senior-lieutenant Frommelt was entrusted with the command of the battery, and as Lieutenant Weissenhagen, the other officer belonging to the detachment, had already been sent on to the practice-camp to look over the barracks and stables, Senior-lieutenant Reimers was attached to the second battery during the march, and until further orders.

Reimers rejoiced that a fortunate turn of events had released the woman he loved from her tormentor he was glad also that this alteration in the arrangements for the march would withdraw him from surroundings in which his thoughts had now become so completely and dizzily changed.

Finally, a faint hope sprang up in his mind: perhaps at the practice-camp, where the capacity of the army was put to its sharpest test in time of peace, he might regain some of his old belief in the unimpeachable superiority of the German forces.

He greeted the open expanse of heath with joyful eyes.

The battery had crossed a river, one of those quiet waters of the flat country that glide along lazily between their sandy banks, and conceal beneath their harmless-looking surface deep holes and dangerous under-currents.

From the rear came riding a troop of hussars, apparently engaged in scouting-practice. The bridge was supposed to have been destroyed, and they were trying to find a place for fording the river. The officer first drove his horse into the water, and the animal sank at once up to its neck, but then began to swim, and soon reached the opposite side. The hussars followed smartly and quickly, and the troop proceeded onward from the other bank, leaving wet traces on the light sandy soil. The officer galloped up closer to the marching battery.

Reimers recognised an old companion from the Military Academy.

"You, Ottensen?" he cried. "What a strange chance!"

"Isn't it?" said the hussar. "Pity I've no time to stop. I must teach my chaps to scout!"

They exchanged a pressure of the hand; then the cavalry officer spurred on his horse, and disappeared in a cloud of yellow dust.

Shortly after this the battery came upon the hussars for a second time. The riders had dismounted at the edge of a fir plantation. One hussar after another was being made to buckle on the climbing-irons and climb up a tree-trunk in order to survey the surrounding country with a telescope.

The lieutenant was examining them, and testing their reports by the map.

"Not seen you for a long time, Reimers!" he laughed, as the battery marched by. "Just look; these chaps climb like monkeys!"

Reimers nodded gaily to his lively friend. It was indeed a pleasure to watch the agile hussars.

"Wait a bit!" said Ottensen, "I'll ride a little way with you." He asked Senior-lieutenant Frommelt politely for permission, and sent his men back in charge of a sergeant. Then he joined the battery, chattering away gaily in his droll, staccato fashion, and making his horse leap the ditch from time to time. He sat his magnificent steed splendidly, and with his slender, neatly-made figure, looked the perfect model of a cavalry officer.

Reimers looked at him with honest admiration and pleasure.

"Your hussars are smart fellows!" he said.

Ottensen smiled, well pleased, and said: "Well, perhaps so!"

"They climb the trees well," continued the artilleryman.

"I should think so!" said Ottensen. "Trees, corn-stacks, church-towers, roofs of houses, telegraph-posts, and devil knows what besides--mountain-tops too, only there aren't any hereabouts."

"Perhaps there will be during the manoeuvres."

The hussar let his single eye-glass fall, and showed an astonished face.

"Manoeuvres, my dear fellow? Why, all's plain sailing in them!"

"How do you mean? Plain sailing?"

"The rendezvous all fixed up beforehand, with friends on the enemy's side; simultaneous luncheons arranged for when possible. Every detail settled in advance."

The little hussar suddenly burst out laughing: "Reimers! my dear fellow!" he cried, "don't pull a face like a funeral march! Do you mean to say you didn't know it? You didn't? Well!"

Reimers asked him: "But what do you take to be the object of the manoeuvres?"

"Object? Oh, there is plenty of object!"

"Surely the object of the manœuvres is to get the nearest possible approach to the conditions of actual warfare?"

"All rot!" declared the hussar. "You're still just the same old bookworm as ever; an incorrigible old wool-gatherer! The object of the manœuvres is the most deadly punctuality in the meeting of the two opposing parties, and not the training of young cavalry lieutenants in scouting. The object is attained by careful consultations beforehand. Oh, yes! I was once just such another innocent youth as you, dear boy. Shall I ever forget it, my first scouting expedition, with no rendezvous? On and on I rode till it was perfectly dark. Couldn't see a single wicked enemy. Didn't I just get a rowing! A whole winter practice thrown away! Two infantry regiments with a mile of transport, and behind them four batteries and four squadrons of horse. All had marched gaily past each other at about half an hour's interval! Not a shot fired! No, thanks--never again!"

At a cross-road Ottensen took leave of them. From afar he waved once more his immaculately-gloved right hand.

Reimers rode on in silence.

On the horizon appeared the white walls of the barracks and stables, and the water-tower of the practice-camp.

It was an unwelcome thought this that his old companion of the Military Academy had suggested to him. Here was another proof of how everything in the army was worked up simply to present a smooth outward appearance. How he would laugh now if any one spoke to him of a similarity between the conditions of real warfare and those of the manœuvres! It was a thoroughly planned-out game, in which no ill-timed mischance was allowed to disturb the preordained harmony of the arrangements.

But what a crying shame that such splendid material should be spoilt by this dangerous system! Ottensen was not a highly-gifted soldier; he was no model military instructor; but he was a fine horseman, had a cool head, plenty of dash, and some keen mother-wit to boot: a born leader of scouts. And yet these brilliant qualities were sacrificed to outward show, and were let go to waste for want of use! One good cavalry officer the less; that was bad enough. But had not Ottensen spoken as though these were quite usual practices? It looked as though this purely external unwarlike training of the army were being erected into a principle.

The first day at the practice-camp was entirely taken up by settling into quarters. The tables were laid at six o'clock in the evening. Most of the officers were perfectly exhausted with standing about and running hither and thither; and directly the meal was over they retired to their rooms to get half an hour's nap before their evening duty.

Reimers left the camp by the back gate and went slowly along the edge of the forest towards the butts.

The sun was setting, and the rim of the red disk seemed to be just resting on the dark line of the tree-tops. The heath glowed with colour in the evening radiance.

Some men with pickaxes and spades over their shoulders met him; behind them a waggon laden with planks toiled heavily through the sand. Even the drill coats of the soldiers were tinted red by the sunset light. Reimers strolled on further. A sandy pathway cut across the pink blossoms of the heather; without thinking he turned into it. This was the road which had formerly led from the forest towards the ruined village; there was now no use for it, and it was being allowed to fall into disrepair.

The solitary wanderer approached the dilapidated dwellings. In the village itself the perilously inclined walls of the ruins threatened to fall into the roadway. Reimers stepped through a doorway into the courtyard of one of the largest houses. A rose-tree spread its branches over the wall. Everything was bathed in the red light of the setting sun. Through the empty casements Reimers seemed to be looking at the fierce glow of some incendiary fire. The white roses gleamed pink, and a pool of water that had run down from a gutter shone like newly-shed blood. The deserted garden, the empty casements, the smoke-blackened walls, the glowing colour in the sky, and the red pool on the ground: this was a picture of war, in which men were laid low beneath blossoming rose trees, whose roots were drenched in their hearts' blood.

Reimers stumbled down the dim mud-stained passage and over the broken threshold into the village street, and wandered back again to the camp, gazing with thoughtful eyes into the gathering dusk.

The picture of the ruined cottages had recalled his South African experiences to his memory.

He saw the cosy farm-houses burst into flames behind the fleeing riders. The men shook their clenched fists as they looked back, and sent up grim but child-like petitions to a patriarchal God on whose help they had too confidently relied. But they made no stand, possessed by the irresistible panic which had seized upon them after the unfortunate episode of Cronje's capture.

It was but now and then that a handful of brave men, together with a few from the foreign legion, had made a short resistance at some pass or ford; and these were the only experiences, during the time of that gradual break-up, to which he could look back with any satisfaction.

Like the others he had lain in the high grass or behind a jutting rock, and had picked out his man; while beside him a twig would occasionally be snapped by a bullet, or splinters of stone strewn over him. This had been sharp, honest skirmishing, and he had had no scruple about doing as much injury to the English as possible. He never knew whether he had killed his man or merely wounded him. Either was possible; and did not war necessarily involve this?

At last, however, he had an experience that weighed more heavily on his mind.

It was near the Portuguese frontier on an open grassy expanse, somewhat resembling the heath by the practice-camp. They were hurrying onwards, hoping to reach neutral territory and escape capture by the English. Between them and the pursuing lancers lay only the deep channel of a river, whose waters lapped idly and languidly on the shore in the peaceful summer stillness.

An English officer came riding carelessly up to it, a fresh young lad. He had slung his carbine on his saddle, and was gaily flourishing a switch in the air and flicking at his brown leather gaiters. He was within speaking distance, his men were trotting far behind him.

Then one of the foreigners, a lean Irishman, reined in his flying steed. With a wild expression of hatred he raised his loaded weapon, took aim, and fired. The Englishman fell heavily backwards on his horse and plump into the shallow water.

The Irishman galloped up to Reimers' side. His ragged coat and brown weather-beaten face proclaimed the seasoned fighter.

"A good shot, mate!" he said. Reimers looked sideways at him and answered nothing.

The other waxed indignant, and began fiercely:

"Damn it, sir! Thirty years ago my father rented a farm in county Waterford that one of yon fellow's breed coveted. My father died in Philadelphia, with nothing but a torn shirt to his back and his bones coming through his skin. It's an old debt that I have just paid off!"

Reimers nodded in assent; he could do nothing else. The man was one of the many Fenians who had entered the ranks of the Boer army, instigated by the age-long hereditary hatred of Irishman for Englishman; from his point of view he was justified. This was warfare, and why had the young officer ridden ahead in that boyish, foolhardy way?

Nevertheless, the deed had filled the German with inexpressible disgust.

And suddenly, in this evening hour among the blossoming heather, within view of the ruined village now fast becoming indistinguishable in the twilight, the recollection of that nearly dry river-bed on the frontier of the Transvaal Republic drove in upon his mind clearly and definitely all the terrors of war: men falling upon each other like ravening beasts, blood and fire, death and destruction.

Innumerable thoughts conflicted in his brain. Whose was the guilt that these immemorial horrors still existed, that they were even protected by law? Who was it that desired war? Was it the nations, incensed against each other by race-hatred? Was it their rulers seeking renown? Was it greedy self-interested diplomatists? Secret, but so much the more effectual, under-currents of Jesuitical intrigue? Fire-eating generals, pining to justify their existence? Who was it that dared assume responsibility for such a colossal crime against humanity?

Reimers was loth to press such considerations further, By so doing he might be led to conclusions before which he shrank, because from his youth up they had been pictured to him as detestable and criminal; he turned from them in alarm.

One thing he saw clearly and distinctly: war, which seemed to be a necessity in the life of a nation, demanded strong-minded men, hard as steel. Men like himself, broken in spirit, were useless and unfit for the profession of an officer. A soldier without fresh living enthusiasm for his calling was nothing but a figure of straw.

It was borne in upon him that he was a mere caricature of an officer, such as he had hitherto despised; perhaps but a more thoughtful, melancholy variation from the whole brainless type.

But what had he to look for in the world beside?

Next morning Senior-lieutenant Frommelt, the temporary commander of the second battery, came to Reimers in a hurry.

"My dear Reimers," he said, "I must ask you to do me a kindness. After the exercises to-day will you drive back at once to the garrison? Somewhere in Gropphusen's house the punishment-book of the battery must be lying about, and a few important orders with it. The sergeant-major

sent it over to him the evening before our departure, and now we want it. Will you go?"

And Reimers answered, "Of course I will, Frommelt."

The commander of the battery continued, quivering with the anxiety appertaining to his new dignity: "You know, I would have sent Weissenhagen, as he is the youngest officer; but he is a little flighty, and I don't quite like to trust him with such a delicate matter as conversing with a lady about the failings of her absent husband."

"But is that necessary?" asked Reimers.

"I think so. You see we have not been able to find the things anywhere. You must describe the books--you know the usual binding--and then they must be sought for very thoroughly."

"Very good. I will go."

Reimers went through the shooting-practice (in which, by-the-by, the "flighty" Lieutenant Weissenhagen seemed to give a very good account of himself), buried in a deep reverie. At every shot he started in his saddle, and when the battery took up a change of position he entirely forgot to ride into his place. But the good brown mare moved correctly of herself. Her rider patted her neck in praise, and drew himself up erect. The joy which had at first stupefied him made him now feel glad and proud. Happiness smiled upon him once more, before the consummation of his evil fortune--he would see Hannah Gropphusen again.

It was noon when he arrived in the garrison town. All the good citizens were at their midday meal. The streets were deserted, and the little colony of villas that formed the officers' quarters showed no sign of living inhabitants.

The Gropphusens' house, with its closed shutters and lowered blinds, looked half asleep; but Hannah's windows were as usual draped in their pale pink curtains. Reimers went through the garden and into the porch. He hesitated a moment and listened; not a sound was to be heard.

Then he rang. The electric bell echoed sharply in the deep stillness; but everything remained quiet. He could only hear the beating of his pulses.

He rang for the second time, but silence still reigned. Had the unhappy wife returned to her parents? Was the household broken up?

Then a door banged within the house, and light steps approached. The chain was taken down and the key turned in the lock.

Hannah Gropphusen stood on the threshold, a weary expression on her pale face; she was clad in a loose flowing gown of thin white silk. Her shoulders scarcely seemed fit to bear the weight of anything heavier than this light airy texture. Her small head was bowed as though unable to support the burden of her hair.

Her eyes expressed the astonished query: "How come you here?" And she stepped back hesitatingly.

"I have come on business," stammered Reimers.

Hannah opened the door and signed to him to enter. Her noiseless steps preceded him as she led him into her own little sitting-room.

She seated herself on the edge of the sofa and pointed to a chair.

"Won't you sit down?" she said gently. But Reimers remained standing, gazing down upon the woman he loved. At last he was near her; he could see her and hear her voice.

She raised her eyes to his, as if asking why he would not be seated. Their glances met, greeting and caressing each other in the first shy emotion of love.

The man threw himself down before the woman, covering her feet, her dress, her hands, her knees with kisses, and sobbing out the irrepressible confession of his love, over and over again, in unceasing repetition: "I love you! how I love you! I love you! how I love you!"

Hannah suffered his protestations silently. An unspeakable bliss weighed upon her and paralysed her. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and as though in the far distance she heard the soothing call of love: "I love you! how I love you!"

She bent over him with a glad, loving look. Her deep blue eyes shone darkly and protectingly, like the night sky.

"Hannah, I love you. I have always, always loved you. Only you, Hannah, only you!"

Her beautiful hand cooled his burning forehead. "I know," she whispered. And he asseverated:

"Even when I was hovering round Marie Falkenheim, it was you, you that I loved. You, only you! Hannah, do you believe me?"

She nodded: "I know."

Suddenly her aspect changed, and instead of the overpowering happiness came a hard, bitter expression.

"I know, too," she continued, in a low voice, "why you have broken off with Marie Falkenheim."

The words struck Reimers like a blow. He started back and tried to disengage himself from her. But the slender fingers held his hand with a spasmodic grasp which almost hurt him.

"You!" he cried. "How can that be?" Hannah had become calm. She stroked his hair tenderly. "How can that be?" she repeated. "Dearest! a woman can always find out anything she really wants to know. I wished to know this, and I know it."

In bitter shame the man broke down completely. He kissed the hem of her robe, and would have turned to the door.

"Forgive! forgive me!" he murmured.

But the fair hands would not let him go, and close in his ear a trembling voice whispered: "Stay, my beloved! For we belong to each other. I am--what you are. We are damned together, both of us. Stay!"

Reimers gazed up at her speechless, his eyes full of a terrible question.

Hannah rose. All signs of weariness had fallen from her; she stood erect, a sombre dignity in the expression of her countenance. She pointed back to that part of the house formerly inhabited by her husband.

"Through him," she said, in accents of denunciation, "I have been ruined. He has destroyed my life, so that I am--what I am."

She looked down upon the kneeling man before her, and suddenly the wild look of hatred and unrelenting sternness died out of her face.

"And now," she went on softly, "as things are, I could almost bless him for what he has done." Bitter irony invaded her tone. "Besides, he has bidden me adieu now like a man of honour. He is in Paris, and is going henceforth to devote himself entirely to art."

But then again lamentations burst from her lips, and long pent-up confessions, which she poured forth with a self-accusing candour.

"Listen, beloved," she said. "When he took me for his wife, a sort of dizzy enchantment overwhelmed me. We lived as in a mad whirl of intoxication. The hours that were not passed together we counted lost; and there was nothing he could have asked of me in vain. He set my foot on his neck and called me queen, goddess. And I--I gave him my beauty."

She lifted her head with an imperial gesture, and a proud smile curved her lips.

"I was a spendthrift," she went on. "Undraped I have danced before him; and down in the garden he had a tent erected--people never could guess the purpose of those canvas walls, but there I sat to him, naked, on his dun-coloured Irish mare, Lady Godiva. And he fell weeping on his knees and worshipped me. He longed for a thousand eyes, that he might drink in the twofold beauty--mine, and the noble animal's. He boasted that he would not repine if his eyes were stricken with blindness after having looked upon us."

She paused for a moment. The eternal might of beauty illumined her brow as though with an invisible crown. Then she bowed her head, and her voice lost its resonance.

"All that I gave him. I was no miser. The day came in which I repented my generosity. I suffered when he turned from me; but jealousy I felt none. Perhaps I was to blame for not recovering my pride at once. But through my love he had taught me that it is bitter indeed to love in vain."

She was silent. Her features hardened, and a deep furrow was graven in her smooth forehead.

"And then," her voice continued; "then came the moment of that terrible revelation. I do not know how I bore it. I was struck as by a lightning-flash; I was shattered. I wanted to leave him; but my people at home would not consent, and I--I could not tell him. Unresisting I let them do with me what they would. I would lie like a corpse, without movement or sensation; then I would rave, needing the most careful watching. And he--he came to me again, as the culmination of his misdeeds. I had become changed for him, more desirable. But I spat in his face. He came crawling and begging to me on his knees, and I struck him in the face and spurned him."

She raised her clenched hand to her brow, and shook it as against an invisible enemy. Her

eyes glowed with resentment, and her breath came pantingly.

Then again the unnaturally excited bearing relaxed; she sank gently down on the couch, and bent over her lover, who hid his face in the silk of her gown.

"Beloved," she whispered, in an infinitely softened tone; "it was then, just when I had recovered from my delirium, that you returned. When I saw you again, here in this room, it was borne in on me that we belonged to each other, and I thought you must feel as I did."

Reimers looked up at her, and made a movement to seize her hand.

"I know now that I already loved you," he said, "but I fought against it, because I feared unhappiness for you."

Hannah gently shook her head.

"Do not speak of unhappiness, beloved," she exhorted him. "Do I not love you, and do you not love me? Are we not happy?"

She stooped to him, and pressed her lips to his in a long kiss.

"I could not see clearly through my dreadful doubts," she went on. "What could I be to you--impure, defiled, ruined? There was only in me the longing that you should love me. What was the mad intoxication of my girlish folly to the happiness that possessed me when I became certain that you did love me? I could have denied you nothing, dearest. How happy I was!"

She smiled softly to herself, sunk in tender recollection, and Reimers felt her light hand touch his hair gently with a caressing motion. He grasped that fair hand and kissed it reverently.

"Ah, how happy I was!" repeated Hannah, with a sigh. "But the serpent lurked in my Paradise. I came to know the pangs of jealousy, and I hated Marie Falkenheim--hated her from the bottom of my soul. Ah, beloved! it hurts, hurts deeply, to see the glance of the man one loves passing one over for another woman. Do you remember the night of Kläre's birthday, when you sat in the Falkenheims' garden? I did not exist for you. I could have knelt before you, begging and imploring, 'Can you not even see me here?' But you had eyes only for Mariechen, and when I went away into the night, you and she were standing together by the railing like a betrothed pair. Happiness shone in your eyes. Yes! in yours too, dearest."

Reimers kissed the hand of his adored lady. "Forgive me!" he sobbed. "Forgive me! darling, my poor darling! My eyes were drawn to follow you; but I turned them by force to Mariechen. I know now that I loved you alone even then. In dreams, and when half awake, when I let myself go, it was you only for whom I longed. Dearest, forgive me!"

Hannah shook her head gently, and looked fondly into his petitioning eyes.

"Be content," she whispered; "it was wrong of me, and I conquered it. In the night, after I had seen you both like that, I fought it out with myself. I recognised that it was hateful egoism that made me grudge you your happiness, and that my love for you should be quite otherwise--more unselfish. From thenceforth Marie Falkenheim became dear to me; it was as though I were you,--I felt an involuntary yearning towards her, warmer, apparently, than your own. I would have liked to endow her with all that you found clever and charming in my speech or actions; I would have given her all that remained to me of beauty; above all, I longed to pour into her veins the fire of my own great love, that you might be entirely happy and blest. I would have decked your bride with my own hands, and have brought her to you; I would have kept watch, that nothing profane should disturb your bliss."

Tenderly her arms encircled her lover's neck, and her words flowed faster.

"Suddenly all this was changed, and I was not less so. I could not be sad when I saw Mariechen's tear-stained eyes. I guessed that something terrible had occurred; but I was groping in the dark till I got the truth out of that good Andreae. Then I wept for grief that your happiness was blighted; and I wept for joy that you were now wholly mine. For you are mine?"

Reimers clasped her to him passionately; she nestled quivering in his arms. Their lips met, and she whispered: "If chance had not led you to me to-day--then I should have gone to you. I love you so."

Late in the afternoon Frau von Gropphusen rang for the maid; but the girl had been allowed to go out, and had not yet returned. The groom from the stable came hastening to answer the second ring. He stood still in the doorway, astonished. His mistress had let down her hair and was standing in the sunshine as though wrapped in a golden mantle.

"Is Betty not here yet?" she asked.

"No, madam."

"Well, it does not matter. Saddle Lady Godiva for me."

"Very good, madam. But excuse me, madam; you will remember that Lady Godiva has not been ridden for three days; she will be very fresh."

Frau von Gropphusen smiled: "Do not be afraid. I shall be able to manage her."

"Shall I go with you, madam?"

"No, I am going alone."

Languidly she put up her hair before the mirror. Her pale cheeks were faintly coloured, and her lips shone moist and red. She slipped on her riding habit and settled her hat firmly. When the hoofs of the mare clattered on the pavement outside she was quite ready.

The maid met her at the garden gate, and was profuse in her apologies.

Frau von Gropphusen replied lightly: "All right, all right."

Lady Godiva was fidgeting about impatiently. She whinnied joyfully as her mistress's hand stroked her delicate nostrils.

The groom helped Frau von Gropphusen to mount, and inquired if he should tighten the curb a little.

His mistress nodded.

The mare resented not being given her head at once; but finally trotted off with a coquettish gait that showed her fine breeding and her graceful proportions. And the beautiful woman on her back was like a bride going forth to meet her beloved.

Hannah Gropphusen chose the road that led to the big exercise-ground of the regiment. Lady Godiva neighed with pleasure as she cantered along the well-known path; the gentle ascent which she had to traverse in no way exhausted her long-restrained impatience.

The great level quadrangle of the exercise-ground lay at a high elevation; in the valley below the air had felt hot and stifling, but up here a soft breeze was blowing, and with gentle caressing touch it brushed back the golden tendrils of hair from the rider's white forehead.

Upon the scantily growing grass of the plain Hannah Gropphusen gave the mare her head, and the animal bore her at a light even gallop to the far end of the ground. From thence ran a narrow cart-track, by which their sluggish teams drew the loaded harvest-waggon down to the high road. The track led straight on to the edge of the plain, the chalky surface being there broken up by deep quarries. Here a strong rough paling had been erected as a barrier, in case any stubborn horse should prove unmanageable. This was no impediment to an unerring fencer like Lady Godiva. She went over it easily at full stretch.

After her landing Hannah Gropphusen gave the mare a touch of the whip. The animal laid her ears back and increased the pace. At a little distance a second obstacle showed itself, a whitethorn hedge that looked like a hurdle.

Lady Godiva scarcely seemed to touch the ground with her hoofs. Her mane and tail gleamed golden as they streamed on the mild evening breeze. A pair of quails started up from amid the ripe corn.

The mare rose on her hind legs for the jump, then made a sudden violent movement as though to avoid it. Behind the whitethorn yawned an abyss.

But the impetus of her motion carried her on, and a firm grip kept her head forwards.

Early next morning when the stone-breakers came to their work they found at the bottom of the precipice a dead woman and a dead horse.

There were no external injuries either to the animal or her rider. The force of the fall must have killed them both. The terrified eyes of the mare were staring into vacancy, but those of the woman--indeed she was but a girl--were closed, and her small delicate hands still gripped the bridle firmly.

The foreman sent a boy to inform the village-elder; the other workmen stood in a silent circle round the unfortunate pair.

"Mates," said the foreman at last, "it's quite clear there is nothing to be done. We'd better be getting back to work."

A lean, bearded man protested: "We might as well say a prayer first for the poor creature." For the stone-breakers are a pious people; they stand always with one foot in the grave. A

loosened mass of chalk, a collapsing wall, a mine exploding prematurely, may threaten their lives; and the chalk-dust chokes their lungs so that they die early.

The bearded man took off his hat and began to pray. All the others bared their heads.

After the "deliver us from evil" he inserted another petition: "And grant to this poor lady, who has met with such a terrible and sudden death, Thy eternal rest, we beseech Thee, O Lord! For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

One only had gone back to his work, an aged man who, with trembling knees, was pushing a loaded wheelbarrow before him. He was himself too near death for the sight of a corpse to strike him as anything out of the common.

When he saw the others praying he set down his burden. His toothless mouth stammered out his words with difficulty.

"What are you praying for?" he said. "That the Lord will grant her eternal rest? Look at her, then! Isn't eternal rest written on her face?"

Reimers reached the practice-camp again when his brother-officers were at mess.

It was only on alighting from the carriage that he remembered Frommelt's commission. He was staggered a little at this neglect; but after all what did such trifles matter? He smiled to himself that he should trouble about it now.

In his own room he threw himself upon the hard camp-bed. The bare place felt stifling, although the window was wide open. The white-washed walls seemed narrowing about him, and he felt as if he would be suffocated.

He shut his eyes wearily. Then the troubled vision disappeared, and he had a feeling of freedom and deliverance, a grateful sensation of release from the limitations of matter, as though borne aloft into the unconfined regions of cosmic space.

The mounted sentry patrolling the forest passed by the window. The man had settled himself comfortably on horse-back, and his hanging bugle and accoutrements jingled. As he came near the creaking of the saddle could be heard. By degrees the sounds subsided, though the metallic tinkling was perceptible for a long time.

Perhaps, however, that gentle sound was but the prelude to some illusion of the senses.

Then voices sounded from the mess-room: the high crowing tones of Wegstetten and the mellow bass of Major Lischke, The little captain was grumbling about the food.

"No, no, major," he piped. "The mess-steward sets disgusting stuff before us, and that's the truth. Now, to-day beef and potato-soup? Pah! It was lean old cow, as tough as shoe-leather! And soup? hot water and Liebig!"

"But, my dear Wegstetten," Lischke tried to appease him, "think of the difficulties of transport! A two-hours' drive, and we're not to run up the expenses!"

Wegstetten's reply was lost in the passage.

Reimers rose quickly from the bed. He was afraid that Frommelt might seek him out, and that he would have to invent some kind of excuse.

He took his little revolver out of the drawer and examined the chamber; it was loaded with five cartridges. He had often thought of unloading the weapon, but had then said to himself: "Why? Who knows if it might not be wanted?"

He hastened down the steps of the officers' quarters and ran quickly along the camp-road to the gate. The sentry stared after him in surprise; he had not expected to have to present arms at such an hour. Then he stepped into his place beside the sentry-box, and performed the neglected salute; for so the regulations prescribed.

At a little distance from the camp Reimers moderated his pace; at last he walked quite slowly. His footsteps were hesitating, as if groping in the dark. He could not hear his tread upon the ground, and his eyes gazed into space like those of a sleep-walker. Everything seemed to him far remote: the sandy path beneath his feet, the dark forest, and the blossoming heather beside the way. And he felt strangely light, as if he were floating or flying.

Night was beginning to sink over the ruins of the deserted village. Reimers found his way among the dilapidated dwellings and into the courtyard of the big house where he had lingered the previous day.

The white roses of the creeper on the wall still glimmered faintly through the gloom. He bent aside a straggling piece of a box-tree and sat down on the broken masonry of the smoke-

blackened wall. Somewhere in the corner of the ruins a screech-owl shrieked. The cry sounded quite close.

Reimers smiled. There is an old wives' superstition that where a screech-owl cries there will soon be a corpse. This time the old women would be right.

He rested his head in his hands and reflected.

Before him passed with bewildering rapidity many recollections and impressions from his life's history: vague boyish impulses; enthusiasms of youth; exalted strivings and ambitions of manhood; the disenchantments and doubts of these latter days. It was as though he had been already lifted into a clearer light, above all the errors of earthly experience.

The restless ineffectual arguing to and fro with which he had tormented himself the day before was absent from this calmer mood. What was the use of struggling against inexorable necessity? Certainly war was one of the most terrible evils to which the world had ever been subjected, and he who should deliver mankind from this curse would be a new Saviour. But when would the Messiah come? Till then one must have patience.

The nations groaned under the weight of their armaments; but none would set the example of throwing off the oppressive burden. And the German people, who seemed to furnish an object-lesson in the world's history, whose destiny had been fuller than any other of changes and contradictions--the German people, at once so large-minded and so petty, so admirable and so despicable, so strong and so weak; who had done so much for the advancement of culture, and yet were so unconscious of their great work; hated by the rest of the world, yet divided amongst themselves--the German people had least call of all to make a beginning. They must, like every other nation, look to a strong army as their safeguard.

But then came the crushing thought: that army was no longer the same that had in one famous struggle forced the whole world to unwilling admiration.

Reimers took a mournful farewell of the beloved heroes of that mighty epoch. Every name connected with it thrilled his memory: Saarbrücken, a skirmish still scarcely imbued with the gravity of war, and assuming rather the character of playful bantering provocation; Weissenburgh and Wörth, where Bavarians and North Germans met as comrades in arms; Spicheren, where a slight encounter with the rear-guard grew into a serious conflict; Metz, which cost the enemy one of his two armies in the field, and was the cause of weeping to countless German mothers; Beaumont, the prelude to the huge tragedy of Sedan; and lastly, Paris, and the grim tussle of the seasoned fighters with the young enthusiasm of the republican army of relief at Orleans, Beaune la Rolande, Le Mans, St. Quentin, and on the Lisaine. He saw the army returning from the campaign crowned with victory; and then began that steady persevering activity which, not content to rest on its laurels, proceeded with the work of strengthening and protecting what had been won.

Then he thought of the present, and, still more gravely, of the future.

A good part of that modest, quiet devotion to duty was still alive in the army; but was not the new-fangled, shallow, noisy bustle of show and glitter every day displacing the good old feeling that recognised its power without any big words? A proud self-denying asceticism had given way to trivialities and superficialities. And that in a time when such follies were more than ever dangerous!

And in proportion as the army pursued this course did disintegration go forward within its ranks. The ever-increasing spread of socialistic opinions among the men, and the growing disaffection for military service, perfected the work which was already loosening the structure from without. This army, lacking in martial ardour, and educated more for parade than for war, was rushing with blinded eyes towards its doom. The flames of annihilation already shone ahead; the heirs of Sedan's conquerors marched straight onward, firm and erect in grand ceremonial array--and the sign-posts by the way pointed to Jena.

Reimers groaned in bitter distress of mind.

Was there no salvation?

He looked around him and gazed into the blackness of night. All about him was gloom. A light breeze was blowing; it bore on its wings the scent of the blossoming heather and the resinous odour of pine-trees. And from the beds of the wasted garden arose another smell that mingled with the perfume of the breeze: the invigorating smell of the soil, of the mother-earth. It infused courage into the despairing heart of the lonely man, and elevated his drooping spirit.

The soil of their native land was the inexhaustible source from which the strength of the German people constantly renewed itself. Thanks to their love for the soil they could never utterly perish.

To this was owing the continual unconscious longing that drove the workmen out of the great cities on holidays, so that the green of woods and meadows was dotted with colour by the gay summer attire of women and children; a longing that made the lower classes crave to possess a

few roods of land, if only to stand on their own soil and cultivate fruit whose flavour would be sweeter to them than any food that money could buy: the mighty living love for the soil of their native land.

And suddenly Reimers had a waking vision. He looked down upon the earth from some point of vantage. Germany lay beneath him as though viewed from the car of a balloon, with the familiar outlines pictured in the maps; yet he seemed to distinguish every roof in the cities and every tree in the woods. All parts of the country bore harvest; moors, marshes, heath-lands, had been converted into orchards, fruitful fields, or stately forests. But the extended boundaries of the large estates had vanished.

From the Baltic to the Vosges, from the marches of Schleswig to the Bavarian highlands, one peasant-farm neighboured another. The towns had grown no larger, for a new and happy race of men cultivated the soil: a lusty race, who flooded the cities with fresh vigour; a free race, loving its fatherland with a jubilant, willing, conscious love. And the sun shone down joyfully on this land of peace and plenty.

The pleasant picture vanished, and once more his eyes stared into the gloom.

From the distant camp came borne on the night wind the sound of the tattoo. He listened vaguely. Distance muffled the clear trumpet-call, and the final majestic roll of the drum was alike lost in the deep melancholy of the darkness. The tattoo. All must now go to rest. He thought of the beautiful pale woman whom he loved, who had given him one last moment of ecstatic joy in life before death claimed him.

Had she too gone to her rest?

The little weapon gave a faint report.

The screech-owl fluttered out of its cranny in the wall. With an apprehensive beat of its wings it sailed off over the deserted village and sent forth its piteous cry.

CHAPTER XVII

"Love of the fatherland,
Love of the freeborn man,--"

(German National Anthem.)

Franz Vogt had calculated that his release from prison would take place at the beginning of February. He had hoped for a clear sunshiny day, a blue winter sky, a hard frost, and crackling snow beneath his feet.

Everything turned out according to his wish; yet when the heavy prison-gates opened, Vogt never noticed the beauty of the winter day. He thought of Wolf, whom they had shot down in his attempt to escape. He himself had helped to lift the dead man, whose skull had been shattered by the shot.

Vogt was escorted back to the garrison by a sergeant. He would have had about two months more to serve, as the five months of his imprisonment were not counted; but on account of his father's death he had in any case to be given his discharge, in order that his little property might not suffer by neglect.

He had to wait a few days till all the formalities were gone through. Gunner Vogt did everything he was told punctually and obediently, though hardly with that cheerful frank readiness which had of old proved him such a good soldier. During his punishment the fresh open-hearted lad had become a gloomy, self-contained man.

One evening Käppchen, the clerk, who among all the changes in the battery seemed to be the only person who remained in his place, announced to him: "Vogt, your papers are made out. Tomorrow you can go."

And Vogt answered him respectfully: "Very good, sir."

He was alone in Room IX. on the morning of his release, putting on his civilian clothes. The

battery had gone down to the big exercise-ground for general foot-drill. He took his time over his dressing. What need was there to hurry? Nobody was waiting for him outside; and nobody would miss him here. He was quite alone in the wide world.

At the door he gave a last look round the bare barrack-room. Once these grey walls had seemed almost home-like to him; once, when the faithful Klitzing had the locker next his own. But that was long ago.

He went down the steps and out towards the back-gate, In the drill-ground the battery, just returned from exercise, was drawn up.

Vogt pulled off his hat and the captain slightly touched his cap. The greeting looked almost embarrassed.

This was a topsy-turvy world. Wegstetten's eyes chanced to rest on Gustav Weise, who was in his place in the right wing as corporal in charge of the first column. It would be unjust to complain of him; Weise did his work very well. But the captain would have preferred to see a Corporal Vogt in his stead.

In front of Weise stood Senior-lieutenant Brettschneider as leader of the first column. With his stiffened neck and proudly erect carriage he gave the impression of wishing to point out what an immense gulf separated him from the men. Between this officer and his subordinates there was no kind of sympathy.

And at that sight the commander of the battery looked still more glum. Brettschneider might have been quite brilliant at the Staff College in tactics and military history, but he was of no real use as an officer; still less could he instil into the men either military efficiency or convinced patriotism.

When Vogt arrived at the station the train he had meant to take had already gone.

Well, that couldn't be helped. He must wait for the next.

The dull February day was drawing towards its close when he stepped out upon the road that led to his native village. Joylessly he saw the familiar details of the neighbourhood appearing out of the fog, and he gave a casual, uninterested glance over the fields that bordered the highway.

Before the turnpike-keeper's cottage he stood still a moment. The dusty windows looked strange and dead; and the closed door over the well-worn threshold seemed to warn him off.

The little side-gate into the yard was not locked. Franz Vogt entered by it upon his paternal inheritance.

Just then old Wackwitz came hobbling with his wooden leg across the yard, carrying a pot of steamed potatoes.

"Nobody has any business here!" he cried out to the intruder.

Then he recognised "young Herr Vogt." He took him at once across the yard, and pointed out to him, in his clumsy, babbling way, the fine glossy appearance of the cows and the appetising sleekness of the pigs. Who could be found to take more trouble with the beasts than he? And he had been very economical with the food, although the local authorities had not given him too liberal an allowance!

Vogt listened perfunctorily. He nodded assent to all the garrulous old man said. It was quite true, the beasts looked well cared-for.

He patted the strawberry cow, who was in calf; and she turned her head towards him as she lay in her stall comfortably chewing the cud. Yet he could not feel easy. With his foot he pushed aside some straw that was littering about the place, and he carefully avoided the dung that lay on the stones of the yard.

He went down to the village and got the keys. A stuffy, chilly atmosphere met him in the passage and exhaled from every room. Thick dust lay everywhere on floors and furniture.

Nothing had been moved from its place, and every picture hung as usual on the wall. But it seemed to Vogt as if the rooms were empty and the walls bare. He shuddered with cold and with the sense of loneliness.

In the living-room his father's plain easy-chair was pushed up to the table, and beside it the stool on which the son had usually sat. It looked as if they had both only been out into the field for a moment and would return immediately; but yet he could not feel at home.

Franz Vogt looked about him sadly. All else was as of old; but his father lay in the churchyard beneath the heaped-up clay of his newly-made grave, and the son stood like a stranger in his father's house.

The lowing of the cows aroused him from his dismal brooding. He had sent away old Wackwitz after rewarding him liberally: for he meant to do as his father had done, and manage all the work himself.

He gave the beasts their food, which had already been prepared for them. There was not a scrap of bread nor of butter in the house for himself. He made his way down to the village in the dark, and was glad to find that the baker's shop was not yet shut, and that a neighbour could provide him with some butter.

And when, dead tired after the varying experiences of the day, he went upstairs, there were no sheets on his bed. He could not take the trouble to rummage in the linen-chest, and crept heavily between the rough woollen blankets.

Early next morning he was aroused by the uneasy mooing of the cows. He sprang from bed and scarcely gave himself time to wash. He had to bestir himself, and the fagging and worry lasted without intermittence from morning until night. He had hardly time to go down to the village inn in the middle of the day and get a hot meal.

He would not allow himself to fall short in any way, and was unremitting in his exertions.

But was this the condition on which, while a soldier, he had looked back with such longing? This haste and breathless labour, this hurrying from one thing to another without pause or rest?

He smiled bitterly to himself, and looked about him with dull, joyless eyes. He was tired with his day's work, and his back ached with fatigue; where was that joy of labour, which had formerly sustained him, and had lightened the burden on his shoulders?

Seed-time was coming on; when the young leaves of the lime-tree began to show as tender brown buds on the twigs, then the corn must be sown for the summer's harvest. But before that the fields, which had lain fallow through the winter, must be ploughed and harrowed.

Franz Vogt yoked the two dun cows, the strawberry remaining in her stall. Wintry weather persisted obstinately this year. As he followed the plough the hail lashed in his face, and the icy wind penetrated to the skin through his jacket and warm knitted vest. He turned his back to the storm in order to get breath, and hid his face behind a sheltering arm. More than once he broke off work half-way, and took back his team to their warm stable.

He would then spare no trouble with the beasts, and the two cows would soon be standing contentedly with their feet in the plentiful straw. But he himself would crouch before the cold hearth, trying to blow up the smouldering turf into a bright flame. He would throw his damp frieze coat over the back of a chair, and wait shivering for the fire to burn up and warm him. Sometimes he would dally with the thought that it might be best for him to sell up the whole place-house, stock, and field, and go into the town. Was he not living the life of a beast of burden? Worse, indeed! He had not had a single day of rest since his release: not one, among all these days of labour on which he had toiled till his bones ached. Wolf had told him how easily any poor devil could get on in town if he only had a fairly level head, how free and independent one could be there; how much more, then, a man with a few thousand thalers in his pocket!

It so happened that at this moment the lord of the manor made a rather advantageous offer for the land. He wanted it to "round off" his estate.

Would it not be his most prudent course to seize this opportunity? Certainly the very least he could do was to turn the matter over carefully.

Perhaps the lord of the manor would offer more if one seemed unwilling to sell.

At last the bad weather came to an end, and it seemed possible to begin to think about the sowing.

A suggestion of a warmer spell to come mellowed the freshness of the morning air when Vogt came out of the yard with his team. The eastern horizon was gaily tinted. The rising sun shone clear and bright, sending forth prophetic rays that foretold fair weather.

The young peasant glanced into the cow-house, where the strawberry seemed scarcely able to sustain her heavy burden, though she was not due to calve for another fortnight. For the first time Vogt began to feel some return of joy and content. This strawberry cow was a magnificent animal. She brought gigantic calves into the world; lively little creatures too, that made the funniest leaps and bounds, and were always beautifully marked. One could not but feel sorry when the butcher fetched them away.

The two dun cows lowed with pleasure when they came briskly out into the yard, as though they already scented summer, with its mild air and green grass. He yoked them to the small wooden cart. Then he brought the sack of seed-corn from the barn. He had laid it in some time before, and the sack had not been disturbed. But he opened it to convince himself that all was right. He took up a large handful, and let the grains of wheat run through his fingers. The seed

lay plump and heavy in the palm of his hand.

Then a current of joy made his heart beat higher. He saw the crop growing green, then ripening; the stalks crowded thickly together, and as the summer breeze passed over the field the heavy ears bowed and swayed like ripples upon the sea.

With a happy glance he looked about him; house and yard were in good order, the harrow lay waiting in the field, all was ready. And he drove his team merrily onwards.

The dun cows stopped of themselves when they reached their destination.

Franz Vogt smiled. Yes, this must be a thorn in the flesh for the lord of the manor! The corn-patch was small; but it stretched out amid the turnip-fields like a long arm that could hold its own, and that would not brook encroachment. Rich fruitful soil it was, that scarcely needed the manure he gave it.

Pride awoke in the heart of the young peasant-farmer. Oh no, it was not so simple as the lord of the manor thought! It might be a good while yet before the big estate was "rounded off."

Franz Vogt opened the mouth of the sack and shook out a portion of the seed-corn. The two cows stood chewing the cud by the wayside. He turned to the field.

The sun shone gaily as it mounted upwards. The black earth lay ready and receptive; above the furrows hovered a light mist, and an invigorating aroma ascended from the soil, like incense offered by the maternal earth to the engendering sun to celebrate the new year of fruitfulness that was just beginning.

The untiring force of nature was in this fragrance, shedding courage and strength into the hearts of mankind with the full benediction of spring.

An overpowering sensation made the young peasant fall on his knees, and he touched the earth with reverent caressing hands as though it were something sacred.

He had found his home again.

A troop of hired labourers, strangers from Galicia, were approaching a field in the neighbouring property of the manor. They followed each other wearily like a band of slaves, unwilling and half asleep. Behind them came the inspector.

"Avanti, avanti!" he cried, supposing, apparently, that this was Polish.

And the strangers set to work. Their heads were bowed wearily, and their movements resembled the automatism of a machine.

But Franz Vogt stepped out into the broad sunshine with head erect, and strewed the seed into the furrows of his land with a free sweep of his outstretched arm.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK 'JENA' OR 'SEDAN'? ***

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