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A Little Garrison

A REALISTIC NOVEL *of* GERMAN ARMY LIFE of TO-DAY

By FRITZ VON DER KYRBURG (Lieutenant Bilse) · *Translated, Edited and with a Special Introduction by* WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND Author of "GERMANY: THE WELDING OF A WORLD POWER," "THE KAISER'S SPEECHES," ETC., ETC.

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Introduction

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IN his book, *Le Débâcle*, Zola shows in a vivid and intelligible manner the downfall of Napoleon III. and his army, and paints in his usual matter-of-fact tints the actual condition of the great host led forth to destruction. He makes us read in the soul of the common French soldier and in that of his commanding officer. The keen analysis of the characters he portrays enables us humanly to understand the catastrophe on the plains of Sedan. The whole Second Empire undermined by corruption; the army, head and front, honeycombed with loose morals, favoritism, and boundless conceit,—we begin to perceive the main reasons underlying the utter defeat of a gallant nation. And this all the more when, side by side with the sombre painting of Zola, we read the God-fearing letters written home from the reeking battlefields by William I. and his Iron Chancellor.

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Indeed, when the conquering German legions returned, in the spring of 1871, to their own firesides, they presented a body of men of whom any nation might have been proud. Elated they were at their unparalleled successes, but not puffed-up or vainglorious.

A generation has passed since then. Is the German army of to-day still of the same metal? Does it, as a body, still show the same sterling qualities which led it to victory after victory on the soil of France?

Alas, no. On that point the best and clearest minds in Germany itself are agreed. Foreign military leaders who have had opportunity to watch the German soldier of to-day at play and at work, have sent home reports to their respective governments, saying: "These are not the men that won in 1870!"

A couple of years ago several American officers of high rank, fresh from the Philippines, witnessed the great autumn manœuvres of the German army, conducted under the supreme command of William II. One of them, after viewing in stark amazement the senseless attacks of whole cavalry divisions up steep declivities or down slippery embankments, exposed all the while to a withering fire from the rifles of infantry masses, said to the present writer: "If this were actual war, not a horse or man would be left alive!"

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In the Reichstag, the national parliament of Germany, many have been the heated debates and scorching has been the bitter satire passed during recent years upon the German army of to-day. And not only the solid phalanx of Socialists did the criticising on such occasions, but also not a few members of every other party, even including those of the Conservative Faction, composed of men who are the very representatives of the caste from which the Empire's corps of officers have sprung.

The German newspaper press has sounded of late years, again and again, the note of alarm, dwelling in scathing articles on signs of decadence in the nation's whilom pride,—the army. It has pointed out the growing spirit of luxury in its ranks, the wholesale abuse of power by the officers and sergeants, the looseness of discipline, the havoc wrought by "army usurers," the "money marriages," so much in vogue with debt-ridden officers, the hard drinking and lax morals prevailing, the gaming for high stakes, which is another festering sore, and leads to the ruin of so many,—and a whole train of other evils. The professional, that is, the military, press has joined in this chorus in more subdued tones.

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Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire a spirit of disquiet, nay, of apprehension, has spread. Are the very foundations trembling on which the reunited "fatherland" rests?

If any reliance can be placed on an unbroken chain of evidence it would seem so indeed.

It was in 1786 that Frederick the Great died, leaving an army that he had raised to the pinnacle of fame. With this army he had faced and vanquished, standing at bay against almost the whole of continental Europe, his powerful foes. Little Prussia, a straggling strip of territory stretching from the ice-bound Niemen to the vine-clad Rhine, Frederick's genius had lifted until it took rank with the powers that prescribe laws to the world.

A score of years later, just one short score, the hills of Jena looked down upon the crushing, [xi] disgraceful defeat of this same Prussian army. The country was dismembered, and as a political force ceased to exist. The heel of the Corsican despot was on its neck. Even after the restoration of Prussia by the Vienna Congress in 1815, it required another half-century to give her back her lost prestige. Sadowa and Sedan reinstated Prussia, and with her the allied states of Germany in her former glory.

Is another Jena coming?

Are we on the eve of another international upheaval?

A little book has recently appeared in Germany. Its title is unpretentious. *Aus einer kleinen Garnison* ("A Little Garrison") does not sound very sensational. The book, besides, was written by a simple lieutenant, Bilse by name. There was apparently nothing to arouse public attention in its appearance.

And yet, from the instant of its publication, this little book *did* arouse such attention; more than that, it grew into an enormous sensational event, and led to developments of such a serious [xii] character that their consequences will be felt for many years to come. Indeed it seems likely that this little book will indirectly be the means of the moral reformation of the entire German army.

Shortly after its appearance the authorship of Lieutenant Bilse, who had written under the pen name of Fritz von der Kyrburg, was discovered. A court-martial was promptly convened, and he was summoned to appear before this military tribunal.

Mail reports now to hand of this memorable trial show that it created intense interest in Germany, that it was regarded, indeed, as a *cause célèbre* of the first magnitude. The interest in the case was largely due to the belief that Lieutenant Bilse's novel—for he had given his terrible arraignment of the army the outward semblance of a novel—presented a true, if highly unflattering, picture of conditions as they exist in many German garrison towns. This impression was borne out by the evidence, which tended to corroborate the account given by Lieutenant Bilse of the moral tone and the standard of discipline prevailing among the officers. Part of the [xiii] revelations have not been made public, as the examination of some witnesses was conducted *in camera*. It is understood that their evidence was of a highly sensational character.

In his examination, Lieutenant Bilse stated that since entering the service he had "lost all his illusions concerning the character and duties of an officer's calling." He declared that the social and regimental tone of the frontier garrison towns was extremely low, and that the repeated instances of lax discipline, favoritism, and loose living which he had observed had provoked him to write his book.

In not a single instance were the facts of the various incidents and events which form, grouped in a loose tissue, the body of his book disproved or even weakened by the testimony produced at the trial.

Nevertheless the court-martial sentenced the young officer to six months' imprisonment and to dismissal from the service "for libelling his superior and commanding officers by the publication of writings in a peculiarly offensive and damaging form, and also for a breach of service [xiv] regulations."

The lieutenant was undoubtedly guilty of a breach of regulations, as an officer in Germany is prohibited from publishing any printed matter except over his true name, and is required to give notice of his intention to the military authorities,—a rule which the young man had violated.

The German press, in its comments on the case, admits that it has an importance far beyond the person of the accused.

The Berlin *Post*, one of the chief organs of the aristocracy in Germany, said:

> "In the interest of the army's good name it is urgently requisite that abuses such as have been partly disclosed should be speedily and thoroughly eradicated."

The Berlin *Tageblatt*, a leading paper, said:

> "Lieutenant Bilse's book should be seriously pondered in high places."

The *Vossische Zeitung*, one of the oldest and most respected journals at the German capital, made this comment: [xv]

> "That such things could be possible in German military corps would have seemed impossible

to the most malevolent critic ... the public confidence must be restored."

The Hamburg *Nachrichten*, Bismarck's old organ, says:

"We regret to admit that the picture is not overdrawn."

And that is the tenor of all the comment of the entire German press. In the neighboring countries, in the house of Germany's friends, Austria and Italy, the comment was even more outspoken; while in France and Russia, although their political affiliations are not precisely friendly to Germany, more forbearance was shown.

The Bilse book and the Bilse case have since formed the theme of divers debates in the Reichstag. On an interpellation from some of the delegates, the Minister of War, General von Einem, made some interesting admissions. He did not deny that Bilse had stated, in the guise of fiction, established facts; nor did he repudiate the statement that the conditions described by the [xvi] author existed in duplicate form or worse in many garrisons of the empire.

The Kaiser himself was forced, much against his will, to take notice of Bilse's book. A detailed report was made to him by the chief of his Private Military Cabinet, General von Hülsen-Häseler, on all the essential facts underlying the plot of *A Little Garrison*. He expressed himself as much grieved at the terrible revelations in it. In their totality they presented a state of facts of which he himself, thoroughly acquainted as he had deemed himself to be with conditions in his army, had been ignorant.

The immediate outcome of this conviction on his part was the issuance of a secret decree directed to the various commanders of the twenty-three army corps composing his army. In this decree he called the attention of these commanders to the awful conditions laid bare in Bilse's book, and bade them watch hereafter with greater zeal over the morals and discipline of their various corps. The decree he ordered to be read by each commanding colonel to his subordinate officers, threatening with expulsion from the army any officer who should hereafter be guilty of [xvii] such heinous behavior as exemplified by the characters in Bilse's book.

It might, therefore, be supposed that a thorough reform of the whole moral status of the German army was now under way, or that it had been at least initiated by this action of the Kaiser. Certainly, there is no one in all Germany who takes a deeper interest than he in the welfare of his army, or who has a profounder conviction of its importance in maintaining the empire's proud position as a world power. On many occasions the Kaiser has emphasized his belief that this, "the most precious legacy" left him by his grandfather, must be kept intact to secure his own throne and the nation's predominance in the heart of Europe.

But it would be short-sighted to assume this. The causes that have been at work for thirty years past, undermining and honeycombing the whole structure of the German army, are too manifold, too much ingrained in the very fibre of the German people of to-day, and too complex to yield at the mere bidding of even so imperious a voice as the Kaiser's. Bilse, in his book, lays a pitiless [xviii] finger on the ulcers that have been festering and growing in the bosom of the army; but his story, after all, is that of only one small garrison, and refers to but a brief period in the very recent past.

It may be worth while, in order to give the reader a more comprehensive and more general view of conditions in the German army of to-day, briefly to survey some patent facts.

The wide spread of the gambling spirit is one of these. Against it the Kaiser has inveighed in army orders since his accession to the throne, but all in vain. This evil spirit is as strong to-day as ever. It was but a few years ago that a monster trial took place in Hanover. It showed a frightful state of rottenness within even the most renowned regiments—those of the Guard Corps, in which the scions of nobility hold it an honor to serve. The details of this trial were a shock to the whole country, and it ended by dismissal or expulsion from the army of a score of officers bearing, some of them, the most ancient and honored names within the empire. Even one of the Kaiser's own aides-de-camp issued from it with a reputation so besmirched as to lead to his hasty [xix] retirement. More recently still the Club of Innocents (*Club der Harmlosen*) became the cynosure of all eyes, but unenviably so. It was not, strictly speaking, a military club, but it counted in its membership list a majority of active army officers. I will not go into details, but merely mention that one of the chief victims of the diabolical machinations practised by a number of high-titled black-legs—officers of this club—was young Prince Alfred, a grandson of the late Queen Victoria, whose complete moral and physical ruin was wrought, soon followed by his death. The Jockey Club in Berlin, made up largely of officers, and similar organizations in Potsdam, Charlottenburg, Hanover, Cassel, Dresden, Brunswick, Cologne, and, in fact, nearly every other garrison town of any importance within the empire, have all had their list of scandals during recent years,—scandals brought about by unprincipled gamesters belonging to their corps of officers. Probably several thousands of resignations, semi-enforced retirements, or outright dismissals from the army have been due during the last decade to this one evil of high play alone. [xx]

The hard drinking indulged in throughout the army, to a degree which to the ignorant outsider seems incredible, is another evil of perhaps as great magnitude. Of that Bilse's book gives a faithful impression. For these excessive drinking habits, and in an equal degree for the luxurious habits of life, more particularly the indulgence in sybarite banquets, the Kaiser himself must be held largely to blame, since, by force of example at the many "love feasts" (*Liebesmähler*) and anniversary celebrations of every kind which he not only attends at the quarters of the various regiments throughout the German domain, but which he very frequently arranges for or

encourages himself, he has taught his army officers a direful lesson. Certainly, the old Spartan simplicity in food and drink which prevailed in German army circles during the days of William I., grandfather of the present ruler, has gone forever.

A direct outgrowth of the luxuriousness prevalent in the German army of to-day is two other evils which in their consequences on the morals of the officers can scarcely be overrated. They [xxi] are epitomized by the two words “army usury” and “money marriages.” To live beyond one’s means leads to indebtedness. And there we have the simple genesis of the army usurer, so-called. He exists and thrives in every garrison in the empire, and the broad swath he mows within the ranks of the army testifies to his diligence and to his successful methods. It would be going too far to expatiate on this matter. Suffice it to say that the system by which the usurer brings hundreds, nay thousands, to disgrace and premature retirement from the army, usually involving the impoverishment of the officers’ families, is wellnigh perfection in itself. Within his net are driven, at some time or other, the vast majority of the younger men as well as a great many of the older ones.

The favorite avenue of escape offered to the young spendthrift officer is a so-called money marriage. He barters himself, his social position, and the prestige which the ownership of an old and honored name still carries with it in Germany, for the gold which his bride brings him on the wedding day. Dowries must of course correspond in some measure with the load of debt the [xxii] young officer has been accumulating for years, and also with his claims to distinction and attractiveness. Such dowries vary between a paltry twenty thousand and several million marks, strictly according to circumstances. There is an unwritten code in force in this respect, every paragraph of which is made and provided to cover the individual needs of such impecunious officers. The matter is well understood throughout the land, and is looked upon as an established institution, something in which squeamish scruples are not allowed to interfere with concrete requirements. No German maiden consciously feels the shame of being thus made purely an object of barter and sale. She is to the manner bred. But of course good, fat dowries are often taken by officers, together with brides, who in other respects by no means realize their ideas of what a wife should be. Enough said on this dreary subject!

Still another evil, and one which of late has been much ventilated in Germany, is the abuse of power by officers and non-commissioned officers towards their subordinates. There has always [xxiii] been too much of this in the German army, and it would carry us too far afield to trace here the causes. In itself it seems a strange anomaly that in an army which calls itself by the proud term of a “nation in arms,” and whose membership is recruited from every stratum of society, there should be such wholesale maltreatment of the privates by their superior officers. And yet such is the fact, inexplicable as it seems at first sight. Against this curse the Kaiser has likewise launched his thunderbolts at some time or other. But they have had no effect. If anything there has been an increase in such cases.

At a Reichstag session, in the middle of December, the Kaiser’s spokesman, General von Einem, made the formal admission that during the preceding year no fewer than fifty officers and five hundred and seventy-nine non-commissioned officers had been court-martialed and sentenced for cruelly maltreating their subordinates. When we reflect that scarcely in one case out of every hundred formal charges are preferred by the victims, who know themselves completely in the power of their tyrannous masters, the official record thus stated is indeed appalling. But here [xxiv] again the Kaiser himself, as chief commander of the army, must be held largely responsible; for his more than lenient treatment of the convicted offenders is nothing less than a direct encouragement to their fellows to continue in these fiendish practices. One sergeant, a man by the name of Franzki, belonging to the Eighty-fifth Regiment of the Infantry, was shown at the trial to have been guilty of no less than twelve hundred and fifty individual cases of cruelty and of one hundred cases of abuse of power. Another man, Lieutenant Schilling, of the Ninety-eighth Regiment of Infantry, stationed in Metz, had a record against him of over a thousand such cases. Both men were recently tried and convicted, and the degree of their punishment seems strangely inadequate. Yet in most instances the Kaiser does not even allow these convicted offenders to serve out their brief terms of confinement, but issues free pardons to them after they have undergone but a small portion of their penalty.

However, from several points of view, the most serious evil of all that has grown up within the [xxv] German army since the close of the Franco-German War of 1870-1871 is the cleavage in sentiment between the army and the nation. That also has been demonstrable on many occasions during recent years. I recall the case of Lieutenant von Brüsewitz, of Carlsruhe. This young officer ran his sword through the back of a defenceless civilian by whom he fancied himself insulted in a restaurant, the man dying within a few hours of the deed. His murderer attempted no other exculpation, or indeed explanation, than by saying that according to the army code of honor he was forced to avenge on the spot the insult offered him. Brüsewitz was sentenced to merely a mild type of confinement for a term of two years, but was pardoned by the Kaiser at the expiration of a twelvemonth. A more recent case was that of a young navy lieutenant who likewise stabbed to death with his sword a former schoolfellow and townsman who had not saluted him on the street with sufficient ceremoniousness. That, he said, was his only reason for killing the man, and he, too, received a very mild sentence. Even worse was the case of two [xxvi] officers quartered in a small garrison of the province of East Prussia, close to the Russian border. These men, being somewhat in liquor on New Year’s Eve, mortally wounded one civilian and gravely wounded another for no other reason than that these men had shouted a song distasteful to them, the whole occurrence happening in the street after midnight. The officers got off with a

ludicrously small punishment.

Such facts as these—and they could be multiplied indefinitely—show, above all, one thing: the striking difference in the conception of what is termed “honor” obtaining between the officers in the army and the bulk of the population, the citizen element. The so-called “army code” embodies views which it is euphemism to call mediæval—remnants of the dark ages. And yet these views are not excused; no, they are upheld and endorsed by the Kaiser, his government, and by the army in a body.

The “code” also brings about that other absurdity, the army duel, as a mode of settling all serious “affairs of honor.” About that enough has been written in Germany itself to fill whole [xxvii] libraries, and yet the foolish thing continues. The Kaiser, grown up in all the prejudices of caste as held by his ancestors and by the present generation of the upper classes in Germany, has done nothing to eradicate this evil. The provisions made by him, and now carried out, for regulating the practice of duelling in his army, have had only the effect of rendering the duel as an institution still more respectable.

The main reason which impelled me to secure the authority for presenting his little work in an English dress was the fact that it tells a truthful tale about an organization of such first-rate importance as the German army. It paints that organization not only as he himself saw it, but as in its essential features it really is. In doing this Lieutenant Bilse has not only rendered an enormous service to his own country,—as indeed many thousands of Germans are recognizing to-day,—but he has also enabled the rest of the world to gain a clear insight into the inner mechanism of the most powerful fighting-machine in the world, has shown its hidden flaws, its grave organic defects, and has thus permitted us truly to gauge its inherent power. But [xxviii] interwoven with his criticism there is the hope, nay the conviction, that the main part of the machine is still sound.

A book of this kind, “written from the inside,” has a strong merit of its own not to be measured by its purely literary qualities; for these, I am free to admit, are not of the highest order. There is talent in it, when considering that it is the first effort of a literary tyro; but its great value lies in its intense realism, interpreting that word in its higher sense.

I have been compelled to make some alterations and omissions in my work of translation. The omissions have been due to the conviction both of myself and of my publisher, that the author has in certain instances given a mass of unnecessary details to which serious objection might be urged, in this country at least, on the score of clean literary taste. The alterations were either dictated by similar considerations or grew indirectly out of them.

With these exceptions mentioned, however, my translation may fairly claim to be true to the spirit of the original. Even the strictest moralist will not cavil at seeing equivocal situations [xxix] painted in Bilse’s book when his purpose in doing so has been the radical exposure of ills existing in a body around which cluster so many traditions of honor and duty well done as is the case with the German army. And there is no excuse to be offered by me for furthering that task.

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.

New York, January 1, 1904.

A Little Garrison

Chapter I [1]

AN EVENING PARTY AT CAPTAIN KÖNIG’S

STANDING in the centre of her parlor, a spacious and cosy one, Frau Clara König let her eyes glide over the arrangements made for the reception of her guests.

For this was her regular *soirée musicale*, when she saw assembled about her, one evening each week, those of her more intimate friends who dallied habitually with Euterpe, loveliest of the Muses. To-night, however, her invitations had not been so restricted, for she had asked some other families to come, largely for the laudable purpose of admiring the musical achievements of the “artists.”

Here she placed a chair in its proper place; there she smoothed with tapering fingers one or the other of the tidies, products of her own skilful needle, which, in every hue and size, adorned [2] the furniture. She tested the various lamps; opened and shut piano and parlor organ to convince herself of the absence of dust; and finally minutely inspected sundry vases, deftly manipulating their lovely contents, so that each flower and each enfolding leaf stood out to greatest advantage. This was one of her specialties. At none of her parties, even in mid-winter, was there a lack of tastefully grouped nosegays and bits of green on mantel and corner brackets.

Frau Clara was a woman of about thirty, with a well-proportioned figure and a rather pretty, rosy face. Her lively blue eyes and a wealth of well-groomed hair combined to give her a look of pleasant youthfulness.

These last touches done, she seated herself on a low stool, for her thoughts pronounced it all good.

And now the heavy drapery was thrust aside, and her husband appeared—a tall man with a black moustache. He, too, came to attend to his share of the preparations. He lit up the chandelier. Usually he gauged the number of gas jets lit by the number of guests expected, one [3] for each. But inasmuch as there were only five jets and about a dozen guests to come, he indulged in the luxury of igniting them all. He did this with various groans at the latest outrageous gas bill, and next inspected the stoves. Then he also sank down into a seat.

Albrecht König was captain in the cavalry regiment quartered in the town. His squadron was always in apple-pie order, for he devoted to it his entire energy during waking hours. Brief intervals of leisure he filled by glancing at the *Deutsche Zeitung*, studying the money-market reports, toiling in the large garden behind the house, which he always kept in almost as good order as his squadron, and superintending his hennery, the useful output of which he sold to his wife at more than current prices.[1] And if there was nothing else to do, he had scientific skirmishes with his nine-year-old, attended wine-tests,[2] or practised on the piano, an instrument [4] which he played almost as well as might have been wished by his friends.

A noise in the hall told of the arrival of the first guest. A heavy, dragging step and a snorting breath told them who it was. The door opened, and Agricultural Counsellor von Konradi made his appearance. A rather fleshy sort of man, with glasses on his aristocratic nose, over the tops of which his eyes sought the lady of the house. His hair was dyed a fine dark shade, and envy proclaimed that this was done on account of the fair sex; for he was unmarried. His two ideals in life, however, were a good dinner and several bottles of even a better wine to go with it. Since he realized both of these ideals in the captain’s house, he was fond of going there. As to the rest, he was held to be a gentleman.

While he was at the critical point in a story embodying his profound grief at the arrival from his estate of a pheasant in a scandalously unripe condition, the door opened again and admitted the spouse of Captain Kahle.

Of a dainty, petite figure, and with a face that seemed to belong to a *gamin*, she presented on [5] the whole a graceful enough *ensemble*. But there were two drawbacks—her rather large mouth was wreathed in a stereotyped smile, and when she opened it it gave utterance to a voice of somewhat unpleasant, strident timbre.

Three youngish men followed on her heels. The first of them was Lieutenant Pommer, who was somewhat of a general favorite because of his unaffected, frank demeanor. Occasionally it became a trifle rough or rude; but you always knew where you had him. With special ardor he saluted Frau Kahle, and it looked almost droll to watch the contrast between him, a burly, corpulent fellow, and this tiny, fragile figure that resembled a Dresden china shepherdess.

The second one was Lieutenant Müller. Those who did not know him could have guessed from his stiff, self-contained mien that he must be the regimental adjutant. Housewives dreaded him, for his appetite was Gargantuan. With stoic defiance of all warning glances he was in the habit of demolishing thrice the quantity of the daintiest eatables apportioned to each guest. After [6] everybody else had put down his fork, his invariable way was to help himself once more liberally, saying it was his favorite dish.

The last of the trio was Lieutenant Kolberg, an amazingly pale young man with *moustaches à la Kaiser*. He led a life against which moralists might have urged arguments, and there had been various scandals connected with his past.

While the other guests were waited for, a few groups were being formed. Lieutenant Kolberg approached Frau Kahle and measured her from top to toe with approval. The adjutant made a clever attempt to find out from the hostess what particular dishes were in store for him. Having ascertained this, he at once swore they were his special delectation. Herr von Konradi was chatting with Captain König about a wine-testing trip into the Moselle district which they were jointly planning in order to replenish their respective cellars.

Another lady entered, one whose corpulency and unskilfully powdered face and arms made an unpleasing contrast with a badly fitting robe of black and yellow. She ran up to Frau Clara and [7] squeezed her hand in her wobbly fingers, expressing joy at the invitation. To the gentlemen who sidled up to her one after the other she extended that same chubby hand with a fatuous smile, but holding it so high that they could not do otherwise than touch it with their lips.

This was Frau Captain Stark, the latest spouse in the regiment, though probably past the demi-century line.

Her lord, likewise of rotund shape, came after her. He wore a black Vandyke beard, and his special forte was a carefully trained and extremely long nail on the little finger. It was said that this nail demanded a goodly portion of his leisure hours. His voice told its own story of bonhommie and unctuous Rhine wine.

Behind this couple hove in sight the figure of the commander. Everybody stepped aside with a

show of deference, and all around he was saluted with deep bows, while he slowly stepped up to Captain König and his lady. The bowlegs and the robust body were not relieved by a face of finer mould, and thus it was that Colonel von Kronau scarcely corresponded with the popular [8] conception of a dashing cavalry officer. Most striking about him was a tear that permanently glistened in the corner of his eye. This tear he always allowed to grow to a certain size, when he would, by a dexterous motion born of long practice, propel it from its resting-place over at his *vis-à-vis*, either at the latter's feet or in his face, as the case might be. It largely depended on the size of the tear and the rank of his *vis-à-vis*.

The lady who accompanied him and who had the face and manners of a governess was his better half. She had squeezed herself on this occasion into a dowdy dress of pearl-gray silk, with a purple collar of velvet.

Almost simultaneously the remainder of the invited personages filed in. There was First Lieutenant Borgert. His shifting eyes seldom looked squarely at any one whom he deigned to address. He was fleshy, but his movements were nevertheless elastic and suave. Behind him stood First Lieutenant Leimann, under-sized and prematurely bent, with a neck several sizes too short for him and a suspicion of deformity between the shoulders. A pear-shaped head protruded [9] from between them, fitfully lit up by a pair of pig's eyes, which either restlessly shot glances or else were so completely buried under their lids as to become invisible. A monocle hung down his bosom from a broad ribbon, but he never used it, for fear of becoming ridiculous.

These two gentlemen dwelt together in the same house, each occupying a floor, and were inseparables. Though perennially short of cash, they saw no reason to deny themselves the luxuries of this mundane sphere. On the contrary, they lived like heirs to great fortunes.

"Pardon me, my gracious lady,"[3] remarked Leimann to the hostess, "but my wife could not come immediately, having her old complaint—nervous headache, you know!" In saying this he made a face as though he didn't himself believe what he was saying. "But she will doubtless come a bit later."

"Sorry to hear it," Frau Clara sweetly answered, "but I hope she will soon feel well enough to [10] appear."

After little Lieutenant Bleibtreu, a special friend of the house and the only subaltern in Captain König's squadron, had in his turn saluted everybody, the servant announced that the meal was served. The diners, in couples, ranged strictly according to rank, passed in. The dining-room looked cheerful, and the table had been arranged with Frau Clara's customary taste.

Everybody having been served, conversation started slowly. "The weather has turned so fine of late that we can commence playing tennis," remarked Frau Colonel von Kronau.

"Certainly," chimed in her husband, masticating vigorously. "I shall call a meeting of the club next week, and then nothing will stand in the way."

"Charming!" enthusiastically fluted Frau Stark. "I love it passionately, and you, of course, will all join in? You, my dear Frau Kahle, were one of the most zealous members last season. And how is it with you, Frau König?" [11]

"I'll have to forego the pleasure," she replied, "for it does not agree with me."

"And your husband?"

"I don't know how to play," the captain said; "but I like to watch graceful ladies at it."

Frau Stark bit her lips and shot an angry glance at the captain. "What did he mean by 'graceful ladies,' anyway?" she thought. That was meant for her, no doubt. And she remembered unpleasant comment made because she with her fifty years had started riding a patient old mare belonging to her husband's squadron. One of the sergeants was giving her lessons.

"Some civilians, I believe, will join," broke in the colonel. "I will have a list circulating."

Everybody knew this was buncombe, the colonel being extremely unpopular in civilian circles, and they smiled incredulously.

"I will join you," said Herr von Konradi, "provided the heat is not excessive. Next week, however, I have no leisure. I must sow my peas, or it will be too late."

"Yes," put in König, "or they will not thrive."

"What? Not thrive? Peas will always turn out well if properly attended to," said the colonel's [12] wife, with a touch of asperity.

"I fear I must contradict you, my gracious lady," retorted the captain. "Last year's did not turn out well anywhere."

"They must be sowed at moonlight, and not a word be spoken, then they will do finely, every time," said the Frau Colonel, eagerly. "But don't imagine that I am superstitious. I am simply stating a fact."

It was a bold thing to do, for whatever the colonel's wife said must not be gainsaid, yet Lieutenant Bleibtreu could not help it. He laughingly said: "Sowing, therefore, bacon in between

while the sun is shining, we'll have one of my favorite dishes ready made."

The colonel's lady merely transfixed him with an envenomed stare. After a dramatic interval she resumed: "But, come to think of it, I myself won't have leisure next week. My goose-liver *pâtés* are not yet finished."

"You prepare them yourself?" asked the agricultural counsellor with deep interest.

"Of course. I do up six potfuls every year. The colonel dotes on this kind of stuff." [13]

"And where do you procure your truffles, may I ask? I am myself looking for a trustworthy person."

"Truffles? Nonsense, it tastes every bit as good without them—that is all imagination."

"Oh, but you must excuse me, my gracious lady; truffles are the very soul of a goose-liver *pâté*. Without them it is insipid—'Hamlet' with Hamlet left out."

"'Hamlet'?" rejoined the lady with the governess face. "We were talking of truffles."

Herr von Konradi shrugged his shoulders. Nobody else said a word. Just then Frau First Lieutenant Leimann entered. She looked as fresh and bright as the morning star.

"A thousand pardons, Frau König," she smiled, "but I had to finish some important letters." And she sat down in the place reserved for her.

"We heard you were suffering from headache," was the general remark.

"Headache? Yes, I forgot—I did have it. But that is such an old story with me that I scarcely think of mentioning it any more."

She was a handsome young woman, and the fact was made more apparent by the really tasteful gown she wore. [14]

During all this time the adjutant had not said a word. He attended strictly to the business that had brought him here. His voracity attracted no attention, because everybody was used to it. Off and on he merely emitted a species of grunt in token of approval or dissent of what had been said. He was still eating when the hostess finally gave the signal to rise. Then everybody wished everybody else a "blessed digestion,"[4] and made for the adjoining rooms, where the ladies were served with coffee and the men with cordials, beer, and cigars.

Informal chatting was indulged in. The colonel, after briefly despatching a trifling matter connected with the service, for which purpose he retained Müller, who was fairly oozing with good cheer, retired to a quiet corner with Frau Stark. Since their conversation was carried on in whispers, First Lieutenant Borgert, despite strenuous efforts to overhear, could only catch a phrase or a single word from time to time.

"You *must* manage it," he heard her say. [15]

"Let us hope that the annual inspection will turn out well," replied the colonel. "Last time our direct superiors were finding fault with your husband. It began in the stables, and I heard some talk about it."

"Never mind all that, Colonel, my husband *must* be promoted to be major. I tell you plainly, if you drop him I shall—"

"Have no fears, my most gracious lady. I have given him a very brilliant report, though he doesn't deserve it, as you know. But I shall do my best."

"And you owe me your best, Colonel, as you very well know, for without me you would be to-day—"

Captain König came up.

"Will the Herr Colonel not accompany us next week on a wine-testing trip up the Moselle? Agricultural Counsellor von Konradi will make one of the party. Some exquisite growths are to be sold."

"Certainly, my dear König. You know that I always join in such expeditions. And with you in particular I like to go, for your dinner has shown me once more that you own a faultless 'wine tongue.'" [16]

"Very flattering, Colonel. But I see you are still cigarless; everything is laid out in my room."

The colonel stepped into the next room. Frau Kahle was flirting with Lieutenant Pommer in one corner, while several young men were doing that with the pretty hostess in the other corner. Just then First Lieutenant Leimann entered from the dining-room, and behind him his spouse, making a wry face. Her mien became sunny, however, when First Lieutenant Borgert stepped up to her and inquired with solicitude as to the cause of grief.

"Oh! The usual thing," she snapped. "My husband has scolded me. You know his ungentlemanly ways. Always rude and offensive."

"What was the trouble this time?"

“Merely the fact that I had excused my lateness at table by pleading unfinished letters, while he had urged a headache. I am tired of his eternal fault-finding.”

“That is valid reason for a divorce, my bewitching lady,” smiled Borgert. “Look for another husband if you are tired of the present one.” [17]

She peered into his face inquiringly. “You don’t imagine how serious I am.”

“Ah, if that’s the case, my dear lady, there is no time like the present for planning a change. How, for instance, would I do for a substitute? Now, honor bright?” and he playfully fondled her plump little hand.

She took this just as smilingly. “Before I answer,” she said, coquettishly lowering her eyelids, “I must know what you have to offer me.”

“Let us sit down then and discuss this most alluring topic in its various bearings,” laughingly remarked he; and he led her to a divan, where they sat down side by side.

“Now, then, pay close attention, please,” continued he. “I offer you an elegant home, a neat turnout, a tolerably groomed nag, a villa on Lake Zurich, and a host of serving genii.”

“And who is to pay for it all?”

“Pay?” His wonderment was great. “Pay for it? Why, what is the use of doing that? It has become unfashionable, and besides, so much good money is frittered away by paying. *I* never pay, and yet I manage to live pretty comfortably.” [18]

“All very well, but there is my husband to think of besides,” joked the pretty woman.

“Of course you still have him; but meanwhile you might try and accustom yourself to me—as his successor, you know.”

Frau Leimann nodded cheerfully and then buried her empty little head in her hand, dreamily scanning the carpet. The others had left the two in sole possession of the room. The eyes of the officer sought hers, and there was a peculiar expression in them when they met.

“Why do you look at me that way?” said she. “You make me almost fear you.”

“Afraid of your most dutiful slave?” whispered he, and his breath fanned her cheek. “Ah, no. But do not forget our conversation, loveliest of women. Things spoken in jest often come true in the end.” She looked up and smiled as if enchanted at the idea. Then she rose, and when he grasped one of her hands she made no effort to wrest it away. He imprinted a long-drawn kiss on it. She shivered and then rapidly glided into the adjoining room, where the jumble of sounds produced by tuning a variety of musical instruments was now heard. The strident notes of violins, the rumbling boom of a cello, and the broken chords of a piano were confusedly mingling, and the male guests were slowly dropping in or taking up a position, a half-smoked Havana or cigarette between the lips, just outside the door, so as to combine two sources of enjoyment. Borgert had remained behind in the next room, and was now studying intently a letter the contents of which plunged him in a painful reverie. At last he put back the letter in his breast pocket, audibly cursing its sender, and then joined the group nearest him. [19]

At the parlor organ Captain König was seated, while his wife had taken charge of the piano accompaniment. Herr von Konradi and First Lieutenant Leimann stood ready with their violins, while Lieutenant Bleibtreu, the violoncello pressed between the knees, occupied the rear. The auditors, at least the majority of them, were comfortably ensconced in chairs or sofas, near the mantelpiece, and around a table on which a small battery of beer mugs, steins, and tankards was solidly planted. [20]

They began to play: a trio by Reinhardt. It sounded well, for the performers had practised their respective parts thoroughly. But there were some disturbing factors, as is always the case with amateurs. The unwieldy agricultural counsellor rose on his creaking boots with every note he drew, and frequently snorted in his zeal. Leimann, too, was one of those one must not look at while performing, for his queer-shaped head had sunk between his shoulders and his bowed back presented a rather unæsthetic picture. The cellist, whose fingers were rather thick, occasionally grasped the wrong string, but tried to make up for this by bringing out the next tones with doubled vigor. The trio was followed by violin solos, and lastly by a Liszt rhapsody, played by the Königs with warm feeling and sufficient technique.

For *finale* the small audience overwhelmed the players with praise, and some more or less correct remarks were made about the different compositions. [21]

“Oh, my dear Lieutenant Bleibtreu,” cried Frau Stark, “I must resume my cello practice with you. It is such a soulful instrument, and I used to play it with tolerable proficiency in my younger days.”

Bleibtreu made a grimace, and Captain König whispered to him that the elderly lady was unable to distinguish one note from another.

Borgert had looked on nonchalantly from the door during the concert. Once in a while he glanced sharply at Frau Leimann, who was cosily reclining in an arm-chair, her eyes half closed, a prey to thoughts.

The players had now taken seats at the large table, and the conversation turned to trivial affairs of the day, the Frau Colonel assuming the lion's share of it, for she was decidedly talkative. Thus another hour passed; and when the clock on the mantel marked half-past ten, Colonel von Kronau gave his better half a look of understanding, and the latter slightly nodded in reply, and rose, saying to the lady of the house, with a smile:

"Dear Frau König, it was charming of you to prepare such an enchanting evening for us. But it [22]
is time for us to be going. Many thanks!"

The hostess made some polite objections; but when she saw that the Starks too, and the agricultural counsellor began to take formal leave, she desisted from any further attempts to retain her guests, not dissatisfied, on the whole, that but a small circle remained. For with them it was not necessary to weigh words as carefully as in the presence of the colonel. It frequently happened that he, the day after a social gathering, took occasion to reprove his captains and lieutenants for a careless turn of phrase or for something which he construed as a lack of respect shown to him or his wife.

Those five gone, the others moved their chairs closer together around the table, and some fresh, foaming nectar was served. Borgert started the talk.

"Did you notice how this Stark woman again had a whispered confab with the colonel?" he said. "Such manners I think they ought to leave at home, for there they are not very particular. Just fancy, the other day I was witness when Stark threw a slipper at his wife, and she on her part had [23]
received me in a horribly soiled and frowzy morning gown."

"I saw worse than that," interrupted Leimann. "Last week they had in my presence one of their frequent matrimonial disagreements, and the fat one, her husband, clinched the matter by shouting at her: 'Hold your tongue, woman!' A nice, lovable couple, those two!"

"Anyway, it seems as if she lorded it over him pretty effectually," broke in the adjutant. "Day before yesterday Stark had had his fill at the White Swan, and when he became a trifle noisy and quarrelsome his wife arrived on the scene and behaved simply disgracefully. Finally she tucked him under her arm and took him home amidst the shouts and laughter of the other guests. I don't think their meeting at home can have been an angelic one."

"That sort of thing happens every little while," remarked Pommer; "at least at the Casino[5] she appears whenever he does not depart punctually at mealtime, and calls him hard names before the very orderlies."

"Well, she is keeping a sharp eye on him just now," said Captain König, good-humoredly, "for [24]
he wants to get his promotion as major, or, rather, it is her ambition to become Frau Major."

"Why, there can be no idea of that," interjected Borgert, with a great show of righteous indignation. "If this totally incapable idiot becomes major I ought to be made at least a general. Though it is queer that the colonel is evidently moving heaven and earth in his behalf."

"Good reason why," retorted Leimann, calmly.

"How so?"

"Don't you know the story? And yet it is in everybody's mouth."

"Then tell us, please, because we know not a word of it, and I scent something fiendishly interesting!" And Borgert rubbed his hands in anticipation.

"Why, last year the colonel had, with his usual want of tact, insulted a civilian—a gentleman, you know. The latter sent him a challenge. Our good colonel began to feel queer, for while he is [25]
constantly doing heroic things with his mouth, he is by no means fond of risking his skin. So after some talk with her, this Stark woman went to see the gentleman in question as peacemaker. She told him that the colonel was really innocent in the whole matter, and that she herself had been the cause of the trouble, having spread a false report under an erroneous impression. She managed to tell her yarn with so much plausibility as entirely to deceive and bamboozle the other party, who thereupon withdrew his challenge with expressions of his profound regret. So, you see, she saved the colonel's life, for the civilian is known as a dead shot. Since then she has the colonel completely in her power, and no matter what she tells him to do, he executes her orders like a docile poodle dog,—a fact which we all see illustrated every day."

"Well, that explains the whole mystery, of course," delightedly shouted Borgert. "Don't you know any more such stories? For it is really high time to call a halt. He has manners like a ploughboy's, and she like a washerwoman's. I'll collect a few more tales of the sort. It is simply [26]
shameful that one must submit to the dictation of this woman."

"There are rumors that she had peculiar relations with a well-known nobleman in her younger days; but I know nothing positive, mind you."

"Where in the world did you hear that now?"

"My military servant told me. He happens to hail from the neighborhood she comes from."

During this delectable interchange of gossip the wife of First Lieutenant Leimann had listened

with gleaming eyes and heightened color; it seemed wonderfully interesting to her. Captain König, on the other hand, sucked his cigar thoughtfully, and his wife toyed with the embroidered border of the table-cover.

"Why so lost in thought, my gracious lady?" Borgert said.

"I was merely wondering what stories you gentlemen might hatch against *us*," she said with some dignity.

[27] He was about pathetically to disclaim any such fell designs, when it was noticed that Frau Kahle had risen to bid farewell, and with her Lieutenant Pommer, whose escort home she had accepted, her husband being off on a short official trip.

They were barely gone, when Borgert remarked:

"I think we ought to subscribe for this poor Kahle woman, just enough to enable her to buy a new dress. I don't think she has anything to wear besides this faded, worn-out rag of hers. I am sick of seeing it."

"But you ought to see her at home," interjected Müller, in a minor key of disdain. "There she looks worse than a slovenly servant girl. And she doesn't seem to find time to patch up her dirty gown, while her boy, the only child she has, runs about the streets like a cobbler's apprentice from the lower town. One thing, though, that urchin *does* know—he can lie like Satan."

"Inherited from his mother, of course," remarked Borgert, when a cold and reproachful look out of Frau Clara's eyes made him stop in the middle of his sentence. There was an embarrassed silence for a minute, and when the talk was resumed it no longer furnished such "interesting" [28] material. Captain König's yawning became more pronounced, and Leimann was leaning back in his chair, dozing, with mouth half open. His wife, too, showed unmistakable signs of ennui, now that the scandal she loved no longer poured forth. Her features, a moment ago smooth and animated, now looked worn and aged, losing all their charm. Müller was still digesting audibly, and hence it seemed the proper moment for adjourning.

Amid unanimous assurances that "this has been the most enjoyable evening this season," the leave-taking was finally effected, and the captain accompanied his last guests down the stairs, and returned after shooting the strong bolt at the house door.

As he turned off the gas in the drawing-room, he said to Frau Clara: "Quite interesting, this evening! These are two gentlemen we shall have to be on our guard against."

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This has reference to the not uncommon habit in German households, especially those of officers and the higher classes, of keeping husband's and wife's exchequer strictly separate. —Tr.

[2] "Wine tests." In the wine-growing districts of Germany men possessed of a delicate "wine tongue" delight in attending public or private meetings where new vintages are sampled and their prices and marketable qualities determined.—Tr.

[3] "My gracious lady"—"Gnädige Frau"—a term of politeness used to-day indiscriminately in Germany toward married women.—Tr.

[4] "Blessed digestion"—"Gesegnete Mahlzeit"—is the universal greeting in Germany after meals. —Tr.

[5] "Casino"; the military club houses are so called.—Ed.

CHAPTER II

[29]

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CASINO DANCE

"CORPORAL MEYER! Have all this cleared out of the stable! Instantly! What beastly filth is this? What? The stable guard is not present? Then do it yourself; it won't hurt you. Forward, march! And then bring me the parole book!"

"At your orders, gracious lady!"

Frau Captain Stark strode with rattling steps up and down in the stable, followed by two ragged-looking dogs. She wore a badly fitting riding habit of slate-colored cloth, with a black derby that had seen better days. In her right hand she carried a whip with which now and then she cut the rank atmosphere in a reckless manner, so that the dogs slunk aside in affright. Her keen eye pierced everywhere. She scanned the black register boards nailed above the different partitions, and studied attentively the tablet on which was marked in chalk the *ordre du jour*. She [30]

came to a full stop behind two horses, the only ones left behind by the squadron which had gone off for drill to the parade grounds. Wrathfully she glanced at the poor old beasts, the bones sticking out of their wrinkled, badly groomed skin like those of a skeleton. Then she lifted the hind feet of the brown gelding and examined the hoofs. She drew a small note-book from her habit, and entered on the dated page: “Remus No. 37. Left hind iron.” Next she climbed the steep wooden stairs leading up to the hayloft. There they were, the culprits, two men of the stable guard, slumbering peacefully, and not even awakened by the entrance of the “squadron’s mother.” Quick as a flash her whip rained a shower of blows, while she cried:

“Down with you; attend to your work, you lazy scum! I shall have you reported to the colonel!”

And they flew down the stairs, and were at the feed-cutter as if the devil himself were after them. She met Corporal Meyer at the door, breathless from running, but handing her the parole [31] book. He clapped his heels together before her so that the spurs jingled.

She pushed the greasy book aside.

“What does the idiot think?” she cried. “Hold it before my eyes while I read it. Here is an entry that the saddles and bridles are to be inspected to-morrow. Have your men everything in good shape?”

“I will go and inquire of the sergeant-major.”

“Away! Bring him here, but this very moment.”

The sergeant-major made a black face when Meyer had delivered his message, for the hours when the squadron was drilling or practising were his choicest during the day. He spent them, as a rule, in domestic bliss, having his cup of coffee before him and the wife of his bosom in close proximity. He was peacefully enjoying his morning cigar when Meyer reported to him the desire of the “gracious one.”

He cursed his luck, but lost no time in girding his loins with his sabre; shoved his cap on his bald brow, and went rattling down the stairs.

The gracious one received him very ungraciously. [32]

“Sergeant-major, is everything in readiness for to-morrow?”

“I think so, but will once more examine to-night.”

“To-night? You are crazy. At once. Loafing must stop. And, mark you, I demand a more respectful tone from you, or I shall report your case to the colonel. Now bring me my horse!”

“Horse, my gracious lady? That is out with the rest of them. All horses were ordered out, except these two lame ones,” and he pointed at the two sorry steeds.

“What? My horse ordered out? What new insolence is this? Let it be brought to me instantly. One of the corporals can go on foot.”

But this moment she heard steps approaching, and seeing Borgert she called out to him in dulcet tones:

“Ah, what a pleasure, my dear First Lieutenant! So early out on duty? I was just about to give some sugar to my husband’s horses, but find them already gone. My dear husband is so excessively punctual in all that concerns the service.” [33]

“Your interest for the squadron is most praiseworthy, my gracious lady,” said Borgert with a malicious twinkle in his eye. “I have often remarked you with secret admiration when issuing orders to the men about the stable.”

“Orders? Scarcely that, my dear Borgert. Once in a while I am the messenger of my dear husband when he has forgotten something. Of course, I take an interest in all that concerns him and the squadron.”

“Frau Captain is quite right, and I can only congratulate you on the successful way in which your interest in the squadron and in the whole regiment takes concrete form.”

“You are always jesting. But I suppose I shall see you at the Casino to-night?”

“Assuredly, we are to meet at five to talk over some service matters.”

“Yes, you remind me. But that will not last long. It concerns only some trifling affairs.”

“Much obliged for the exact information.”

“Oh, of course, I take an interest in everything, as I said. I called the colonel’s attention to divers things, and I presume he will talk them over with you gentlemen.” [34]

“I am curious to learn what they can be. But, pardon me, I see Captain König coming, with whom I have to transact some business. Good morning, my most gracious lady!”

“Good morning, *mon cher*!” And she held her hand up high to him,—a big hand, which was encased in a soiled, worn-out gauntlet of her husband’s.

Then she turned once more to the sergeant-major, while Borgert hastened to intercept König,

who was on the point of turning into the big courtyard of the third squadron.

“Good morning, Herr Captain! I must beg you to excuse me if I interfere with your liberty for a moment, but a very pressing matter induces me to ask of you a great favor.”

“You astonish me. What is the matter? Is it anything of importance?” retorted the captain.

“This afternoon the colonel will doubtless mention the unpaid Casino bills, and it would be extremely painful to me, especially in the presence of the junior officers, to have my name spoken of in that connection.”

“My dear fellow,” said Captain König, “you’ll have to go elsewhere for the money. It was [35] difficult enough for me to raise that hundred for you a week ago.”

“And if I repeat my request, nevertheless, Captain, it is because I find myself in a horribly embarrassing situation. For if I don’t succeed in procuring four hundred marks till this evening, I shall have to face the most annoying, possibly disastrous consequences.”

“All very well, but I simply haven’t the money,” said the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

For a moment or two there was silence, and each avoided looking at the other. Then Borgert murmured, hesitatingly:

“May I make a proposition, Herr Captain?”

“Well?”

“But I must ask you not to misunderstand me. Would it not be possible to borrow so small a sum from the funds of the squadron, since it would be only a question of a few days?”

Captain König looked startled.

“But, my dear fellow, how can you suggest such a thing to me! You can’t expect me to touch the treasury.” [36]

“I do not think it would matter the least bit, since the Herr Captain alone is responsible for that fund, and since this would practically mean nothing but the transferring of four hundred marks from the public fund in your own keeping to private funds of your own, to be made good by you, without anybody being the wiser within a week or so.”

“No, no, that would never do,” again said the other.

“But, Captain, you cannot leave me in the lurch. It would simply place me in a beastly predicament,” wailed Borgert, glancing appealingly at his brother officer.

König began to think, twirling his moustache. On the whole, he reflected, it might be a wise thing to place under an obligation this man with the dangerously bitter tongue. Borgert’s influence on the younger officers was not to be underestimated, he knew, and a refusal would turn him into an enemy. The money itself he had, locked up in a drawer of his desk at home; but if he made Borgert believe that he had to “borrow” it from the squadron funds,—whose custodian he was,—it might be expected that the lieutenant would not so soon ask for another loan, mindful [37] of the great difficulties this present one was causing. It was as the result of these cogitations that König resolved to lend Borgert the sum he required, but to leave him in the belief that to do so it was necessary to touch the funds in his care.

“All right, then,” he said; “you shall have your money. When will you pay it back without fail?”

“Within ten days, Captain. I give you my word on it.”

“Very well, come to my office at noon, and you shall have it.”

“Accept my most grateful thanks, Herr Captain!”

“Don’t mention it; but I trust it won’t occur again.”

They shook hands, and the captain mounted and trotted off in a lively tempo toward the parade grounds.

Borgert, elated and free of care, hastened home. His duties to-day did not begin until ten. He really felt kindly towards König for the moment. It was not the first time the captain had helped [38] him out of a dilemma. Ten days! Well, within ten days all sorts of things could happen. Why not his ability to repay the loan? And if not, bah! What is the use of speculating about the future? For the moment he was safe; that was the main thing.

Leimann meanwhile was awaiting the coming of his friend in the latter’s study, and when Borgert entered, serene of brow and humming an operatic tune, his face too brightened.

“Has he done it?” he shouted.

“Of course. Go to him at eleven, and he will do the same in your case, all the more as you need it less.”

And at noon, when the two friends met at the Casino over a bottle of fragrant Moselle, you could tell from Leimann’s exuberant gayety that his own request had not been refused.

Punctually at five all the officers of the regiment were assembled, with caps and sabres, in the reading-room of the Casino. And when the different squadron commanders had stepped up and reported “Everybody present,” the colonel at once let them know his mind. [39]

“Gentlemen,” he said, in his most pompous manner, “I have commanded your presence in order to talk over a few matters. First: I must request that for the future, at balls and similar affairs, dancing spurs be worn, so as to avoid such unpleasant accidents as we had night before last. One gentleman, who shall be nameless,”—and as he said it he fixed a basilisk eye on Lieutenant von Meckelburg—“tore off with his spurs the whole edge on the robe of Frau Captain Stark. This must not occur again, gentlemen, and from now on I shall officially punish similar behavior. Furthermore, it is customary among persons of education not to be first in stretching out a hand to shake that of a lady. And if the lady herself offers her hand, good manners in our circles requires that the gentleman salute it with his lips. It was made evident to me by the complaints of one of the ladies of this regiment that some of you gentlemen stand greatly in need of further education on such points of etiquette.” This particular passage referred to the fact that Lieutenant Bleibtreu had omitted the customary hand-kiss the other day, when Frau Captain Stark had thrust her hand under his nose, his reason being that she had worn an old pair of [40] dogskin gloves, soiled and wet by the rain.

Casting a big tear, which had meanwhile gathered in his left eye, several yards away, where it glittered in the sunshine, the commander continued:

“Next, gentlemen, I formally forbid you to visit another town without first obtaining leave of absence. Whoever will visit the neighboring town must ask my formal permission first, no matter if the distance is inconsiderable. You all remember that two of the gentlemen of this regiment were forced to retire under peculiarly distressing circumstances, because of large debts contracted in the adjoining town.”

“Will the Herr Colonel permit me a question?” interrupted Captain König.

“If you please, Herr Captain!”

“Is this order intended to apply to married officers as far as invitations to social entertainments, the theatre, concerts, *et cetera*, are concerned?”

“Most assuredly; I must retain exact control of the movements of every one of you gentlemen as [41] often as he leaves the garrison. Infringements I shall punish severely, in exact accordance with the military penal code. Such infringements I shall regard not as mere breaches of discipline, but as direct disobedience to my explicit orders.”

There was a pause, the colonel whisking his big bandanna out of the breast pocket of his uniform coat, and carefully wiping his left eye. This done, he looked about and saw disgust plainly printed on every face around him.

Indeed there was disgust. Because two offenders in the past had got themselves into trouble, the whole corps of officers in town was to suffer vicariously, forced to remain shut up, even during their leisure hours, in a place offering absolutely no intellectual and worthy relaxation. The elder officers more especially felt all the insulting tyranny that lay in this new order; but iron-clad military discipline forbade even a murmur.

“And now, gentlemen,” resumed the colonel, after scanning the clouded faces around him for another minute, “let us proceed to the election of president of the Casino management, for the [42] term has just elapsed. You, Captain Kahle, filled that position for a year past, and I rejoice to say that the manner in which you have done so has found my full approval. Indeed, gentlemen, all of us are indebted to Captain Kahle, for he has done his best, by devoting the larger portion of his leisure hours to the task, in improving the management of our Casino. He has enlarged our funds, and has introduced a number of well-considered and highly welcome ameliorations. It is for this, I think, we cannot do better than to beg Captain Kahle to remain in an office which he has administered so much to our joint benefit. If, however, there should be among you, gentlemen, somebody to propose another man, let him speak up, for in that case we must ballot in the regular manner.”

A unanimous murmur of approval, such as never before had greeted utterances by the colonel, ran through the assembly, and Kahle issued as the choice of everybody from the oral election. His office of dictator of the Casino was one which involved much gratuitous labor and frequent abuse, but was of the greatest importance to his fellows, since it concerned so closely the most [43] sensitive portion of a soldier’s anatomy—his stomach.

“It is not necessary to inspect the books,” continued the colonel; “for I feel quite sure that everything is in the best of order. But one more thing, gentlemen! I cannot permit Casino bills to grow in this avalanche fashion, such as has been the case for months past. It is true that the two highest accounts have been settled to-day; but I warn you that henceforth I shall proceed without leniency, if all the outstanding bills are not settled by the first of next month. Consider well what I have said! Thank you, gentlemen!”

Thus dismissed, most of the poor lieutenants felt and looked decidedly blue. For some of them it meant another loan in Berlin or Cologne at usurious interest, with no prospect of ever discharging the principal, which meant nothing less than ultimate ruin and disgrace. For others,

less reckless or with less credit because of more modest family connections, it meant the paying off in monthly instalments of their debts, which always led to a black mark against their names in the regimental list of conduct, minimizing their chances of promotion when the list would reach [44] the eyes of the commanding general and, finally, those of the Kaiser and of his military cabinet. At best it meant a tussle with the pater. But golden youth does not long indulge in such gloomy reflections. That is its privilege. Thus, then, after exchanging melancholy views, the younger swarm broke and fled into the garden or into the cool veranda.

Meanwhile the ladies of the regiment convened in the reading-room, and with them were two young civilian gentlemen who had not been able to withstand their combined blandishments, and who had declared themselves ready to join the tennis club. The main business of the evening was to be transacted; namely, the election of a board for the tennis club and the fixing of certain days for play in the courts near the Casino building.

Frau König alone had not come, and her husband had had formally to excuse her. The truth was, she avoided as much as she could to meet the wives and sisters of her husband's comrades, for she was not fond of the malicious, evil gossip that formed their chief pleasure in life. This [45] natural inclination on her part had become stronger since her recent evening party, when she had heard how even most of the officers themselves did not scruple to retail disgusting bits of scandal. Of course, she was made to suffer for this exclusive taste—or distaste rather—and she knew perfectly well that the scandal-mongers were only awaiting the slightest opportunity to besmirch her own name and that of Captain König; but even so, she preferred her own way.

The negotiations in the reading-room lasted some time, for each one of the ladies had a wish or an idea of her own to defend. Moreover, it required the encouraging words of the elected club officers to induce a number of newly arrived gentlemen to become candidates for admission. Of course they knew, these sirens, that nearly all of these candidates would never show up at the tennis courts; but at any rate the initiation and membership fees were thus substantially increased, and the ladies, of course, paid no dues.

At last, however, the folding-doors of the dining-room were thrown open. A substantial but not [46] very elaborate supper was to be served there. The acrimonious and strident voice of the Frau Colonel floated above all this babel of feminine noises. In the corners stood, in little groups, a number of the younger and older officers, discussing, in subdued accents, the latest decrees of their superior officer. They were still vibrating with suppressed indignation.

Captains König and Hagemann made sport of Frau Stark, but in such manner that she never suspected it. Lieutenant Pommer never quitted the immediate vicinity of Captain Kahle's spouse.

Supper over, nearly all the men present had the lively desire to escape from this promiscuous gathering, into which they had been inveigled under pretence of an official matter. But such was not the intention of Frau Stark, who cried out to the colonel in her domineering way:

"How about this, Colonel; cannot we make a good use of this favorable occasion and arrange a hop? Nobody, I suppose, would have any objection? I myself would think it charming,—simply delicious."

The colonel took just one minute to ruminate; then he declared himself equally delighted with [47] the lady's idea. For her wish had indeed become his law—*dura lex sed lex*.

The men were in a rage. What folly to dance, with the thermometer so high! Much more sensible to sit down quietly on the veranda and drink cool, frothy beer! Lieutenant Specht felt particularly enraged, for he was to meet his flame at the train about ten. He exploded his anger, saying to Borgert:

"The old woman is crazy, with her eternal dancing; but let us keep her in perpetual motion to-night, just to teach her a lesson, until she herself gives in!"

While the ballroom was being cleared of chairs and got ready for the hop, couples were promenading in the garden. The golden sickle of the moon shed dim rays over the landscape and made the towers and steeples of the town, standing out at some distance, appear like misty silhouettes. In the deep green of the bushes a nightingale pealed forth his liquid plaint into the balmy night air, while from the ballroom inside the tuning of violins mingled inharmoniously. From the town gusts of warm wind carried snatches of a martial song, ground out on the barrel- [48] organ of a carrousel. All these noises rose in a confused mass into the still air, mingling with the laughter of the women and the calls of the servants and musicians.

Meanwhile Borgert gave a *gratis* performance to a number of his younger comrades. He had gathered them around him in the tennis courts, where he strikingly imitated Frau Stark in the rôle of a tennis player. He showed how she attempted to meet the balls with a racquet, and how she picked them up, until these young men were fairly dying with hilarity. He was too funny, they said, and played his improvised part really to perfection. At last, however, Borgert tired of this "manly" sport, and his audience dropped off, one by one, joining the dancers inside. Borgert, though, enjoying the mild night air, lit a fresh cigar and strolled about the garden, his habitual cat-like tread barely audible on the soft ground. Puffing the fragrant weed, he suddenly spied, in the uncertain glimmer of the moon, the sheen of a white summer robe.

"Oho! A little intrigue," he thought to himself. "Maybe something of interest. Let's [49] reconnoitre!"

He glided like a shadow among the flowering lilacs, heavy with perfume, and when a few paces from the figure in white, crouched and hid himself behind one of the bushes. He could not distinguish the outlines of the two figures clearly, but he heard whispering. First, in low tones, he made out the voice of Frau Kahle, cooing like a turtle, and next it was the *basso profundo* of Lieutenant Pommer, vainly endeavoring to compress its volume into a murmur.

"Amazing! Has this coarse elephant turned into a Romeo, sighing like a furnace?" he said to himself, and listened with all his might.

The syllables and now and then the broken words that he was able to understand from his point of vantage seemed to afford him the greatest delight. When the couple at last rose and disappeared down the path leading to the side entrance of the Casino, he left his hiding-place and slowly followed in their footsteps. An unholy smile played around his thin lips. "Two more in my power!" he whispered. [50]

All this time the dancers inside were devoting themselves, without interruption, to Terpsichorean pleasures,—mostly waltzes, they being the special delight of Frau Stark. When Borgert entered the ballroom the band struck up the latest waltz,—"Over the Waves,"—and he noticed Frau Stark, flaming like a peony, perspiration streaming down her rubicund face, being handed, true to his programme, by Lieutenant Specht to his smiling comrade, von Meckelburg. Frau Stark just took the time to gulp a glass of lemonade, and then was off again, breathing hard, but still in the ring. The atmosphere in the room was stifling, but all the ladies, at least, seemed to enjoy themselves. Officers' wives are proverbially insatiable dancers.

After two rounds of the room von Meckelburg was seen steering his victim towards a chair near the open window. Frau Stark sank into it, literally exhausted. She looked indeed dripping. The young lieutenants had had their revenge. She had "given in."

Borgert meanwhile had taken his stand in a corner, where he bent over Frau Leimann, who was [51] seated and fanning herself with her handkerchief. Although fatigued from heat and dancing, she looked most seductive in her pale blue tulle, whose filmy lace clouds around throat and bosom heightened the effects of her charms. Borgert, bending over her, sniffed with sensual delight a faint perfume, while he carried on a whispered conversation in monosyllables with her—a conversation which seemed to have meaning but for these two.

In the reading-room the orderlies were busy filling tulip glasses with that fragrant mixture, a May bowl, so grateful in its delicious iced condition, and yet so deceptive. Around a plain table in the small side room, away from the throng and undisturbed, several of the captains, the colonel, and two of the younger officers were playing "skat" at a penny the point. One of the lieutenants, to judge from his heated face and the anxious look on it, must be losing heavily. Had this "little game" been arranged to encourage the men under him in the economies Colonel von Kronau had but now so strongly recommended to them?

Lieutenant Specht just then was taking French leave. It was necessary for him to run to the [52] station and meet the young lady—a lovesick, pretty little milliner from Cologne—who for the time being dwelt in his unstable heart.

Lieutenant Bleibtreu sat in a brown study, a few feet away from the players, deep in his melancholy thoughts. The army, his military career, intercourse with his brother officers and their ladies—it was all a grave disappointment to him. His illusions were gone, though it was but a couple of years since he had donned the bright, showy, glittering dragoon uniform, so attractive to the neophyte. He was thinking of home, of his dear, patient, loving mother, whose constant preoccupation he was; of his lovely, self-denying sisters, whose dowry was fast going while he was himself enjoying himself in the "king's service." Was he? Was he "enjoying" himself? Was this—this hollow, stupid round of the coarsest pleasures and the equally coarse and stupid round of duties—really what he had looked forward to?

The young man sighed. The absence of the wife of his captain, Frau König, rendered him still more melancholy. Bah, it was disgusting. And to think that this was the profession most highly [53] honored, most envied in the fatherland! To think that it had always been drummed in his ears, ever since early childhood, that to "wear the king's coat" would exalt him high above his fellow mortals!

Comradeship! What a fine word when it bears out its full meaning, thought Lieutenant Bleibtreu. But what was it here? What had he found the practical construction of the term? To follow, day by day, step by step, in the same treadmill of dull routine, only relieved by occasional but all too brief glimpses of the freedom that lay beyond "the service"—that was the meaning of comradeship. There was none of that unselfish intimacy, that ready sympathy and help between the members of the caste into which he had risen on the proud day he first read his name among the Kaiser's appointments in the *Armee-Verordnŭngsblatt*. Dead sea fruit! Ashes that taste bitter on the tongue.

Certainly there were exceptions. He himself had heard of some such cases of comradeship as he had dreamed of when still a slim little cadet in the military academy: cases where one [54] comrade lifted the other, the younger and less experienced, up to his higher level; cases where one comrade sacrificed himself for the other. But these must be very rare, he thought, for he had never seen such a case himself. What he had seen was the casting into one stiff, unchanging form of so many individualities not suited to each other. It was the hollow mockery of the thing that palled so on him. And what would be the end?

Though young in the service, he had seen men meant for better things broken as a reed on the wheel of military formalism; he had seen them retiring when but in the prime of life, broken in spirit, unfit for any new career, impaired in health, perfectly useless—victims of the conventional ideas that rule supreme in the army. Others he had seen forced to resign, overloaded with a burden of debt, ruined financially, physically, morally bankrupt,—all due to the tinsel and glitter, to the ceaseless temptations thrown into the path of the German army officer. A young civilian, even when the son of wealthy parents, is not coaxed and wheedled into a network of useless expenditure, as is the youngest army officer, waylaid everywhere by the detestable gang of "army [55] usurers," who follow him to the bitter end, knowing that to repudiate even the shadiest debt means disgrace and dismissal from the army to every officer, no matter if his follies have been committed at an age when other young boys are still subject to closest supervision.

Deep lines had formed on Bleibtreu's smooth forehead, and he was visibly startled when the cheery, round voice of his squadron commander, Captain König, recalled him to his surroundings.

"And that's what they call pleasure," said he, sitting down on the sofa beside his young lieutenant, for whom he felt something like paternal affection. "If such entertainments were at least arranged beforehand, with the consent or at the instance of the juniors themselves,—for I will say nothing about us older men,—but no! Frau Stark commands, and the whole regiment, from the colonel down to the youngest cornet, has simply to obey. Disgraceful, I say. Why, we cannot even choose our own tipple on such occasions. The colonel simply orders that a May bowl be composed, and we have to brew it, drink it, and—pay for it. This evening will cost us a pretty [56] penny again. A glass of apollinaris would be far more palatable, and certainly much cheaper and appropriate at this temperature than this confounded sweetish stuff, which gives one a headache fit to split the skull next morning."

"Quite true, Captain," replied the young man. "This form of quasi-official pressure, even in one's private expenditures, is one of the worst curses of our profession. It has indirectly caused the ruin of many a promising young officer, I've been told."

"Yes, my boy, you are quite right," answered König. "It is amazing how many officers have been forced into retirement of recent years, solely because of unpaid and unpayable debts. Things in this respect cannot go on much longer. For the ruin of thousands of these young officers means also the ruin of their families, and among them many of the oldest and best in the Empire. An unhealthy craze for luxurious living has seized upon the army, and God alone knows how it will end some day. It is a thing which will and must frighten every true patriot, and I wish our most [57] gracious sovereign would take up this matter more earnestly."

"Yes, H. M. does not attach enough importance to this chapter."

"And yet the remedy would be such a simple one," remarked the captain. "If H. M. would simply issue a decree to the effect that no debts of army officers up to captain's rank shall be recoverable in court, that would be the end of army usury, and with it would be removed the worst cancer of which the whole army suffers. Once the certainty that ultimately they are sure of their money would be gone, these leeches would no longer trouble the gay and shiftless young officer whom they now pursue with the persistence of bloodhounds. But what is the use of saying this? H. M. himself is not without blame in these things. As long as his personal example all tells the other way, how can we expect the army to become prudent and economical?"

"However, Captain, that is not the sole trouble. I think as long as we as a class—or caste—are taught that we are something better than the civilian population, so long as we are guided by [58] another code of ethics, erecting an insurmountable barrier around us, there can be no real reform. Such prejudices, or rather such systematic teaching, must inevitably lead to sharp separation between the professional soldier class and the rest of the people. Good heavens, this is the twentieth century, and no longer the middle ages, we're living in. Caste and exclusive privileges must go, else—"

"Sh! Sh! Lower your voice, my dear boy—the colonel is looking our way, and over there stands Müller, the adjutant, always ready for tale-bearing. Let us get up and take a stroll in the moonlight, or, better still, let us go home."

The lieutenant accompanied his superior officer as far as the door of his dwelling, and on the way spoke in tones of real concern of the fact that the cleavage between the private soldier and his superiors was so great.

"After all," he remarked, "many of these poor devils are every bit as well educated as we,—some of them even better,—and as long as this is supposed to be a 'nation in arms,' and not, as in the eighteenth century, an army of mercenaries, no such strict difference, socially, ought to be [59] made. Do you know, I often think the Socialists are not so wrong in some things they urge."

"For goodness' sake, my dear Lieutenant, don't let any such remarks escape you anywhere else," said Captain König, in a scared voice. But they had reached the captain's door, and so they shook hands and parted.

Bleibtreu lived at the other end of the straggling little town. In walking leisurely home, he followed his train of thought. The systematic brutality shown the common soldier—even the noncom. (though not in so pronounced a manner)—by his fellow-officers had from the start been very much against his taste. "They don't see the defender of the fatherland in him," thought he, "but merely the green man, unused to strict discipline and to the narrowly bound round of dull

duties, the clumsy, ungainly recruit, or the smarter, but even more unsympathetic private of some experience whose drill is an unpleasant task for them, and who, they know, hates and abominates them in his heart." And he remembered scenes of such brutality, the unwilling [60] witness of which he had been. Such cruelty and abuse of power, he felt, was playing into the hands of the Socialist Party. "These young men, fresh from the plough or the workshop," he mused, "cannot help losing all their love for the army. So long as they serve in it, of course, they will not risk those punishments for expressing their real thoughts which the military law metes out with such draconic severity; they will prefer suffering in silence the injustice, cruelty, and inhuman treatment to which, at one time or another, nearly every one of them is subjected during their period of active service. But once dismissed to the reserve, how many, many thousands of them will naturally turn to the only political party with us which dares to oppose with courage militarism and all its fearful excrescences! And all this," he continued inwardly, "is the natural result of a long period of deadening, enervating peace. Oh! If there were but a war! All this dross would then glide off us, and the true metal underneath would once more shine forth."

He went to bed with these ideas still humming in his brain. [61]

Borgert had been enjoying himself meanwhile. His kind always does. He had, for a few moments, tried to listen to the arguments of Captain König and Lieutenant Bleibtreu, while they were seated on the sofa; but, pshaw! how absurd to philosophize about these things, he thought. Far better to take life as it comes. And so he had joined the party at the gaming-table, where one of the winners was just then standing treat for a battery of Veuve Clicquot, and as he slowly sipped the delicious beverage, the bubbles rising like rosy pearls from the depths of his chalice, he smiled with self-satisfaction.

But at last he, too, left the house and directed his steps toward the far end of the garden, where a small gate led directly into the street at the end of which he dwelt. There! Again Frau Kahle and uncouth, elephantine Lieutenant Pommer! The May bowl, he thought, has been too strong for his addled brain. And he stepped silently aside on the velvety sward, under the clump of lilacs. The nightingale, from the centre of a thicket a score of paces away, still fluted and trilled a song of passion. And something like it, he made sure, big Pommer was also pouring into [62] the tiny ear of that conquering flirt, the volatile spouse of Captain Kahle. Having ascertained this, First Lieutenant Borgert rapidly strode toward the interesting pair, clinking his spurs and drawling forth an accented "G-o-o-d evening!" as he came up to them before they had had a chance to rise. Pommer looked indescribably much like an idiot in returning the salute; but the little woman, with the ready wit of her sex, assumed the air of an immaculate dove.

The players were the last to leave the Casino,—all of them with heavy heads and some of them with much lighter purse. Among the latter was Leimann.

Chapter III [63]

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A MAY BOWL

NEXT morning the garrison—that is, the officers of it—was slower and later in awakening than usual. That cursed May bowl! It was precisely as Captain König had said: terrific headaches paid for indulgence in its seductive potency. Pommer, poor Pommer, although waked by his servant at the usual time, was still so much under the influence of the fumes that had mounted to his silly head the night before, that the only answer he was able to make to the shoutings of his Masovian[6] man was an unintelligible grunt. Then he turned over on the other side and settled down to a solid sleep.

At eleven he was still peacefully snoring, when his man stepped up to his bed once more, and undertook such violent and persistent manipulations with the extremities of his master that the [64] latter finally opened his eyes far enough to let a little daylight and some sense into his dazed brain. The bulky lieutenant stretched himself, yawned, and at last remembered his doings of the night before. With both mighty fists he hammered his thick skull in disgust and despair.

"Holy smoke—that— —— May bowl!" he groaned, and then sat down in the chair beside his couch to feel of his head, which seemed a gigantic bass drum, hollow and reverberating. Like a flash his desperate flirtation with the wife of his own squadron chief came back to his muddled consciousness.

Vaclav, his man,—whom he, for short, called Watz,—brought in his morning coffee, and after dressing with a great running commentary of grunts and groans, he sat down to drink a mouthful of the reviving decoction. But his brain was still in a whirl, and the scenes of a few hours ago passed rapidly, but in nebulous form, before his clouded inner vision.

Dimly he felt ashamed of himself. He knew he had not behaved like a gentleman, and he thought he remembered that somebody had witnessed the spectacle he had made of himself. [65] Specht? Meckelburg? Or Müller? No—he thought not. But Borgert? Yes, he thought it was Borgert. No, no. But who? He gave it up with another groan, and took a mouthful of the cold coffee.

Anyway, he had behaved in a beastly fashion. That he did know. But stop! Had she not told him

how badly she was treated by her husband—how neglected—had she not appealed to his gallantry and friendship? He felt uncertain. All he knew with certainty was that he had been a brute.

He buried his head in his brawny hands.

How had it been possible for him so to forget himself?

He knew:—champagne luncheon with that fellow Borgert,—a fellow whose powers of consumption had never been ascertained. Then, at dinner, that heavy "Turk's blood"[7] to which Müller had to treat because of a lost bet. And then, worst of all, that thrice-condemned May bowl! And hadn't they noticed it, the other fellows, and hadn't they filled him up notwithstanding, or [66] rather because, they saw that he couldn't carry any more liquid conveniently? His big fist slammed the table.

There was a knock at the door.

The man with the sore conscience and the sorer head bade the unknown enter.

It was First Lieutenant Borgert, helmet in hand. He pretended astonishment at the evident condition of his comrade, but eyed him sharply, and then said:

"Pardon me if I come inopportunely, but a rather delicate matter induces me to see you this morning."

"Officially or privately?" grunted Pommer.

"Both, if you wish it," answered the other.

"If a private matter I beg you will postpone it," said Pommer. "Let us talk about it some other day."

"I regret to say that I *must* insist on discussing the matter now," retorted Borgert, stiffly. "You are aware, of course, that as the elder man in the service I have the right, even the duty, to remonstrate with you if I see occasion for it." [67]

Pommer reflected a moment. In years he was the other man's senior, and he had also visited a university for a triennium before joining the army, while the other had simply completed the easy curriculum of the military academy. But, true, Borgert was a twelvemonth ahead of him in actual service. So he silently submitted.

"All right, then; to what matter do you refer, sir?"

Borgert assumed the air of a grand inquisitor.

"Accident made me, last night, witness to a scene which I am sorry to say, Herr Comrade, I cannot otherwise describe than shocking. It was in the most secluded spot of the grounds near the Casino. The lady in question—"

"You need proceed no further, Herr Comrade. I know perfectly well that I am to blame."

"May I ask you for an explanation?"

"I was intoxicated. That is the sole explanation I can offer."

"A strange one. Why, if you cannot drink without losing your senses,—why, then, do you drink at all?"

"The fact that I was intoxicated was due in large measure to the very gentleman I am now [68] addressing, who would not—"

"You need not go into such details," Borgert interrupted him. "You do not seem to understand the gravity of your offence, and it seems necessary that I should enlighten you as a younger comrade on that point."

Pommer felt indignant at this hypocritical lecture, but before he could reply to it Borgert continued:

"Your offence is the most serious against comradeship which can be conceived. Really, it would be my duty to call the attention of the lady's husband to it if I did not trust in your sense of honor to rectify the matter before any more mischief is done. If you will promise me to go at once and ask the lady's pardon, and to do all in your power to avoid any further cause for scandal, I will on my part forbear to mention what I saw. You must know, of course, that to tell Captain Kahle would mean a challenge, a duel, your enforced resignation from the army, and maybe your death,—for he is a good shot."

Borgert was very dramatic as he said this. The rôle of an austere prophet, calling a sinner to [69] repentance and amends, had all the spice of novelty for him. Inwardly he smiled at himself, but outwardly he drew up his tall, sinewy frame to its full height, and cast a hypnotizing stare at the man before him, now slowly recovering his usual sober frame of mind. And as the sense of his wrong-doing began to overpower poor Pommer, he bowed his towzled head in misery. Two big tears crept slowly down his tanned cheeks.

Borgert went on:

“It is, of course, your duty to go at once to the outraged husband as well, and to confess your guilt. As I know Captain Kahle, he is not the man to withstand a direct appeal to his clemency if couched in appropriately contrite terms. If you will pledge me your word of honor to do as requested and to obtain the pardon of husband and wife, you may count on my silence.”

Pommer glanced up. Tumultuous feelings were surging in his breast, and so rapid had been the revulsion from his first sentiments when Borgert had opened the conversation, that what was now uppermost in his mind was gratitude for this discreet and wise friend. He rose, and with a [70] pathetic gesture stretched forth his great paw.

“Here is my hand,” he said, with a hitch in his voice. “I promise.”

Borgert clasped it a moment.

“Thanks, many thanks, for your sympathy and aid in this sorry business,” the junior mumbled, and surreptitiously wiped a briny drop out of the corner of his eye.

Borgert left, very much satisfied with himself. He had now among the younger officers of the regiment another one who would henceforth swear by him. He noisily clanked down the shaky wooden stairs of the humble house wherein Pommer occupied narrow quarters. And Frau Kahle, too, was now in his power, he gleefully reflected. Besides all that, there was something positively piquant about the little adventure,—something which would frequently hereafter furnish him with pleasant innuendoes and hints, understood only by those immediately concerned, and which would supply him, Borgert, with an endless fund of amusement. He intensely enjoyed this propitious ending to his machinations. [71]

Humming a tune, and feeling in the best of spirits, he went home, gave his servant sabre, cloak, and helmet, and mounted the stairs leading up to Frau Leimann’s apartments.

She was not alone. The adjutant was present. Müller, in fact, had shirked his duties to-day, the colonel being off on a hunting trip in the adjacent extensive forest, having been invited thereto by the royal head forester commanding that district. Frau Leimann greeted Borgert warmly, and while the latter and the adjutant stepped to the window, looking at the wife of Captain König and Lieutenant Bleibtreu, who were riding past the house on horseback, Borgert seized the opportunity and deftly appropriated the pretty woman’s hands, which he kissed passionately.

Then he told them of his interview with Pommer,—told it in such droll terms and with such an abundance of mimicry, that his two hearers could not help laughing immoderately. The picture of ungainly, rough Pommer being in the sentimental stage and a prey to a lacerated conscience was too exquisitely ludicrous.

Meanwhile Pommer sat at his desk, laboriously inditing a letter to his mother, to whom he [72] opened his whole heart, as in duty bound. Several of the strongest passages in his letter were panegyrics on his new-won friend, Borgert, whom he limned in colors so brilliant that the original would indeed have had great trouble in recognizing himself in the portrait.

The lieutenant had by this time calmed down a good deal, and the blurred images of the past evening resolved themselves, one after another, into sane recollections. He now distinctly recalled the part in the ugly intrigue played by the woman; how she had skilfully led him on to make advances; how she had smiled encouragingly at his terms of endearment; how she had “fished” for dubious compliments, and how she had, above all, so alluringly made the most intimate confidences to him as to her marital troubles and as to her status of a *femme incomprise*. Really, he thought after quiet reflection, he himself was not so much to blame in this affair, disgraceful as it doubtless was when all was said and done. For the woman herself, a change of feeling took place simultaneously. The tender pity he had felt for her in his maudlin [73] condition made room for something akin to contempt and dislike. She certainly could not be a pure woman, a faithful wife and mother, he thought, thus to invite, almost provoke, the passionate regard of a man much younger and less experienced than herself,—a man, too, whom she had known but slightly and conventionally hitherto. In his inmost consciousness he had almost absolved himself from guilt in the matter. And as to writing to her husband, or confronting him with the raw tale of her and his indiscretion, as Borgert had suggested, why, the more he thought of it, the less advisable a step it seemed to him, from every point of view. However, a promise was a promise, and he would keep it.

He donned his full regimentals, and issued forth at the right time for a visit of the kind.

He did not find Kahle himself in, he being still away at squadron drill. But his wife flew to meet him as soon as the parlor door had closed behind the announcing servant, and her reception was indeed such an affectionate and even enthusiastic one that the words of penitence perforce died on his lips. She drew him toward her on the low lounge, and exuberantly babbled on about the [74] comfort, the delight his confidence had brought her. There was not the slightest word said by her to show that she had disapproved his approaches now that the glamour of the moment, the enervating effects of close communion in the warm air of a spring night, were gone. Coquettishly she plied all her wiles to captivate poor Pommer anew. His pulses hammered, his senses were aflame; but he remained master of himself, and sternly he resolved to sever these equivocal relations with a woman whom he could no longer respect. The weak, purblind man had been steeled against further temptation by seeing a few hours ago the abyss yawning at his feet, in which an illicit love had threatened to engulf him forever. The image of his mother, noble type of womanhood, rose before his mind, and he remained strong.

Frau Kahle, on her part, at last becoming convinced that all her arts were thrown away on this iceberg, suddenly changed her tactics, and dismissed her visitor in somewhat abrupt fashion. She swept from the room, leaving him to find his way out. Only the intoxicating perfume which she [75] used by preference lingered a moment longer in the close air of the room as the lieutenant sought his way out; but despite a curious feeling of defeat which he could not help instinctively feeling, there was subdued exultation in his heart. His brow was serene as, at the next crossing of the street, he encountered Borgert, who hailed him:

"Well, Pommer," he shouted satirically, "how is your headache? And how did you find things at Kahle's?—everything forgiven?"

"Oh, yes, everything forgiven," answered Pommer, demurely, without going into any further details.

"Excellent. Was a wise thing for you to do to take counsel with an elder comrade, my dear fellow. Well, I am glad for your sake everything ended well."

"Yes, thanks to you," said Pommer; and the two shook hands and parted.

Pommer went home, well satisfied with himself.

He fancied that all was now over between him and Frau Kahle. His acquaintance with women [76] of her stamp had never been extensive, and to read the soul of one so utterly false and grossly sensual as this inveterate coquette, was quite beyond the ability of Lieutenant Pommer, analysis of his own or anybody else's character not being his strong point.

He had, however, miscalculated Frau Kahle's fascinations over his unsophisticated self, and decidedly underestimated her craving for admiration. He was made aware of this when he next met her, on the day following. She greeted him with a smile so bewitching and a half-expressed sense of intimacy so flattering to his *amour propre*, that he was unable to resist. Soon these two became the talk of the little town. No matter if Pommer, looking at his inner self within the quiet retreat of his own bachelor quarters, bitterly bewailed his renewed fall from grace, her influence over the coarser fibre in his being easily triumphed over his qualms of conscience.

He frequently met Borgert during this period, but the latter, far from training once more on him the battery of his eloquence, contented himself with some facetious remark or with a Mephistophelian grin. And for Kahle himself, he was probably the only one in the garrison—as is [77] the fate of husbands too often in such cases—who was not in the slightest aware of the "goings-on" of his nominal partner in the joys and sorrows of life. And, besides, his tasks as chairman of the Casino's house committee kept him, together with his official duties, practically away from home all day long, and frequently far into the night.

Pommer was, as we have seen, not precisely of delicate stuff, either bodily or in his psychic makeup. But the chains he was wearing nevertheless galled him, and he not seldom manœuvred with his charmer to obtain release; but all in vain. More than once he thought seriously of writing to Captain Kahle himself, confessing his guilt, glossing over her own share of it, and offering all the reparation in his power. That would mean, of course, exposing his own precious life to the unerring bullet of the captain; but even that outlook appeared to him preferable to his present life of deceit. He now regretted that he had not followed, the morning after the Casino hop, his first impulse of making a clean breast of it to Captain Kahle. Thus weeks dragged on, and there [78] was no prospect of a change in a situation which gradually became intolerable to him.

But suddenly, without his having done anything to bring it about, the day came that granted him escape from his degrading entanglement. The imperial order arrived, promoting him to the grade of First Lieutenant and transferring him to another garrison, far in the interior of the country.

She was the first person he informed of it.

"Farewell! We shall not see each other again!" He spoke quite coolly, almost callously, and he left her cowering on the sofa and weeping hysterically. He felt a free man again. The abominable shackles had fallen from him.

If he had seen Frau Kahle five minutes after he had left her he would not even have retained for her a vestige of that first tenderness that had swept over him that night in the Casino garden. For when he had retired, and she had heard his step on the flagging of the hall below, she had quickly risen and peered, from behind the lace curtains, into the street after his vanishing figure. [79] Then she had sat down at the piano and intoned a merry Strauss waltz.

But then she reflected that they might call her heartless. So she had indited a long, passionate farewell letter to him. He showed it, the night before his going, to Borgert at the Casino. They were all his guests that night. Borgert had screamed with laughter.

"What a devilish smart little woman she is, after all," he had exclaimed. And then, poising in mid-air his champagne glass, he said, nodding to Pommer:

"Here's to her and her simpleton!"

He spoke from experience.

FOOTNOTES:

[6] Masovians, the population of certain districts in eastern Prussia; they are of Polish race.—Tr.

[7] "Turk's blood" ("Türkenblut") is the name of a mixture of English porter, brandy, and French champagne very much in vogue in the army.—Tr.

Chapter IV

[80]

THE CASE OF SERGEANT SCHMITZ

LATE in the forenoon of a raw day in autumn Vice-Sergeant-Major Roth was seated in his comfortably heated room, and near him Sergeant Schmitz. Each was enjoying a cup of coffee.

The quarters occupied by Roth were situated on the second story of the regimental barracks, and made at first sight the impression of elegance and almost wealth, precisely as though the occupant were a member of the upper ten thousand.[8] It required a closer examination to become convinced that a good deal of these apparently costly trappings, as well as the furniture and wall decorations, was not what it seemed, and that, to produce by all means the effect sought for, taste and appropriateness had been sacrificed. The wall paper of arabesques in green and [81] blue, which the government had furnished, did not harmonize with the hangings or carpets. The paintings on the wall were cased in heavy gilt or oak frames, so unskilfully placed as to conceal in spots the very wall itself. Above the scarlet plush sofa hung a reproduction of Lenbach's "Prince Bismarck," and to right and left of it abominable oil chromos representing horses. Against the opposite wall stood a piano in stained oak, showing glittering silver-plated candelabra. Neither Roth himself nor his worthy better half, formerly saleswoman in a shop, possessed the slightest knowledge of the art of manipulating such an instrument. But there was a story connected with this showy piece of furniture—a story that even now, years after the events themselves occurred, brought tears of rage to the eyes of the "Vice." To the young corporal of his own squadron who on Sunday afternoons strummed on the piano, he used to say in pathetic accents, that those "one year's volunteers"[9] had treated him most outrageously; and from his own point of view he was [82] probably right.

During the first year of their married life the "Frau Vice-Sergeant-Major," full of a sense of her new dignity, had painfully felt the lack of an "upright" or, better still, a "grand," inasmuch as she regarded such an instrument as an irrefutable evidence of belonging to the higher walks of life. She asserted, besides, that in her girlhood she had received instruction on the piano,—an assertion which nobody was able to dispute because that period lay about a generation back. She admitted that she had forgotten whatever of piano playing she might ever have known; but she felt quite sure that a piano in her parlor would restore the lost nimbus, and then—perhaps the most potent reason of all—the wife of her husband's "colleague" in the second squadron owned a piano, and had taken great care to let her know the fact soon after she had become Frau Roth.

Roth himself, probably under the influence of his partner's urgings, had frequently and with [83] due emphasis spoken to that year's crop of "one year's men" about the great musical talents of his wife, now, alas! lying fallow for want of a piano of her own, and he had coupled these remarks with plaints that the smallness of his resources prevented the purchase of such an instrument. These remarks, coming from one who had it virtually in his power to obtain for each one of the "one year's men" promotion after the fall manœuvres, had at last borne fruit. One day the aforesaid stained oak piano had been unloaded at Roth's door, accompanied by a round-robin from the volunteers themselves, in which they waxed duly enthusiastic over his wife's imaginary musical proficiency. Of course, the supposed gift had been accepted, and of course every one of the supposed donors was advanced in rank the following autumn, due to Roth's brilliant testimonials of their prowess and exceptional fitness for a higher grade.

Roth never saw these "one year's men" again, but about a week after their departure from the regiment a cart stopped before his door, and the driver said he had come to take the piano back [84] to the factory, the term of pre-paid hire having expired. Decidedly a dirty trick on the part of these young fellows, all the more so as Frau Roth had by this time bragged so much about her piano to every one of her female friends and neighbors, to whom she had represented it as a belated wedding gift from a far-away uncle! The couple agreed it would never do to return the instrument to the makers, and thus it was that the Roths were still paying for this piano in monthly instalments, one "gold fox"[10] each time, a number of years afterwards, with quite a long time yet to run. No reasonable person will blame Vice-Sergeant-Major Roth for the aforementioned tears of rage.

Hanging above the piano, one could admire a huge steel engraving of Vernet's "Funeral Banquet," also in an expensive frame (the gift of a parting young soldier, son of a wealthy farmer); while antlers, Japanese fans, a peacock's tail, etc., helped to produce a somewhat incongruous *ensemble*. There was a pretty mahogany stand, on the various shelves of which [85] stood a large china punch-bowl, six green Rhine-wine glasses (both gifts from other "grateful"

recruits). There was also a solid oak writing-table, on one corner of which Frau Roth had stood the cages for her canary birds, just then in the interesting stage of breeding, and therefore voiceless. A huge portrait of the Kaiser, with two crossed sabres and a pair of pistols under it, and a cuckoo clock were exhibited on the wall close by. There was also a big flower table, but on near view it was seen that its fine roses and tulips had not originated in a hothouse, but under the scissors of an artist in tissue paper.

On the floor were to be seen two white goat-skins and three small mats of domestic make, as well as a genuine Kelim (gift from “one year’s men”), and a thick plush table-cover, as well as plush draperies, helped to make an impression which, combined as it was of so many ill-fitting details, was far from the one intended.

Glancing at the lowering sky through the east windows of this room, big, shapeless clouds of [86]
gray could be observed slowly driving along; it looked, in fact, like a cheerless and stormy ocean, monotonous in its uniform tint. Now and then showers of cold hail or rain tore away from this chaos, and, pitched hither and thither by howling winds, swept across the town or over the desolate fields.

When the rain thus whipped the window-panes and the boisterous west wind whistled and roared in the stove-pipe, it was, by very contrast, all the more comfortable in this warm, cosy room, where one felt like humanely pitying the poor comrades, now far out on the parade field, drilling for dear life in the open.

This was the time of year when the regiment ordered into a shorter or longer term of renewed active service its reserve men, who were then temporarily quartered in the sheds and loosely constructed pavilions erected behind the barracks proper. At such a time and in such weather it was by no means pleasant to be out on the drill grounds for the space of a whole afternoon, and then, returning, to find one’s quarters cold, dripping with rain; and to stand shivering in clothes and boots thoroughly soaked. Those corporals and sergeants detailed for the instruction of [87]
recruits under the roof of the big barracks hall, and those told off for stable or other indoor service, were well off in comparison.

For the non-commissioned officers generally, however, and especially for Roth, there was profit connected with the annual recall of the reserves; for it meant increased pay, and it meant a great increase in pickings of every kind. Roth had been detailed as sergeant-major for the first reserve squadron, and he was glad of it. There were among these reserves a number of men he knew to be “flush” of money, and whom he understood how to handle. There were also some “one year’s men,” who, nearly all of them, had open hands and well-filled pockets. By shutting an eye, or maybe both sometimes, thus easing the severe discipline for them, he was sure, at the end of their brief term of supplementary service, to have the larger portion of their “gold foxes” in his own pocket. Roth was, therefore, with such prospects before him, in the best of spirits. He was likewise in a confidential mood.

Schmitz was “foddermaster” of the fourth squadron and detailed to the reserve squadron for [88]
the time being. He was a very competent man. Whoever wished to convince himself of that needed but to visit the horses belonging to his squadron. He would have seen them with silky coat, round in limb, and full of dash and life, standing above their fetlocks in the clean, shining straw. His stable, too, was always a model of neatness and cleanliness. Even the walls were always well whitewashed and the grated windows shining. Sergeant Schmitz, in fact, made a labor of love of his duties.

When he went down the main aisle of his big stable, and then turned and walked between the rows of his smooth-coated darlings, it was amusing to see these animals, all of them at once recognizing his step, his voice, his touch; how they turned their heads around, whinnying and glancing affectionately at him if he called to one or the other of his favorites.

There was, for instance, Clairette, a charming little roan, which followed him like a dog, and with her nostrils forever sniffed at his pockets for sugar, and then rose on her hind legs or lifted her left foreleg beggar-fashion. There was the “Ahnfrau,” a dainty little horse, though old as the [89]
hills, with a coat black as sloes, and which because of long faithful service and because of the shrewd wisdom that comes with age, was in favor with the whole regiment and was often fed some sweet morsel. The special pride of the foddermaster, however, was the “twelve Chinamen.” They had been bought in China, had then gone through the campaign against the Boxers, had had their share in the capture of Peking, and had then, at the close of the Far Asiatic War, been enrolled in the regiment. They were fine, powerful horses, with shining coats and strong bones, even if some of them did not reach the height of “Peiho,” “Woo,” and “Kwangsue,” but were, strictly speaking, but ponies. Each one of the horses had its special claim on the affections of this man who now sat chatting with his “Vice” at the table.

Just then Frau Roth entered, carrying a tray neatly covered with a snowy napkin, on which stood a bottle of fragrant Moselle wine, three glasses, and a narrow box of cigars.

“The devil! You’re living high, Roth! I wish I had such easy times myself. What’s up?” said [90]
Schmitz, in amazement.

“I have my birthday anniversary but once a year,” remarked Roth, sententiously, “and on such occasions it’s worth while spending something.”

His wife poured the wine into the green “Römer,”[11] and each of the three raised a glass of

wine whose delicious, flower-like perfume and whose straw-yellow color told them that this noble grape-juice had been distilled by the sun on one of the favored hills rising steeply along the banks of the upper Moselle. Then they cried, “Prosit” and clinked, so that the fine glass emitted a bell-like sound. Then they sipped with the air of connoisseurs. The little scene was an unconscious imitation of similar ones they had often noticed the officers of the garrison enact with a certain solemnity. In wine-growing countries they enshroud with a time-honored ceremonial the ceremony of drinking wine of quality.

[91] The two men lit their cigars, each bearing the well-known narrow band of a famous importing firm, and next they refilled their glasses. They had another hour until the time for the evening stable service should come, and there was nothing to do meanwhile, for First Lieutenant Specht, temporarily in command of the reserve squadron, never appeared during the afternoon service. Hence, there would be no disturbance.

“Will you be off on leave at Christmas?” asked Roth of his friend.

“Don’t know yet,” Schmitz replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. “I should like to, for I haven’t been outside this dirty hole of a town for two years; but it is hardly worth my while to undertake such a long trip for the few days, for I don’t suppose I should get more than a week off, and it takes me forty-eight hours to reach my home—it’s at the other end of the world, you know—and that much to return. So I should have but a couple of days to myself, after all my trouble and expense.”

[92] “What is the fare?” asked Roth.

“About thirty marks, and I haven’t that much to spare.”

Roth laughed disdainfully.

“Such a trifle only! Ho ho ho!”

“Well, you can laugh, of course,” retorted Schmitz, good-naturedly. “It wouldn’t mean anything to you. But suppose you haven’t got that much money, what then?”

“I’ll lend you that trifle,” said the “Vice,” pompously.

“Say, you must have been winning in the lottery, old friend! You’re spending money like water for some time past. Every short while you’re making a run into town; you’re smoking genuine Havanas; and you’re even ready to lend money! At the very least you must have come into an inheritance.”

“No, mine is not dead men’s money,” Roth sneered. “All it takes is to be shrewd and to gather up all the money that crosses your path.”

“I suppose you’ve slain a rich Jew!”[12]

“Not precisely,” said Roth, mysteriously.

[93] “Well, I don’t catch your meaning,” put in the other.

Roth winked at his wife and then at Schmitz, to show that she was not to hear his confidences; but when she rose immediately after, to fetch another bottle of wine, he said in whispers:

“I’ll tell you, if you want to know; but—” he put his index finger significantly to his mouth —“Mum’s the word!”

“Oh, of course; don’t be afraid. I never betray my pals!”

“Well, then, I will tell you. This is the second time I am in command of the reserves. Last time we had a whole lot of one year’s volunteers amongst them, mostly well-to-do farmer boys. You remember ‘Fatty’ Kramer, that swine, and Rossbach, whose father at home has twelve horses in the stable, and Scheller, the fellow who was always running after the girls, and that whole crowd? Fellows of that sort, you see, don’t know what to do with their money, and I wouldn’t be such an ass as to give them their pay, their uniform allowance, and so on; they don’t care about those measly few coins. Scheller, besides, gave me a chance to make some money outside of that. [94] The last night before he had finished his two years, I happened to inspect his quarters, it being considerably past taps. And what do I see but this very fellow, Scheller, together with—well, you know—and as I was just about to raise the deuce, he whispers in my ear: ‘Don’t say anything, please!’ Well, then, I kept my mouth shut, and at noon the following day there was a ‘blue rag’[13] in my overcoat pocket.”

“The deuce you say! What luck! But supposing these fellows afterwards give you away, especially if they don’t get their promotions?”

“Oh, they won’t say anything; they are glad enough if they can stay away from the army. As to promotions, most of them were not the kind to think about such a thing.”

“Well, I in your place should be afraid there might be trouble some time, and then think what a rumpus there would be!”

[95] “Leave me alone for that. Just now there are a couple more of these rich, stupid fellows; there is the son of a butcher in Brunswick whose father must be worth a million or so, and the others, too, have lots of money to burn. What do you suppose I’ll make out of them before they leave the

squadron? They are worth at least a couple of hundred apiece to me. Well, *Prosit!*" They clinked glasses.

The glasses rang out harmoniously, and the next instant they were emptied of the last drops.

"How do you like this stuff? Costs six marks the bottle! Of course, *I* didn't pay for it,"—with another wink.

"Horribly expensive; where did you get it?"

"Last year, you remember, that one year's volunteer, Hoch? When he wanted to become sergeant, I did my best for him with the Chief, and so he got the chevrons. And he was not ungrateful. A whole box of wine—two dozen of these bottles. Pretty decent, wasn't it?"

"You're lucky, sure enough!"

"You see, my friend, how these things must be done. Always practical: that's my motto. Last year, for instance, I had charge of the mess provisions. The butcher put in a good many bones now and then, and I don't think that he ever gave over-weight. Naturally, I was after him, and the [96] result was a 'blue rag' every week from him, and my family meat didn't cost me a red, either."

Roth broke into a hearty laughter. He slapped his pocket jocularly, and the jingling sound of gold and silver met their ears. Then he gulped down another glassful of the delicious wine.

"Why don't you drink, Schmitz? I suppose you are full."

"As to that, no; that takes longer. *Prosit!*"

In this style the conversation proceeded, and when they had emptied their third bottle it was very evident that they had drunk about as much as was good for them. Their eyes had assumed a glassy stare, and their faces were scarlet. Moreover, their speech was loud and blustering, and Roth, particularly, was unable longer to talk coherently, except with difficulty.

Suddenly he looked at the clock. "Six, by thunder. Time to look after the stables!"

"Yes, let's go," said Schmitz; "we must get to the stables, the beasts are hungry!"

They arose reeling. Roth girded his loins with his sabre, and both of them went clattering down [97] the stone stairs of the barracks. The sabre struck the steps all along, as Roth descended heavily, and there was a terrific noise.

Several soldiers stuck out their heads as the two went along; and when they noticed their intoxicated superiors they quickly retreated into their own rooms, saying: "They surely have enough! If one of us went about in that way we'd be ripe for a pretty long term in the cooler."

At the turn of the corridor Dietrich, a good-service man belonging to the fourth squadron, stepped up to Roth and said: "I'd like to ask the Herr 'Vice' for some coal for Room X. My men have been out in the rain foraging, and all of us are wet to the skin. It is very cold upstairs, and unless we can heat the stove our clothes will not dry till to-morrow."

"What! Coal? Go to the quartermaster, you loafers; I haven't any coal for you!" spluttered Roth with a heavy tongue.

"The quartermaster has gone to town, and the Herr 'Vice' keeps the keys to the cellar in such cases!"

"Get out of my way, you —— fool! You don't need coal every time a few drops of rain fall. Lie [98] down in bed, you pack of swine, if you are cold, and leave me alone with your impudent complaints."

Dietrich stood for a moment in doubt, not knowing whether it would be safe to make another rejoinder. But he saw plainly that the "Vice" was in an irresponsible condition, and so silently, but with rage in his heart, he turned on his heels so that the spurs jingled, and went back to his men.

In the stables hardly anybody remained, the men having attended to their duties and retired. Only the stable guard was to be seen.

For stable guards men are taken, by preference, whose health has suffered in the hard service at this inclement season. One of them had incipient consumption, the regimental surgeon having noticed the man's condition only a week after his joining the squadron, and now the colonel thought it was not worth while discharging the man. The second one of these reserves had, since his civilian life, nursed himself so well as to have acquired a regular paunch, so that the quartermaster had been unable to fit him with any of the uniforms, and the man, put into a soiled [99] canvas suit, had been permanently assigned to stable duty. The third of this interesting trio was something of an idiot, hailing from the Polish districts. He grinned like a maniac, and he was entirely unfit for drill or any other kind of service that required even the faintest degree of intelligence; but, having been laborer with a Polish peasant, he knew how to handle horses and to clean the stable. He addressed, in his broken German, everybody, including the officers, as "Thou," and doffed his cap in token of military salute.

The foddermaster felt frightened when he became aware that feeding time was already considerably past, for he regarded the horses under his care with great affection. He therefore called up the stable guards and hurried them with a "Quick, now, you lazybones!" The fodder

wagon was loaded with oats and chopped straw and then pushed into the main aisle of the stable. The creaking of this vehicle was for the horses the most joyful music every day. As soon as the sound struck their ears they became lively, raised their heads, craned their necks, and turned around, as far as their halters would permit, to watch the operation. They evidently had thought themselves forgotten to-night, and there was a keen edge to their appetites, so that some of them became a little unruly, kicking, neighing, and nipping at their neighbors out of sheer sportiveness. “Napoleon,” the ancient stallion, had been devoured by such an acute sensation of hunger that as soon as the fat guard aforementioned came near him with the measure he tore it out of the man’s hands and gave him such a push against his paunch that the guard dropped the oats and, pressing both hands against the injured part, ran out into the aisle. [100]

Roth, watching things, saw this incident, and shouted to him:

“Go on, you lazy lubber, pick the stuff up again! Your fat carcass won’t be damaged by such a little blow!”

The fat individual, however, made no move to obey, but continued to hold his paunch, while tears of pain stood in his eyes, and his face assumed a livid hue. Roth strode up to him and began to belabor him with both fists, showering hard blows on neck and head. Then, grasping him by the throat, Roth turned the man’s head around and administered such a well-aimed blow on his nose as to draw blood. Under this punishment the ungainly soldier rose with difficulty, then bent down and began to collect the overturned oats. Roth, however, in his drunken fury gave the man a kick with his heavy boot, sending him against “Napoleon,” whose hind legs he embraced in an effort to maintain his equilibrium. [101]

But that was more than “Napoleon” would stand. First he didn’t get his oats, and then such practical jokes! He struck out with both hoofs, hitting the poor devil of a guard against some of the most sensitive portions of his anatomy, and hurling him into the aisle like one dead.

Roth was frightened. Fortunately for him nobody had seen the incident, for Schmitz, with the other two men, happened just then to be busy at the other end of the stable. So he merely called the other two reserve men, and made them carry his unconscious victim to the reserve quarters close by. The whole business, though, was very disagreeable to him, for the poor fellow had been hit hard. [102]

When the first lieutenant the next morning asked why the injured man had been taken to the hospital, Roth answered:

“He was too clumsy in handling the horse,—frightened it, and the beast naturally struck out. I understand he has got a good-sized hole in his head.”

“What a beastly fool,” scolded the officer. “By rights the fellow ought to be put in jail besides, as he will only spoil our horses.” But that was the next morning. On the evening in question, as soon as the accident had happened, Roth felt in worse temper than ever. He looked around for some one on whom to vent his spleen.

He looked in the fodder chest.

“Give the rest to ‘Zeus’; he hasn’t got quite enough, and he looks as lean as a goat,” he said to Schmitz.

“No,” Schmitz retorted; “he won’t get any more. He has got enough—more than is good for him,—and this morning he struck out and hit a man. The horses are getting crazy, standing all the time in the stable and munching their oats.” [103]

“Oh, give it to him anyway; he can stand it!”

“But why? It’s nonsense!”

Roth had a new access of fury; nothing enraged him as much as to be contradicted.

“Give him the rest, I say!” he said roughly to Schmitz.

But Schmitz shut the lid of the chest and answered shortly:

“I’m glad when I can save some fodder!” And with that he pushed away the cart.

Roth, quite beside himself, shouted:

“Sergeant Schmitz, you will not carry out my orders? I shall report you.”

In saying which he left the foddermaster in a huff, went with uncertain steps and with black mien through the stable to his own quarters, drank a big glassful of raw spirits “to quiet his nerves,” and then threw himself full-clad on the bed.

The two guards in the stable, who had observed these occurrences with considerable interest, stuck another handful of hay in front of each horse, and then lay down on the straw in the corner of the stable to sleep. Sergeant Schmitz, however, went to his room, completely sobered. [104]

The following noon the orderly transmitted to the reserve squadron of the regiment a document reading as follows:

REPORT

On the occasion of the stable service last night Vice-Sergeant-Major Roth gave to Foddermaster Sergeant Schmitz a formal order, which the latter did not carry out. When the said Vice-Sergeant-Major Roth emphatically repeated the order, the aforementioned Schmitz refused once more to comply therewith. This happened in the presence of the stable guards, and it is charged by the aforesaid Roth that Sergeant Schmitz was at the time in an intoxicated condition.

SPECHT,
First Lieutenant and Squadron Chief
of the 2d Reserve Squadron.

The foddermaster happened to be seated at his noon meal, when the sergeant-major stepped up, announced his arrest to him, and took him to the lock-up. There he was to remain until sentence should be pronounced in his case, for his offence had been officially designated as "Peremptory refusal of obedience in the presence of men assembled." As such "men assembled" [105] the two guards of the stable were regarded in the eyes of the law.

The incident was reported from mouth to mouth throughout the regiment, and by far the greater majority were indignant at Roth's action. Even the officers themselves declared unanimously that such a superior as Roth ought to be got rid of.

But Roth thought he had done something heroic, and seemed great in his own eyes. When off duty he declared he liked comradeship, and was ever ready for a good joke, not taking offence at anything. But when on duty, why, the devil, they should see that he was not to be trifled with. Every species of intimacy or friendship was at an end when on duty. Then it was: I order, and you have to obey, else I'll break your neck!

And Sergeant Schmitz all this time was in his gloomy, cold cell. Lifeless and broken in courage, he was staring at the rough stone flagging through the long hours of the day. He thought he was dreaming, and could not or would not believe that he was behind lock and key because of a [106] military offence. Why, he had nine long years of service behind him, in which he had conducted himself blamelessly, never having been punished for a day.

Slowly, indeed, the seriousness of the situation dawned on him, and with this consciousness grew up a violent hatred of the man whom he had deemed his friend, and who now, under the influence of alcoholic rage was about to destroy the fruits of all his life and those he had counted to garner in the future. But he would show the regiment, once he was a free man again, what a low character the fellow really had, and how behind his hypocritical and insinuating manners were concealed systematic dishonesty and fraudulent practices. Nobody should be deceived by him again. He, Schmitz, would take care of that.

That he was to be court-martialed seemed to be beyond question. And as a matter of fact he was charged, as he knew, with "peremptory refusal to obey"; but the trial must certainly show that the peculiar circumstances of his offence were of such a character as to deprive it of all seriousness, and that really there had been but an exchange of words which, although an official [107] character might be attributed to it, could not possibly be viewed with great severity when once all the facts had been established. He counted, of course, among these facts his intimate intercourse with Roth; but this point would have to be clearly and skilfully brought out at the trial, for on that hinged the issue.

Sergeant Schmitz prayed, therefore, formally, in a petition to the regiment, for legal counsel, and at the same time for permission to enter with such counsel into oral and written communication.

He was amazed when informed a few days later that legal counsel could be provided by military courts only in those cases where the defendant was accused of a crime. On the other hand, the communication said, there was no objection to his retaining a suitable lawyer, but of course at his own expense.

But where get the money for such a lawyer? Schmitz's slender means and those of his parents at home were by no means sufficient for the purpose, and yet he felt that he had no chance in his defence if he were to face the judges of the military court, and Roth himself, whose persuasive [108] powers of language he knew so well. He would be unable, with his very insufficient command of language, to enlighten the court in an impressive manner as to intimate details. Somehow, therefore, the money must be raised.

After three weeks of preliminary confinement, the term was at last fixed at which the trial was to take place. Schmitz felt that he could await its issue with a clear conscience. Even his counsel had told him that an unfavorable end was not to be expected, as soon as the judges had been made acquainted with the circumstances preceding the actual trifling occurrence in the stable. Schmitz expected, therefore, that the term at which he was to be tried would also be the day of regaining his liberty; for the last few weeks, what with suffering from hardships, from the insufficient and coarse jail diet, and from worry, had been terrible ones indeed for him.

Even the formal indictment drawn up against him, of which a copy had been sent him, could not repress his hopes. He knew that in such a document everything concerning him and his [109] offence was naturally represented in the darkest colors, so as to leave the judge-advocate sufficient grounds on which to bring the proceedings against him to the point of actual trial.

The document read:

"Proceedings have been opened against Sergeant Ferdinand Julius Schmitz, on motion to that effect, because of an offence against Paragraph 94 of the Military Criminal Code.

"Although the defendant maintains that he has been on particularly friendly terms with Vice-Sergeant-Major Roth, that would in no way justify him in disobeying an order issued while in the performance of duty. On the contrary, his refusal to obey two peremptory and emphatic orders, given in the presence of the stable guard, and therefore before men assembled, was a most glaring instance of insubordination.

"The excuse of defendant, that he was in an excited condition by reason of indulgence in alcoholic liquors, in nowise exculpates him. The circumstance that his offence has been committed while intoxicated during the performance of his duty, is rather an additional reason for increasing the measure of his punishment.

"Defendant will be tried by court-martial."

That sounded indeed very dangerous, just as if he were a criminal of the deepest dye,—he, who [110] for nine years had conducted himself blamelessly. He was almost tempted to laugh at this accusation, which seemed to him so strongly tinctured with prejudice.

On October 20th, at noon precisely, the trial began.

The judges had come to town from the seat of the command of the army corps. With faces severe and forbidding, they sat at a long table,—a major, a captain, a first lieutenant, a judge-advocate to conduct the proceedings according to the statutes, and a second one to conduct the prosecution.

After Schmitz had given an intelligent account of the facts, Roth was called as witness. He represented the affair in the most glaring colors, denied all friendship with the defendant, and likewise denied in the strongest language that he also had been intoxicated, as Schmitz had stated. By hook or crook he had gained over as witnesses for his sober condition on that evening the invalid afflicted with lung trouble, and likewise the Pole. The latter, because of the semi-idiotic state of his mind, and because of his insufficient knowledge of German, he had instructed [111] to simply nod his head to all the questions asked him. As luck would have it, it so happened that the questions put to this witness were of a kind to which his mute nods were the answers most unfavorable to the defendant. The wonder was, however, that the court made no objection to such testimony. Finally the "Vice" swore, with a voice shaken by no tremor, to the truth of his deposition.

This, of course, was an unexpected turn in the affair. Schmitz had not expected, and he had not forearmed himself against such a tissue of lies. His hopes sank considerably when he noticed that the major, as chairman of the commission, was shaking his head in grave disapproval on hearing the unfavorable testimony.

Next followed the address of the prosecuting judge-advocate, which conformed in almost every detail to the substance of the act of accusation.

Then Schmitz's counsel arose. In eloquent words he described the event as it had actually occurred, weighed the peculiar circumstances, and pointed with great emphasis to the former intimacy of accuser and defendant,—an intimacy the existence of which had been corroborated [112] by several witnesses who had deposed during the preliminary stage of the case. Lastly, he made as much as he could out of the fact that the whole occurrence had been an outgrowth of a friendly birthday celebration. In consideration of all these things, and also because of the irreproachable conduct of the defendant for so many years of active service, he moved for his acquittal.

The court-martial then retired for deliberation, and a long time elapsed before its members, wearing a severe aspect, reappeared in the session chamber.

Schmitz was in a dazed condition when he heard the sentence: two months of jail!

He saw his life destroyed. In vain had been the long years which he had given, at the sacrifice of his best strength, to his country. His dream of a future free from care, and of an appointment, after another three years of service, to a municipal office of an humble kind in his native town, had been shattered at one blow. What would his parents say, his sisters and brothers, and what would become of the girl to whom he had been engaged for several years past? [113]

A fierce rage seized him, and he could have throttled on the spot the man who by perjury, out of vindictiveness and for selfish reasons, had marred his existence forever. The blood rushed to his head as he saw this same man striding past him now, a sneer on his lips, in haughty indifference. Nay, worse, he heard the commander of the regiment say to this dishonorable scoundrel:

"That is right, Roth. Unpitying in the service is what I want my non-commissioned officers to be."

Schmitz was taken to a fortress on October 21st, where many hours of mental torture and many days of hard, grinding labor of the lowest kind awaited him.

Thus gradually approached Christmas time. The wide yard of the barracks was covered with snow. All lay desolate, lifeless, and grim in the severe cold which had supervened during the last days.

A large part of the regiment had been granted holiday leave, and every one of the men did his utmost while on duty, in order not to forfeit at the last moment the joys of home and friendship which awaited him. [114]

Almost every evening the members of the corps of officers rode to the neighboring city, there to make Christmas purchases; for only one of them intended to go home for the holidays, and the others were preparing a little celebration at the Casino for which mutual gifts were being chosen.

Borgert and Leimann both returned from their divers trips, heavily laden with packages. They bought everything that pleased them. It might be that at some future time they would somehow have the money to pay for it all. Meanwhile every tradesman continued to give them unlimited credit.

After making their purchases, the officers usually met in a certain restaurant, where they broke the necks of a few bottles of good wine. And often it would happen that they boarded the midnight train, being in a decidedly animated mood, returning to their garrison.

One night Lieutenant Müller, the regimental adjutant, found an official telegram on his reaching home, and was obliged, despite the late hour, to go to the chief clerk of the regiment, in order to talk over its contents. [115]

There had been a heavy fall of snow, and the keen east wind drove the snowflakes in a wild dance through the cold air. It was all one could do to recognize the path.

Müller, who did not like being disturbed at such a late hour, continued grumbling to himself all the way to the barracks. Whenever he had taken more than was good for him he was in a quarrelsome mood, and in such a case he usually made trouble. His comrades claimed that he was suffering from megalomania.

Through the thick snow Müller saw the illuminated windows of the guard house, and inside the small detachment of men were peacefully slumbering.

The officer *du jour* had already visited them, and the men had now made themselves comfortable, discarding their sabres and helmets, contrary to the regulations, and, dozing in their chairs, had covered themselves with warm blankets.

Private Röse had mounted guard outside. He stood, shivering in the cold air, holding his sabre in his fist, barely able to maintain his martial attitude without freezing on the spot. [116]

His thoughts dwelt in his far-away home, with his parents and brothers, whom he expected to meet again at Christmas, after a long term of separation. His people were well-to-do farmers, and his affection for the horses, cows, and plump pigs under his father’s roof was as sincere as that for the bipeds. He pictured to himself all these pets, and was speculating as to what he was to do in the shape of amusement during the holidays, when he was suddenly scared by the shout:

“Guard!”

Röse pulled himself together and quickly glanced all around him in the gloom; but he was unable to discover the owner of the voice. Another similar shout reached him, and then at last he saw dimly in the driving snowflakes a figure approaching him.

“Why don’t you present arms, you swine?” bawled the regimental adjutant.

“I humbly beg the Herr Lieutenant’s pardon; but I did not see him coming in the snowstorm.” [117]

“Shut your mouth, you lying beast; you’ve been sleeping. I have been waiting an eternity for your salute; but I will show you, you hog, what punishment awaits a fellow of your stripe!”

With that he passed the sentinel, and the latter was almost paralyzed with fear. Arrived at the regimental headquarters, Müller made the following report:

> “The sentinel keeping guard between twelve and two o’clock this night I found asleep during an inspection which I made. He answered my call only after a considerable time. I must declare in advance that the man, in case he should urge his inability to recognize me in the dark, is stating what is not true, since I noticed particularly that he was asleep.”

This report he placed on the desk of the commander of the regiment. Then he aroused the regimental chief clerk from a sound sleep in the adjoining room, kept that poor fellow shivering in his night garments in the corridor for about ten minutes, and then went home. Having discharged what he considered a grave duty, he was able to sleep the sleep of the just.

On the afternoon of December 22d, Sergeant Schmitz returned from jail. [118]

The poor fellow had greatly changed. The black moustache, formerly twisted and waxed so as to describe an angle in exact imitation of the Kaiser’s, was drooping, and his face was pale and worn. He looked shyly at all the privates whom he met in the streets, and when one of them saluted him, he deemed it a special act of courtesy. He thought he read in everybody’s eyes:

“This man is a criminal,—a man punished for grave insubordination!”

When he reported himself to the chief of the squadron, the latter said, with some show of feeling:

"Sorry, my dear Schmitz, that I have to lose you. You were always a man of whom I felt proud, and who did his duty as few others did. But the colonel has commanded me to cancel the capitulation agreement[14] and to dismiss you forthwith. Console yourself with the thought that you have become the victim of a dirty intrigue. I wish you well, and if I can be of any service to [119] you, you know where to find me. And so, farewell!"

Schmitz felt the tears spurting from his eyes, as his chief went towards the stable. His captain was really sorry to lose him. Schmitz had always been one of the pillars of discipline in the squadron, and now this train of misfortune had removed him and plunged him into misery. It was a most unfortunate thing.

Schmitz went to the sergeant-major, who gave him his papers and the fifty marks due him. The sergeant-major, too, felt sorry for him. He gave him a fervent shake of the hand.

"Have you any further claims on the regiment, Schmitz?" he asked.

"Since the manœuvres last year I've been suffering with rheumatism."

"But you didn't tell me about that, Schmitz, at the time, and considerably over a year has elapsed since then."

"Well, I didn't report it then because I did not want to disturb the run of things by my absence. [120] I knew the captain was bothered a good deal at the time."

"Yes, yes, that is all very well. I will report your statement at once to the regiment, but I'm afraid it will be too late. Meanwhile you had better deliver up all the regimental property."

So then Schmitz went up to his room, packed all his things, and put his private belongings in a small trunk. But before doffing his uniform he went to the neighboring city and purchased for himself a civilian's suit, a collar, and a hat. These took about all the money which had been paid him.

Then he carried everything of the government's outfit to the quartermaster, to whom he likewise sold some of the private regimentals he had bought with his own money. The sabre he kept as a memento.

And then came the hardest of all,—the farewell from his comrades and his horses. Every one had a friendly word for him, for he had been a good comrade and had never been puffed up with his own importance. Many a mute pressure of the hand told him that they all felt sorry for him, [121] and that they, as much as he himself, thought the treatment to which he had been subjected an act of injustice. The privates, too, pressed up to him to say a word of good-bye. Often he had berated them soundly, but they all knew him as a decent fellow, and as one who had never badgered them unnecessarily.

As the noon service drew towards its close, Schmitz went into the stable. What a pang for him! Never in his life had a thing seemed so hard to him. All the beasts he loved so well turned and craned their necks towards him, leaving the savory hay and their oats for a moment as soon as they heard his voice, and gazing at him with such intelligence as if they appreciated his woe to the full. The sense of desolation almost overpowered him.

He had filled his pockets with sugar, and he began with "Clairette," feeding the sweet morsels to all his quadruped friends. "Clairette" lifted her forefoot, begging for one more piece. He laid his head against the velvety neck of the animal, stroking caressingly the silky nostrils and around the fine eyes, then kissing her on the white spot just below. The mare seemed to understand him. [122] She whinnied softly, and gave him a sad glance of parting. Next came old "Marie." How much longer would she be able to stand the service? And thus he visited them, one by one, in token of farewell. The last one was "Napoleon"; but even he showed to-day no trace of his accustomed ill temper. He gave the strange man in civilian clothes a long look of doubt and forbearance.

A last, lingering glance to his hundred darlings, and then he painfully suppressed a tearful sob, and climbed up to his late quarters to get his trunk.

There he met the sergeant-major of his squadron.

"Your invalid claims, Schmitz, have been disallowed. The colonel says you would have had to make a report at the time. Now it is too late. Just as I thought. Here is something for you,—the bill of your attorney, who has asked the regiment to collect the amount due him. It's a matter of sixty marks; and if you are unable to pay it he threatens to seize your property."

Schmitz had almost forgotten about that. [123]

"Within an hour I shall have the money," said he, after reflecting a moment.

Then he went down to the city and entered the store of a watchmaker. He laid on the counter his watch and chain and asked in a firm voice:

"What will you give me on this? I need money!"

The watchmaker examined both, and then said, with something of a sneer:

“Twenty marks. That is all I can give you.”

Schmitz calculated silently. He still had thirty-five, and twenty more made fifty-five. So he needed another five marks. He removed a ring from his finger, a little gift from his mother.

“What is this worth to you?”

“Ten marks!”

“Good, give it to me!”

Schmitz pocketed silently the two gold pieces, then went to the barracks, paid the sergeant-major the sixty marks, and took his trunk away. He was just in time to catch the evening train.

Those who saw this pale, downcast man, with his small trunk, seated in the car, scarcely [124]
supposed that he was until recently a royal Prussian sergeant, dismissed in disgrace from long service because of a small offence, without a penny, but with rheumatism in all his bones, and with his patriotism destroyed, thrust into the street to seek a new and precarious means of living, after spending his best strength, his health, and his youth in the service of his country.

On the summit of the hill, whence he could discern the barracks, the snow glistening on its roof, he cast a last look at the spot where he had spent so many years. He raised his arms with a threatening gesture, and a curse escaped his lips.

In the train which carried him off there were numerous soldiers of his regiment, singing and joking, on their way home for the holidays.

Christmas Eve had come. All the world—thousands, millions—were happy. They felt the charm of this most beautiful Christian festival,—a day which moves to softness the hardest hearts. But Schmitz, an outcast, felt nothing but bitterness and shame. His glance dwelt on the lighted windows where all these happy people were celebrating, and he vowed vengeance. [125]

Friedrich Röse meanwhile occupied a badly warmed cell, undergoing a fortnight’s confinement because of his alleged inattention while on duty as sentinel.

Through the narrow window of his cell he could espy the quarters occupied by the third squadron, a couple of stories higher, in the same building; the row of windows was shining with the brilliant lights of a gigantic Christmas tree, standing in the centre of the large hall. The sounds of a pathetic Christmas hymn were floating down to him, as it was intoned by the throats of the men. Shivering with cold, he sat on the edge of his hard pallet, and a tear rolled down his cheek. Again his thoughts dwelt with his friends at home, far away, and wrath filled his soul.

What disillusionment the year had brought him since he had begun his term as volunteer! His father, once sergeant-major in a regiment of Guard Cuirassiers, had often described to him a soldier’s life in vivid colors, and had expressed his hope to see, some day, his boy himself [126]
advanced to the grade of sergeant.

But that prospect was now gone. His punishment brought with it as a consequence the impossibility of ever rising from the ranks.

His one-time zeal for his calling had changed suddenly to a violent distaste for everything connected with the service. At one blow the enthusiastic, ambitious recruit had turned into one of the many soldiers who serve in the army simply because they are compelled to do so, and who are longing for the day when they will be able to doff the uniform forever.

And why all this?

Not because he had knowingly neglected his duty, but because one of the officers, one of the men whom he had until recently looked up to as demigods, had in his drunken spleen selected him for a victim. And that which this officer had maintained in his report had to stand as an absolute fact, no matter how untrue; and if he or anybody else should express doubts of its accuracy it would mean a new and punishable offence.

In answer to the questions asked by the chief of his squadron, Röse had stated the occurrence [127]
quite truthfully, and had assured him solemnly of his innocence. But the adjutant had replied to this that the man wanted to exculpate himself by untrue statements. The report was, therefore, accepted as it read.

Was it to be expected that Müller would admit his own wrong, admit that he had in his semi-drunkenness misinterpreted the facts, and that he had been in an unpleasant frame of mind at the time? Of course not. That would have meant charging himself with an offence. How could he, the infallible regimental adjutant, own up to an error? No, he was never mistaken; and what difference did it make, anyway, if this raw recruit did get a fortnight’s term in the “cooler”?

What difference?

This difference,—that there was now one more of those who proclaim that the private soldier in the German army is a man forced into a yoke, the prey of every whim of his superiors, a man exposed to the bad humor of those above him, one who has to suffer, without a sign of resistance,

undeserved harshness and injustice. Such a man was now this young recruit. [128]

And what further harm was there in it?

This,—that everybody in the future, when Röse should be asked for his testimonials, would shrug his shoulders, thinking: “This man cannot be trustworthy, for he has undergone severe punishment for neglect of duty as a sentinel, and that is a bad sign!”

Towards nine o’clock in the evening Röse was aroused from his sombre reflections by a rattling of keys at his door. The key turned in the lock, and in stepped the officer on duty, making his round, behind him the guard.

Röse jumped up, assumed a rigid military posture, and reported himself.

“Private Röse, sentenced to a fortnight’s confinement for neglect of duty while on guard!”

The officer cast a searching glance into the dark cell, trying to make out whether he could discover a forbidden object in it beside the blanket and the water-pitcher, and then he turned to go. But Röse hesitatingly and in humble tones said: [129]

“Will the Herr Lieutenant permit me to make a respectful request?”

“Ask the guard if you want anything,” answered the officer shortly, and then descended the stone steps, his sword clanking.

The corporal on guard then turned and went back to Röse’s cell.

“What is it you want?” he asked, with a show of good-nature.

“I should like to know, Herr Corporal, whether a letter from home has arrived for me, and whether I could not have it!” answered Röse, shyly.

“Well, my boy,” laughed the corporal, “strictly speaking, that is something not permitted—first serve your sentence, then you can find out.”

But as he scanned closely the features of Röse, who was of his own squadron, and whom he rather liked,—noticing the melancholy face,—he felt pity for the poor fellow. It was really a hard thing to spend Christmas in jail for what probably was a mere oversight, or for what, according to Röse himself, he had not even committed. Therefore he said pleasantly: [130]

“Well, I will inquire.”

He locked the door, and sent a man to Röse’s quarters with a request to the corporal there to call on him. When the man came over he asked him:

“Is there a letter for Röse?”

“A letter? No, but a package has come for him.”

“Let me tell you!” whispered the corporal. “Open the box and bring something of the contents over here. I feel sorry for the poor devil.”

The other nodded and disappeared, soon to return with a letter that he had found inside the package together with some dainty eatables. The corporal took it all and brought it up to Röse, and then he told a man to carry up a pail of coal to the cell.

In a few minutes the sheet-iron stove was aglow, and sent waves of warmth into the cold cell. Röse stood in front of it, and by the flickering light of the flames he slowly perused the letter of his parents. While he read tears were streaming down his face. Then he hid away under his pillow the other treasures,—a sausage and a cake,—wrapped himself into his blanket and lay down to sleep. In his dreams Röse was standing beneath the Christmas tree, and around him were his dear ones at home. [131]

The twenty-eighth of December was a day of mourning for the fourth squadron.

All the men, including those who had just returned from leave, gave the last escort to a dead comrade. It was Dietrich, the good-service man, who was carried out to the cemetery.

He had always been of a weakly constitution; but he had been seized by a violent fever the day when he had returned, overheated, and wet to the bones from rain, after hard drill on the parade ground, and had had to spend the evening and the night in a cold room, because Roth had refused to furnish coal. Two days later the surgeon of the regiment established the fact that inflammatory rheumatism had supervened, and this had taken so bad a turn within a short time that the heart had become affected. On Christmas Day the poor fellow had died.

His parents had been summoned by telegraph to attend the funeral of their only son; but sickness in the family and other circumstances had prevented their coming, and thus the funeral took place without a single friend or relative being present. [132]

The day afterward the fat reserve man, the one who had been injured by “Napoleon,” left the hospital. His injuries seemed healed; but the whole face was horribly disfigured by livid marks left from the sutures of the surgeon’s needle, and the left eye had been removed by an operation, since it had been feared that the other eye might also be lost unless prompt and radical measures were taken.

Maimed and crippled for life, the man returned to his home, discharged from the army for physical inability. A monthly pension of nine marks had been “generously” allowed him by the government.

Schmitz, the ex-sergeant, on New Year’s Eve sat in a scantily furnished room.

To earn a living, even if but a very poor one, he had been forced to take work as a common laborer in a large factory of the neighboring city. He had engaged board in a tenement house, with the family of a fellow-workman. [133]

There he sat now, his head buried in his hands. On a plate before him were the remnants of a frugal supper, and a small lamp with broken chimney threw a reddish sheen on his immobile figure. Against the wall, above his bed, were hung his sabre and its scabbard, crosswise. On a small wooden stool stood a bowl, in which he had performed his ablutions, and a soiled towel hung from it. The fire in the small stove had long ago died down, and but a few coals were still glimmering feebly.

To see the man one would have imagined him asleep; but Schmitz was very much awake, and in his head wild thoughts were whirling. He was thinking of times past and gone; and the more his present circumstances contrasted with former ones, the more grimly rose his hatred against the man who had brought him to his present plight. He was planning his revenge, ruminating deeply how best he should punish the rascal, and how to brand him with a life-long reminder of his infamous deed.

A while longer he thus sat, brooding darkly; then he rose with clouded face and stepped to the window. He breathed against the pane covered with rime, until a small space had been formed [134] through which he could peer out into the open. He saw the dial opposite on the church steeple, from which the bells melodiously rang out in full-toned peals the closing moments of the old year, and proclaiming the advent of a new one.

Midnight. Schmitz seized his hat, clapped it on, took his heavy cane into the right hand, blew out the lamp, and cautiously descended the dark staircase. On the ice-crusted step in front of the housedoor he lingered a moment, listening to the vibrations of the solemn bells. No other sound was audible; no human step could be heard—only the distant rush of air which, like the breath of a gigantic being, told of the thronged streets of a busy city.

Schmitz shiveringly turned up his coat collar, sank both his hands into his pockets, and went briskly, the cane under his arm, to the railway station. There he bought a ticket for his former garrison, but a few minutes away by rail, and stepped on board the train which had just rolled in.

Arrived there, he found the small town buried under a thick blanket of snow. From the barracks [135] row upon row of lighted windows glimmered like stars from the distance. Every little while snatches of song or single chords, wafted towards him by the wind, gave sound in the night. Far away the ringing of church bells could be heard, coming not only from the steeples of the town itself, but from the villages and hamlets surrounding it,—a joyful greeting to the new year. From out of the dramshops and restaurants floated the sounds of loud talking, laughter, and singing of merry people, celebrating in hot punch the gladsome hour.

Schmitz went fleet-footed towards the end of the town where the barracks were situated. But when he came to a restaurant in the vicinity of the spacious building he made a halt. Cautiously he peered into the gloom around him, to make sure that nobody was near, and then he climbed to the top of a wall and looked intently into the lighted window below.

Sure enough, there sat Roth, a conspicuous figure in a company of fellow-drinkers; for in this place he habitually spent his evening hours, frequently far into the night, drinking and playing at [136] cards.

Then carefully and noiselessly he climbed down and strolled on in the direction of the barracks. He turned into a rural pathway, lined on both sides by snow-capped hedges, and then stopped at a certain spot. He knew that Roth would pass him on his way home.

Schmitz had to wait a long while in the nipping air, but his blood bounded tumultuously through his veins; for his revenge, longed for with all his heart, was close at hand.

The keen-edged wind drove particles of snow before it and pricked his heated face like needle-points. The dead leaves of a tall beech-tree rustled over him, and he felt like a victor. Patiently, triumphantly, he waited.

Down below, where the pathway opened into the street, he now and then saw a dark shape reel past and disappear in the night like a shadow, the soft snow deadening the footfall. These were jolly roysterers, returning from their carousal.

From the steeple, some distance away, came the metallic voice of a bell striking the first hour of the new year, and Schmitz reckoned on the probability that his foe would soon wend his way [137] homeward.

But in this he deceived himself, for it was close unto two o’clock when the “Vice” at last turned into the lane. Schmitz could not be mistaken. His sharp eyes, by this time habituated to the dark,

clearly made out the burly figure. He grasped his cane firmly in his hand, and his heart hammered in his bosom. Nearer and nearer Roth approached, now but a few steps away, his face almost completely hidden in the upturned collar of his cloak; but Schmitz saw the cruel, hard eyes, now dull and fishy from excessive indulgence in New Year's punch. Roth was in a good humor, however, whistling to himself and dragging his sabre at his feet, walking with unsteady gait.

At this moment Schmitz stepped out from beside the hedge, and, his cane on his shoulder, he planted himself before the other.

Roth was startled, and looked keenly at the man who stopped his progress. He did not recognize him.

"What is it you want?" He mumbled thickly. [138]

"To settle accounts with you," was the brief answer. At the sound of the voice Roth visibly paled. For a moment the two stared at each other.

"Oh, I see, it is you, old fellow. And what do you want of me?"

"This is what I want!" shouted Schmitz, and with terrific force his cane came down on Roth's head. A second blow followed, almost as hard, which hit him on the cheek, so that the blood rushed out of the wound. The "Vice," taken unawares, made no motion to defend himself while Schmitz rained a shower of strokes on his body. Then at last Roth, wide awake now, felt for his sabre, partly drawing it from its scabbard; but Schmitz gave him no chance to use it. Like a famished wolf he seized his enemy by the throat, throttling him, and, dropping his cane, with his clenched fist he dealt him several fearful blows on forehead and mouth, winding up with a tattoo that sounded like the beating of a drum on the man's skull. A violent push made Roth stumble and fall to his knees.

"So, now, you miserable cur, I have paid my debt to you!" and saying which, he kicked his [139] fallen foe. Then he turned on his heels and said, as a parting shot:

"Now go and report me again, you swine; but if you do I shall have another reckoning with you, and tell about some of your thieving!"

The former "foddermaster" felt that he had meted out justice, and he was fully prepared to take the consequences, no matter what they might be. Revenge is a sweet morsel.

Roth had to spend several weeks in the hospital, until he had recovered from his injuries. It was the hardest drubbing he had ever received in his life. Vanity forbade him to give a true version of the assault. He reported that he had been attacked by several drunken laborers, and claimed to have used his sabre with effect on one of them; but nobody believed his tale, for no wounded laborer was heard of in the little town, and physicians there and in the vicinity were equally ignorant of such a case. It was, therefore, generally assumed that Roth had met with his deserts at the hands of the ex-sergeant, and nobody pitied him.

FOOTNOTES:

[8] A vice-sergeant-major in the German cavalry receives in legitimate pay and emoluments and rations, if married, about one dollar per day. But it is notorious that peculations, hush money, and bribes from privates often swell his income to ten times that amount.—Tr.

[9] "One year's volunteers" are those young soldiers in the German army who, by reason of superior education and because they pay for their own uniforms and accoutrements, serve but one year in the active army. They belong, of course, mostly to the well-to-do classes, and generally are promoted to the rank of officers in the reserves.—Tr.

[10] "Gold fox," a slang term for the German twenty-mark gold pieces.—Tr.

[11] "Römer," the name of prettily shaped glasses, usually of amber or emerald hue, in which Rhine and Moselle wines are served.—Tr.

[12] "Slain a rich Jew," a German phrase for "suddenly acquired wealth."—Tr.

[13] "Blue rag," German slang term for bank notes of large amount.—Tr.

[14] "Capitulation" means an arrangement by which a non-commissioned officer agrees to serve the government for a certain term of years.—Tr.

Chapter V [140]

OFFICERS AT A MASQUERADE

DURING the last days of January the Casino was in an uproar. A number of mechanics, painters, and florists were busy transforming the rooms and corridors, even the veranda, with its adjoining conservatory, into a suite of daintily decorated festal halls. Numerous booths and tents were being erected, and all other preparations were made worthily to receive Prince Carnival, whose coming was timed for the first week in February.

Hundreds of potted plants and orange and laurel trees from the conservatory gave a gay and summer-like appearance to the ballroom. Placards painted and inscribed in suitable manner hung from the walls. In the booths and tents the usual array of eatables and "wet goods" of every description could be seen, to be sold by pretty womenfolk. One stage had been fitted up for [141] variety performances, while on another a circus was to be seen, in which a number of private soldiers, disguised as wild beasts, were to play leading parts under the eyes and whip of the trainer—none other than Captain Kahle. These men had been drilled for the purpose throughout the whole month.

There was also a stretch of natural greensward, laid down by the Casino gardener. This was to produce the illusion of a small park. Benches placed on it invited the guests to rest and to enjoy the music of a band upon a suitable stand, while Pilsen beer was to be handed to the audience by waiters. In an adjoining room mock marriages were to be performed, the fee to the officiating justice of the peace to consist in the purchase of a bottle of champagne. And, to complete the scene, arrangements had also been made to obtain a quick decree of divorce (by the same official) for all those couples who deemed themselves mismated after a short experience of an hour or so.

The large dining-room represented picnic grounds. On a platform wreathed in green there was room for an orchestra, and the trumpeters of the regiment had been ransacking the whole town [142] for weeks in order to find ragged costumes and discarded garments of every kind, clad in which they were to represent village musicians.

Even photographers were there, to ply their trade in several tents, the outside of which showed a collection of ludicrous portraits and prints of various kinds. The purpose of this stratagem was, of course, to attract customers.

Naturally all these festivities, planned for weeks, formed the main topic of conversation with the members of the club, and the whole garrison was for the time being turned topsy-turvy. Every one intended to appear in as original and amusing a guise as possible, and there was much mutual consulting and guessing as to which particular rôle was to be assumed by each person.

Thus the opening night of the fête drew near. During the afternoon a crowd of hairdressers moved into the Casino, to assist members of the club in getting themselves up properly. The regimental tailor, with his aides, went from one officer's house to another, making alterations or [143] needed repairs on the uniforms and costumes to be donned.

At seven in the evening the orderlies, in the black garments of waiters, were expecting the guests and members, and half an hour later these began to arrive in crowds.

It was a multi-colored, vivid picture, as all these persons, many of them good-looking and picturesquely attired, in all sorts of disguises, began to move in the brilliantly lighted halls, while the several bands, placed at coigns of vantage, struck up lively and inspiring airs. Dancing began at once, and champagne flowed in streams. At a garden table under an orange tree one could see a powerfully limbed peasant, his hawthorn stick between his knees, devouring a plateful of caviare, while his neighbor, a circus clown, was dissecting a lobster.

The most ludicrous figure, however, was Colonel von Kronau in his Polish farmer's costume, wearing a fur cap on his head, and a tippet around his neck. If he had appeared in this disguise at the hog market in a Pomeranian town, every purchaser would have supposed him to be the "genuine article," namely, a breeder of porkers. And it was quite evident that he did not have to [144] take much pains correctly to imitate the manners and gestures of the person he represented.

The champagne was paid for out of a common fund specially raised by all the members of the Casino. It was, therefore, not astonishing that the Herr Colonel was, after the lapse of one brief hour, deep in his cups.

His adjutant had not done well to disguise himself as a Polish Jew, for in that way he looked indeed too much his part.

Frau König was charming as a chambermaid, and her blue eyes radiated the pleasure she felt. As a young gamekeeper, Lieutenant Bleibtreu paid assiduous court to the aforementioned chambermaid. He had already proposed to her to visit the "marriage booth" in the adjoining room, and the justice of the peace was getting ready his paraphernalia. Only late at night, when the captain, her every-day husband, carried her home, did the pretty maid relinquish her newer claims upon the gamekeeper.

Frau Leimann presented herself as a peasant girl from the "Vierlande,"—a district near [145] Hamburg,—and her costume looked indeed very picturesque, and became her well. Borgert noticed this fact with great pleasure, and the dainty figure and small nimble feet made a strong impression on his susceptible heart.

Frau Kahle, as a flower girl, was flirting desperately with the younger men. She also played her

part very well, for the champagne in which she had liberally indulged began to exert its effects. Lieutenant Kolberg, as a modish dandy, had already purchased nearly her entire supply of flowers, and when, soon after, the remnant had gone, he claimed and obtained her as his partner for the dance.

Frau Captain Stark alone did not seem to belong in this *milieu*. The choice of a costume, to begin with, had occasioned her deep and anxious thought. She felt that to follow her inclinations and appear at the masquerade in either the guise of a ballet dancer or of a flower girl would too markedly invite criticism. Her fifty years and her towering shape would really have made her too conspicuous in such parts. On the other hand, to show herself as a peddler woman or fishwife would have, so she feared, made her look "too natural." Having, therefore, discarded these [146] notions, her fancy roved in the realms of the beautiful and fantastic, until it settled down upon a costume which, bespangled and with its garland of rushes, she declared to be that of a "mermaid of middle age." Nobody was in a condition to contradict her, inasmuch as nobody recollected ever having seen a "middle-aged" mermaid before. She floated, as a matter of fact, in a cloud of pink and sea-green laces. The capacious bosom this cloud concealed from view rolled and heaved quite realistically, thus producing the effect of ocean waves, and her enormous arms were awe-inspiring enough to keep away all evening those in the crowd who had not got their sea-legs,—and that meant practically all the younger officers. At all other times her most dutiful slaves, these young men seemed to have conspired to leave the dreaded chief of the regiment's nominal chief severely alone. Of course she felt this as an unpardonable offence, and this all the more as the colonel at an early hour was in an irresponsible condition, and hence listened to her violent plaint with stolid equanimity. [147]

There was a male trio, too, that claimed some attention. They represented to the life merry, devil-may-care vagabonds, and so well did they act their parts that one would have supposed they had just been picked up on the miry highway outside. They deemed it, of course, strictly within their privileges to get drunk with all due speed,—an endeavor in which they admirably succeeded. From that hour on they became an unmitigated nuisance, not even atoned for by some humor or merry pranks. After midnight they were always seen in a bunch, steadying each other as they lurched along.

Lieutenant von Meckelburg, during the earlier part of the evening, stuck resolutely and almost silently to his assigned duty, it being that of an organ-grinder. He had picked up somewhere a villainous specimen of this instrument of torture, and with it had retired into a corner, wearing the ragged and faded clothes of an impecunious veteran of the wars, with his visorless, crumpled cap pulled over his eyes, and with a face which for unadulterated melancholy could not be duplicated. Hardly any one took notice of him, and his physiognomy grew sadder and sadder. At [148] last, however, he left his organ in its corner, and visited the various bars where champagne could be had. With each generous libation his features cleared, and finally he got himself into a decidedly hilarious condition, and not only moved with his organ into the centre of the greensward, where he placed it on one of the benches, but accompanied its shrill and squeaking notes with a mellow basso of his own.

The bands meanwhile played their best and merriest, and as several casks of beer and some dozen bottles of cheap spirits had been provided for them, the members, both trumpeters of the regiment and civilian musicians hired for the night, devoted no inconsiderable portion of the intervals between their playing to frequent and prolonged visits to that small side-room where these drinkables had been placed ready for use. After a while they dispensed even with such formalities. They rolled the remaining casks up the steps of their podium, and shortly the faucet could be espied from among the greenery, and the musicians hovering about it. As a matter of course, their playing soon showed the effects of all this tippling. One man particularly, one of the [149] flageolets, became quite unmanageable,—or rather the instrument on which he was performing,—so that it usually was the space of a second or two ahead of the others. This weird music only ended with the removal of flageolet and man from the scene.

At eleven began the festal performance on the small stage constructed for the purpose.

One of the lieutenants led off with two topical songs rather too outspoken in the lessons they tried to convey. He was disguised as a prima ballerina for the purpose, and as a windup he danced, with great skill and abandon, a can-can. The ladies tittered and the men guffawed. After more of the same kind there was enacted a parody on Shakespeare's "Hamlet." The gentleman responsible for this version had employed radical means to clear the stage of all the *dramatis personæ*, at the end. Murder, suicide, poison, dagger, lightning even decimated their ranks, and when the curtain dropped there was not a soul of them left alive. The crowning effect of this parody was the appearance of the prompter himself before the footlights. In a few tear-choked [150] words he informed the audience that after seeing the actors all die, and nothing but corpses around him, he could and would not survive, and so he made an end of himself, too, using a rope for the purpose.

The humor of the whole audience after that grew rapidly boisterous, and by midnight the tone of this carnival fête given by officers and their ladies could scarcely be distinguished from that rampant at a village kermess. If anything, it was a trifle more unconventional.

Lieutenant Kolberg had in the meantime found a cosy arbor into which to retire with Frau Captain Kahle, and more effectually to exclude intruders had placed a tall screen before the entrance.

A little “flirtation,” more or less serious, was something he could not do without, and since the garrison with its staid citizens and their staider wives and daughters did not furnish the material required for him, he had made up his mind to lay violent siege to the heart of the lady. He knew that it was a susceptible one, and from Pommer he had heard, in hours of bibulous intercourse, that siege in her case meant speedy surrender. He had already progressed with her beyond mere [151] preliminary skirmishes, and in their conversations with nobody near they had begun to use the intimate “thou,” and to call each other by their given names.

For his purpose, then, no better time could have been found than this very festivity, with all the allurements which champagne, music, the dance, and the hurly-burly of a huge crowd afforded. Shielded against indiscreet spies by the interlacing vines creeping all over this arbor, his love-making had proceeded at such a rapid pace that within an hour the little woman did not thrust her gallant wooer aside when he dared imprint a kiss on her swelling lips.

In another arbor, more in proximity to the champagne bar, First Lieutenant Leimann sat in lonely misery and shed rivulets of tears. His intoxication, in its more advanced stage, always took that form known technically as “howling desolation.” On this occasion it had seized him promptly after the ninth glassful.

His condition was in ludicrous contrast with the magnificence and dash of his attire, for he was dressed, regardless of expense, as a Hungarian magnate of the first water, and he rejected with [152] sombre scorn all attempts made by friends to commiserate him. His nearer acquaintances knew for a certainty that he would thus remain seated on top of an empty wine cask until the very close of the ball. For whenever the black devils of drink cast their spell over him in this fashion it required from four to six hours to emerge into a saner and somewhat soberer frame of mind. Just now his sobs shook his whole bony body. The divers orderlies who passed him held their sides with laughter, but he heeded them not.

His wife found the situation very annoying, and she therefore resolved to get one of her sudden attacks of headache. She retired, with signs of disgust on her pretty face, to another corner, and when Borgert joined her soon afterward, she requested him in mellifluous tones to escort her home.

As they reached the door of the house in which she with her husband occupied the upper part, while Borgert had his smaller lodgings on the ground floor, she sighed with some satisfaction and said in a low voice: [153]

“The air has done me good; I feel much better now.”

“Then may I take you back to the Casino?” was Borgert’s answer, and the tone of his voice was full of disappointment.

“No, no, we will go up and have a cup of coffee; that will do us good, and I really do not feel like returning to that crowd of drunken people; it is simply disgusting!”

“Just as it pleases you, my most gracious lady!”

With that he inserted the key into the lock, opened the door, and both of them silently scaled the rather steep stairs, dark as Erebus.

When they had reached her cosy parlor, Borgert brought the lamp and lit it. He knew exactly the spot where he would find it in the dark, for his acquaintance with every nook of the apartments had come in the course of time with their mutual intimacy. Then he took up a newspaper and sat down in the sofa corner.

Frau Leimann had disappeared in the adjoining room; but it took her only a very few minutes to return, bearing in her hands the Vienna coffee machine, and presenting, now that she had [154] resumed a comfortable and coquettish kimono in lieu of her masquerade costume, a most seductive picture.

“So,” said she, letting the heavy window curtains down, “now at last we are again where we can have a comfortable, undisturbed chat together.”

The first rosy dawn showed on the horizon as a heavy, lurching step was heard on the stone stairs outside. Frau Leimann blew out the lamp, and then resumed her seat on the sofa, leaning her head against the soft cushions.

Meanwhile Leimann had noisily opened the door leading into the corridor, and now stepped into the room where his wife was waiting.

For a moment he halted at the door. He thought he discovered the scent of cigarette smoke. Then he felt his way towards the table, found a box of matches, and lighted a candle. Then he saw his wife recumbent on the sofa.

The sight touched him. Had this faithful soul awaited his coming so long, in order to offer him a cup of coffee? Doubtless sleep had overtaken her, and she had not heard his step. So he [155] cautiously approached her and imprinted a kiss on her forehead.

A nervous cry escaped her, and she quickly rose.

“Oh, it is you, Franz. Where did you stay so long?”

“Do not be angry with me, my angel, that I kept you awake so long; but I really never dreamed that you would do this. Why did you not retire long ago?”

The words sounded so full of affection,—almost like an excuse, like a prayer for forgiveness,—but they did not touch her; she simply yawned with some affectation, and stretched her arms as if dying for a sound sleep.

“Why, you know, Franz, that I had to wait for you; you were again in a fearful condition. When I saw you sitting in that way I felt so miserable that I could bear it no longer, and went home.”

“Alone,—so late at night? Why did you not have one of the orderlies escort you?”

“Borgert took me as far as the door; he offered to be my escort.” [156]

“Well, I’ll have to thank him for that to-morrow, and, come to think of it, he is always very attentive to you. Where did he go afterwards; I never set eyes on him again the whole night.”

“He complained of a headache, and seemed to have had enough of the whole show. I suppose he went to bed long ago.”

“Why didn’t you offer him a cup of coffee?”

“But, Franz, what would the servants think if they heard me coming home with a gentleman so late at night? That would never do. Our maid, Marie, anyway, is listening and spying continually, and one has to take care not to let her hear things. I presume she has been telling tales out of school as it is.”

“Send her away then, if you have no confidence in her.”

“I would have done it long ago, but I can’t let her go until we have paid her wages. We’re several months behind with her.”

“Then pay her to-morrow.”

“What with? Have you any money?”

“I? What an idea. You know perfectly well that the few marks of my pay could never keep this [157] household running. Hasn’t your mother sent the allowance this month?”

“No, she hasn’t anything to spare this time.”

“Oh, of course,—the old story.”

“Is that meant for reproach? You knew yourself that we were not rich. Do me the favor, therefore, to spare me your hints and complaints. I find them tactless and inappropriate at this late time.”

“Yes, you never want to hear about that. You ought to have known before you married me that to keep house without money is a beastly nuisance. Now we have this ceaseless dunning every day: one day it’s the butcher, the next the baker, and the day after the laundress,—and they all want money. I can’t cut it out of my hide.”

“But wasn’t it yourself who kept on urging and urging me until I promised to marry you? Didn’t you gainsay all my objections and insist on our marriage?”

“True enough; but you and your mother ought to have known better. You never ought to have consented, even if I was fool enough to insist on it. Your mother knew how much it costs to keep [158] house, and I didn’t. And now it is too late.”

“That I know myself, and you needn’t drive me crazy by constantly nagging at me. And it isn’t my fault, either; for if everything had turned out the way my mother desired, you would not have had to complain to-day that you are married to a woman without money. You were not the only one from whom I had proposals.”

“That you ought to have told me then,” replied her husband, with an ugly sneer. “I’m awfully sorry if I have interfered with your fine prospects.”

“You are more vulgar, Franz, than I thought you.”

“Oh, yes, women can never bear the truth. If one doesn’t flatter you the whole time and play on the tuneful lyre of love, you at once begin to find fault.”

“Well, I haven’t been surfeited with terms of affection by you.”

“That is merely because I don’t know how you have deserved them of me. Is it perhaps because I don’t know how to pay my shoemaker, or how to meet a whole bunch of bills that have come in [159] the last fortnight? Oh, what a fool I have been! Instead of leading this dog’s life with you, I might to-day attend the Academy of War and lead a decent existence.”

“Hold your tongue, you vulgar brute; you have no right to insult me! Leave my room, or I shall leave the house!”

“Instantly, and with the greatest pleasure, my gracious lady! Pleasant dreams to you!”

So saying, Leimann violently slammed the door behind him so that the windows shook, and then went to his own bedroom.

But his wife buried her face in the sofa cushions and sobbingly sought relief in tears. That gave a vent to her feelings of hatred and rage against her heartless husband. Her whole soul rebelled against this brutal man whom she had married because he had sworn on his knees to her that he could not live without her. And now he roughly stamped into the ground the affection which she once had borne him. He desecrated all those recollections which are so dear to a woman’s heart, and which at critical points in her life are meant to be a stay and a comfort, and to make the [160] burden of misfortune lighter to her.

And if, a short time before, when she had hastily parted from Borgert, she had felt something like remorse,—something of shame in having abused the confidence placed in her by her husband,—she now regarded herself as a victim, and her fault only in the light of a just revenge for his heartless conduct.

For at no time is the heart of woman more susceptible to temptation than at the moment when she feels herself betrayed and outraged in her best feelings.

Chapter VI [161]

A SENSATIONAL EVENT STIRS THE GARRISON

IT was plain daylight when the last guests left the Casino. Without exception, liberal indulgence in champagne and brandy had done its work, and the motley crowd that left the building thus “early” was in a decidedly boisterous mood, and the limits of decency and good manners had been passed by them hours before.

The nearby church bell struck the hour of seven as Captain Stark and his wife, as well as the colonel and his better half, climbed into the capacious vehicle that had been waiting for them at the door of the club-house for several hours. The horses had become stiff in the joints, and, with a cold and raw blustering wind to chill them, they were now forced to pull their heavy load on the miry highway leading toward town. The coachman had to use his whip freely to make the poor beasts break into a sorry trot; but at last the human load had been deposited before their doors. [162]

Lieutenant von Meckelburg and First Lieutenant Specht could scarcely keep on their legs; but, nevertheless, they walked straight from the Casino to the barracks, where they were to give, each of them, an hour’s instruction to the recruits. They quickly doffed their fantastic gear—the organ had been left behind by the lieutenant; but when they appeared before their pupils the latter could scarcely suppress a shout of laughter. For Specht had in his hurry forgotten to remove his artificial moustache, and this gave him such an unusual appearance that it was only when his voice, somewhat shaken by alcoholic excesses, met the soldiers’ ears that they felt sure whom they had before them. The “instruction” he thus imparted was certainly very far from enlightening their minds on the duties falling to the share of a defender of the fatherland.

Most of the other officers preferred, however, a good long sleep, and simply ignored the work of the day. It was only towards noon when the first captain showed his face at the barracks. [163]

Captain König and his faithful Lieutenant Bleibtreu were, in fact, the only officers of the whole regiment who attended to their duties in the forenoon, they having gone home at reasonable hours. Their principle was: first the work, and then the amusement.

Captain Hagemann showed himself in the streets, mounted on his favorite horse, as the noon hour struck. He had not yet recovered his equilibrium, and the horse seemed to appreciate that fact instinctively. He carried his master with such tender commiseration for the condition of the latter that he picked his way as carefully as if walking on ice.

Stark himself preferred to remain altogether at home. His “Kater”[15] was inexorable, and demanded a long, unbroken rest to find its way out of the muddled brain of its owner. His place in the regiment was, as usual, filled by his tireless lady. Holding her husband’s official note-book in her hand, she went her rounds, noticing the presence of all the men and non-commissioned officers, and making a black mark against the name of Lieutenant Kolberg, as he was absent [164] without leave.

At 1.30 she received a visit from Hagemann, who came to make most elaborate and humble excuses because he had been audacious enough to indulge in gibes at the expense of the doughty lady during the ball. In fact, while in the enterprising stage which forms so interesting a part of the effects produced on human bipeds by champagne, he had been bold enough to pay her some strongly ironical compliments in her capacity of “mermaid.” He had told her incidentally that she was eminently fitted for her part, as it was a well-known physiological fact that fat kept afloat on water. Frau Stark, who was proof at all times both against flattery and against the insinuating allurements of the foamy liquid, and who was as much matter-of-fact to-day as she had been the night before, merely deigned to accept these excuses with a small nod and a dry “That will do!”

Leimann, on his part, likewise started out on a tour of visits, the sole purpose of which was to offer much-needed explanations and apologies to nearly every member of the club whom he had offended more or less seriously during the period of his “howling desolation.” [165]

Night had come, in fact, when the larger number of the officers met at a solemn “Dämmerschoppen” at the Casino,—a process of applying hair of the dog that bit you to cure the injury. They discussed in voices still considerably husky and thick the doings and misdoings at the entertainment of the previous night. Criticism was applied freely to everybody who happened to be absent; but about Leimann judgment was unanimous: he was a beast.

It was Borgert’s part to report to the assembled “Corona,”[16] in his inimitable manner, about that part of the adventures of Kolberg and Frau Kahle which had come under his personal observation.

Nothing had escaped his lynx eye, and he related with great gusto what he had not failed to discover of the interesting proceedings in the arbor. Even the protection of the screen had not been sufficient to blind him.

While all these things were said about them, Kolberg and Frau Kahle were sitting near a good fire in his room, enjoying the renewal of their intimacy. [166]

On pretext of necessary purchases, she had escaped the vigilance of her husband, and under the protection of the dark had hastened to that end of the town and to the garden behind the walls of which stood the small house inhabited by Kolberg. Tall chestnut trees, throwing their shadows over its roof, gave it additional seclusion.

What was there really for her to make life enjoyable? Aside from walks in the woods nearby there was nothing to do for her the live-long day, so that she felt it a positive blessing to have, as often as circumstances would permit, a cosy tête-à-tête with Kolberg. Her husband, too, was not the kind of man a woman could be happy with. Hard drinking and interminable hours spent at the Casino were all he cared for. The estrangement between him and his wife had been almost complete even before Pommer, and now, since his going, Kolberg had crossed her path.

In this way passed several months. [167]

The secret of the intimate relations existing between Kolberg and Frau Kahle had slowly filtered down into all the strata of society represented in the little town, and they formed even one of the regular themes of conversation in the low-class dramshops on the outskirts of the town where the laboring population lived.

Even Kolberg’s comrades knew about it, but none of them felt rash enough to undertake mediation or interference in such a delicate matter where the tangible proofs seemed not within reach. It was to be expected, that if confronted with the facts of the case as far as these were palpable, both parties concerned would simply deny the damaging allegation, and in such a case the rôle of the advising friend might easily have become one of great difficulty. The accuser might then have been charged with assailing the honor of a lady of the regiment and that of a fellow-officer. Such a charge, in the absence of absolute proof, could have had but one issue. For who could tell whether the sole witness to some of the escapades of the two—that is, Kolberg’s man—would stick to his statements as soon as he should see that circumstances became serious? [168] Perhaps—and that seemed probable—he would entirely recant from fear of punishment for having secretly played the spy on his master. And suppose he then represented the facts in a more harmless light, who could gainsay him?

On the other hand, it was justly feared that the *dénouement* of this matter would raise much dust, and lead to the resigning of one comrade, to a serious duel, and to the disruption of another comrade’s household. And as Captain Kahle was rather popular with his comrades, because of his open-handedness and his easy good nature, nobody felt like opening his eyes to the miserable intrigue.

Therefore everything remained as it was, and only malignant gossip increased in volume, so that Captain König at last resolved to give the commander of the regiment a hint of affairs in a spirit of strict privacy.

But the colonel asked, as soon as the ticklish subject was broached:

“Do you report this to me officially? No? Well, then, I don’t want to know anything about it. I won’t burn my fingers in meddling with a matter of that kind.” [169]

König himself did not feel like becoming the instigator of a most disastrous scandal. After all, it was not primarily an affair where he ought to take the initiative, and this aside from the further consideration that he would probably become involved in a duel by taking the lead in exposing the guilty parties. He therefore also made up his mind to keep quiet.

Thus it was that nothing was done by anybody to put a stop to all this mischievous talk, and to put out of the world a matter which was of the greatest injury to the regiment and to the whole corps of officers,—a matter, too, in which the civilian population was perfectly justified in pointing the finger of scorn at them. And whereas in other circles, in civilian ones, the guilty parties would under similar circumstances have been called to account, in this instance a state of things was permitted to exist for a number of months which scandalized every decent person who, while forced by social conventions to meet the offenders on terms of equality, would have

entirely shunned them once proper steps were taken to conciliate outraged public opinion. And this was all the more reprehensible because it affected a caste which deems itself superior to any other within the monarchy, and which believes itself to be the guardian of good manners and morals, and of a high conception of honor. [170]

The largest measure of blame necessarily fell to the share of Colonel von Kronau. This gentleman, at all other times ready to proceed with stringent severity wherever he discovered slight breaches of discipline or of the mechanical details of drill, and who knew no clemency where nothing was to be feared for himself by playing the rigid taskmaster, in this instance tolerated this shameful thing; for he knew that interference in this particular would mean for him, in any case, serious inconvenience. Two things were possible. Either he would be charged with falsely accusing others, or else his position as commander would receive such a blow as to make it perhaps untenable, once his superiors should obtain knowledge of the actual state of affairs within the regiment. Neither of these contingencies was to his taste. [171]

It was, therefore, with great relief that he one day received the official notification of Captain Kahle's promotion to a majority, together with an order of the latter's transference to a garrison in South Germany. That, then, meant the longed-for end of this horrible business, and he doubly rejoiced that he had not acted on the spur of impulse; for he doubted not that, if he had, the outcome would not have been as favorable.

Kahle felt naturally greatly elated at his unexpectedly rapid promotion. At last he had reached the goal of his ambition. For many years, ever since he had entered the army as a beardless stripling, it had been his aim to attain to a commanding position. And once up the ladder as far as major,—the critical point in the career of every German army officer,—he could with confidence await further promotions in the course of time; for he was not devoid of talent in his profession, and had devoted much serious study and research to its higher spheres, although the benumbing effects of the dissolute and monotonous life in the little garrison had also had upon him decidedly deleterious effects. He had acquired drinking habits, and his domestic peace had, as he was aware, for some time suffered therefrom; but he felt sure that amid new and more inspiring surroundings he could pull himself together and become once more his old self of former days. Hence the new Major Kahle felt happy, and no cloud disturbed his serenity. He was going to a large and lively city, and both he and his wife would reap the advantages of that. There was quartered there a considerable body of troops of various branches of the service, and his intercourse would, in consequence, greatly widen, and so would that of his wife. His income would be much larger, and the social attractions offered in the new place,—such as diverse entertainments, concerts, a good theatre, and the opera,—would do much to restore that sense of contentment to his volatile spouse which she had seemed to lack for long. [172]

The day after his promotion had become public,—a "Liebesmahl"[17] assembled the entire corps of officers at the Casino. Specially to honor the departing major, the colonel had ordered full-dress uniform, and Kahle himself, a man of tall and commanding figure, made a fine show in all the glory of his orders, silver tassels, and broad stripes. [173]

After the second course the colonel arose and made an impressive speech in behalf of the departing comrade. In it he paid high tribute to the new major's popularity and to his eminent military virtues. At its close he handed to Kahle the usual silver tankard, bearing the initials and insignia of the regiment.

Kahle was greatly moved by these tokens of esteem, and he thanked the colonel in a short, manly way. In his farewell speech the joy of his promotion was the predominant note; but there was an undertone of sadness at parting, after so many years, from comrades and a garrison he had known so long. Often, it is true, he had sighed for a change, and there had been a good deal of worry and annoyance in this world-forgotten little town close to the French frontier; but now, when the hour of parting came, it cut him, nevertheless, to the quick to have to leave it all behind. Such is the weakness and inconsistency of frail human nature. [174]

Next day he left by the noon train, and the officers were assembled at the station in full force to bid him good-bye. Brief military leave-taking,—just a shake of the hand and a word or two. The colonel formally and affectionately kissed him on the cheek, and then Kahle bade leave to his wife and their little son. His heart was heavy, and it cost him something to conceal the tear which had stolen into a corner of his eye. He had fully resolved to make his married life hereafter a happier one, and to have once more a real home. It was this thought in his mind which made parting with his wife particularly cordial. He trusted that she would rid herself of those bad habits she had acquired here, and that different environs would soon sweep from her memory recollections of life in this little town, where he and she had been forced to spend the best years of their lives, at the frontier, *quasi* outcasts of the empire.

Until arrangements could be made by him for new and comfortable quarters in the garrison he was going to, Frau Kahle was to stay on here, and First Lieutenant Weil and wife had asked her, to make things pleasanter for her, to remain as a guest at their dwelling for the short intervening time. [175]

Joyfully Frau Kahle had accepted the friendly invitation. Thus she would have occasion thoroughly to enjoy herself with Kolberg until the hour of separation from him should strike. She felt with great relief that with her husband away she had no longer to give an account of her actions to anybody.

One day the Weil family were seated with their guest at table, when a military servant brought in a letter for Frau Kahle which the carrier had just left. She opened it, rapidly looked over its contents, and then put it away in the pocket of her robe, her cheeks reddening.

“Frau Pastor Klein is writing me to come and take a cup of coffee with her this afternoon, since she wants to see me once more before my going,—amiable of her, isn’t it? I think I will start at once, so as not to be too late.”

She arose, and sidled out of the room with a “Till this evening, then!”

A few minutes later Weil saw her hastening down the street in the direction of the town. [176]

“Strange!” he then said to his wife. “I don’t think she ever associated with her before, and scarcely knows her. I hope this is not one of madame’s little tricks.”

“Let her go where she will, Max,” retorted Frau Weil, indifferently. “It’s none of our affair. She will leave in a day or two, anyway, and, after all, she is responsible for her own actions.”

But Weil shook his head doubtfully and went to his study.

The clock on the mantel indicated eight, and Frau Kahle had not yet returned. They began to fear anxiety on the score of their guest. What could have happened to her?

The maid was just setting the table for the evening meal in the adjoining room when the couple were giving expression to their surmises, explaining in one way or another this prolonged absence.

“Minna,”—Frau Weil turned to the girl,—“I think you had better go to the house of Frau Pastor Klein and ask whether Frau Major Kahle is still there. I shall have no rest until I know what has [177] become of her.”

“I don’t think I shall find her at the Frau Pastor’s, gracious lady,” replied the girl, “for I saw the Frau Major up on the avenue, about half-past four, as I was fetching the milk, and the Frau Pastor lives right behind the church.”

“In that case there is no use in sending there,” and Frau Weil shrugged her shoulders.

“I think my idea will prove the right one,” said the first lieutenant,—“it was a mere pretext on her part. She did not want to tell us where she was really going. I have my own thoughts about the matter.”

“And what do you think, Max,” his wife asked, with some show of curiosity. “Where else could she be?”

“With Kolberg, of course.”

“But how can you say so, Max? I don’t suppose she....”

“Certainly she will! That is just what she is doing.”

Both became silent when the servant girl stepped in. She placed the teapot on the table, and then took a folded piece of paper from her pocket, and handed it to Weil with a peculiar smile. [178]

“Has this perhaps been dropped by either the Herr First Lieutenant or the gracious lady?”

And as Minna had again retired, the officer first gazed at the paper with eyes wide open, then he gave a scornful laugh and held it open to his wife.

“Here, my dear, will you not convince yourself? There it is in black and white.”

Frau Weil hesitatingly took the slip of paper from his hands and read:

> “Am expecting you to-day at 4.30, since I shall be engaged to-morrow in the service.”

Signature and address were wanting, but the writing was unmistakably Kolberg’s.

“Here it is,” said Weil. “That is her way of thanking us for offering her our hospitality,—just lying to us, and trying to befool us for no other purpose than to permit her to continue her disgraceful conduct. Didn’t I at once say it would be better not to have her come? But you, of course, insisted on inviting her. If you had listened to me, we should now be spared the [179] disagreeable necessity of throwing that woman out.”

“But for heaven’s sake, Max, that you can’t do. Throw the note into the fire!”

“I’ll do nothing of the kind,” her husband flared up. “I shall certainly throw her out of the house! Or do you suppose I’m going to make our home a convenient shelter for depraved women? Let her see where she will find another refuge. As for me, I respectfully decline the honor of harboring her any longer as our guest; and this note will not go into the fire, but, instead, where it belongs,—before a Council of Honor!”

The young officer was in a great state of excitement. With rapid strides he measured the room, burying his hands in his pockets. His dark look betrayed indignation and resolve.

“If you will take my advice,” his soft-hearted spouse said, with some trepidation, “you will put that bit of paper into the stove and keep quiet about the whole matter. She is to join her husband

in another two days, anyway, and then there would be an end to her intrigues in any case. Do me the favor, my dear Max, and leave your fingers out of that pie, for there will be nothing but [180] disagreeable consequences awaiting you if you don't. And then, another thing, think of the poor major!" And the little woman had actually tears in her eyes.

But that stubborn husband of hers proved inexorable.

"I shall do what I said I was going to do, and that's all there is about it. These are matters you don't understand. I won't quietly look on while this person continues her miserable intrigue with that scoundrel, Kolberg,—at least not while she is in my house. She ought to have had enough decency remaining to have left off meeting him while being the guest of honest people. That is beastly; it's worse than beastly,—hoggish, I may say!"

Frau Weil did not insist any longer. She knew her husband, knew his strictness in such matters, and also knew that the more she would plead with him the more fixed his purpose would become; but her forehead became rumpled with unpleasant thoughts, and she sat down before the glowing coal in the grate, in a brown study. [181]

Her husband meanwhile continued to pace the carpet, reflecting on what steps he had best decide.

At last the maid came into the room once more, and said, with a mien of ill-concealed curiosity:

"Madam is served!"

"Tell us, Minna, where did you find that letter?" said the officer to her.

"I found it lying in the hall under the hat-rack; I presume it must have dropped out of somebody's pocket."

"Very well; you may go."

Silently the couple sat down to table. Weil's face was clouded, and his wife scarcely looked up from her plate. She lifted her glance to him, however, with considerable anxiety when the hall door was heard to open, and Frau Kahle's voice became audible.

"She is coming, Max! Now, for pity's sake, don't make a scene! Think of the servants who will be sure to listen and to spread everything that's said."

But Weil did not answer, neither did he look at the door when it now opened and gave admission to the Frau Major. Her face was rosy with excitement, and her eyes were gleaming in [182] humid tenderness.

"Good evening, both of you!" she cried gayly, her voice trembling with suppressed agitation. "I hope you will pardon the delay; but Frau Pastor Klein pressed me so much to drive with her over to the city that I could not resist, and that is how it became so late. But it was delightful,—my afternoon with her. We were at a café, and made a number of purchases."

Weil arose stiffly and faced his guest.

"Madam," said he, with quiet dignity, "it is useless for you to try to deceive us as to the purpose of your absence this afternoon. The letter which reached you while at table with us, and which has come into our hands by accident, proves in the most unmistakable manner that you have abused our hospitality most grossly. May I request you to leave this house as soon as ever you can, but certainly no later than to-morrow morning? I must beg that you will leave us undisturbed for the remainder of the evening." [183]

He ceremoniously bowed, and then took his seat once more at table.

Frau Kahle remained for a moment as if petrified in the semi-obscurity of the room. Then she hastily seized her châtelaine bag. Her hand tremblingly fingered its contents, and then she turned to the door and went out, slamming it behind her. The footfall of her retreating steps could be heard in the direction of her own room.

After supper the first lieutenant stepped up to his writing-desk, lit the green shaded lamp, and sat down on a stool before it. Next he selected a large sheet of official note-paper, dipped his pen, and leaned back and reflected.

For some time he thus concentrated his thoughts, and at last began to write.

His spouse, meanwhile, with anxious aspect, sat on the sofa near a small table, busy with some embroidery, her fingers mechanically travelling to and fro; but every little while she cast a troubled glance towards her husband, whose pen went scratch, scratch, over the paper.

At last he had finished the letter. Weil reclined pensively in his chair, and slowly read over and [184] over what he had written. He made no alterations, but folded Frau Kahle's note up with his own, and then enclosed both in a large yellow envelope, sealing it in the proper way.

Then he locked up the document in a drawer of his desk, blew out the lamp, and took a seat on the sofa next to his wife, perusing attentively a newspaper.

Frau Kahle departed the following morning by an early train. Nobody, not even the orderly, knew her destination. He had taken her trunk to the station, but she had not told him a word as

to her future intentions. And neither by letter nor by word of mouth had she left a word of thanks or apology for her late hosts.

At noon of the same day Lieutenant Kolberg, whose mind not even the faintest suspicion of these latest developments of his intrigue had crossed, was ordered to appear forthwith before the commander. The latter, dryly and without comment, informed him that proceedings had been begun against him before the Council of Honor, and that until further notice he would be excused from service.

[185] There was much excitement within the body of officers. In their secret hearts every one of them was glad that in the deadening monotony of their garrison life this affair, painful as it was, was now assuming tangible proportions. For not a single one of them had any kindly feeling for Kolberg, whose secretive disposition and whose absence from nearly all joint festivities at the Casino had rendered him unpopular, and Frau Kahle herself was scarcely better liked, desperate flirt as she was.

It was because of this that none of the officers, least of all Borgert, refrained from criticising in a most uncompromising spirit both Kolberg and his paramour. And Weil's proceedings were unanimously adjudged perfectly correct. The remarks made in regard to this whole matter were by no means couched in such terms as might have been expected from his Majesty's officers of the army when applied to comrades. In fact, hard names were used, and everybody proclaimed aloud his intention severely to cut "the vulgar beast" and "that coarse woman."

[186] Colonel von Kronau had had a great fright when Captain Stark, as president of the Council of Honor, had handed him in the morning that document which had given Weil so much anxious thought. He ruminated and lugubriously pondered what had best be done in this unfortunate affair in order to end it with the least amount of scandal; but his cogitations were in vain. The matter had been brought formally to the attention of the Council of Honor, and, according to the strict wording of the instructions provided, there was no squelching or modification of the proceedings possible. He had to be satisfied, therefore, to curse most heartily the author of the fatal document,—First Lieutenant Weil,—and to give him in his thoughts a big black mark in the next conduct list.

A most unwelcome business, indeed. Already he saw himself superintending the unloading of hay-carts on that estate of his, far off in the eastern, semi-civilized districts of the realm.

But it was poor Major Kahle who would suffer most of all. After attaining at last the goal of his desires, all his aspirations were to be nipped in the bud by the misdemeanor of his wife. He had no idea where she was now; she had preferred not to venture near him in leaving the garrison, since she did not feel sure of a cordial reception on his part. Hence she had sent her little son to [187] her parents, while she herself had taken up quarters in Berlin. Her chief amusement just now consisted in the inditing of innumerable letters to Kolberg, full of reproaches for "having succeeded by his diabolical arts in alienating her affections from her husband," while the leisure she could spare from these epistolary efforts was devoted to roaming that broad international thoroughfare, Unter den Linden, which presented to her, after her long "exile" close to the frontier, a striking and highly appreciated contrast.

Kahle was firmly resolved to show the door to his faithless wife if she should dare present herself before him; meanwhile he took preliminary steps to obtain a legal separation from her.

But there was another thought heavy on his mind. It was the unavoidable duel. Because his wife had deceived him, the army code forced him to next expose himself to the bullet of her seducer, instead of simply expelling the latter from the army and giving him a much-needed period of reflection in jail. [188]

He was expected to "save the honor of his wife" by mortal combat.

What an absurdity! he thought to himself. Is there any honor left in a wife who deceives her husband? A coquette she was, heartless and honorless, nothing more, and yet he must risk his life in defence of a thing which did not exist any longer, and which, he now strongly suspected, had from the first been nothing but a delusion on his part—her honor! What a ludicrous farce!

And he began to reflect whether there was not some way in which he could escape this impending duel. Not because he was a coward or afraid of death; no, he was brave enough, but he could not see why he should expose to blind chance not only the fruits of his own arduous life, but also the future of his son, merely because another man had acted in a despicable manner. It was quite possible that his adversary might kill him in this duel. In that case he, the innocent party, would suffer the supreme penalty which man can suffer,—death,—and the criminal himself would go off scot-free.

[189] But reflection showed him clearly that there was no way to avoid mortal combat, for, if he refused or neglected to send a challenge to the other, the Council of Honor was bound under the code to dismiss him from the army, because, forsooth, he did not know how to "protect the honor of the profession." On the other hand, if he did this prescribed duty of "honor," and fought this duel and escaped being wounded or killed, a term of confinement in a fortress awaited him. The latter seemed to him the lesser of two evils, but he now made up his mind to show no consideration to the man who had destroyed the peace of his home, and who was likely to destroy his existence. He would demand the most severe conditions for this duel, and he would not scruple to send a bullet crashing into his antagonist's brain if his arm were steady enough, or

else let the scoundrel deprive him of his life as well,—a life which would hereafter be a burden to him.

The proceedings and investigations of the Council of Honor required several months. Things were unearthed which to the younger officers of the garrison seemed very interesting, but which threw a dubious light upon Lieutenant Kolberg and his conceptions of honor and comradeship. [190]

The behavior, too, of the corps of officers underwent a change during this time.

At first all the officers had shunned Kolberg, and he was only occasionally seen in the environs of the garrison when exercising his horses.

But one day Borgert was in severe financial straits, and then, all his other sources failing, he had repaired to Kolberg for the money as a last resort. And Kolberg on his part had been shrewd enough to use the opportunity to place Borgert under obligations, for he knew the latter's influence on his younger comrades. Therefore, Kolberg managed to raise the thousand marks needed, and put himself at Borgert's disposal for future occasions of the kind.

The result of this manœuvre could have been foreseen. Within a few days Borgert had changed his tune in regard to Kolberg's character and failings. At the Casino table he now sang his praises, lauded the fine qualities of comradeship possessed by Kolberg, and condemned the view taken by the superior officers of the lieutenant's guilt, doing all this in his effective manner, half [191] banter, half bonhomie; so that the disgraced one, although not doing actual duty, became suddenly a well-received guest at the social functions in the Casino; and not alone that, he also assumed successfully the part of host himself, in the much-talked-of little garden-house under the chestnut trees.

Kolberg could even go so far as to brag at his own table, while champagne from his cellars was flowing and his guests smoked his fragrant Havanas, of the prowess to be shown by him at the prospective duel. He applied names like "*Dämelsack*"[18] to Kahle, of whom he vowed to "make short work." In that way he not only silenced all his former detractors, but actually became the lion of the garrison—a dashing fellow, who had made the conquest of a lady's heart, while others had to be satisfied with lesser game.

He began to sing small, however, when he one day received Kahle's challenge:

"Fifteen paces distance, visored duelling pistols, and an exchange of bullets to the point of incapacitating one or both parties."

That he had not expected. Why, this was murder, he said, and the issue of the forthcoming duel [192] now became suddenly rather doubtful to him; all the more as the major was known to be a good shot, and his reputation as an excellent Nimrod was known beyond the confines of the garrison.

So, then, Kolberg earnestly began to train for the meeting. Day after day he could be seen issuing forth for a walk into the woods nearby, for pistol practice. Scores of trees soon bore the traces of his bullets. When the day of battle would come he meant to be prepared to face his adversary well equipped.

Sometimes, when he sent leaden pellets, one after the other, into his targets, the thought would occur to him that really he ought not to hit the major, since he had sinned against him and betrayed his trust. It was something like the last flickerings of a feeling of duty which had dwindled for years in the slow process of moral decadence: the last flutterings of a guilt-laden conscience and of a sense of justice. These dim emotions, however, were drowned by a more powerful sentiment: his newly awakened love of life, the primal feeling of self-preservation, which [193] seized him all the harder the more he began to muse about the possibility of having to lose a life which offered so much that was worth living for. An inner voice called to him: "Thou shalt not die! Life is sweet!"

And there was only one way of carrying out his purpose,—to kill his man.

In this way, with delays and supplementary investigation, four months elapsed. Then at last the Council of Honor pronounced its sentence. Kolberg was dismissed from the service; but, along with the formal request to his Majesty to confirm the sentence, went a unanimously signed petition for his reinstatement.

The proposed duel was likewise sanctioned, but not under the conditions proposed by Kahle. Perhaps it was feared that a fatal ending to the duel, such as the very stringent conditions seemed to make almost unavoidable, would raise too much dust. For quite recently there had been several cases of a similar nature, and the death of one of the duellists had had the most [194] disagreeable consequences for those high-commanding officers who had neither attempted to modify the conditions of combat nor endeavored to bring about reconciliation.

Thus it was that the new terms of the challenge were: thirty-five paces distance and one exchange of bullets; ordinary pistols.

Kahle, then, was to be given no opportunity to punish as he deserved the disturber of his domestic peace, because superior officers did not wish to bring unpleasant consequences upon themselves; for the duel, as now arranged for under these altered terms, he regarded as a mere farce, and a possible fatal issue could be nothing but the work of blind accident.

Borgert had been requested by Kolberg to serve as his second, and the former readily agreed

to this; for on the one hand he liked to play the rôle of an onlooker in such an affair, and on the other he deemed it prudent to put Kolberg under a new obligation; all the more as the repaying of his loans seemed as far off as ever. [195]

On the eve of his leaving for that city in South Germany where the meeting was to take place, Kolberg once more assembled his faithful admirers in his quiet little garden-house. His invitations had been for a banquet, washed down with some of his choicest wines. The drinking on that occasion was so hard that Kolberg himself became completely intoxicated, and when his guests left he was snoring in a drunken stupor on his lounge. The train left early, and Kolberg's man had a hard task in rousing his master sufficiently at the proper time to hastily prepare him for his long journey.

Borgert had been in a similar plight. As he stood on the station platform a few minutes before the train rolled in, he felt as if he had only just now risen from his chair at the festive board.

As he confided this impression to his principal, Kolberg, he did not forget to mention incidentally that, "of course," he had forgotten to take his purse along. With a show of assumed indifference he stuffed the two "blue rags" into his watchpocket, Kolberg having fished the bills [196] with trembling fingers out of his own wallet, and a silent pressure of the hand was the only thing Kolberg was ever to receive in lieu thereof.

They arrived at Kahle's garrison in due time, still in a somewhat dazed condition. Kahle's second had attended to all the preliminaries of the duel. It was a cold morning when two cabs rolled out of the town on their way to the garrison shooting stands, where the bloody meeting was to take place.

The sun was just peeping over the backs of the mountains to the east, and sent his first oblique rays down upon the hoar-frosted stubble fields.

Peacefully Nature spread her autumnal robe, and in the forest deep silence reigned. The only sound, now and then, was the fluttering of a dead leaf seeking its bed of repose on the bare earth.

In the first cab sat Kolberg, Borgert, and two surgeons, while the second was occupied by Kahle, his second, and the two members of the Council of Honor, who were to witness the duel as impartial judges. Beneath the rear seat lay the case of pistols. From the highroad the vehicles [197] turned into a side path, so narrow that the branches of the trees standing to right and left frequently beat against the cab panes.

They reached their destination,—an opening in the woods. It was here, secluded from all curious and observant eyes, that the officers of the nearby garrison went to settle their "affairs of honor." The occupants of both vehicles descended and ordered the drivers to ride back to the edge of the woods, and there await their return.

The case containing the pistols was placed on a slight eminence, and the seconds took out the weapons; then these were loaded, and both pistols underwent an examination by the seconds.

The surgeons took off their coats, spread out their instruments, and made ready strips of bandage. Meanwhile the judges had measured the proper distance and had firmly planted their swords at either end, to mark the terminal points. This was accomplished with some difficulty, as the ground was frozen hard. [198]

The customary formal attempt to effect a reconciliation was ineffectual, of course, and so the two principals took their stands at the indicated points.

Kahle looked pale; he trembled with the cold, and his nervously-twitching features betrayed intense agitation.

Kolberg, on the contrary, was almost smiling, and threw away with a careless gesture the stub of the cigarette he had been smoking until the last.

One of the judges explained briefly the order of combat, saying that the shots must be fired between the words "one" and "three." A moment later he commanded:

"Ready!"

Both men held their pistols pointed towards the ground, in order to raise them immediately on the word "one."

Simultaneously with "two" Kahle fired, and the ball struck with a slight noise the bark of a beech tree, a step or two to the left of and above his adversary, while a small twig fell rattling from overhead. Kahle's unsteady hand had given his pistol a slight upward turn, so that he had [199] missed his prey.

Kolberg, however, stood throughout firm and motionless, and took steady aim, so that with "three" the trigger of his pistol fell.

Kahle looked unflinchingly at the small black mouth of the pistol pointing at him, but at the shot he opened his eyes wide, lurched heavily, and fell headlong.

A cold tremor ran down Kolberg's spine as he saw the tall, powerful man pitch forward, and for a moment he remained, his smoking pistol lifted, rooted to the spot. Then the weapon slipped

from his hand.

The others, however, immediately ran towards the major, and the surgeons tore open his coat.

There was a small hole in his chest, and the blood began to ooze from it.

Kahle had lost consciousness for a second only. Now he lay there, pale, and gazing steadily at the men busily engaged about him.

Kolberg also approached, holding out his hand in token of amity; but he quickly withdrew his hand and retreated out of sight, for a cold, repellent look from Kahle's eyes had met his. From [200] some short distance in the rear, out of the reach of those severe eyes, he attentively viewed his prostrate foe; then he turned on his heels and made off through the woods, towards the cabs.

The major's wound, however, was found to be not fatal, although the bullet had grazed the lungs, and a long time would have to elapse before he would be up and about once more.

One of the cabs was driven up and the major carefully lifted into it. The two surgeons accompanied him inside, while his second occupied the place next the driver. Thereupon they drove back at a slow gait to the city, where the injured man was to be at once taken to the hospital.

After he had taken farewell from the two judges as the vehicle reached the outskirts of the town, Borgert, who remained with Kolberg, slapped the latter encouragingly on the shoulder and said:

"Don't make such a wry face, man alive! Be satisfied that you got off with a whole skin. Of course, it was rough on the poor devil that you happened to hit him in the chest; but that's [201] something you are not responsible for; after all, the challenge came from him. And now let's have a good breakfast, for my stomach rebels against this raw air. I am not accustomed to knock about the woods so early in the morning."

"I feel sincerely sorry that I hit the major so unluckily," replied Kolberg; "but I didn't mean to, and the devil take the women! It's always their doing. I don't know anyway what made me take up with that silly Kahle woman!"

"Don't bother your head about that, my dear fellow," said Borgert. "The major alone is to blame, for he ought to have looked out better for that handsome wife of his. And as for her, she is not worth a thought, as we all know. One must treat a woman as she deserves."

Borgert's specious eloquence succeeded in a short while in dispelling the clouds from Kolberg's face, for to his callous perceptions all that the other had said was true. That there were heartless and vulgar sentiments contained in Borgert's words he neither understood nor cared about. [202]

So these worthy twain proceeded to their hotel, donned citizens' clothes, and then repaired to a fashionable restaurant. The waiters received them with sleepy eyes, being just engaged in putting the place to rights; for it was still very early in the day, and they looked at their guests with something of amazement.

The two officers started in on their round of dissipation with several glassfuls of neat brandy, and wound up, late at night, in a resort of doubtful repute. Whoever might have observed them throughout the day, joking and jesting, could not have helped the conclusion that these two had clearly forgotten the events of the morning, and that they had recovered, together with their peace of mind, that superficial good humor which so often distinguishes the conscienceless rascal from the man of finer mould.

Next day, at noon, our two heroes arrived at their garrison. They were received with open arms by a number of their comrades, for the rumor of what had occurred had preceded them. [203]

A group of officers, in fact, stood on the platform of the little station as they left their train, and after much handshaking and congratulations, all of them accompanied Kolberg to his dwelling, there to celebrate his triumph in a "drop" of choice wine.

But there were some of the officers, especially the elder ones, who censured Kolberg for his heartless behavior. Several of them even went so far as to say that it would have been more fitting for him to have remained alone just at this time, and to make amends for his past follies by a term of undisturbed self-inspection; this new orgy they thought, above all, indecent and coarse.

Two days afterward the confirmation of the sentence pronounced in his case by the Council of Honor arrived from Berlin. With it came likewise the permission for Kolberg to enter the army anew as a junior lieutenant. That, however, meant his transference to another garrison, for in this one there was no room for him. Before he could start his career afresh in a beautiful city by the [204] Rhine, Kolberg had to comply with one other little formality, and that took him to a fortress where he had to undergo confinement of an easy description, and lasting only for a couple of months, because he had been guilty of "participation in a duel with deadly weapons," as his Majesty's decree read.

The major recovered very slowly. The difficult operation undertaken by two regimental surgeons of removing the bullet imbedded near the spinal column had not entirely succeeded. The bullet had indeed been removed, but inflammation of the affected parts had set in, and this had been accompanied with great pain and a high fever.

It was only towards the close of winter that the major was dismissed from the hospital as a convalescent. His health and his energy were both gone, and he was compelled to resign his commission in the army, his strength being insufficient to discharge the duties of his post.

He also had been sentenced to a three months' term in a fortress in consonance with the invariable custom followed in such cases by the Kaiser, which makes no distinction between offender and offended, between victim and aggressor. But in this instance a confinement of a few days was considered ample, and at the expiration of this brief term the imperial pardon reached the broken-down man, and he was permitted to depart to wherever his inclination might take him. [205]

Kahle thus saw his life's labor destroyed. As a man who had scarcely reached forty, yet with his physical strength nearly spent, he had to face the question how and where he was to carve out a new field of activity for himself. His small pension was wholly insufficient to enable him to even eke out an existence on it, and he had, besides, by the decree of the court, been intrusted with the sole custody of his child. This, while it gave him at least an object in life, was for a man in his circumstances an additional grave burden; for his little son was still of that tender age to require a woman's constant ministrations.

The small fortune which his divorced wife had brought into their marriage had, of course, been handed back to her by the law. [206]

And why had all this misfortune overtaken him?

Because the army code and social conventions had bidden him to save as much of the "honor" of his wife as he could. To this mistaken idea he had been sacrificed.

And Kolberg was domiciled by the vine-clad borders of the Rhine, and in his new garrison led a life as dissipated and as free of care as he had in his former one.

FOOTNOTES:

[15] "Kater," a slang term for the demoralized condition consequent upon alcoholic overindulgence.—Tr.

[16] "Corona," meaning all the drinkers present; a student's expression.—Tr.

[17] "Liebesmahl," a fraternal banquet arranged, on special occasions, by the officers of a garrison or of a regiment for the purpose of celebrating joyous events.—Tr.

[18] "Dämelsack"—a low term of opprobrium.—Tr.

Chapter VII [207]

AN AIRY STRUCTURE COLLAPSES

SEATED at his desk in his elegantly furnished apartments, we see First Lieutenant Borgert.

Before him lay a large sheet of paper covered with rows of figures, and all around him whole mountains of documents, bills, and vari-colored envelopes.

One after another he took up these bits of paper, and from them noted down amounts on the big sheet. He had already reached the third column when he suddenly ceased his labors and threw the pencil disgustedly away. Then he grasped the whole pile and threw it into the fire, where in a few moments it was consumed in the leaping flame and reduced to a tiny mass of ashes.

His laudable purpose had been to go through all the claims against him, so far as they had been presented. Usually his simple method was to throw bills, as they reached him, into the stove; but for once he had been curious to find out how much he really owed in the world, or at least to gain an approximate idea of his indebtedness. [208]

But we have seen that he gave it up as an impossible task. To tread the mazes of these bundles of dunning letters, plaints, simple bills, and formal orders issued to him by the colonel to discharge certain debts submitted to his authority, was more than Borgert felt himself equal to, especially as the conviction had very soon dawned on him that his was labor lost. This much had become quite clear: to pay his debts was impossible, for their total rose far and away above his surmises. When he had left off in sheer disgust, the neat little sum of eleven thousand marks had been reached, and to that had to be added the other mountain of bills which he had just consigned to the flames.

Most of all, the seven hundred marks which he owed to Captain König lay on his conscience; but there were some other items that pressed him hard, for they were "debts of honor,"

contracted with his equals in the social scale; and the first of these, amounting to two thousand three hundred marks, was due in about six weeks. How and where should he raise these large amounts? [209]

He began to reflect. The furniture had already been saddled with a chattel mortgage, one of his horses even been mortgaged twice, and for the other, his former charger, he probably would not get more than three hundred marks, and that was nothing but a drop on a hot stone. Of his comrades there was none remaining with whom an attempt to borrow would have had the slightest prospect of success,—possibly König alone excepted. But should he go to him again with such a request? It could not be easily done,—at least not before the old item of seven hundred marks had been paid back. The only safety anchor he could think of was a formal request for a large loan from a Berlin usurer with a large clientèle in the army. In fact, he had tried it; but the fellow had not yet been heard from, although three weeks had gone since this same individual had been furnished with a surety given by First Lieutenant Leimann, and with a life insurance [210] policy in the amount of twenty thousand marks.

For the moment nothing could be done. He would try to pacify in some way the most pressing of his creditors, and to pay in small instalments only those who either should begin legal proceedings against him, or lodge their complaints with the regiment. Perhaps—who could tell?—an undiscovered source might open somewhere; perhaps luck at the cards, so long unfaithful to him, would return, or one of his many tickets in various state lotteries would draw a big prize. And who could tell but what the biggest prize of all, a wealthy bride with a good fat dowry, might not fall to his share? He had formal applications of the kind on file with several of the most prominent and successful marriage agencies at the capital and elsewhere, and only recently one of these centres for the radiation of connubial bliss, so much in vogue with his kind throughout the empire, had been heard from to some apparent purpose.

"Quite a bundle of bright hopes," he said to himself, and with that his plastic mind resumed its [211] equilibrium. His good humor returned, he lit himself a cigarette, and whistled a gay tune, while pacing the thick Smyrna rugs in the centre of his study.

His alert ear heard a whispering in the corridor. He discerned the soft tread of nimble feet on the hall carpet, and then there was a knock at his door.

That must be Frau Leimann, he thought to himself, for she frequently paid him hasty visits at the afternoon tea hour, because at that time her husband used to go to the "*Dämmerschoppen*."

To his "Come," however, a poorly clad woman with a basket on her arm stepped over the threshold. Her youthful face showed already the unmistakable stamp which care and sorrow had imprinted on it, and she gazed shyly at the officer who had remained standing in the centre of the room, whence he eyed his visitor with undisguised displeasure.

"And what is it you want again, Frau Meyer?" he blurted. "I've told you once before that I will give you no more washing to do."

"I beg the Herr First Lieutenant will excuse me, but I wanted to ask whether I cannot have to- [212] day those forty marks, or at least a part of them. I badly need money, for my husband has been lying sick for three weeks past and is unable to work."

"Oh, bother!" replied Borgert, roughly. "Come back to-morrow night; I have no small change about me, and I haven't any time to spare."

"But I hope you will keep faith with me this time, Herr First Lieutenant; you have promised so often to pay me."

With that she diffidently opened the door and left, but Borgert undid one of the windows and let the pure autumn air stream in. The odor of these poverty-stricken wretches was insupportable to him. Disgusting! He took from a carved cabinet on the wall a large perfume bottle, and sprinkled a good portion of its contents upon the costly rugs and the upholstery of his furniture. Then he rang the bell for his servant.

The man stepped in briskly. It was Private Röse, whom the captain no longer wanted in the front, since he had proven unreliable, and with his deficient conceptions of military discipline [213] would only be an injury to the squadron.

"What did I order you to do, you swine?" the officer shouted.

"I was to let nobody in without being announced," answered Röse with diffidence; "but the woman passed me by, and I could not hinder her from going in."

"Then throw the carrion out, thou sloppy beast! The first time somebody is let in again without my consent, I'll cowhide you within an inch of your life!"

In saying which, he struck Röse with both fists in the face, then thrust open the door and kicked him out.

"If the hag should come back to-morrow night, you tell her I've just gone out!" he called after him.

Borgert had just seated himself, with a newspaper, by the window when the floor bell once more sounded. It was a short, energetic tinkle. The servant came in and announced, with a face

still wet with tears:

"A gentleman would like to see the Herr First Lieutenant!" [214]

"What is his name? I told you always to get the name first."

The man left the room, but immediately returned.

"He will not give me his name, but he says he must speak with the Herr First Lieutenant in any event."

"Then ask him in!"

A moment later a man stepped in, carrying a large wallet under his arm, and introduced himself,—"Bailiff Krause."

"Begging the Herr First Lieutenant's pardon in case I should disturb him, but I have a mandate from the court. Please, here it is!"

And he took from his wallet a voluminous envelope and handed it to Borgert, who, however, did not lose his presence of mind, and answered in a pleasant tone:

"Ah, I know. Has already been settled yesterday; for I presume it is for that small amount which I owe to my tailor."

"As far as I know, Herr First Lieutenant, it is about the matter of the firm of Froehlich & Co., the sum demanded, on bills of exchange signed by you, being four thousand marks, for furniture [215] sold and delivered."

"Oh, that's it! The firm might have spared itself that trouble; the whole amount was transmitted by my bank day before yesterday."

"So much the better, then," jested the official. "I have the honor."

"Farewell, Herr Krause; I would say *au revoir*, but your visit always means a doubtful pleasure."

When the man was gone, Borgert tore open the envelope and scanned the contents of the document it contained.

That was a most disagreeable business. The furniture had not yet been paid for, but already mortgaged, although the explicit terms of the contract forbade his doing so until after payment in full to the merchant had made the whole his own property.

Four thousand marks! A heap of money! He would have to speak to Leimann; perhaps he could do something.

Then suddenly he remembered that the bailiff had not passed out into the street through the [216] front garden. He called his servant and asked him:

"Where did the man go to?"

"Upstairs, Herr First Lieutenant."

"To Leimann's?"

"Just so, Herr First Lieutenant."

Well, now, what had he to do up there? Could it be possible that they also were in his toils? That indeed would be bad, for Leimann had, in spite of all, remained something like an aid and help to him in becoming surety for payments promised or in calming obstreperous creditors.

Meanwhile Herr Krause handed to Frau Leimann, scared almost out of her wits, the summons in an action begun by the firm of Weinstein & Co., to which she owed a matter of four hundred marks for a silk robe furnished by them.

She was in despair, and scurried to and fro in the room, vainly cudgelling her brain for an idea that would bring her succor. What could she do? Where should she get the money? She would go to Borgert and ask him for the amount. But what would he think of her? Would he not lose all respect for her? [217]

For a moment she stood undecided in her room, and pressed both hands against her wildly beating heart. Then she went resolutely to the door and hastened down the back stairs.

She found Borgert musing in an easy-chair, and he did not even rise when she entered, but merely waved his hand in greeting to her. But she stepped up to him and kissed him tenderly on the forehead, and then she sat down close by him. He was puzzled by her demeanor, and looked up questioningly into her face.

"What kind of visitors do you receive nowadays?" he said pleasantly.

"I? Visitors?" Frau Leimann retorted with some embarrassment. "I have received nobody,—truly not, nobody."

And while she said it her eyes wandered about the room without meeting his.

“You have received no visitor? Oh, but that is a big fib!”

“Why should you say so, George; who should have been to see me?”

“Well, I merely thought a certain Herr Krause called on you.” [218]

“How do you know that?” she cried, startled by his knowledge.

“I know everything, my child; even that the bailiff was just in to see you.”

Frau Leimann was covered with confusion, and mechanically began to fondle the seam of her little silk apron.

“Well, if you know, it is unnecessary for me to tell you. Yes, he was to see me.”

“And what did he want?”

The pretty woman told him the details. With a tear-choked voice she exclaimed:

“I am lost if my husband hears of it!”

“But I don’t see. If he has bought it he must, of course, pay for the dress.”

“He knows of nothing. I had to have the dress, the red silk, you know. I told him at that time that my mother had sent it; for he would have refused me, and I had to have it, and so I took it on my own account.”

“That was very stupid of you. Where will you take the money from now?”

“I really don’t know. Cannot you help me?”

“I will go to those people and ask them for time.” [219]

“There would be no use in doing that, George; I must have the cash. I need at least a thousand marks, for I have to pay for other things as well—the dressmaker, the hair-dresser, the shoemaker, etc. Get me the money, George, and show me that you really love me as much as you always say you do.”

“I?” Borgert set up an unpleasant laugh. “Good heavens, I don’t know myself what is to become of me.”

“How so? Are you in debt too?”

“If you would take the trouble to devote some attention to that big sheet of paper over there on my desk, you might be able to tell. That sort of thing I get every day.”

Frau Leimann stepped up to the desk, unfolded the big sheet, and stared with wide-open eyes at the formidable columns.

“Why, I had no idea of this, George! What is to become of all this? You were my only reliance, and now I am entirely undone.”

She sank, sobbing, down on the divan and covered her face with both hands.

“Don’t lose courage at once, you little goose; you won’t die for the lack of these few hundred marks!” Borgert consoled her, affectionately passing his hand over her blonde hair. “I will see what can be done, and in a week’s time you’ll have your thousand marks.” [220]

For an answer she put her arms passionately around Borgert’s neck, and thanked him.

“I knew that you would not leave me in the lurch, thou best one!”

When Leimann returned home about eight o’clock, he found all the rooms dark and silent.

To his question about his wife the maid answered:

“The gracious lady has gone out.”

“Where to?”

“I do not know, Herr First Lieutenant!”

He lit a lamp and then went to the letter-box to ascertain whether anything had arrived by the evening mail. He found two letters with bills inside, amounting to over six hundred marks.

He did a little grumbling to himself, and then locked up the two “rags” in his desk.

In doing so he noticed a large yellow envelope. Supposing it to be an official letter, he seized it, intending to open it. But he found that it had been already opened, and his curiosity grew as he drew from it three large sheets. [221]

Without at first catching its purport, he gazed at the clerical handwriting in it, and then he sat down at the table and read the whole document from beginning to end.

Ah, indeed, his wife too? Why, that was quite a charming surprise! If her funds were running so low as to oblige her to contract debts it would be vain, he thought, to expect any help from his mother-in-law, and yet he had always counted on her as a last resort. In a rage he flung the summons and the legal statement into a corner and went up and down in the room, musing on the financial embarrassment of his wife.

Probably Frau Leimann had heard the steady tramp of his feet through the ceiling, for now she entered with exuberant excuses.

"My dear George," said she, breathlessly, "I had a pressing engagement with my dressmaker, and I ran after you in the street. I saw you passing before me, but I could not catch up with you." [222]

"What did you have to do with your dressmaker?" Leimann confronted her furiously.

"What else should I have had to do there than business for which I pay her? She is making a riding-habit for me!"

"You had better first pay for your old rubbish before ordering any new gear!" shouted he.

"Why this tone to me? And who tells you that I do not pay my bills? You think, I suppose, that I'm squandering my money as you are squandering yours."

"If you do not wish me to see what the bailiff brings you, you had better not leave it directly under my nose."

His wife for an instant did not quite understand what he meant by that, but then she recollected that she had left the summons on her husband's desk.

"I must tell you very emphatically," she flared up indignantly, "not to put your nose into my private correspondence. If the letter was lying open on the table, you had no right to read it. *I* never look at *your* bills."

"Oh, do what you please; but I must request you not to bring the bailiff to my house." [223]

"That is not the worst, *mon cher*, that may happen to you; he will know now at least the way here when he'll call on you next."

"Hold your tongue, you impudent woman, or I will throw you into the street."

"Many thanks for your kind offer, but I'm going of my own accord."

She left the room, went into her bed-chamber, and retired to rest.

Meanwhile on the floor below Borgert was reading a book; but his thoughts were far away. He had serious forebodings that all his creditors, like a pack of hungry wolfhounds, were about to engage in a joint hunt for him, or rather for the money that he didn't have. He was afraid that the colonel would soon demand the immediate payment of his load of debts, and that, if unable to comply with the order, resignation from the army was the only possible outcome. And what should he do then, without a penny, without any useful knowledge, and with many luxurious habits? Something must be done, he made up his mind, and he was going to employ the next day, a Sunday, to consider once more the various possibilities of raising a large sum, no matter how, [224] to discharge all these liabilities, most of them small in themselves, but in their totality representing quite a fortune.

Solaced by the hope that after all some mild hand would open and drop into his lap a small mountain of gold, he fell asleep; the book slipped from his hands, and the lamp on the night table went out after midnight, since Borgert had forgotten to blow it out. He slept restlessly, and bad dreams pursued him. His load of debt developed into a nightmare that was pressing on his chest and threatening to crush out his life.

When he awoke in the morning it was past ten. Borgert began to rage. Almost half the day was gone now, and yet he had meant to do so much. Had this ass of a servant again forgotten to wake him? With that his head ached, and he felt nervous and out of sorts. Throwing his dressing-gown loosely about him he went into his servant's room and found Röse laboriously penning a letter. When his master entered the poor fellow shot out of the seat and stood bolt upright. [225]

"Why didn't you wake me, you beast?" he thundered at him.

"I wakened the Herr First Lieutenant at seven o'clock, but the Herr First Lieutenant wanted to continue sleeping and said I need not come back any more to annoy him."

"That's a lie, you swine; I will teach you to do as you are told." And he seized a leather belt lying on the fellow's bed, and with it struck Röse violently, then kicking him, and letting the belt play around his face and neck until broad livid marks began to show.

Röse preserved his military attitude, and stood his punishment without in the least resisting. But that was a further cause of anger to Borgert, and the latter dropped the belt, and with his fist struck the man several hard blows in the chest. Then he took the man's letter, half finished as it was, crumpled it up in his hand, and threw it into the coal-scuttle.

"Step upstairs lively and tell Herr First Lieutenant Leimann that I want to speak to him. Tell him if possible to step in here for half an hour before he goes to town."

“At your orders, Herr First Lieutenant.” [226]

Borgert stepped back to his chamber, finished dressing, and then went into the adjoining room.

Sure enough, there stood his coffee, but cold as ice. In that case Röse must have been before him in the room. Well, a drubbing or two would do the fellow no harm. That was good for preserving discipline and a respect for his superiors, even if now and then it should be applied not exactly at the right moment.

On his desk were lying several letters. Three of them contained bills, and the fourth was from his father. The three he threw unopened into the fire, and the fourth he read as follows:

> My dear Son,—With growing concern I have seen from your last letter that you had again to incur large expenditures which harass you because you had not counted on them. Much as my desire would be to let you have the money you ask, with the best intentions it is not possible to do so. You know best how closely I have to economize to make both ends meet. If seventy-five marks would be any object to you, I could let you have them, although I had promised your mother this money for a new dress of which she stands in much need.
>
> But I must frankly confess to you that I do not see why you should not be able to meet all [227] your legitimate expenses with your pay and the two hundred marks allowance per month. At your age I did not have more than that myself, and yet I was able to undertake an extended trip every year. I give you the well-meant advice to live for a time a little more apart from your comrades, in order to reduce your expenses. Employ yourself diligently at home—there is so much to learn in your profession nowadays—and avoid carefully every opportunity which would force you into needless outlay which you would subsequently not be able to meet. Make your scale of living correspond to your income. If you will openly declare that this or that is too costly for you, every one will respect you the more, for they will see that you are not spending beyond your proper income. Do not live carelessly, and shun those amusements which you cannot afford. After all, it is both sensible and high-minded to live within one’s means.
>
> Write to me soon how you have regulated this affair and whether the small sum I can offer you will be of advantage to you.
>
> In the hope that no inconvenience of a serious character will grow out of your present embarrassment,
>
> I remain,
> Your affectionate
> Old Father.

When Borgert had read these lines, he crushed the paper within his palm and then cast it [228] likewise into the stove. With a sigh he sank into a chair and began to ruminate.

At this moment his servant entered and announced Leimann.

Borgert went to the door to meet his friend, and when they had stepped into his study, Leimann asked with considerable anxiety:

“Well, what important matter is it you have for me this morning?”

Borgert planted himself squarely on his legs in front of the other and said with assumed gaiety:

“You see, my dear fellow, we all have our troubles. I have just about reached the end of my tether and should like to appoint you receiver of my assets.”

“The end of your tether?” retorted Leimann with agitation. “What do you mean by that? Do you mean in money matters?”

“You have guessed it. I must have money right now, a whole bagful of it, or else I’m done for.”

“Is it as bad as all that? Have new complications arisen? Why, you told me the last time that you were out of your troubles just now.” [229]

“Yes, I did; but yesterday I made something of an investigation, and I found that there is no other way out my difficulties than by means of a gigantic loan. I should like, therefore, to speak openly to you about the matter, for I’m in hopes that there must be still ways and means to keep me above water.”

Leimann lowered his eyes, looked fixedly at the pattern of the Turkish rug, and rubbed reflectively his unshaven chin. Then he replied with a shrug:

“How much is it?”

“Twelve thousand marks I must have, and not a penny less, for I’ll have to make a clear track. I’m about badgered to death by these unceasing dunning letters and complaints in the courts.”

“Hm, and how did you think you were going to manage this matter?”

“I have some more addresses of financial men, usurers, you know. If I could get you once more to go security for me, I think we ought to be able to attain our end.”

“Security? Security? Yes, it is easy for you to talk that way, my dear boy; but finally there must be something in the background in order to assume responsibility for another’s debts. I must tell [230] you frankly that if you can’t meet this payment of three thousand marks of last month, there will be the devil to pay for me, since I went bail for you.”

“I do not think there is any need of your being so explicit; as a matter of course, I shall meet my obligations.”

“I don’t doubt it in the least; but for me it is indeed impossible to become security for you once more. Not only that, but I have to ask you to let me have some money, for I really do need some very badly.”

“With the greatest of pleasure,” said Borgert with a sinister smile; “but why don’t you raise money on your ‘commiss-fortune’?[19] That, it strikes me, would be the surest way of obtaining it.”

“My ‘commiss-fortune’? Very well put; but I’d have to have one in order to raise money on it.”

“What have you been marrying on, then?” asked Borgert in amazement.

“I only had it four weeks in my hands, when it was returned to the party who had lent it for a consideration until I had obtained the official consent.” [231]

Borgert looked in consternation at his friend and then began to measure the room in nervous excitement.

“In that case,” he began, after making several turns of the room, “I will make another proposition: I become surety for you, and you for me.”

“Good,” cried Leimann, joyfully; “but it is a somewhat ticklish business, for some time or other there is bound to come a crash, and then if neither of us has a penny there will be the deuce and all.”

“That catastrophe will not happen, my most beloved friend, because if I can pull through once more there will be nothing to fear for me. I shall marry.”

“By the eternal gods, but you have amazing courage! Only let me tell you, be careful in the choice of your father-in-law, otherwise it is a worse than useless arrangement. I myself can speak from experience.” [232]

“That is a matter of course; I shan’t marry on empty promises. For less than half a million they cannot do business with me.”

“Well, I wish you luck; but, come to think of it, how is it about König? Couldn’t he be induced to come out with a few thousand marks?”

“I’ve thought of him, but it seems to me doubtful whether he can be got at. For, first of all, we would have to pay him the old score.”

“All right; but we might make at least an attempt. He can’t say more than ‘no,’ and I shall sit down at once and write a few lines to him.”

Leimann took a chair at the desk and a sheet of letter-paper from one of the drawers.

Borgert sat down quietly in a corner, lit a cigarette, and blew its smoke into the slanting triangle of floating particles of dust which was formed by a ray of sunlight penetrating his window. The bluish wreaths of smoke formed fantastic bands, weaving and interweaving.

Now at last the letter was ended, and Leimann closed it, wrote the address on the outside, and Röse was told to take it immediately to its destination. [233]

“That will pull his leg, I think, if anything will!” said Leimann, with a satisfied air, as he arose from his chair.

“What have you written him?” asked Borgert with some curiosity.

“Simply this,—that I needed money for a comrade and appealed therefore to his generous sentiments of friendship which he had so often proved. As a term for repayment I have indicated three months hence, and have pledged my word for the punctual refunding of the money; for you told me, you know, that you would have it here by that time.”

“Most assuredly I can. If the fellow will only give us the money now, everything else will be attended to at its proper time.”

Thus they chatted on for another half hour, when Röse returned with his answer from Captain König.

Leimann quickly grasped the letter, but then he hesitated before opening it. Undecided, he scanned the address and looked questioningly at Borgert, who was still comfortably seated in his chair. [234]

At last, however, impatience mastered him, and Leimann tore open the envelope and unfolded the letter.

With consternation he read again and again. Borgert saw from the face of his friend, who with eyebrows lifted and hands trembling with nervous excitement stood there a picture of disappointment, that König’s answer had not brought joyful news. But he was more quiet and felt less disappointment than Leimann, although the whole matter concerned in the first place rather him than the latter. It was no longer new to him to receive denials to his letters requesting loans.

His face, though, assumed a wrathful expression when Leimann handed him silently König's response, and he began to read it. In his letter the captain said:

> "I earnestly regret that I'm not able to comply with your wishes. On the one hand considerations for my family restrain me, for sums of such magnitude I could only advance if perfect security for their repayment were offered. But the only pledge *you* offer me for [235]
> punctual return of the money is your word of honor, and I am sorry to say I cannot look upon that as such an absolute security, since you as well as First Lieutenant Borgert have not yet refunded the divers amounts which I loaned you months ago, although you at the time passed your word to me to see that the debt was paid promptly within ten days. Besides, it seems to me, that your financial condition, as far as I understand it, is not of a description to guarantee the keeping of a promise of that kind made to me."

Borgert rose from his chair and flung the letter aside in a rage. Then he stepped to the window and looked down into the street.

Neither of the two spoke a word; but as their glances met, Leimann remarked:

"Well, what do you say to this?"

"A piece of insolence, a vulgar bit of presumption it is on his part!" Borgert broke out. "How the devil does this fellow dare, anyway, to concern himself with our private affairs? It would have been merely an unfriendly act and would have shown a deficient spirit of comradeship to send us a reply refusing our request, but to do so in this offensive manner! We cannot quietly submit to this."

"But what are you going to do about it?" retorted Leimann with a shrug. "If you openly take a [236]
stand against him, he has us by the throat if he merely states that we did not keep our pledged word, and we could not dispute that, for he can show it in black and white. Therefore it will be best for us to pocket his rudeness and to cut the fellow; he will not fail to notice that."

"Apparently he has entirely forgotten that it would be an easy matter for us to break his neck. Did he not say himself at the time that he was going to take the amount in question from the squadron fund? I think we could make it very unpleasant for him if we were to use this fact against him."

"True," said Leimann, "but you could not in decency bring up the matter, since his touching those funds was done in our interest."

"I don't care. If he at present takes the liberty to throw impudent remarks in our faces, I will certainly show him that I'm in a condition to pay him back in the same coin."

"But you cannot possibly sign a formal accusation stating that König had lent you money obtained from the squadron fund. Do you not see that that would throw a curious light upon [237]
yourself?"

"Oh, I wouldn't be so clumsy as to do that. There are other ways in which the trick could be done, and I shall manage to let nobody suspect me as the author of the tale. But he will have to pay for this, you can take my word for that. D—— the ugly face of him, anyway!"

Both became silent once more, and a few minutes later Leimann took his leave, since he had to attend to several minor engagements in town before the dinner hour.

Nor did Borgert remain much longer at home. He went to the Casino and drowned his bad humor in a bottle of Heidsieck.

When Borgert awoke, a couple of days later, from a night's troubled sleep, he noticed with concern that he had overslept himself and missed his earlier duties. He rang the bell for his servant, but Röse did not appear, not even on a second summons.

Borgert dressed and went to Röse's room. He found it unoccupied. The bed was untouched, and on top of it lay the uniform and the cap of the man. [238]

With astonishment the officer looked about him; the sticky, unventilated atmosphere of the little chamber, and a strong odor of soiled linen and worn-out clothes, was all that he noticed. Where could Röse have gone so early in the day, and that, too, without leave, even without a word to him? Had he been summoned to some unexpected duty? But no, that was impossible, for here lay his regimentals.

Borgert had already crossed over to the threshold to leave the room again when his eye lighted on a much-stained slip of paper on the table. He picked it up and his face paled while he read, for in the man's scrawling handwriting there were the words:

"Farewell! And go to the devil!"

As if petrified, Borgert stared at the paper. The fellow, then, had deserted!

About his reasons for the step Borgert was not in doubt a minute, and a sudden feeling of shame and disquiet seized him at the thought that the man might be apprehended. In that case everything would come to light: the bad usage to which he had been subjected, the maltreatment which he had met at his hands, and, worst of all, all those big or little secrets of which he had [239]
become aware during his service with his master.

Too unpleasant! Borgert stepped again over to his room and sat down on the edge of the bed. His face was not pleasant to look at, and a nervous twitching of his features showed how much he dreaded an unlucky turn of affairs in case the fugitive should be caught and then blab out all he knew.

It seemed to him as if of late there was a perfect conspiracy against him. Anxiety, ill luck, and disappointment on every side, with not a single silver lining to the cloud, which, black and ominous, had suddenly begun to crowd his horizon.

For the first time the awful certainty flashed through his mind that he stood at the brink of a catastrophe against which there was no remedy unless a miracle intervened. But where under the sun should such a miracle come from? All faith, all hope, dissolved before his view in these few moments when the whole crushing weight of his guilt, the whole labyrinth of his failure in life, came clearly to his consciousness. An unreasoning terror, a fear of himself and a feeling of [240] helplessness conquered the man, who at other times had never surrendered to untoward conditions, who had never hesitated to stamp down all obstacles in his path. Borgert was not capable of deep feeling or of noble sentiment; he had so far trodden the path of life with cold egotism, coupled with a superficial view of his surroundings and a lack of clearer insight into the motives impelling him and others.

For some time he sat there, pallid, motionless, gazing into the vast blank space of the unknown future; only the convulsive workings of his face betrayed the intense agitation of his mind. It was the psychological crisis in the life of a man who too late becomes aware of having destroyed his better self, of having annihilated all those hopes which on entering life had floated before his vision in roseate hue. And there was nothing to which he could cling, not even a straw for this man battling with the waves that threatened to engulf him, no human soul that could or would help him. Despair clutched his throat, and his breath came thick and short like that of one drowning. [241]

Borgert had struck a balance with himself. He had taken stock, and now felt clearly that his life was one not only marred but destroyed by his own fault. He made up his mind to bear the consequences since escape there was none.

Mechanically he completed his toilet and then went to the barracks to report himself to the captain for having missed the morning service. He kept silence about Röse's flight, saying to himself that if the deserter had the start of pursuit by a sufficiency of time, say forty-eight hours, he would be a bigger fool indeed than Borgert took him to be if he had not reached a safe retreat across the frontier. And that, of course, would spare Borgert himself the unpleasant predicament of facing a court-martial because of systematic maltreatment of a subordinate.

When he returned home at noon, Borgert found a letter. It was the reply of the financial man in Berlin to whom, in his quandary, he had turned. The letter told the recipient in curt terms that his application had been rejected. No loan could be made to him, it said, since inquiries about [242] Borgert and his co-called bondsmen, and the endorsement of Leimann, had "demonstrated a financial status highly unfavorable."

Borgert received this news almost with indifference, for since this morning he had abandoned all hope of a favorable turn, and hence felt no disappointment.

He knew he could obtain no money anywhere after this. In fact, now that he clearly envisaged things, it seemed astonishing that the bubble had not burst long ere this. It had been solely due, as he now felt, to Leimann's extraordinary skill in hiding his own pecuniary embarrassments that Borgert himself had been able to run up large accounts without any tangible security whatever. For Leimann, he remembered, had backed him up throughout.

Dazed and spent, Borgert lay down on his divan.

He did not wish to go to the Casino, for he felt no appetite, and he was not in the mood to play his accustomed pranks and capers for the delectation of his comrades. He did not want to see or hear of anybody. He wanted to be all by himself and indulge in his morose reflections. His eye [243] wandered around the elegant appointments of his dwelling. These fine paintings on his walls; this handsome and costly furniture, most of it carved in solid oak; the soft Oriental rugs underfoot which deadened every sound and made his bachelor home so comfortable and cosy; those heavy, discreet hangings of finest velvet which shut out the intrusive light and kept his apartments in that epicurean *chiaroscuro* which his sybarite taste demanded—what a pity, what an infernal shame, to have to surrender into the hands of these vermin of usurers all these trappings of his bachelor freedom! Of course, they would struggle and fight for it all, and each one of them would scramble to be the first to assert and enforce his rights. Rather amusing it would be, he thought, but alas! he himself would not be able to view the scene.

There was no help for it. Within a few days the crash must come; he could see no escape.

But what was to become of himself? He had never seriously thought of that before. Should he [244] allow himself to be simply thrown into the street? Perhaps, after all, they would even put him in quod? Time pressed, and a decision must be reached quickly—at once.

Really, on sober reflection, he could not very well see why he should remain any longer in this vale of tears after all his glory and his pleasures would be gone. To learn anew, after losing all caste, after dismissal from the army in disgrace and dishonor, to learn a bread-winning calling

and to have to work like everybody in that despised throng of perspiring, vulgar toilers—surely, that was not at all to his taste. From infancy up he had been reared in disdain of labor—had acquired, one by one, tastes and habits of thought that seemed irreconcilable with a life of sober, plain living and thinking, with a life where his part would be that of a subordinate. It seemed an impossible thing to him. Dimly he felt that to do so would require energy, self-denial, and diligence, and of all these he possessed not a trace. Should he then make an end of it, put a bullet in his brain?

But no, that was absurd, and, besides, that required courage. And courage, in its best sense, he [245] had never had. He had only shown courage, or the semblance of it—a certain dash—the kind which in the army is known as "*Schneid*."

But here, when facing the final realities of life, his courage entirely deserted him. And was it not possible, after all, that luck would come to his aid in this dire extremity? He had only the one life, and once thrown away the loss was irremediable. Suicide therefore would be rash and stupid —folly never to be redeemed. Life might smile on him again, and should he then with his own hand cut it off? No, on no account.

But no rescuing thought would occur to him, cudgel his brain as he might. And torturing, self-abasing reflections crowded again into his brain.

The thought of his servant, of poor Röse, curiously enough, was uppermost. Had not Röse, dolt that he was, cunningly managed to disappear from a scene which was, in a certain sense, as unbearable as his master's at this juncture? And Röse by now was perhaps seated comfortably in a quiet corner where nobody was looking for him, and where it was possible to live without [246] interference.

Could he himself, then, not do the same thing?

And this shadowy thought began to take solid form the more Borgert dwelt on it. It seemed to him the only egress from the situation.

In new surroundings, in another country, amongst people who did not know him, he might begin life afresh, and soon grass would grow over the short-lived sensation which his disappearance would create in this world-forgotten little hole of a town! Within a twelvemonth his very name perhaps would be no longer on anybody's lips in this place. And even if in times to come this or that one of his comrades should mention his name, it would be with the thought that such a man had existed at some time or other, and that nobody to-day cared about him any more.

He was so lost in his dreary thoughts that he did not observe the door opening and giving admittance to Frau Leimann.

She looked pale and serious. Her face, so pleasant in its youthful, placid beauty at other times, [247] now appeared aged, and her eyes wore an anxious expression.

Borgert did not rise, but contented himself with nodding to her, saying never a word. His glance enveloped this woman, an intrigue with whom had seemed to him but a short while ago an ambition worthy of his talents.

But to-day she appeared to him no longer so desirable; her motions seemed to him without grace or distinction, and her charms mediocre.

Her hair was arranged in negligent fashion, and the soft folds of her morning gown to-day seemed to enwrap another woman and not the one whose beauty had intoxicated him.

Two impressions stood out clearly in his mind: the woman as she now faced him, and as she had appeared to him on a memorable evening.

But Frau Leimann was so preoccupied herself that the unflattering and searching look of Borgert escaped her. She sat down on the divan beside him and took his hand in hers. Her eyes gazed with diffidence at the face of the man. [248]

"You are ill, George?" asked she with anxiety.

He contented himself for all answer with a shake of his head.

"But tell me, speak to me. What ails you?"

"Why, it is nothing and it is everything," Borgert answered with indifference.

"What do you mean by that, George? Talk sensibly, please."

"What am I to say? I am done with the whole business. That is all."

"Done! Done with what? How am I to understand you?"

"Done with everything,—with life and with myself."

"You talk like a sphinx, George. Why not tell me frankly what has happened to you?"

"My money is gone. I'll have to run away, or else there will be the deuce to pay."

Borgert felt a tremor run through her body. She did not reply, but turned her face slowly away from him and stared at the window.

In his heart Borgert was thankful to her for receiving his communication with such composure, and not with the screams and hysterical sobbings which women habitually employ on occasions of the kind. [249]

And as he regarded attentively her pale profile, clear-cut against the light, and saw a tear glistening in her eye, a passionate emotion, largely pity for this suffering creature by his side, so pathetic in her dumb resignation, took hold of him, and he drew her into his arms.

Then she murmured:

“Take me along, George!”

In amazement Borgert stared at her.

“For heaven’s sake, how did you get such thoughts? How can I do that?”

“Oh, George, you do not know. I cannot bear my life here any longer. Let me go with you, I beseech you.”

“But that is not to be dreamt of. Will there not be scandal enough when I disappear? And then take you along? Impossible.”

“In that case I shall go alone. I must leave here—I *must*.”

“But why all this so suddenly? What has come to you?”

Frau Leimann gave vent to her suppressed feelings by a violent fit of sobbing. “My husband has beaten me with his clenched fist—see, here are the marks!—because the bailiff had called on me. His treatment of me has become worse and worse of late, and now my hatred, my dislike of him has reached a point where I can no longer see him around me, breathe the same air he breathes; and then,—another thing,” and here she broke into weeping again, “I have no money—there is nothing with which I can pay my debts; something—some great misfortune will come—I’m sure of it, George, if I do not leave him peaceably.” [250]

Borgert had great pains to quiet the excited woman.

He reflected. After all, her idea was not such a bad one. If she really had made up her mind fully to leave her husband, she might as well go with him; for in that case he would at least have somebody by his side to whom he could speak, to whom he could open his heart,—somebody who would be in the same situation as himself. And when Frau Leimann once more implored him with a tearful voice, he whispered: [251]

“Then come with me. We shall leave to-morrow night.”

They began to make plans, and he said:

“Let us talk this matter over sensibly. First, how will you get away from here without being observed by your husband?”

“He is leaving for Berlin to-morrow morning. He has official matters to attend to there. Has he not yet told you about it?”

“No; but this is excellent. And now, have you some money?”

“Yes; I received this morning three hundred marks from my mother, and I have not touched the money because I had resolved on this step.”

“Then you are better off than I am, at least for the moment; but I shall raise some money. And third, how will you get your luggage to the station? for, of course, I cannot expect you to run away without some clothes.”

“Very simply, George; just ask my husband to lend you his big trunk, and tell him you are obliged to go home on a short leave. I will pack all my things into that, and the orderly will bring it down to you here. The trunk is big enough to hold enough for us both.” [252]

“There it is again,” laughingly said Borgert. “Women are best for all underhanded work.”

“And by which train shall we leave?”

“You will go by the afternoon train, for we will not leave together; that would attract too much attention. I shall follow you on the evening train. I think it will be best to meet in Frankfort. We will meet in the waiting-room of the main station, and there we can talk over everything in quiet. I shall take a three days’ leave, so that they will not follow me at once.”

“Then we are agreed so far. I will come down here to-morrow forenoon, as soon as my husband has left, and then we can talk this matter over a little more in detail. Just now I’ll have to leave you.”

Frau Leimann turned towards the door. When she sent a parting nod from the threshold, she seemed once more enticing in his eyes. The heated face was animated, and the glowing eyes radiated life. Truly, she was charming. Borgert lost himself in pleasant speculations about the honeyed existence which they two were to lead hereafter, once that inconvenient husband was out of the way, and all scruples which still clung to them, as the last vestiges of respectability, had been thrown overboard. [253]

Borgert had regained all his good humor; he felt almost buoyant, and as if he could dare undertake anything. There was another consideration with him. His flight, his desertion, his leaving his creditors unsatisfied, and a record of somewhat crooked financial transactions behind him,—all that would now be regarded by people in a wholly different light. The romantic element would predominate in the minds of all the gossips. They would say that these two had fled, because of an overmastering passion,—to become united, when unfortunate circumstances did not permit them to belong to each other in their present plight. There would, of course, be enough scandal even now, but the whole story was going to be lifted by this elopement into a higher sphere; it would take on, so to speak, an appearance vastly more interesting, less vulgar, nay, even aristocratic and excusable,—an entirely different matter from the bald statement that he, Borgert, had deserted for no other reason except a lot of bad debts and unclean financial machinations. [254]

For a moment, it is true, his better conscience spoke, reproaching him with the intention of adding a new crime to his list of old ones; but this warning resounded so weakly within him that it had not the slightest effect. The principal thing, after all, was that he must not let such an advantage escape him simply to save the feelings of others. Such minor considerations could not be allowed to interfere with his plans.

Borgert therefore briskly walked to town, and at the post-office, where the telegraph bureau was located, he wired to a large second-hand dealer in the neighboring city, telling him to pay him a visit the following morning.

Then he returned home and stepped up to Leimann’s.

He found his friend busy packing.

“Well, I hear you are to start to-morrow. I only learned it this noon,” said Borgert, shaking hands with him.

“Yes; I am not at all charmed with the prospect of this trip, for I had made no arrangements for it; but you know how it is. It is always only at the last moment we receive orders of that kind, [255] often barely leaving us time enough to reach the train.”

“Nevertheless, I envy you your trip. As for me, there is a less agreeable one awaiting me.”

“What, you are also planning a journey?”

“It is not a matter of choice with me; I simply have to.”

“And where are you going?”

“Home, starting to-morrow afternoon.”

“Ah, I see. Well, I wish you luck.”

“Thanks. By the way, could you lend me a trunk? I should like to take a number of things with me home, and my own trunk is too small.”

“Why, certainly; my servant will bring you down the large trunk. I suppose that will answer your purpose?”

“Oh, of course; it will do very nicely. Thanks again.”

Borgert could not help perceiving that his visit did not come quite opportunely. Leimann was in an ugly humor and did not let himself be interrupted in his occupation. He was so much engrossed with his own thoughts that the import of Borgert’s questions scarcely reached him, and the latter deemed it therefore wise to remain no longer. He made the promise, however, to [256] join the Leimanns at their evening meal.

Reaching his own room again, Borgert felt himself free of a great burden. In his heart he rejoiced at the sudden turn his affairs had taken. The bother and vexation of uncertainty no longer weighed on his mind. “The die is cast!” he mumbled to himself. He would have liked to dance and scream for joy. Another day only, and he would be rid of the whole sorry outfit, and there would be no further occasion to worry. And with that, such a pretty travelling companion! He really wondered at himself now that this idea had not come to him sooner.

Suddenly it crossed his mind that he had not yet begun to pack. At least he should at once proceed to preliminaries,—arranging and putting aside things, and making ready for packing the more important objects which he meant to take along.

But what was worth while taking? That was the question. He began to pick out things. From over the sofa he took the large silver goblet—the farewell gift from his former regiment—and [257] placed it in an adjoining room on the table.

Rapidly, then, he made his selections: an album of family portraits; sundry packages of letters; a couple of riding-whips and crops possessing an intrinsic value,—that is, a metallic one; two of the smaller and more valuable oil paintings; and a large bundle of letters,—these, besides some indispensable clothes, were all he intended to take with him.

When he entered the door at Leimann’s at seven, he found them already at table.

Leimann’s face wore a black look, and he hardly lifted his eyes to his guest as Borgert entered.

His wife sat opposite to him, her eyes red and swollen with recent weeping. She did not touch the food before her, but every little while cast a searching and anxious look at her husband.

Throughout the evening harmony was not restored; not even a bottle of Eckel succeeded in bringing gaiety back into this small circle. Leimann remained in an ugly mood, and whenever that seized him nothing could be done with him. Therefore the parting took place at an early hour, and it was cooler than it had been on similar occasions. [258]

Next morning Borgert had just risen when the second-hand dealer arrived.

The officer saluted him pleasantly and bade him enter. Then he completed his toilet and began negotiations with the Hebrew merchant.

“Will you, please, take the trouble to examine the furniture and all the other equipments in these apartments?” said he. “I mean to sell all of it, just as it stands, since I have been transferred to another garrison. But as to this point—I mean my transference—I must beg to preserve silence for the moment, as it is not yet generally known. How much could you offer me?”

The Jew pensively let his keen eyes wander all about the dwelling, mentally going through a rapid process of addition, subtraction, and silence. Then he proceeded to a more minute examination. He handled every single piece, using his knuckles to ascertain its exact condition; he subjected hangings, rugs, and carpets, as well as the expensive carving of the book-cases and stands, to a similar process. Then he drew forth a small note-book, greasy and worn, and squinted at each single object as he noted down its price. Finally he turned to Borgert and said, with an obsequious smile: [259]

“Fifteen hundred marks, Herr First Lieutenant, counting it out in gold on this table.”

“What! fifteen hundred marks?” and Borgert gave a snort of disapproval. “Why, man, you must be dreaming. I have paid almost ten thousand marks for the things.”

“Sorry, Herr First Lieutenant,” the Jew said, shrugging his shoulders in deprecation of such high figures. “Old things are not new things, and you won’t get any more from anybody.”

“That is not enough; that would be giving the things away.”

“Well, I will pay you two thousand marks, then, but not a penny more.”

Borgert sat down at his desk. He began to see that there was no time to lose, and that the man had him at a great disadvantage. Meanwhile the dealer had his eyes fastened on the officer’s face, and wore the same expectant and obsequious smile. [260]

“All right, give me the money; you can have the whole stuff,” said Borgert, briefly.

With a smile that now broke over his face until it illuminated every nook and corner of the parchment-like wrinkles, the Jew drew a formal document, a bill of sale, from his breast pocket, stepped up to the desk, and wrote a few words on it. Then he requested Borgert to sign it.

After the dealer had left and Borgert had securely stowed away the purchase price, he felt that the last hindrance to his flight had now been removed, for a certain amount of cash was an indispensable requisite. Then he stepped into his bed-chamber, where he took from the clothes-press an elegant travelling suit. The remainder of his civilian clothes he packed carefully and compactly in the large trunk which Leimann meanwhile had sent down. He placed them next to Frau Leimann’s finery in the huge trunk, and on top of them the few other trifles above enumerated. Then he had the trunk taken to the station. [261]

Leimann meanwhile was on his way to Berlin. His wife, however, was still very busy,—burning up packages of letters which she did not wish either her husband or her companion to read, and then put into a handbag a few objects of the kind which only women cherish, and the sole value of which lies in the recollections clinging to them. It is astonishing what resplendent images a woman can conjure before her inner vision when in the possession of such faded flowers, bits of ribbon, and the like.

Lastly came the leave-taking from Bubi, her little two-year-old son, and this she had fancied the day before a much harder achievement than it now turned out. She felt some qualms of conscience as she now, with a light heart, without a tear, left behind her her only child,—left it motherless, exposed to a future probably troubled and cheerless.

It was strange, she thought. From the first moment on she had experienced something like aversion for this child with the broad nose, the large mouth, and the small, shifting eyes. When but a couple of weeks old, the baby had shown a striking resemblance to his father, and the more the estrangement grew between his parents, the more dwindled the small remnant of her mother love. She regarded this tiny human being, ugly and eternally crying, as solely *his* child. It was in this way that the poor little fellow had spent nearly the whole of his short existence,—either in the kitchen or with the servants, fondled, scolded, and educated by hirelings. The mother herself frequently had not seen her child even for a minute a day. [262]

She had the conviction that her husband had deserved no better treatment at her hands, and because of that she scarcely gave him a thought during these last hours spent at her home. When she boarded, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a first-class compartment of the express train for Frankfort, she did so with a spirit light and almost gay.

And the same was true of Borgert. He likewise cast to the winds any slight sentiments of regret at leaving the garrison, and as the train, some hours after Frau Leimann's departure, went shrieking and thundering out of the little station, he felt that he was being carried on to a brighter future. That was enough for him. [263]

When he and Frau Leimann met, late the same evening, in the dining-room of an elegant hotel, all their life seemed to lie before them draped in rosy hue, and no shadows of coming evils troubled them. After they had ladled their soup in comfort, and with the appearance of a fine game pie, for which this hotel is famous among *gourmets*, the ex-officer motioned to the black-frocked waiter with the immaculate shirt front, and said, curtly:

"A bottle of Mumm, *sec!*"

Thus these two celebrated the event of their flight.

FOOTNOTES:

[19] "Commiss-fortune"—the term applied to the dowry of an officer's wife, which must reach a certain figure.—Tr.

Chapter VIII [264]

CHANGES IN THE GARRISON

THE flight of First Lieutenant Borgert could not long remain a secret.

When he did not return at the expiration of his short leave, and a telegraphic query brought the answer from his father that he had not seen him, the assumption began to take shape that he had tried to escape the consequences of his misdoings by deserting.

It is true that no one aside from Leimann had known precisely his bad financial status. But when the Jewish dealer came to claim the furniture sold him, and at the same time the bailiff arrived with the intention of seizing the very same objects on the strength of a new process of attachment begun in court, the catastrophe could no longer be hidden from the world. Everybody then began to see, detail after detail, the whole system of fraud erected by Borgert, with the [265] passive connivance of his friend Leimann.

The court ordered that the entire property of the deserter be placed in legal custody. A term was fixed when the horde of creditors whom he had so shamefully deceived were to be adjudged *pro-rata* shares of the whole. Advertisements were inserted in the papers, calling upon all those having claims against the estate of the defaulter to come forward. Hundreds of bills came by mail from all the cities and towns, and even from the villages surrounding the little garrison, and the amounts in their totality figured up to a considerable sum.

Borgert's father, too,—a worthy old gentleman, broken-hearted at the downfall of his only son,—had to appear in court and depose as to his son's past and present misdoings, as far as he was aware of them. Even that portion of the estate which, according to the father's intentions, was to fall to his son's share at his father's death, was sequestrated by a mandate of the court and added to the assets left behind by Borgert. In addition, the state's attorney issued a "*Steckbrief*"[20] [266] against the ex-officer, in which he was charged with a whole list of offences.

The dwelling itself had the court seals attached to it, and even the poor horses in the stable had fastened to their manes small, leaden seals tied on with string, to denote that the state had taken possession of them.

It stands to reason that all these interesting events travelled through the little town on the wings of gossip, and no village or city within a radius of ten miles failed to regard the matter as a delicious bit of local scandal. The small penny sheets printed in a number of these places were in clover. Nothing like such a genuine sensation had come to their hands for some time.

Colonel von Kronau, the pompous and infallible, was very much cast down. There were some smart gentlemen in the regiment who now claimed to have suspected the facts for a long time, and to have seen such a catastrophe approaching. But there are always such people, and as a [267] matter-of-fact neither these wiseacres nor their less astute comrades had ever expected Borgert to turn out badly. For his case, although somewhat worse, was substantially the epitome of their own cases, and it is a truism that we never see ourselves as others see us.

The colonel remarked to Captain König, shaking his head with a melancholy smile, that this new turn of affairs was the “last nail in his coffin,” and henceforth he was seen going about with a face gloomy and expectant of the worst. For gradually he came to the conclusion that to keep in good order a garrison and its corps of officers, some other methods must be employed than those to which he had clung, at the advice of Frau Stark, for years. It dawned on him that his type of discipline had wrought a train of evils which had grown avalanche-like, and which now at last was likely to bury his official head under a load of opprobrium.

The fact that Frau Leimann had followed the First Lieutenant became known a few days later. This was when her husband returned from Berlin and found a letter from her, in which she implored his forgiveness, and assured him she had acted under an impulse too strong to resist. Of [268] their unhappy married life she said nothing.

Thus Leimann was punished doubly. He had been made ridiculous before the world, and was laughed at behind his back by all those who belonged to his extensive circle of acquaintances. And Borgert’s flight had precipitated Leimann’s own financial downfall. His creditors and those of Borgert obtained orders in court which forced him to sell the larger part of his small private fortune, consisting of sound investments, to satisfy their claims. A goodly proportion of his enforced payments was for those sums guaranteed by him in Borgert’s behalf. When all his affairs had been unravelled, he had but a very small sum remaining to him.

Meanwhile no trace of Frau Leimann and of her companion was found, although detectives of various countries were several times on their tracks. Nobody knew where they had found a refuge.

A fortnight after his desertion poor Röse was discovered and arrested. He had been seized at [269] the Belgian frontier. A court-martial was quickly summoned, and during the trial it became apparent that the motive which alone had driven him to desertion had been the brutal maltreatment to which his master, Borgert, had subjected him. The court regarded that, however, as a mitigating circumstance of such slight value that it reduced the measure of the punishment meted out to him in only a small degree. The poor fellow was universally commiserated by high and low, and even among the officers a voice was raised now and then in exculpation. Many of their subordinates expressed privately the opinion that a poor soldier, even if only the son of an humble peasant, like Röse, ought to have some rights, and that he ought to be treated humanely by his superiors. But these were but private opinions, stated in a barely audible voice, and in the seclusion of the men’s own quarters. As such, naturally, they had not the slightest value in changing the fortunes of poor Röse, who was sentenced to undergo a term of many years of hard labor in a military penitentiary.

At the divorce trial, which took place at Leimann’s instance, a great many unpalatable facts [270] were brought to light.

The two servant-maids in his house, as well as the orderly, gave testimony of such a character that the few remaining hairs on Leimann’s pear-shaped skull rose in affright. He could not understand how he had been so blind as not to have perceived the treachery of his friend and the faithlessness of his wife. A decree of divorce was pronounced by the court, and Leimann shortly after handed in his resignation. He was forced to that step by several considerations. On the one hand he was compelled to turn to a more profitable calling than that of serving his country in the army, since he had now but very slender means at his command; on the other hand, all the events in which he had been a conspicuous figure had damaged his reputation so greatly as to make his further stay in the corps of officers almost impossible.

He accepted a position for which he was eminently qualified by natural taste and long experience,—that of drummer for a wholesale wine firm. His little boy he intrusted to the care of [271] some humble relatives, and his pension as First Lieutenant was just sufficient to pay for the little fellow’s board.

Almost simultaneously, with the acceptance of Leimann’s resignation, formal sentence was pronounced against Borgert. He was condemned to a jail term of five years, to deprivation of all civic honors for ten years, and to expulsion from the army, brought about by a series of frauds, by desertion and by maltreatment of subordinates in ten cases.

The newspapers published this sentence, and with it came to a close the career of this miscreant, as far as the army was concerned.

Meanwhile there sat in the bureau of a large factory ex-Sergeant Schmitz, busy at his desk with a row of figures.

The other employees had already risen from their places and were taking their overcoats from a rack in the corner, for the large factory bell announcing the close of the day’s labor had rung

out ten minutes since.

But Schmitz did not allow himself to be disturbed by the loud conversation going on about him. [272] He continued writing as if he were in the midst of silence. The large office-room had almost emptied itself of its inmates when Master Worker Maurer entered.

Maurer was a squat-built man, and his pale, oval face was strangely illuminated by piercing eyes of a forbidding expression. His moustache hung straggling about the corners of his mouth, and there was something indicative of cruelty and meanness about his whole face.

“I suppose you can’t tear yourself away from your work again? Aren’t you coming soon?” he called over to Schmitz. But the latter did not even look up from his work, and briefly answered:

“In a moment; sit down!”

The two men were good friends.

Only a few weeks before Schmitz had stood amidst the mechanics at the lathe, pushing mechanically one cube of wood after the other into the sharp teeth of the rotating steel. This sort of activity had permitted him to indulge in his own thoughts, for it did not require him to expend his intellect as well as his brawn. [273]

But in a short while qualities had been detected in the quiet, diligent workingman which brought him advancement. His military training and the self-sufficing determination which he had acquired in dealing with raw recruits had given him a knack of controlling his fellow-workers. Thus it came about that Schmitz was promoted to the position of overseer in the machine hall, the same in which he had so far toiled with the rest. His fellow-workers, of course, looked with envy upon this *parvenu*, who had only recently appeared among them and who now played the part of commander. There was no dearth of scornful remarks at his expense, but the old soldier understood very well how to baffle such behavior.

In the morning, after he had seen his men busily at work at their various tasks, he frequently paid a visit to Maurer, who was employed as an engineer.

And during these matutinal chats Maurer discovered in Schmitz a man whom it would be easy to gain for his cause,—the cause of Socialism. Maurer himself was one of the most notorious local leaders of the Socialist hosts, and he felt sure that this new man would become a valuable [274] addition to the ranks of the forces acting under his supervision.

In this assumption, indeed, Maurer was not mistaken. Schmitz was still harboring the hatred against militarism and the government, which had been engendered in him by his own experience in the army. A deep-seated, grim feeling fermented in his soul because of the bitter injustice done him. He could not forget that the best years of his life had been frittered away in a service which in the end proved of no avail to him. Thus, he had become a recruit for the Socialist cause, and it had scarcely needed the persuasions of his new comrade, Maurer, to induce him to forswear all allegiance to the ancient cause of king and fatherland, and to vow service with body and soul to the red flag. The loyal soldier had become a strong pillar of the Socialist Party. On the morrow Schmitz was to make a speech before a large circle of men holding similar views, and it was for that Maurer was now waiting for him. He meant to inculcate another lesson or two in his friend’s mind, and to talk over with him a few important points in the programme of the evening. [275]

When Schmitz had laid aside his work and locked up his sheets in the desk,—sheets on which the list of names of the men under him and the respective amounts of work done by each were marked down,—he joined Maurer. Both then walked on in silence through the narrow lanes towards Maurer’s dwelling.

At a nearby dramshop they jointly purchased a jugful of beer; then took it home, lit the lamp, and began their conversation.

It turned particularly on a new tax bill, which would add another serious burden to those under which the working classes were groaning. The aim was to gain as many opponents to it as possible, so that at the last reading in the Reichstag an overwhelming majority could be secured against the measure, sufficient to bring about its defeat.

The two friends were engaged in eager discussion until after midnight. When they parted they had reached perfect agreement.

On the day following Schmitz was in a state of feverish agitation. It seemed strange to him, [276] after all. But a short while ago he was wearing the “king’s coat.” A short twelvemonth previously he had been a soldier of the Kaiser’s,—a man sworn to defend the fatherland and to aid and further its interests,—and to-day?—to-day he was one of those who are accused of shaking the foundations of the state edifice, those who are aiming to erect a new commonwealth more in consonance with their own ideas and interests.

But when he on the same evening ascended the speaker’s stand, carrying himself erect as a freeman, and when a crowd of many hundreds welcomed the new comrade with enthusiastic shouts, he felt differently. Even before he had said a word to his new friends they saluted him joyously as one of themselves,—as one to bring about the new millennium,—and his confidence in himself grew apace, and a mighty longing to achieve fame in this *new* army clutched his soul. It was his full intention to please this heterogeneous mass of men; he meant to force them into the

circle of his own conceptions and beliefs, so that all of them should follow him, without a will of their own, as sheep follow a shepherd. [277]

And he began his address. He first described the provisions of this new bill, and then laid bare the consequences to the laboring multitude that the adoption of such a measure would have.

A new tax, he explained, meant a further step in the pauperization of the masses. He showed that this new tax was a superfluity, provided the attempt was abandoned by the government to increase still further the strength of the army.

“Gigantic sums of money are annually wasted by the government for the military,” said he, in a ringing voice. “Scarcely have millions upon millions been voted for the introduction of new rifles and new guns; scarcely have new regiments been formed and the conformation of existing ones altered, when all these measures are found to be worse than useless. Errors of calculation are discovered when it is too late to retrieve them, and new sums of enormous size are demanded in order to overcome innovations conceived in haste and executed without judgment.

“Germany’s reputation and her power in the world have been won by the army, and it is her [278] army which neighbors begrudge us. But have we not arrived on the summit of military power? Must we extend militarism to the point where it smothers and throttles all other organs of the state machine?

“If we but devoted to other institutions of the empire a modest portion of the untold money that is swallowed up every year by the army, there would be no necessity for laying tax upon tax upon the citizens until what remains to them of the fruits of their labor hardly suffices for bare needs. If we did that, we should be a wealthy country; the citizen would acquire material wellbeing. Industry would revive and yield to the people all its blessings. But if it is not intended to cease favoring the army to such an unreasonable extent, let them take the money needed from the pockets of those who are spending their days in sloth and wilful luxury. As it is, the wealthy are not burdened any more than the poor laborer, while the latter really has to surrender a portion of the scant bread he has earned for himself and his family to maintain a state of things in which capital enjoys all those advantages which are denied to him. [279]

“Then I ask of what blessing is the army to the citizen, to the people as a whole? It takes away his children; it uses up the best years in their lives,—those years in which the youth ripens into a man, and in which his character matures. It is during those years that our sons are often treated with injustice and brutality, and, as a natural consequence, they return from the army into work-a-day life, as the bitter enemies of a government which dismisses many of them as helpless cripples or as physical wrecks without ever thinking of making suitable award. Then, still more frequently, our sons, after spending the best strength they have in the service of the state, in hard toil, and in exposing themselves to all rigors of a changeable climate, are sent back into the world, dismissed from the army, just because of some trivial offence,—kicked out into the cold as one might a dog, compelling him to hunt for food and to seek a new master. Therefore, I say, let us compel the government to spend hereafter the money so uselessly wasted for the enlargement of an army that has already overgrown its proper size, rather for more useful purposes, so that [280] the people, the masses, will know what they have sacrificed themselves for.”

The words of the speaker, drawn so largely from his own bitter experiences, were frequently interrupted by a loud acclaim; but as Schmitz now stepped down from his eminence to mingle with his auditors, the large crowd that filled the hall to suffocation began to rend the air with frantic cheers. They threw up their caps and shouted approval; scores of them cried: “Bravo, Schmitz!”; while others crowded up to him to shake him by the hand. It was an ovation as enthusiastic as Schmitz had never aspired to in his boldest moments, and his natural vanity felt intensely gratified. As to these people, he had indeed gained them over to his way of thinking.

His words had sounded so convincing, they had struck the popular chord so accurately, that many a one in this dense throng who had merely come that night as a spectator, drawn by idle curiosity, had been convinced of the justice of the Socialist cause, and resolved to join the party which espoused the claims of the poor. [281]

And so Schmitz had that night become not only an adherent but a leader of the “red” party,—a party which in this large manufacturing town was becoming more and more formidable.

FOOTNOTES:

[20] “Steckbrief,” a term in German law meaning a circular demand on all domestic or foreign authorities to arrest and hold in custody for extradition an escaped criminal.—Tr.

Chapter IX [282]

RESIGNATIONS ARE IN ORDER

SERGEANT-MAJOR KROHN, the regimental chief clerk, was leaning against the iron railing which shut off from the vulgar civilian world the edifice holding the offices and administrative bureaux.

He was smoking his morning cigar with considerable zest and reading the *Deutsche Zeitung*, which the letter-carrier had just left for the colonel. He was at leisure just then, for the colonel had gone on horseback to view the regimental drill on the parade grounds, quite a distance from town; and on such days it was the habit of the adjutant to recompense himself by a sound matutinal slumber for the nightly sleep he had missed in attending this banquet or that carousal.

Krohn was deep in the study of the advertisements he had found in the paper when his [283] "colleague," Sergeant-Major Schönemann, stepped up to him, dragging his clanking sabre at his heels, and with a cigarette between his lips.

"Morning, morning, Herr Commander!" he addressed Krohn in a jocular spirit. "What is the news?"

The minor dignitary thus addressed smiled pleasantly, and sent a small cloud of fragrant smoke into the air before answering.

"Great things are going on, noble brother-in-arms. I had almost forgotten about that."

"You don't say! Has H. M. at last sent me a decoration?"

"Not precisely, but something almost as unlikely,—König has been placed under arrest."

"What? König? Thunder and lightning! What the dickens has he been doing?"

"Why, they say he has been putting his fingers into the squadron fund, and that some of the gold has stuck to them. Really, it's a disgrace; a fellow like him, too, quite wealthy, and all that."

"The devil! I should never have supposed that of him; no, not of *him*! And how did they find it [284] out?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. I presume the colonel must have heard something about it. Yesterday afternoon he had him up in his room and charged him with the thing to his face. I peeped through the key-hole, and saw the poor fellow becoming pale under the accusation. He wanted to fetch his books at once; but the colonel wouldn't listen to him, and ordered him forthwith under arrest."

"But these two used to get along so well together!"

"Of course! And I presume there must be some truth to the story, else the colonel would probably have managed the thing otherwise, especially as he himself is in disfavor with the powers that be. This new affair will break his neck."

"Well, as for me," said Schönemann, "I don't believe in the story until I see it in print. König is not at all that sort of fellow. And the colonel always flies off the handle and seems to be glad when he has a chance of showing his authority. He thinks that is smart!" [285]

"Oh, I don't know, and what's more, I don't care."

The explanation of all this conversation is a very simple one. We remember that First Lieutenant Borgert, before seeking fresh fields for his energy, had made up his mind to get even with Captain König for that curt letter in which the captain had refused to accede to Leimann's request for another large loan.

Misled by the captain's own words on a previous occasion of similar kind, he had taken it for granted that König had really been guilty of diverting some of the moneys under his care to oblige a needy comrade,—Borgert himself. In his vindictiveness he had spared no pains in the course of his conversations with fellow-officers at the Casino to spread rumors as to this alleged fact, magnifying the matter or distorting its details, as it suited his purpose; and even after Borgert's flight these rumors had been scattered broadcast by the idle tongue of gossip. Finally, they had filtered down and become the theme of general conversation. The colonel, too, had heard of the matter, and, in his present condition of extreme nervousness regarding the [286] reputation of the regiment, that worthy had deemed it his duty to go to the root of it.

König himself had had no occasion to clear himself of all this gathering suspicion, for in his presence the wagging tongues became mute. Borgert had maliciously misrepresented König so much in his talks with the junior officers as to create quite a strong feeling against him. He had stated that König, although abundantly able to help some momentarily embarrassed comrades out of their troubles, had not only refused point-blank, but had added insult to injury. Such supposed behavior, since Borgert's tales had found credence, had cost König the sympathy of the majority of the officers, and now that trouble had overtaken him, many of them rejoiced at the fact. Lieutenant Bleibtreu would have informed his squadron chief of the unpleasant rumors circulating, but ill luck would have it that that faithful junior happened to be off on leave of absence. He did not correspond with any of his fellow-officers during his leave, and knew nothing

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of the matter until after König's arrest.

It was only by furnishing an extravagantly high amount of bail that König temporarily regained his liberty, having spent some ten days in jail meanwhile. By the colonel's order he was then suspended from active duty and compelled to await the outcome of the accusation in his own home. At first König was stunned by the blow. After fifteen years of active service, during which he had never been charged with anything contrary to good morals or manners, he was now accused of a vulgar crime! And what was worse, the accusation against him was entirely based on the irresponsible remarks of a man who was a moral wreck at the time he made them, and who had since been legally condemned as a convicted criminal. It was nothing less than an outrage, it seemed to him.

Where was the confidence, the good comradeship, with which he had formerly met on all sides? Was it not the duty of his superior, the colonel, first closely to investigate the circumstances surrounding an alleged fact which on its face seemed highly improbable, before formulating such an accusation likely to ruin his reputation in the whole regiment and in the entire army? [288]

And, indeed, the good captain had sufficient reason for complaining of the treatment he now met with. The ground had been well prepared by the mischievous gossip that had preceded his arrest, and now he was shunned as would have been a convicted criminal, an outcast, and the very children in the street pointed the finger of scorn at him and his family. Bleibtreu was the only exception. Firmly convinced of the innocence of his friend, he did valiant service in trying to restore the former universal confidence in König's integrity.

He proved his unshaken belief in the captain by paying him daily visits, and by spending every evening with him and his family. He became the companion of König's solitary walks; and he even persisted in this after he had been warned of the consequences by the colonel, and when his comrades punished him for his unselfish friendship by likewise ostracising and assuming a hostile attitude towards him.

But all these machinations did not hinder the young man from doing what he regarded as his duty. He would have deemed himself a poltroon if he had abandoned his friend now that misfortune had overtaken him. [289]

The entire body of non-commissioned officers of the regiment and the whole rank and file of it felt deeply indignant at the manner in which this popular officer was made a scapegoat by the colonel, and this universal sentiment found its expression by numerous unofficial calls which many of the captain's subordinates made on him during his time of tribulation.

The same was true of the civilian circles, both in the garrison and in the neighboring city: they all were filled with disgust and aversion at the conditions created by the stupidity and stubbornness of Colonel von Kronau. They testified their sympathy for König on various occasions. It was owing to all these mitigating facts that König gradually came to view the future with brighter spectacles, and he consoled himself with the thought that justice must triumph in the end; but his patience was sorely tried in the meanwhile, for the investigation of his case dragged on a long while. If it had been a case creating sensational interest,—a case of manslaughter or of cruel abuse of subordinates, perhaps,—there would have been more promptness, in order to quiet public opinion; but his was a case which seemed to call for no such speedy action. What difference did it make if he had to wait for months,—a prey to misgivings and doubts, and exposed hourly to malignant talk of busybodies? [290]

Six weeks had elapsed before his first preliminary hearing took place. König, of course, took occasion to explain the whole matter, and to prove, by means of his ledgers and by oral testimony, how entirely unjust was the accusation against him.

He was soon undeceived, however, in the hope that the end of the proceedings against him had now come; for the court was by no means satisfied with his *ex-parte* showing. They demanded an expert examination of his ledgers for the last three years, and this task required fully three months.

At the trial his innocence of the charge was, of course, fully established, and an acquittal was the result. [291]

It had been proven that there had been no diversion of funds, but that the captain's equivocal statement to that effect made to Borgert and admitted by the captain himself had been a mere pretext. The motive for this had also been shown to be that, as may be remembered, of preventing further requests for loans from so bad a debtor as Borgert. A bald statement of these facts was contained in the finding of the court-martial.

König had expected no other finding; but in the officers' circle the acquittal called forth nothing but disappointment.

Some four months later H. M.'s confirmation of the court's finding reached the little garrison. And that was the signal for another procedure, for now it became the duty of the Council of Honor to undertake a new investigation of the same facts, but from a different point of view,—namely, whether König had failed in any one point against the professional honor of an officer, and hence merited reprimand or punishment at the hands of his second judges.

The captain accepted this new ordeal with the long-suffering patience which had become habitual to him by this time. The final issue was still involved in slight doubt, but he felt himself [292]

safe in the firm conviction of his own innocence.

During this whole period of anxiety his domestic hearth had been almost his sole source of comfort. His family life had always been one of unalloyed happiness, and his wife, though young and pretty, had never been fond of that ceaseless round of noisy dissipation which had been such a feature of the little garrison for years past. So she did not miss the social pleasures which she now perforce had to deny herself; for, along with her husband, the ladies of the garrison now made it their business to cut her whenever she met any of them in the streets. Nevertheless, Frau Clara had felt this whole time of trial quite severely. A loving wife is jealous of her husband's reputation and of the honor due him, and, as for herself, she had been degraded from being the most popular woman in the regiment to the level of a social outcast; but her proud soul refused to submit to this ostracism, and it was no small gratification to her that the wives of the leading civilians made it a point to visit her at frequent intervals, and with some ostentation. Meanwhile [293] Lieutenant Bleibtreu, the ever-faithful, was no less zealous in his attendance.

One evening he again called, but his face was clouded. It was known to the Königs that the unpleasant position into which their steadfast young friend had fallen by championing his captain's cause weighed considerably on him, and that he had made efforts for some time to be transferred somewhere else.

As to the cause of his depressed mood, the lieutenant answered that his petition for transference had been rejected.

"And what do you mean to do now?" said his late chief, after a while.

"I have handed in my resignation."

For a moment his hosts looked at him in some consternation, but then König reached out his hand and said to him:

"You have done well. I must confess I pity you from my heart that you have to leave so fine a profession, and to inure yourself to prosaic civilian life, with its eternal questions of losses and gains; but I understand the motives which have induced you to take this step. You, as a young [294] officer, have seen events in this place which even I, so much older and more experienced than you, cannot but deplore with all my heart, and I can well understand it if you have lost that joyousness in the fulfilment of your duties which alone often makes these duties bearable.

"I could have wished to have you become a valued member of another garrison, and to see other conditions, better than those prevailing here. That would have proven to you that there are still many of the officers in our army who differ radically from some of those with whom we are acquainted here; but since they deny you that boon, it is perhaps best for you to turn your back on the army entirely.

"I myself would have counselled you in this sense if I had not felt a delicacy in urging you to a decision which you might perhaps later regret; and to show you that I speak with deep conviction, I will tell you that I myself am seriously considering my resignation."

This time it was Bleibtreu who opened his eyes in astonishment. [295]

"But why so?" he stammered. "I understand your request for transference has been granted."

"True; but it is with me as with you: my respect is gone for the profession to which I have belonged with honor for fifteen years. The conditions I have found in the corps of officers here have shown me that I do not belong here by rights. And who can tell me that I shall not find similar conditions in my next garrison?"

"You are seeing things too black, Herr Captain," said Bleibtreu.

"I think not," continued König. "For nine years I have been vegetating in this miserable hole. During that time I have lost the natural gaiety of my disposition. I have lost, or almost lost, the manners of good society. If I ever get into better society again, I shall hardly know how to behave myself. I have become a boor, and the comrades in Berlin or Hanover would treat me with perfect disdain if I should venture to approach them on a footing of equality. The tone prevalent in our Casino is enough to demoralize almost anybody in the long run." [296]

"You are quite right, Herr Captain," interjected Bleibtreu. "That is the worst of these little garrisons, especially those located near the frontier. After living in one of them for a number of years, one becomes impossible in decent society. This continual gossip, these ceaseless bickerings, are enough to destroy the temper and, to some extent, the reputation of an angel. Add to this the fact that all sorts of men 'with a past' are stuck into these little garrisons, and the mischief is done. Every little while we hear the phrase: 'Punished by transference to Moerchingen, Lyck,' and a whole number of similar holes."

"Quite true," König replied. "For the most part, officers who are sent to these frontier garrisons are relegated there to get rid of them. But H. M. does not consider the fact that to place such doubtful elements in large numbers into that sort of garrison renders them even more harmful than if they were sent to larger garrisons, where they would be subjected to the influence of respectable and well-bred comrades. That is how so many scandalous affairs happen amongst the officers near the frontier. If only the officers had at least an opportunity of cultivating respectable [297] society and of following a refined taste, permitting them regular attendance at good theatres,

concerts, and the like! But unfortunately that is not the case; their whole social intercourse and their sole diversion consist in frequenting the Casino. And what can you expect, then?"

"There is much truth in what you say," put in Bleibtreu. "By rights the transference to a frontier regiment ought to be a distinction, because there they are closest to the enemy, and would have the first chance to exercise their profession and to show the stuff that's in them at the outbreak of a real war. But to-day that is a mere illusion. Every day the prospect of a war becomes less, and therefore the chances of marching against the enemy exist only on paper."

When these two shook hands on parting that night, it was in a sad state of mind. A couple of weeks later Bleibtreu's resignation had been accepted, and he doffed his uniform and stepped out into the life of a plain citizen.

The Council of Honor decided, after many delays, that Captain König deserved censure because [298] of "endangering his professional honor." The explanation was added that no officer must put himself in such a position as to expose himself to the unfavorable opinion of the world; and since in the present case this had been done, it was necessary to point out to Captain König that his proceeding at the time in question had been incorrect and injurious to his honor as an officer.

König read this official communication calmly, while a scornful smile played around his lips; and on that same night his resignation had been filed at the regimental headquarters.

The colonel himself was not able to see in his official capacity this outcome of his foolish measures. A few weeks previous to the occurrence just described, he himself had received a letter; but that came from "above," and it was enclosed in the fatal "blue envelope."

He had been told in it, in the well-known diplomatic language employed for such occasions, [299] that H. M. fully valued his faithful services, but was unable to avail himself of them any longer.

One fine day a huge furniture van stopped in front of the fine house at the end of the town, where the colonel had made his stately home for so many years, and into its capacious maw brawny men packed, shoved, and kicked everything of his household goods that was worth while transporting to the far-away district near the borders of Russia, to which the deposed military autocrat was returning, with the intention of spending the remainder of his days amid the peaceful calm of his carrot fields and haylofts.

When the colonel and his wife took final leave of the little garrison, there was nobody at the station to bid him a tearful farewell. His orderly alone stood on the platform, loaded down with a dozen handbags and bandboxes the contents of which the Frau Colonel required on her long journey eastward. When the colonel, his wife, and his extensive family of younger children had bestowed themselves in the interior of a vast compartment, he leaned out of the window and handed the orderly a small coin of the realm. The man looked at it and then spat in disgust. [300]

Of all those who in the opening chapter of this veracious tale had assembled around the hospitable board of the Königs, barely a handful remained in "the little garrison." The weeding-out machine had been set in motion by H. M.'s private military cabinet, and lo! this was the result.

Chapter X [301]

UNTO THIS LAST

IT is past eight o'clock of an evening in December. A hurrying crowd is streaming on its way homeward through the arteries of a large and busy city. All the shop doors everywhere are being closed with a thundering noise, and the ear is assailed by the rattling of the iron shutters by which thievish hands are to be kept out during the night hours. The brilliant gas jets and the incandescent lights in the show-windows are turned off in increasing numbers.

On the asphalt pavement dense throngs of people weary from their day's labor, or else eager for the pleasures and excitement which the evening has still in store for them, are pressing forward at an even trot—an endless procession of men and women occupying every grade in the social scale,—elegantly attired women and girls, men dressed in stylish fashion, others clad [302] poorly and with the dust of their hard toil still clinging to their garments, and, mingled with them all, half-grown children,—boys and girls, who had been busy at counter or workshop throughout the day.

It was like a miniature reflection of life itself,—life in a large city, with all its toil and its wealth, its misery and its luxury.

On the pavement cabs and busses rattled past in endless succession; and elegant carriages, drawn swiftly by spirited horses and carrying the princes of trade and of birth, and veiled ladies, who might be actresses or countesses, for all one could tell, rolled smoothly along.

Scurrying to and fro in zigzag line, and emitting those peculiar doleful notes invented for them, automobiles were mixed up in apparently inextricable confusion with all this hurly-burly of vehicles, while the trams clanged their bells, and passengers stood waiting on the edge of the

sidewalks, desirous of boarding them, yet afraid to risk their lives in the turmoil and bustle of the intervening space. All this excitement of metropolitan life, this feverish haste, and this pitiless crush, bore the stamp of intense work performed in a human ant-hill, where every one of the [303] countless inmates has to fulfil his duty unremittingly, so that combined toil will produce a harmonious whole.

An elegantly attired pair turned the corner into a poorly lighted side street, and then took their way along the middle of the road, picking their steps among all the scraps of paper and the refuse of every kind that covered it. They came to a halt before a house the exterior of which showed it to be inhabited by persons in straitened circumstances, and then they ascended the well-worn front steps leading to its main entrance. The doorkeeper peered out of his little lodge and merely nodded slightly to the two. They had come here only a few days before, after leaving the stylish and expensive Grand Hotel, and that fact had furnished the man with food for reflection. They were former First Lieutenant Borgert and Frau Leimann. They had turned their steps to the French capital, in the hope to be there secured against any possible police persecution, expecting to be able to earn a living in this city of millions, which furnishes daily bread to so many. [304]

Their funds had rapidly been exhausted; for he who has not learned to husband his resources in the days of plenty will not be able to do so in the days of dire need.

And so Borgert had been obliged to look about him for some remunerative occupation. Hunger is a hard taskmaster, and hard as it seemed to this man who had been reared and had lived till then virtually in idleness, he had now to turn his hands to useful work; but the employment he had been able to secure had not lasted long. Without a word of warning, he had been dismissed as incapable of the work demanded, and he was just now returning from a last vain effort to obtain another place. They mounted the steep stairs and entered their little room, furnished without regard to even moderate ideas of comfort, and filled with an air which in the days gone by Borgert had never been able to endure.

He threw himself on the narrow sofa with a cry of despair and covered his face with his hands, while Frau Leimann cowered before the grate on a small stool.

With eyes hollow from much weeping and many sleepless nights, she gazed into the dying fire. [305] This was all the warmth which they could expect that night, for their means were entirely exhausted.

Both of them kept silence for a while, and then Borgert spoke. The woman trembled at the sound of his voice, as if she were awaking from a fearful dream.

“And what is to become of us now?” said he, very low.

She did not answer him, but continued to gaze into the faintly glowing coals, and a tear slowly coursed down her pale, emaciated face.

“To-morrow we shall have to leave this house, for we are unable to pay, and then no other refuge is left us but the streets.”

“You must work, George,” replied the woman in a tear-choked voice, although she tried to infuse some energy into her tones.

“Have I not tried?” replied he, with a shrug. “But haven’t they dismissed me every time without warning? And besides, there is no use for my trying again. How can I work? I’ve never learned it.” [306]

“But something must be done; we must find a way out of this,” Frau Leimann cried out, and her voice sounded shrill. “If you intend to leave me to misery, you ought not to have enticed me away from home.”

“Enticed?” Borgert mimicked her. “Who has enticed you? Was it not you who implored me to let you come with me because you were unable to endure any longer the life you were leading with your noble husband?”

“If I did so, you, as a man, ought to have had enough common-sense to talk me out of my intention.”

“I should like to know what man is able to talk an idea out of the head of a woman.”

“Do not speak this way, George; it is worse than frivolous. Summon all your courage and energy and let us see what can be done. There must be a remedy.”

“There is!” retorted Borgert, throwing a loaded revolver on the crazy table.

A tremor shot through the woman, and for a moment she leaned against the wall as if ready to swoon, while her wide-opened eyes stared with fear at the little instrument, the glittering steel of [307] which reflected the glowing embers in the grate.

“By all that is sacred,” her voice came hysterically, “are you out of your senses!”

“On the contrary,” replied Borgert, coolly; “it is the only way out of all our difficulties, and it is not the first time I have had the thought. Is it not better to put an end to this dog’s life than to die by inches in penury and distress?”

Frau Leimann stepped musingly towards the grate, as if its warmth were needed to drive the thought of approaching death out of her head and to pour new life into her trembling limbs. Her gaze hung fixedly on a faded engraving which was over the mantel, and which represented a banquet held by one of the ancient English kings. With glassy eyes she stared at this picture representing the joys of living. She did not notice that Borgert had followed her with his feline step.

The report of his pistol was heard, quick and sharp, and with a dying moan the woman sank to her knees. Her left hand felt for the warming flame, as if searching for its aid, and the tiny bluish [308] tongues of fire wavered in their reflection on the surface of this white, plump hand from which a rill of life-blood was slowly running, drop by drop, into the ashes of the grate. For a moment only her slayer gazed terror-stricken at the lifeless body; then he pointed the weapon at himself, and a second shot put an end to his existence. Death squared with his mighty hand all the guilt and all the debts he had contracted during his riotous life.

When the two corpses, four days later, were carted to the cemetery of Bagneux, the Potter's Field of Paris, and there consigned to the common grave of the destitute, nobody knew and nobody cared who these two unknown strangers had been. Nobody suspected the drama of their lives or the sin which had hurried them to death.

THE END.

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