

DEAR FATHERLAND
BY EX-LIEUTENANT BILSE.



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DEAR FATHERLAND

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
LIFE IN A GARRISON TOWN

With a Preface written by the
Author whilst in London, and an
Introduction by Arnold White,
and a Portrait.

DEAR FATHERLAND

By
EX-LIEUTENANT BILSE

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
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DEAR FATHERLAND

Dear Fatherland.

CHAPTER I

THERE had been a storm in the Koehler family. This was no rare occurrence. Ever since the Major had come to grief, and was left with nothing but a nominal pension and his military title to take with him into civilian life, he had become one of those soured and discontented people who, looking back over the glamour of their career, fondly imagine that the very moment when it has all perforce come to an end, was the beginning of the best time of all ; that fate has dealt specially hardly with them, and that they are the only people whom the world's injustice has robbed of their ideals and cheated of their expectations. Such was the old Major. Who, at one time, would have thought of saying to the smart lieutenant, whose love for his gay uniform was deeply rooted in his heart, the favourite of the regiment, the *enfant gâté* of society, the most capable officer on the drilling ground, with all the doors of a soldier's paradise open to him, who would have thought of saying, "This is all vain splendour, a passing dream ; you too will soon be treading the well-worn path to the military Tartarus, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, poor living, hopeless boredom, and nothing but vain regrets ; whilst above you hangs, far out of reach, your former heaven, peopled by the despised inferiors who have usurped your place, and are decorated with the honours you had vainly hoped might be yours."

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Unfortunately, during some manœuvres, he had led his company *round* a forest instead of *through* it, and was forced to bury his dreams of a brilliant future then and there, for the General had criticised his action so severely that it was an unmistakable hint to send in his papers.

He had buried his ambitions ; but it was the fact of his having buried them alive that made his existence so unbearable. The once gay and pleasure-loving lieutenant had turned into a hypochondriac, a permanently-discontented being who in the morning longed for the evening, and when night came, tormented himself with dreams of the unattainable ; without sufficient energy to take up some definite work, and strive with all his strength to distract his thoughts. The soldier was so deeply ingrained in him that when the Colonel's birthday came round, the only day in the year on which he was permitted to don his beloved uniform once more, he preferred to leave it hanging in the cupboard, because he could not bear the thought of having to take it off again.

To-day Major Koehler was striding restlessly up and down the three rooms, which opened out of one another, in his humble abode, with a most alarming expression on his face, rapping out the same oath every time he passed through the doors, and the ends of his stiff military moustache came in contact with the curtain tassels ; then he would turn half angrily, half pityingly to his wife, who was sitting, with her hands in her lap and her eyes full of tears, silently staring out of the window at the rain ; or he would throw an anxious glance

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in the direction of his two daughters, huddled up in the corner of the room like two whipped puppies, gazing at each other with nervous and helpless apprehension.

Benno had got into debt. There it was, clearly written in the half-torn letter lying on the table, at which the old man now and then cast a furious glance.

“I therefore hope,” ended this unfortunate communication from the Colonel, “that you are in a position to get your son out of a very unpleasant situation by a speedy settlement of his debts.”

It was easy for him to talk, easy to hope! Where was the money to come from, short of stealing it? For this was not the first time that rascal Benno had lived beyond his means during the five years he had been a lieutenant. Last time it was fifty pounds, this time it was a hundred and fifty pounds. No, it would not do! Only that morning he had had to refuse Lilly, his youngest and favourite daughter, her request for a new summer frock, and had himself long ago given up his mid-day cigar because the housekeeping money never sufficed; his wife, too, had been wearing the same dress all last year, although it was hideously ugly and tasteless. And was he now to throw away one hundred and fifty pounds on this scapegrace, whilst he—whilst he—the old Major paused, and remained pondering deeply for a few moments. Then, picking up the letter from the table, he strode, this time forgetting to swear at the curtain tassels, straight into the next room, shutting the door after him. A short while afterwards his wife also got up and, sighing deeply, walked across to the kitchen to prepare the mid-day meal. Lilly took up her fancy

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work, and Edith went on peeling the potatoes out of the pail which stood at her feet. Apparently this was not one of her favourite occupations, for the expression on her white over-tired face, with the thin, firmly closed lips, was plainly one of repugnance. Now and then she would pause in her work and gaze thoughtfully into space, starting up as though out of a dream, every time a potato slipped from her hands and fell back into the pail with a loud splash.

Edith was the blue-stocking of the family. She hated men with all the strength of her twenty-two years, looking upon them as superfluous beings who did nothing but cause their female belongings trouble and disappointment, and who were besides, from her point of view, intellectually far behind women. She spoke three languages fluently, had by her father's express wish "in case of emergency," passed the examination necessary for a school-mistress, knew every production of modern literature, and wrote impassioned articles on women's rights in a lady's paper. But this was not evident from her outward appearance. For with her short-cropped hair, the hard and masculine set of her lips, her deep voice, and her awkward, almost clumsy movements, one might have taken her for a self-conscious male student in female attire, rather than for a young woman, in whose breast, instead of the tender emotions attributed to her sex, there raged a continual warfare against sentimentality, and all the natural feminine affections, which, although they struggled for existence, were kept severely in the background by this example of the third sex. To compare her with rosy-cheeked Lilly, who,

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bending over her work, was continually obliged to smooth back an obstreperous lock of her fair silky hair from the childish face with its dark eyes, which tried so hard to look serious, but were always lit up by suppressed laughter, was like comparing two plants, one of which had grown up in the sunshine, the other in the shade. One could have appropriately called them Prose and Poetry, as they sat there side by side, each intent on her thoughts. Only when the Major's regular footfall was heard in the next room—a sign that, according to his custom, he was treading the path of meditation—did Edith look up from her monotonous work, and glancing across at Lilly with none too friendly an expression, said with a deep sigh :

“Well, this is a nice look out for us again.”

Lilly did not reply, but merely looked interrogation at her sister.

This apparent indifference aggravated Edith, who added almost angrily :

“I really believe you don't care one bit about it! Anyone would think that it was a pleasure to have to put up with papa's dreadful tempers for weeks.”

“My dear Edith, I should have thought that was one of the least of our troubles,” replied Lilly rather nervously. “You cannot blame papa for being upset. I'm sure I only wish I could think of some way of helping Benno.”

“Help Benno, of course !” repeated Edith mockingly. “Do not forget to give him an extra kiss for his heroic deeds when he condescends to come home, will you? I, at any rate, shall not take his part, I can tell you that.”

“That will be nothing new to him,” answered Lilly,

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sighing deeply. "You have never put yourself out for love of him."

"Thank goodness, no!" replied Edith crossly, throwing a potato in the pail with such violence that the water splashed all over her. "Has he ever deserved it? I, for one, have had enough of this everlasting state of starvation, in order that the wonderful Benno should travel first class and drink the best wines. I simply cannot understand papa—a sound box on the ears would do Benno a lot of good," she added under her breath.

"You know quite well," replied Lilly, "that Benno never spends more than he can help; he simply cannot shirk the things which are expected of him in his position."

"Expected of him! That's a good way of putting it! How can it be expected of a man to spend £150 when he has not got it? Still, perhaps you are right; I suppose they are what are called the duties of position."

"Of course, that's just it, and they are the things which Benno cannot possibly avoid."

"Just so! Then papa had no right to force him into a profession which makes it necessary for him to squander other people's money instead of earning something himself. It is simply idiotic!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Edith!" Lilly retorted hotly. "You know quite well that it was papa's and auntie's dearest wish that Benno should go into the army; besides, it is one of the family traditions."

"What do I care for family traditions which will only end by starving us, and which prevent us poor girls from

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earning our own bread? If Aunt Stänzchen was not everlastingly worrying papa about it, I should have been earning my own living long ago, free from all these everlasting worries."

"Edith, you speak as though you had no spark of good feeling in your heart!"

"Thank goodness I have cured myself of all that sort of thing by degrees! I have quite made up my mind what I shall do, and have not the slightest intention of being bullied any longer; in the future I shall go my own way!"

"For heaven's sake do not do that, Edith," Lilly implored in a tearful voice, getting up and going across to her sister. "You will only create more unpleasantness by giving vent to your anger towards Aunt Stänzchen. We must see what we can do. Do let us think things over calmly."

"That's right, howl away, you old cry-baby!" said Edith, who was quite indifferent to, not to say bored by, this exhibition of feeling on Lilly's part. "I am sick to death of this everlasting weeping over everything that goes on in the family. . . I shall take myself off, away from home." She spoke the last words under her breath, got up, and after taking off her apron and folding it, seized the bucket of potatoes and walked towards the door, throwing a very disagreeable look in the direction of her sister. She had barely grasped the handle when the door opened and the much-abused Aunt Stänzchen sailed into the room, with a still graceful carriage despite her sixty-two years, and a cheerful greeting on her lips. The two girls glanced guiltily at one another, as people

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do when they are caught in some act of wrongdoing ; but quickly recovering their self-possession, accorded her the expected kiss on her gloved hand, which she received in a most regal manner, and, having deposited her pug in the best arm-chair, sat down carefully on a straight-backed chair herself, arranging the folds of her black satin skirt with great care, loosening the violet bonnet-strings under her chin and thoughtfully smoothing the parted hair, which came down over her ears like blinkers.

Aunt Constance, known for short in the family as Aunt Stänzchen, was the heiress of the late von Koehler. To the secret chagrin of all her relations she retained a quite exceptional amount of mental and physical vigour, and clung with such tenacity to life that she would certainly have disinherited all of them had she suspected for a moment that the three generations had all in turn bewailed this sad but unalterable fact. In the meanwhile they were particularly affectionate towards her, called all her innumerable fads and fancies "charming eccentricities," nursed her to death when she had an attack of hay fever in the summer, and treated the disagreeable pug like a human being, the Major's wife even going so far as cheerfully to sacrifice to it a piece of the cold sausage reserved for her husband's supper.

In her youth Aunt Stänzchen had been engaged to a Count, but had been forced to give up her dreams of becoming a "high-born" lady when her beloved offered his heart and hand to her prettier cousin. All the same, she had never quite got over it, and occasionally treated her dutifully attentive audience of relatives to a poetical effusion on the lost lover, delivered in a voice trembling

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with emotion. Finally she was extremely miserly, except in the cause of charity. Poor relations often had cause to feel envious at seeing Aunt Stänzchen give away 500 pairs of woollen stockings to orphan children, whilst they themselves had to go about with theirs full of holes and darns. But there was one thing which ranked before all others in Aunt Stänzchen's mind, and that was "family tradition." For "family tradition" she lived and died—at least, she professed to do so ; her failing to fulfil the latter clause was the cause of almost as much abuse as her persistency in clinging to the former. It was purely for the sake of tradition that she treasured up and wore impossible clothes which were made in the fashion of her day, and had the family arms embroidered in colours on everything, down to the pug's waterproof jacket, and there were uncharitable people who maintained that it was even worked on the hem of garments which, owing to conventionality, were not visible to the public gaze. But she was specially strict about keeping up traditions as shown by the family tree, for the Koehlers prided themselves on having been a good old family even as far back as the Middle Ages. What then was more natural than that Benno, from the moment of his birth, was destined to become a lieutenant in one of the best and consequently most expensive regiments, or that she should be shocked beyond measure when Edith showed a desire to be a governess, and to come in contact with the lower ten thousand, simply because she was possessed by the fixed idea of earning her own bread single-handed. She was charmed with Lilly, who, as her aunt fondly imagined, showed

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her sense of what was due to the family by continually refusing the proposals of a very middle-class lieutenant who had been courting her for years. As a matter of fact they had been secretly engaged a long time, but if Aunt Stänzchen had discovered this, or that her niece was in the habit of sending one piece of work after another to the Officer's Charitable Association, receiving money in exchange, she would have had a fainting fit, as she did whenever the Major let fall one of his favourite barrack-room oaths.

Stänzchen's flute-like voice did not escape the Major's ear; he was not in the mood to listen to the chatter of this "old crank" for an hour on end—she never left under that length of time. All the same, she appeared to him to-day in the light of a *dea ex machina*, who was capable of saving the situation by the strength of her purse. He could see no other way out of it; Stänzchen must disburse, or Benno must doff his gay uniform. Accordingly he went into the sitting-room, appearing to be overcome with surprise and pleasure at finding such a welcome visitor, and kissed her right hand. She took a particular delight in the Major's salute, maintaining that the people of her own generation were the only ones who understood the art of kissing the hand with any real grace.

"You here?" said the Major, so heartily that his daughters exchanged astonished glances. "You are quite a stranger! May I enquire after your health?"

"It might be better," murmured Stänzchen languidly. "One cannot help getting older!"

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This was no unwelcome piece of news for the Major, who replied jocularly—

“I maintain the opposite! If you go on getting much younger I shall be greeting you in your swaddling clothes.”

Now Aunt Stänzchen thought it very bad taste to mention swaddling clothes, but all the same the compliment struck her as being so very witty and charming that she smiled sweetly and replied—

“You are, and will always remain, a rogue, but all the same a dear rogue.”

The Major thereupon playfully kissed his hand to her, which piece of gallantry was acknowledged coquettishly by the old lady.

“By the way, Benno wrote to-day and sent his love especially to you!” said the Major with an air of having hitherto forgotten some important communication.

“He sent his love to me? The dear boy!” piped Stänzchen, greatly touched. “I should so like to do something for him and give him some pleasure.”

“Send him a bank-note, then; he would be overcome with joy,” laughed Koehler meaningly.

But Aunt Stänzchen replied stiffly—

“Where am I to get bank-notes from in my impecunious state? As it is I do not know how I shall ever pay my taxes!”

“Well, the people who have a lot of taxes generally have a lot of money. I have neither the one nor the other.”

Aunt Stänzchen was ill at ease. She felt that she was in the uncomfortable position of a person who must

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say B, because they have said A ; so after rocking herself to and fro in her chair for a while, she said hesitatingly :—

“ If you mean that it will be of any use to Benno, I can send him a trifle, but——”

“ Why ‘ but ’ ? ”

“ Well, then, does he require it so badly ? ”

“ A lieutenant is always in need of money,” answered the Major, “ especially when he is in debt.”

Words failed Aunt Stänzchen. Her horrified gaze rested on the Major’s face, her eyes became larger and larger, and at last she managed to stammer hoarsely :

“ Has . . . our Benno . . . your Benno . . . debts ? ”

“ If you have no objection, yes. Perhaps you would like to read this ? ”

Aunt Stänzchen wished to refuse, but the Major had already put the letter from Benno’s Colonel in her lap, so that there was nothing left for her to do but to pick it up and read it. During the process she turned alternately white and red, and at the conclusion let it fall to the ground with a deep sigh, showing all symptoms of fainting, and dropping a tear on the silk dress. But for once these manoeuvres failed in their object, for the Major, who was striding up and down, took no notice, but asked in his categorical manner :

“ Can you raise that sum by to-morrow ? ”

“ I ”—groaned Stänzchen—“ I ? Good heavens, I have not got it ! ”

“ No ? Nor I,” said the Major, and leaving Aunt Stänzchen sitting there, he went back to his room, shutting the door behind him with an audible slam.

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He was experiencing it all over again ; the kind friends and helpful relations with their mouths so full of good wishes and friendly words, who all give out like a machine which has been asked to do more than it can manage ; they, like it, are wanting in willingness. Very miserable and on the verge of tears, the poor old Major sat down in his worn-out armchair to think it over. There was no help to be obtained anywhere now. The game was up. Benno must share the lot of the hundreds who every year die the bitter death of failure—those who at one time are numbered amongst the countless shining planets of the military firmament, and who the next moment fall and disappear into the darkness of the night like shooting stars. No one mourns for them, new stars shine in their places, and the old ones—what becomes of them ?

Happily Koehler was a fatalist. Fate had taught him always to look for some good in everything. Who knows ? perhaps it was a piece of luck, an intentional ordinance of fate, that Benno should be forced to give up the old life, in which perhaps he was not destined to attain any great age, whilst he still possessed the youth and strength to start a new one.

He thought of his own fate. It had certainly been bitterly hard, for it had come upon him at the wrong time—too late to start afresh, too early to die. He gazed sadly at the opposite wall. The sword, helmet, sash, epaulettes, all the ornaments he had worn till he had become grey, hung there covered with dust and rust, seeming to say : We were merely intended to show you happiness ; it was a mistake to try and grasp it.

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“It is true,” he thought to himself, “he who is fortunate enough to be born under the silk canopy of a princely bed, or in some ancestral castle, can safely leave himself in the hands of fate. All the muses and fairies stand by his cradle, and dispense their gifts lavishly over the young worldling, amongst others, if necessary, the talent needful for the making of a general. But the one who is born in obscurity, at whose cradle Dame Sorrow and the veiled Fates have stood sponsors, will, even if he achieves a certain rank and success in life, have a continual struggle for his happiness, earning it only through his own hard work, his capacity for making the best of his opportunities, or his complete understanding of the art of making up for any gifts which Nature has not bestowed on him by clever acting. With Harlequin’s wand he must blind the eyes of all doubters, unless he would wander aimlessly along the rough paths of life, which for the “high-born” folk are cleared of every hindering stone by kind and influential friends and relations. But every one has not such ministering angels, and must perish for lack of them.

The old wound in the Major’s heart began to bleed afresh, and, added to the pain rankling there, a growing resentment against those who had ruined him began to take possession of him. Had he not always done his duty, and spared no effort to perform his work thoroughly? Had he not always earned praise and achieved good results, the fruits of which were now enjoyed by another, probably owing to his name being of more importance, or to his being lucky enough to be a favourite with the authorities through the judicious

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flattering of his superiors? But was it not shameful to think that all this sort of thing should exist in a profession where so much depends on the thoroughness of the individual, and where promotion should only be the result of personal merit?

Who could give back to those who were ousted from their places the youth and strength which they had squandered in preparing a comfortable berth for someone else?

Raised to the highest ranks in society, filled with all sorts of prejudices, with a supreme contempt for all their contemporaries in other professions, crammed with ideas of their own importance, brought up in a mental groove from which they can never quite depart, they have suddenly to enter that lower sphere of the contented, striving middle-class and prosperous officials, on whom they have hitherto looked down with compassion from their high estate, and have to spend the rest of their existence on a paltry pension, filled with vain regrets and resentment.

The Major had become really angry and strode up and down the room in his excitement, tugging nervously at the ends of his moustache. It was not until his eyes fell on Benno's portrait, which hung on the wall over the writing-table, that it suddenly occurred to him what had started his train of thought. Surely it was of his son he should have been thinking, not of himself. He gazed pityingly at the picture. Was not the greatest disappointment of his life awaiting the young fellow; the same sorrow which his father had experienced in his day? Poor fellow! He could not find it in his heart

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to blame him. After all, it was fate, and perhaps it would not be quite so hard for Benno, who, he knew, had not donned the King's uniform with the same enthusiasm as his father before him. That elevating feeling of pride in his nationality, which was one of the greatest mainstays of the army, had never been very strong in Benno, neither had he ever possessed that inexhaustible and necessary fund of satisfaction and keen pleasure in all the ups and downs of military life. He was unfortunately only one in a vast multitude to whom the external glamour, the charm of certain privileges, and the much-envied and luxurious life, had ceased to be novelties, and were looked upon merely in the light of a fit recompense for all the annoyances and troubles, the compulsory servitude, and the many inconveniences of their profession. It was true that this state of things was not satisfactory, but it was nobody's affair, certainly not Benno's; therefore . . . was it not better he should get out of it? the sooner the better?

The old man, having at last argued it all out satisfactorily with himself, sat down at his writing-table, stared thoughtfully in front of him for a moment, then, picking out a large sheet of note-paper, began to write. When he had written one page, he paused again as though something important had suddenly occurred to him, and putting his pen down, began to meditate afresh.

It was easy enough to say: Benno shall send in his papers—but how was he to start laying the foundations of a new career? A retired lieutenant was unfortunately not of much more account than the cast-off wheel of a

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machine which, useless by itself, could at the most only be used for repairs. Very rarely did either turn into anything better. This was specially applicable in Benno's case. He would certainly never set the Thames on fire; serious endeavour and love of work were not his strong points, and above all he did not possess the strength of character to apply himself to anything that was at all distasteful to him, or to take up any occupation in which his social position would be humble compared with his present rank, or which entailed his working hard for his daily bread and denying himself in order to achieve success.

Good advice would have been valuable at this crisis, but the Major was at a loss for it—what was he to do? He must see and talk to Benno, that was the best, in fact the only thing to do. So he wrote to his son instead of the Colonel.

* * * * *

Lieutenant von Koehler had not been seen on duty for some days. In reply to the many enquiries put by his brother officers the Adjutant answered, in the peculiar and indifferent manner people assume when they wish others to have no doubts as to the obvious falseness of their statement, that Lieutenant von Koehler was on the sick list. Consequently no one enquired as to the nature of Benno's illness—they knew enough; and during meals, or where they forgathered, his comrades would throw out sly hints, or exchange secret surmises as to the truth—for to hear evil spoken of another is a satisfaction to all, who know only too well how little good others can possibly say of us. So

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no one went to visit the sick comrade, which otherwise they would willingly have done, making the most of an opportunity of getting a cigar or a drink, or both. For Koehler stood on the brink of retirement, and for candidates for the civilian state they felt nothing but a passing pity, and showed no further interest in them. Koehler had been exempted from his duties by the Colonel until some sort of explanation of the embarrassing situation should be forthcoming.

“An officer,” he had said to him, “who has debts cannot properly attend to his duties, and I have no use for him.”

Koehler was therefore sentenced at once to confinement to his quarters. For four days his foot had not crossed the threshold of his uncongenial rooms in the barracks; he lay the whole day long on a couch, thinking over things and hoping against hope that something would turn up soon. His servant walked about on tiptoe, and had just enveloped the electric bell in a handkerchief, for every ring made his master jump, owing to his nervous dread of its being some unwelcome visitor. From the barrack square could be heard till quite late in the evening the loud shouts and sharp commands of the non-commissioned officers, and the noise nearly drove Benno wild; not only because it interrupted his train of thought, but because he felt that he alone was condemned to inactivity, whilst others were allowed to perform their usual duties. Did he spring up and walk nervously up and down his room, he was always irresistibly drawn to the window and possessed with the desire to look out just for a moment,

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if only for the sake of seeing a living soul ; and the same picture presented itself invariably—a scene whose contemplation caused him almost physical pain : swearing non-commissioned officers, weary recruits, and a few of his comrades, standing gossiping together with their hands rammed up to their elbows in the pockets of their military overcoats. It seemed to him as though they must be talking about him, and he experienced for the first time a feeling of thankfulness towards the superior officers who suddenly arrived on the scene, and whose advent was made known to the chattering group by a sign from the non-commissioned officer who was keeping watch, with the result that the gossips hastily joined their various companies and began storming and swearing, and altogether exhibiting such zeal, that one would have thought their salvation depended on a straight knee or the correct angle of a helmet. Then he would throw himself on the sofa again and light, for the third or fourth time, his last cigar-end to try and pacify his clamouring stomach, for the cook had orders from the Colonel only to serve food in their rooms to officers who had no debts at the mess ; and his last penny had gone to the washerwoman, when she paid him a long-delayed visit in person, in spite of the fact that over his door was a placard, placed there by some former occupier and misogynist, to the effect that “ Womenfolk must remain outside.” When his servant brought in the letters Koehler would throw, at the most, a cursory glance at the grey and green envelopes, which he had long since given up opening.

But there was a white one among them to-day. It

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bore the Major's unmistakable handwriting, and the coronet with his father's monogram ornamented the back of it. Benno picked it up hesitatingly, and opened it, more out of a feeling of dutiful affection than in the expectation of finding any pleasant news in it.

The letter did not contain much. "I am coming to see you to-morrow," that was all.

At nine o'clock next morning Benno was still in bed. The whole night long he had paced restlessly to and fro, preparing a suitable explanation for his father, and thinking of a way out of this uncomfortable *tête-à-tête* which, from his point of view, was quite useless; for it never entered into his calculations that his father would come with a well-filled pocket-book. He knew only too well how short they were of money at home, for he absorbed the greater portion of his father's pension himself. In case of emergencies, Benno had "borrowed" a few cigars and a bottle of Rhine wine from a neighbouring brother officer, who sent them unwillingly by the servant, wondering at the same time what a man in Koehler's position wanted with a bottle of wine. Had he got some girl in his rooms? In that case one could arrange a "chance" visit to inquire for the invalid. "But no," thought he, "he only wants to drown his troubles in drink." "*Tout comme chez nous,*" he added mentally. The chief thing for Benno, however, was that he had something decent to offer his father, for the latter had a decided weakness for these rare treats.

Awakening from his leaden sleep, Benno received a great shock on hearing his captain's voice shouting

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the familiar commands under the window. Had he overslept himself? No, he had "taken cold," and might not go out and enjoy the fresh morning air; then as the sound of the opening bars of his favourite march struck on his ear he could have cried from sheer loneliness and the miserable feeling of being deserted and an outcast. A growing longing for his father awoke in his breast—the one person who still troubled himself about him, except his servant, who only did so because he was ordered to. To his longing for his father was added that for his mother and sisters. What sacrifices they must have made in order to scrape together sufficient for him to live up to his position, which was neither according to his means nor his taste, and from which, all the same, he did not think it possible to sever his connection. His thoughts were interrupted by his servant, who announced that a gentleman had called who would not be refused admittance. Hardly had he given the man instructions to send the persistent stranger away with a plausible lie, when he heard a step in the adjoining room, and a moment later was gazing guiltily upon his father's stern countenance.

"Get up!" said the Major in a deep voice. "Young people should not sleep till ten o'clock," and with these words turned on his heel and went back to the sitting-room, where Benno heard him sink into an armchair with a heavy sigh.

The Major had not long to wait. Benno soon appeared, pale and trembling, with a look of having been up all night, and on observing that his father continued silently staring at the floor without taking any

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notice of his entry he remained standing where he was, uncertain for the moment what to do, then, pulling himself together, fetched the bottle of wine from the corner, and put it on the table.

“What does this mean?” growled the old man. “Poor people do not drink wine.”

Benno looked nervously at his father, put the bottle back in its place, and sat down with some hesitation opposite his taciturn guest. Neither spoke a word, and not until the silence began to grow embarrassing, did the Major break out with a heavy sigh.

“What’s to happen now?”

“If only, father, you can, . . .”

“I can do nothing!” said the old man angrily; “the most I can do is to give you some advice as to how you can most decently disappear.”

Benno paled. He had not been prepared for this turn of affairs, for although he knew that there was nothing much to be had out of his father’s pocket, yet he had always hoped to find some way out of the difficulty. Now, suddenly, like a dreadful apparition, the thought of compulsory resignation arose before him.

“You know,” continued the Major more quietly, “the last of the money that your mother had saved went two years ago to pay your tailor’s bill. I have nothing more to give you. This is the last resource,” and diving into his breast pocket he produced two £5 notes, which he placed on the table. “Lilly sends you these from the money which she had saved up for her dowry.”

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“It is very touching of her, father, but . . . we shall not get very far with that.”

“At all events it will suffice for the journey across the frontier, or if you can think of anything better? . . .”

“Good Heavens, father, you don’t mean that I must desert?”

“Desert? No, no, my boy, that would be a blackguardly thing to do. You must send in your papers and disappear abroad to the El Dorado of all our officers who have gone wrong; that much you *can* do.”

“But what am I to do abroad, my dear father,” expostulated Benno, “am I to——?”

“Black boots, like your comrades in America, or don the garb of a waiter, for the time being. I can think of nothing better.”

Benno gazed at his father in silent bewilderment. Was he in earnest, or was he only playing with him, to punish him for his foolishness?

“Father!” he stammered anxiously, “You cannot really mean me to——”

“Certainly, my son!” answered the old man with decision, “I am not joking.”

Benno stared in consternation at his father for a moment, then his eyes filled with tears and an indescribable feeling of anxiety rose in his breast, a sensation as though he were almost strangling. This feeling fell like a heavy curtain before his eyes; he felt he must cry aloud for help, to make himself heard, and to have those cruel words unsaid.

“You see,” began the Major, who had apparently regained his composure, “there is no object in beginning

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again from the beginning. In two years' time it will be the same old story, you may be sure of that."

"But I will be very economical and live within my means for the future. Consider, father——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the Major sharply, with a forced and bitter laugh; "that 'being economical' is one of the many legends of a bygone day, and sounds just as ridiculous as the story of the recruit who apparently carried the Field-Marshal's *bâton* in his knapsack. A wealthy lieutenant can afford the luxury of being economical, but a poor one either starves or gets into debt."

Benno did not venture to answer. He realised that his father had spoken in bitter earnest. In the depths of despair he stared silently at the floor, not noticing the tears which stood in his father's eyes. The old Major had seen many a young officer go this way in his time, and had always felt the deepest sympathy for them in the trouble he was fated to experience so bitterly in his own life. It was familiar enough to him; the fall from the heaven of a well-deserved and honourable position, free from cares and anxiety, to the depths of hard reality; or else the miserable sense of carelessly contracted debts hanging over one, like an angel with a flaming sword, guarding the gates of Paradise, outside which no existence worth living seemed possible. And these debts—were they in any proportion to all the wretchedness they brought upon the debtor? No, a thousand times no, for they affected others besides the one who contracted them, and the men who would now be called upon to judge his son all sanctioned a system by which the debts of the inexperienced, the tardily warned, and

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the badly advised, brought disaster on the heads of others in a thousand different ways. And this time the victim was his own dearly loved son, whom he had come to advise. . . . Deepest compassion dispelled the Major's few remaining feelings of anger.

"Now cheer up, my boy," he said in a broken voice, "it is not quite hopeless yet. You have still got your father, even if he cannot help you much," he added with a mirthless smile. "I shall go and see the Colonel." With these words he got up slowly.

"The Colonel! You yourself?" cried Benno astonished.

"Yes, I shall go and tell him myself what you were going to have told him, and ask for leave for you. We can arrive at some decision so much better at home."

Benno did not answer, but when the door closed behind his father a moment later, he was filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards the man who had taken pity on him in his helpless position.

Colonel von Schöller and Major von Koehler were not strangers. Already, on Benno's entrance into the regiment, they had shaken hands as old comrades in arms, for at Gravelotte they had stood shoulder to shoulder under the enemy's fire. It is true Schöller had climbed somewhat higher up the military ladder and was now a colonel, with the certainty of being made a Brigadier-General. Consequently Koehler felt a certain antipathy towards the man. Embittered as he was, it had become almost a fixed idea with him, that anyone who had attained a higher rank than himself could not possibly be an honourable man, or, at any rate, must be a

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man always ready to humble or efface himself when his ideas did not happen to coincide with his superiors' views. He hated such people. The man who was afraid to show his own individuality at all times was, in his opinion, no man, but simply a puppet, who grinningly performed every desired movement when the right string was pulled.

Schöller was still sitting at the breakfast table. From his attitude it was clear that he was not in any undue hurry to arrive at the barracks, for his motto was: "First come the superior officers, but not too soon;" consequently he was thoroughly enjoying his morning cigar, whilst his wife, in a morning gown which had once been cream coloured, and with untidy hair, sat beside him reading out the latest alterations in uniform from the army regulations. The Colonel had just remarked that they would be wearing peacocks' feathers next, and his wife had let her silvery-toned laugh be heard, when the servant brought in Koehler's card, whereupon she rustled out of the room with a prolonged "oh!" and the Colonel, wearing a very displeased expression, gave orders to show the gentleman in.

Schöller went to meet the Major with outstretched hands.

"You were lucky to find me here!" he exclaimed jovially. "I was for once in a way going on duty a bit later this morning."

"I have just come from the barracks, Colonel," answered Koehler; a remark which seemed to cause the former some embarrassment. "Please excuse my early visit," he added, "but my stay will not be a very long one." The Major's attitude was stiff.

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This did not escape Schöller's notice, and he therefore assumed a more serious expression as Koehler continued :

"It is no pleasant business that brings me here ; by the way, thank you for your letter."

"It was only natural that I should communicate at once with you as Benno's father and my old friend," interposed the Colonel.

"As a friend you say!" answered Koehler, with raised eyebrows. "H'm. I'm grateful for your friendship, dear Schöller, but I should have been more grateful if you had given some proof of your friendship a little sooner."

"How do you mean?" said Schöller, startled. "I do not understand you."

"Well, let us talk plainly with each other. It is not the first time my son has been in a similar situation, and I maintain that in the beginning it would have been possible to prevent matters going so far ; now it is too late."

"Excuse me one moment—do you mean to suggest that it is my fault that your son has lived beyond his means? I cannot possibly run about after each of my officers like a nurse."

"You need not go so far as that, but I think if you had kept a stricter watch on him this would not have happened, and it would not have come to his having to send in his papers."

"You are mistaken, dear Koehler," replied Schöller sharply, "I am the commander of a regiment, not a nursemaid. I require of my officers that they should

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themselves know what they are to do, or leave undone.”

“Perhaps I have no right to say things to you which might sound like criticism or blame, because you asked me to speak as a friend.”

“But you must see yourself, dear Koehler, that it is impossible for me to run about everywhere after my lieutenants and keep count of every penny they spend; if an opportune warning does not suffice, well then——”

“Then one must find some other means, you were going to say.”

“Under certain circumstances, yes,” answered the Colonel, shrugging his shoulders, for the situation was becoming a little uncomfortable for him. “But you cannot wish to imply that I am responsible for the system.”

“Not quite that; but your method of independence goes, in my opinion, a little too far. The system governing the education of lieutenants is an established law, but one should not do as Lafontaine did who, having never troubled himself in the least about his son, said one day: “*Je suis bien aise, il est réussi.*” The natural result of this system is that ninety per cent. draw blanks; but this does not suffice for our young men who actually require to be educated in firmness of character to comply with the exaggerated requirements of those so-called ‘duties of their position’ which have become such a strong element among us.”

“I will not discuss the question as to whether this system leaves anything to be desired or not. Its chief

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fault is perhaps that we expect a boy of nineteen or twenty to be a regular model of good behaviour and start him with a capital of pride of rank without the smallest guarantee that he has any notion how to husband his resources. It is obvious that those responsible for the education of cadets should study the matter thoroughly in order to send their pupils at any rate partially grounded into their new life. After all, the so-called selection of officers is merely a farce. I mean, how can anyone, after seeing a young cadet sitting as still as a mouse for a few hours in the mess-room, form any real opinion as to his merits? He must be an exceptional youth if he fails to create a favourable impression under this slight test. Then this so-called and much-prized smartness, which the lads bring with them from their military schools, it is either only on the tips of their tongues or borrowed from their tailors. But all this is part of the system and we cannot alter it."

"So," continued the Major, "you require that every greenhorn on entering the regiment should have the whole list of conduct rules at his finger-ends which, with all its regulations as to how to behave in special cases and situations—where one invariably does the wrong thing—has become a science in itself. Therefore, I tell you, a more careful eye should be kept on the young lieutenants who enter their profession so insufficiently prepared in this branch of their education. Advise and guide them so that the number of bankrupts should decrease, instead of increasing yearly, as they are now doing,"

"And if I understand you rightly, you blame me for not having done all this?"

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“I believe I have a right to, speaking as friend to friend,” replied Koehler seriously.

“Well, well, old friend, do not play the part of the judge any longer,” said the Colonel kindly, stretching out his hand towards his old comrade. “If you wish it, I will keep a constant watch over Benno for the future, and in order to make it all the easier, he shall be my Adjutant this winter.”

The Major’s gloomy expression did not change at these words, as the Colonel had expected, and Koehler did not answer till, meeting the former’s questioning look, he said sadly :

“Thank you, dear Schöller, but I have already told you that it is too late. I cannot pay Benno’s debts.”

The Colonel started guiltily.

“You cannot pay them?”

“No!”

“That is indeed a bad look-out!”

A long pause followed. The old Major stared silently at the carpet, trying hard to keep back the tears from his eyes that his former comrade should not see them. Meanwhile the Colonel’s gaze rested sympathetically on the old man before him with a feeling that he himself was partly to blame for all his misery. Never before had he realised to such an extent the great responsibility which rested with him as Colonel of a regiment, as at this moment when he saw the happiness of a family, and the life of one of his subordinates wrecked through events which he might have prevented, or at least have held in check. All this dawned on him now, and he felt that he deserved the bitter reproach in

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the eyes of the man before him. Was not the same thing liable to happen again at any moment? The thought of this possibility weighed so heavily on his conscience that he got up, and began nervously to walk up and down the room, almost oblivious of the presence of the man who had appeared so unexpectedly as his judge. The sight of the old man, fighting to keep back his tears, at last became unbearable.

Quickly making up his mind, he strode towards the Major, held out his hand once more, and said :

“Then I will pay Benno’s debts.”

Koehler looked up incredulously, and surveyed the Colonel for a while with a questioning glance.

“That is very noble and generous of you,” he said hesitatingly. “But I cannot accept this sacrifice, for I do not know if I shall ever be able to repay you. Something might happen to me any day, and I cannot inflict such a burden on my wife.”

“Don’t worry about that, my dear Major! I will settle all that with your son. Go to him and tell him that I expect him to announce his return to duty at noon to-day. And now you must excuse me, for I have arranged a meeting of officers at twelve o’clock.”

Nothing had been made known to the officers of the intended meeting, and it was not until after the Colonel had taken leave of the Major with a hearty shake of the hand at the barrack gates, that it was announced. With the events of the morning still fresh in his mind, the Colonel was going to lecture his officers, partly to ease his conscience, but above all to prevent any similar cases if possible. He could not conceal from himself the fact

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that, should it become known to the authorities that a lieutenant in his regiment had been forced to resign on account of his debts, his own chances of attaining the desired rank of a brigadier-general would not be improved. Whilst Koehler was retracing his steps in a happier state of mind, with his lost faith in true friendship once more revived, the entire watch, which ought to have been on duty elsewhere, were hurrying over the barracks in all directions bearing the Colonel's commands to the officers. As a matter of fact it was not very hard to find them, for with the exception of the adjutant they were having breakfast at the mess.

The news of the meeting burst like a bomb among them, especially as the Colonel requested them to appear in full uniform. There must be something very important on hand. Guilty conscience made cowards of them all, for all of them had something on their minds, which was sufficient cause for a reprimand *coram publico*, and many of them even more serious things; not only the lieutenants, but also the older men, some of whom were afraid they had perhaps been seen lately in certain places in mufti. Others again were filled with anxiety lest the "Old Man" might have secretly inspected their battalions. The fat Major was the only one who felt fairly at ease, for he lent the Colonel one of his horses every day, and only a fortnight ago had given a small fortune for his old and worn out "Laurentia."

Long before the appointed hour the officers were to be seen promenading up and down before the staff quarters in full uniform, exchanging surmises as to the unknown cause of the meeting. At last they caught

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sight of the fat Major, the owner of "Laurentia," whereupon they ventured to ascend the steps, for he always affected arriving at the last minute. They were not a little astonished to find the long-absent Lieutenant von Koehler there, and one or two of them asked him slyly if he had quite recovered from his serious illness.

Schöller now appeared. The top button of his overcoat, which he always wore undone—the Colonel's one eccentricity, as he himself often laughingly observed—was buttoned up to-day, a sign of the seriousness of the occasion, which was accentuated by the stern expression of his countenance, on which the conventional smile had given place to an air of almost Draconic severity. As he never liked to give his addresses a personal application, he turned his head to the left, as usual, and fixing his eyes on the ground began :—

"Gentlemen—I have requested your attendance here to-day, as I think it is high time to recall a very important statute to your remembrance. It runs thus: 'The more luxury and good living there is, the more should an officer be prepared to live a simple life, etc., etc.' You all know the words by heart."

As a matter of fact the Colonel did not know them perfectly enough himself to quote them to his officers, so found it more convenient to take their knowledge for granted.

"This statute, gentlemen," he continued, "arose from the well-proved fact that the increased rate of living in the present day was not compatible with an officer's means. To live like a gentleman does not mean to live

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beyond one's means, and it is a mistake to think that the regard of others is won through outward show, to which the officer should attach the less importance, the more it becomes a ruling factor in society. Besides, gentlemen, the acquirement of debts does not tend to strengthen the trust with which we, as examples of honest living and manly virtue, should inspire the nation. Therefore he who contracts debts which he cannot pay acts dishonourably. We, as officers, should have the strictest code of honour of any people in the land. I have no further use for any officers in my regiment who carelessly contract debts, and should such a thing occur, or any complaints of the same come to my ears, I shall have recourse to the strongest measures. I have warned you, gentlemen! Thank you!"

Thus spoke the Colonel and disappeared once more into his private room, after bestowing an annihilating glance on the company in general.

"Did you ever hear such nonsense!" grumbled the fat-Major, elbowing his way first to the top of the stairs, the others following with more or less discontented faces to continue their interrupted meal. Soon they were all reseated in full force, glasses were filled and refilled with wine, and things became very lively. Only Bülau, the Adjutant of the Fusilier Battalion, who, as he often laughingly said, went through the streets by leaps and bounds to avoid running into the arms of his creditors, had fled to the reading-room. At last he wanted seriously to study the addresses of genuine moneylenders, which up to now he had only glanced at casually in the papers.

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In the mess-room the fat Major was holding forth. His hearers always listened to his speeches, delivered in a deep bass voice, with pleasure ; for he could not only speak well, but he was such an excellent mimic of all his superiors, including the General himself, that he never lost a chance of scoring off them. To-day he was in a more serious mood than usual, and was severely criticising to a sympathetic audience the Colonel's speech, which did not appear to have met with his approval.

"He will be ordering the weather for the manœuvres next!" he grumbled. "Does he imagine that he can correct the evil by a few casual words like that? First he says one must pay one's heavy mess-bills and then says that we must not live luxuriously. Gentlemen, tell me, have you ever heard such a thing? As if any of us could look on whilst some wretched lawyer or some rich civilian fellow dined off oysters! It's too ridiculous!"

"Now, now, calm yourself, Fatty," said the first lieutenant sitting next him, in a soothing voice, laying a hand on his shoulder. "We don't eat the whole day."

"That is not the point," exploded the Major, shaking the friendly hand from his shoulder impatiently. "Now comes the climax! We are supposed to play first fiddle everywhere, to run about the streets like fashion-plates, travel first-class, and then, as soon as one has gone to the expense of buying a new uniform, hey presto! another arrives on the scenes. Our pay should be increased, I say!"

The Major had worked himself up so thoroughly that the veins stood out on his forehead as thick as pencils, and he tossed down one glass of wine after another,

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encouraged by the Adjutant, who kept on filling up his glass and drinking to keep him company. The mess waiters stood in the background with puzzled faces, for they had heard nothing of the matter under discussion, and could not make it out.

Meanwhile Lieutenant von Koehler had been sitting silently at the farther end of the table, looking gratefully now and then at the Major, who was quite unwittingly defending him with such brilliance. Sometimes he glanced impatiently at the big clock in the corner, for the Colonel on receiving his announcement had requested his attendance at one o'clock.

A visit to the "Waxwork Show," also called the "Chamber of Horrors," was not reckoned among an officer's most pleasant experience. The Colonel was in the habit of going into things very thoroughly on these occasions, and more than once a reprimand had been the result of such a visit. To-day Koehler might expect a sample of his wrath, for it was not likely that the Colonel would sacrifice one hundred and fifty pounds without giving vent to his feelings.

Schöller hardly acknowledged the obsequious bow which Koehler made on entering the apartment, and favoured the culprit with a severe look. Eight ears were in the meantime pressed closely to the doors leading to the reading- and mess-rooms, amongst them that of the Adjutant, who listened greedily to the words which were spoken in a clear tone, so that a few minutes later the result of the interview would be known in the officers' and non-commissioned officers' quarters, in the canteen and the barrack-room, in fact, throughout the length

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and breadth of the place. The listeners had a long time to wait, for it took the Colonel fully twenty minutes to make up for his sacrifice, and when Koehler left the room at the end of this time, pale and trembling, everyone knew a few moments later that Lieutenant Koehler had got a severe "jawing," and had been transferred, on account of his debts, to a frontier garrison.

CHAPTER II

THE short leave which Lieutenant von Koehler had received from his new Colonel had almost come to an end.

The Major's spirits had risen considerably during that time, for the turn events had taken with regard to Benno's career had lifted a great weight off his mind as to the future, the thought of which had cost him many a sleepless night. Above all, Benno himself appeared to have learnt a lesson from his unpleasant experiences, and if he remained true to all the good resolutions of which he was now always talking, he could not fail to be happy.

It is true that the Major looked upon his son's removal to a frontier station with decidedly mixed feelings, for his mind was always reverting to the saying, "A gosling flew across the Rhine and came back a gander" * ; and he knew from experience that being transferred to one of these garrisons generally meant that it was a last chance for a young officer who had found himself on the downhill path. It was not likely that a man who had not been able to keep out of mischief in a large garrison town, where every moment was fully occupied by business or pleasure, would, in a smaller station, be able to resist the pitfalls and temptations which would find only too fruitful soil in his weak character, and would be continually obtruding themselves

* "Es flog ein Gänlein über'n Rhein,
Und kam als Gijak wieder heim."

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on his notice, from the mere fact that they were the only attractions which offered themselves in such a dull place.

To banish an officer to the frontier to effect a moral cure, was, according to Koehler's experience, a case of sending him "out of the frying-pan into the fire;" for the idea that the cost of living was smaller was, to begin with, quite an illusion, as one had to do one's best to replace all the advantages and comforts of a larger station out of one's own pocket.

At any rate, Koehler himself looked back with the greatest dislike to the time he had spent as a lieutenant on the eastern German frontier, for it had cost him the greater part of his fortune.

The outlook was pleasanter for Benno, Aunt Stänzchen having been persuaded by his father into allowing him an additional fifty marks a month.

The entire family accompanied the traveller to the station with the exception of Edith, who, remaining true to her principles, had favoured her brother during his brief visit with looks filled with hatred, and only unwillingly stretched her hand round the corner of the door when he came to her room to say good-bye.

There was no lack of good advice from the parents before he started, but Aunt Stänzchen was the one who fairly overwhelmed him with it, for she imagined that she had a particular right to do so, as the liberal donor of so princely an addition to his income.

The journey was long. Benno had changed into a third-class carriage at the next station to that of his native town for the sake of economy, a thing which Aunt Stänzchen must not know, for she would be sure to think

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it a great insult to the traditions of her house for a Koehler to have sat in the same compartment with a common labourer. Benno, however, took no notice of the men who sat, snoring and smoking, closely packed in the carriage, being busy with other thoughts.

He gazed thoughtfully out at the moonlit landscape. The blue-grey hills in the distance cast their dark shadows on the plains, and the fleeting clouds passing over the face of the moon made gigantic and fantastic shapes on the bright green surface of the corn fields.

Benno was in the uncomfortable frame of mind of one who is starting a new life without the slightest notion as to what it will mean for him; and this unpleasant feeling, increasing with every mile which brought him nearer his journey's end, became a state of nervous disquiet. The journey seemed to him to last an eternity, and he counted the hours till he was due to arrive at his new station with growing impatience. The sandwiches with which his careful mother had provided him for the journey were left untouched; but, to soothe his empty stomach, he smoked, in nervous haste, one cigar after another from the box Lilly had given him just before he left. The few miserable huts and villages showing occasionally through the morning mists were not calculated to raise great hopes as to the cheerfulness of the frontier town which, barely marked on the map, was only spoken of in grim jest, just as one frightens little children by talking of the "black man" coming.

Koehler did not reach his destination till the following afternoon. A light cart, with two wretched-looking horses, drove him over the uneven roads to the barracks,

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where, according to the Adjutant's instructions, he was to take up his abode at present. As a matter of fact, these quarters were only intended for the youngest officers, but the Colonel preferred putting uncertain characters there at first.

The place looked inhospitable enough, in all conscience. The paymaster had not ventured to give the order for the repapering of the faded walls in the rooms of Koehler's predecessor, as the appointed time had not elapsed since they were last done. Nearly all the pieces of furniture were minus a leg, and the sheets on the iron bedstead were as dirty as though they had been slept in by the servant for years. The only attempt at decoration was an inventory of the contents of the room, which hung over a large hole in the wall and was covered with fly-blows, while it was impossible to see out of the windows overlooking the courtyard, for they were opaque with dust and cobwebs.

Benno shuddered at the sight of the bare room, which was more like a prison-cell than an officer's quarters, and whilst the servant was unpacking his things he went to have a look round the barracks, as it was too late to report himself to the Colonel. On leaving the wing in which his rooms were situated he found himself in the garden, where he suddenly came upon two gentlemen in grey, who were passing the time by shooting with an air-pistol at a bottle of wine, the contents of which were to be shared, free of cost, by the better shot. On perceiving Koehler they advanced solemnly towards him and introduced themselves—Von Rauch and Von Kollman. Koehler bowed in an embarrassed manner,

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holding out his hand to his new comrades, who were looking him up and down critically.

“Which commandment have you broken that you have been sent to Siberia?” laughed Lieutenant von Rauch, looking at Benno with an almost distrustful expression.

“Is it necessary, then, to have committed some crime to be sent here?” answered Koehler, feeling very uncomfortable.

“That stands to reason!” said Kollman, with a hearty laugh. “We do not come here for pleasure, and anyone misguided enough to do so would lose no time in getting away again.”

“That is a nice outlook!” said Koehler, trying to treat it as a joke, but feeling an involuntary dislike to the tone these two men adopted towards him, as though they had known him at least a year. Rauch appeared to realise this, for he tapped Koehler kindly on the shoulder, saying—

“Don’t be afraid; you will find it is really not half so bad. There is practically no work to be done, which is the chief thing.”

At this moment the servant of another officer who lived in the barracks came up to Rauch, and saluting delivered the following message—

“The gentlemen are requested to attend Lieutenant Gallwitz in his rooms.”

“Splendid!” cried Rauch. “Gallwitz has brewed some coffee. You must come, too, Koehler, then you can make the acquaintance of your next door neighbour.” So saying, he grasped Koehler by the arm and led him

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to his friend's rooms, which were on the ground floor. "You will be astonished. This chap has an awfully swagger den," he added, pushing him into Gallwitz's room.

Rauch had not exaggerated, for Gallwitz, who was looked upon as the eccentric of the regiment, prided himself on having nothing in his room which, as he expressed it, he had not "bagged" from somewhere or other. Consequently the walls were covered with all sorts of advertisements. Each was clearly labelled as to how, where, and when it had been "obtained" by its present owner, whether from a tobacconist's shop, a waiting-room, or a restaurant; and in addition Gallwitz had written a witty description of each of the pictures. On the sideboard stood a collection of glasses with the names of various railway stations inscribed on them, "my souvenirs," as Gallwitz called them. These, with the exception of a cup, which he declared he had only brought away from Cassel Station at great risk, and an old-fashioned oil-lamp which had once been a street lantern at some watering-place, were the chief ornaments of the room. Right across the apartment hung a clothes-line with at least a dozen pairs of gloves suspended from it, each bearing a different monogram. The only article in the room which Gallwitz could swear he had fairly and honestly paid for was a zinc bath which he had picked up at an auction for two shillings, and in which he was now reposing, attired in a pair of bathing-drawers, reading the paper, and waiting to receive his visitors.

"Don't think it rude of me, gentlemen, to have made

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myself comfortable," he shouted to the new arrivals, and stretching out his hand to Koehler, continued: "This is much the best place in this sweltering heat."

Koehler bowed again, more embarrassed than ever. These people seemed to have the knack of keeping others in a continual state of embarrassment; at least, he had never been in such a situation before.

Gallwitz did not appear to have the slightest intention of abandoning his tub; on the contrary, he requested Rauch to bring him his coffee there, on observing that the latter was struggling to rob an antediluvian coffee machine of its doubtfully smelling contents. At the same time it seemed to strike him that Koehler was feeling rather out of it.

"You must not write home at once and say that the people here give 'undress' coffee-parties," he called to him across the room. "I, too, can make myself smart on occasions." So saying, he seized a grey curtain, and, getting out of the bath, sat down to the table in this get-up.

"If you ever offer me coffee like this again I will report you to the sanitary inspector," said Rauch, fishing out the grounds from the bottom of his cup with a leaden spoon. "You might at least give us some of that condensed milk!"

Gallwitz got up, and, opening the cupboard, produced the desired article from amid a most varied assortment of things. At the same time he took a small box out of the drawer, which he handed to Koehler, who opened it obediently and discovered that it contained two caterpillars.

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“My domestic pets,” explained Gallwitz carelessly, and seemed surprised that Koehler did not honour them with a very minute inspection. “I have some more,” he added, opening a small box which he took from the writing-table, in which a frog was seen sitting on a few green leaves.

“You seem to be a great lover of animals!” remarked Koehler, by way of saying something.

“Oh, yes—rather!” replied the frog and caterpillar collector. “I am quite fond of them all, except the smaller kinds”; whereupon he jerked his thumb over his shoulder meaningly in the direction of the bedroom, and on observing Koehler’s puzzled expression, lifted his Spartan-like costume, presenting a back thickly covered with red spots to his astounded guest.

“What!” cried Koehler, horrified; “are there bugs here—real bugs?”

“Keep calm!” was Gallwitz’s answer. “Real live bugs, small and great.”

“Ah, you wait till you get into your room,” laughed Kollman, “you will go through something then! Your predecessor Schröder always shot at them with a revolver.”

At this moment a knock was heard and the postman entered. “Servus, bearer of delight!” was Gallwitz’s greeting, as the man handed him a small envelope. He refused the inevitable request for a tip, pointing to his bathing drawers and saying:—

“I don’t happen to have anything on me at present.” The postman departed laughing, and Gallwitz opened the letter, having recognised the handwriting as that of of his friend Grete.

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“We shall be having a visitor in a quarter of an hour’s time, gentlemen,” he cried triumphantly, and locked up the letter in the drawer of his writing-table which bore the inscription “Letters of my girlhood.”

Rauch and Kollman received the news of Grete’s intended visit with great joy, for Grete, the demi-mondaine of the garrison, was true to the colours, and often lived for weeks at a time in the barracks, enjoying most intimate relationship with almost all the officers, and honouring them each in turn with a visit. Sometimes she would go and stay a short time with one of the officers who lived in the town, and thus it was that she not only knew all their exact circumstances, but had become quite an indispensable factotum. They found her a most convenient go-between when one man wished to express an uncomplimentary opinion of another, for Grete understood how to convey such messages with so much tact and humour that through her they could say the rudest things to each other without there being any occasion to take offence.

This time it was Gallwitz’s turn to enjoy Grete’s society, and with this object in view his bedroom had been turned into “a regular boudoir,” having been newly papered, while, as he related with much gusto, he had talked the cook into giving him a new jug and basin.

Grete did not keep them waiting long. Her shrill laugh was soon audible from the passage, where she had paused for a moment at the window to watch the soldiers drilling and was shaking with laughter at the quaint appearance they presented, stretching out their arms and legs at the word of command. On entering the “den”

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she appeared to be pleasantly surprised at the party assembled there to meet her, and embraced each one tenderly, with the exception of Koehler, to whom she held out her hand, saying :—

“This is something new, isn't it?” She wore a becoming dress, a hat trimmed with ostrich feathers, a military sash turned into a waist-band, a regimental brooch and a number of rings on her hands, while round her neck was the skin of a fox shot by some captain or other.

Almost every article she wore was the gift of one of the officers of “her regiment,” thereby justifying the name which the colonel—who was well aware of her position in the regiment, which however as a bachelor he chose to wink at—had given her, of “The regimental pig.” It was said quite seriously that she was the illegitimate daughter of an officer of high rank from the west, and her aristocratic face, her good breeding, and a certain distinction of carriage seemed to verify the statement.

The new guest soon made herself quite at home. The fox necklet flew in one direction, the hat and sash in another, and after arranging her hair, which was dyed a very light yellow, before the cracked looking-glass, she sat down on the sofa with her legs crossed.

All this seemed like an impossible farce to Koehler. The familiar manner adopted by Rauch and Kollman had struck him as strange, but by this time he really hardly knew how to conduct himself towards these curious individuals in their still stranger surroundings. Filled with impressions of his home-life and up-bringing,

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he felt an absolute disgust at the conduct of these shameless people, and, quickly making up his mind, shook hands with Gallwitz and took leave of the party with the excuse that he wished to unpack his things which had just arrived.

Koehler's rooms were situated just over those of Gallwitz. On entering them, he could still hear quite plainly the laughter and jests of the party downstairs. Kollmann's piercing voice rang out every now and then like the shrill note of a trumpet, and Grete's bold laugh echoed round the empty room. It was impossible to stay there, so again descending the stairs he went to the reading-room to write a letter to his parents. He felt the need of so doing the more because the repulsive surroundings of the place filled him with such homesickness as he had never before experienced in his life. Sadly he thought of the humble yet cosy room at home, where only two days ago he was sitting surrounded by his family. The loving words of comfort and advice were ringing in his ears, and he could still feel the warm pressure of his mother's hand, and see once more the tears she shed as she bade him farewell, as though he were leaving her for ever. Now that he was far away from her he had a hard struggle to keep back the tears which homesickness brought to his eyes, and so he proceeded to pour out all his pent-up feelings in a letter to his parents, taking it to the post-office himself when he had finished. It was getting late in the evening when he returned to his quarters, and his man had already lit the lamp, the cracked chimney of which was stuck together with stamp paper.

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The voices of the three men and Grete's laugh were still audible from below, all a trifle louder than earlier in the afternoon, for Kollmann and Rauch had both been struck with the idea of drinking the bottle of wine which had served for a target in Grete's and Gallwitz's company, whereupon Gallwitz supplemented it with two more. The clinking of glasses, and the sound of a cork which shot like a bullet up to the ceiling, breaking into a thousand pieces the glass of the street-lamp, which had been brought home after some orgie, testified to the fact that the "fizz" had not yet given out. It was not until nearly 11 o'clock that the place became quieter; and instead of laughter he heard only Grete's subdued giggling and Gallwitz's nasal tones.

The night afforded Koehler ample opportunity of proving the truth of what Kollmann had said with reference to the companions lying in wait behind the faded wall-paper. They seemed to have been regularly waiting for a victim, for Benno had not been in bed an hour before he was forced to get up, with the firm resolution of making a complaint as to the state of his quarters.

* * * * *

At nine o'clock the next morning, Lieutenant von Koehler was at headquarters in full uniform, awaiting the Colonel. The Adjutant had not yet appeared, and, on his arriving at the barrack gates an hour later, Koehler went to meet him in order to introduce himself, whereupon he learnt that the Colonel never arrived at the barracks till eleven o'clock in the "Sauergurken" *

* A form of pickled cucumber considered a delicacy in Germany.

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season. Koehler therefore decided to look for the captain of his squadron, Captain Baer, and report himself. He found him on the drilling-ground of troop 8, where, armed with an inch rule, he was busily engaged in measuring the collars and heels of four "Einjährigen,"* for the Colonel had just started a campaign against the "foppishness" developing in the regiment. At the sight of Koehler he interrupted his work and went slowly towards him, eyeing the unpermissible height of his collar and the still greater height of the spike of his helmet as welcome sacrifices. Koehler had scarcely stammered out the stereotyped introduction than Baer drew forth the inch-rule, and holding it to Koehler's collar remarked with raised eyebrows—

"That must disappear, Lieutenant von Koehler, if we are to be good friends. Order reigns supreme in my troop."

"Yes, sir," answered Benno.

"And the helmet spike too."

"Yes, sir!"

"And the white collar under the coat ditto?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good. Then I shall expect you to go on duty tomorrow morning. The parole book will be sent to you."

Baer turned to his "Einjährigen" again, and Koehler, pondering deeply, went back to the staff quarters.

This, then, was his new captain! The first feeling

* Conscripts whose education allows them to get off with one year's service in the German army.

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with which this man, with his lined forehead and nervous expression, filled Koehler was one of pity. Baer seemed to him to be one of those men whose continual anxiety as to what their superior will say makes them debase themselves to almost any work in order to please. It struck him as being unspeakably petty and ridiculous for a man at an age when others busied themselves with the more weighty questions of their profession, to be running about among his subordinates with a yard-measure, like a tailor's apprentice, seeing if their collars were half an inch too high. Although Koehler had met with more than one pedant in uniform, they were most of them pedantic in theory only. In practice, such people, whose range of vision did not extend beyond the commonplace, were in his opinion to be despised. One thing he already knew for certain, and that was that his being good friends with Baer was a very doubtful event, especially as he had a strong foreboding that this narrow-minded Philistine would play the part of guardian to him, by orders "from head-quarters." It was obvious to him that his being put under the care of a strict superior was the result of his not altogether blameless past, and the more this fact obtruded itself on his mind, the more determined he was to take his own line with all these people here, and following his father's advice, preserve his individuality. It is true he knew that the luxury of a personality was almost a breach of discipline in a subordinate, but at the same time he was determined not to descend to the moral level of which he had had an example yesterday, to degrade himself by becoming merely the obedient dog of his superior officers.

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In this determined and stubborn mood, he climbed the stairs leading to the Colonel's room, less in the expectation of meeting him at once than in the desire to escape the inquisitive looks of the non-commissioned officers and men, who he guessed, after Rauch's remarks of yesterday, looked upon him as a confirmed sinner, and were probably puzzling their heads as to the nature of his crime, in case it should not already have come to the ears of the regiment.

The Colonel appeared shortly afterwards, with the end of his morning cigar still held between his lips, and, almost ignoring Koehler's bow, he shook hands with the Adjutant and requested him to send the new arrival to his office. Here again he took no notice of Koehler's salute, and after listening negligently to his report, said, in an almost offensive manner :

"I see by your papers that you were obliged to leave your former station through debt ; you must alter your ways of living here, sir ! The slightest relapse that comes to my knowledge will result in your being cashiered. Thank you."

"Would you allow me to mention one thing, sir ?" said Koehler timidly, before leaving the room.

"What do you want ?"

"My quarters in the barracks are infested with vermin, and are not habitable in their present state."

"Not habitable ?" answered the Colonel sharply. "Your predecessor lived there three years any-way one does not enlighten one's Colonel on these subjects. Go and see the inspector of the barracks about it."

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Koehler had not expected a particularly friendly reception, but he was not prepared for the Colonel's extreme abruptness. He had to put up with it, however, and pocket his pride, which was by no means a novelty to him. It was unfortunately one of the sanctioned privileges of those in authority to cruelly illtreat their subordinates, who were grimly bound by military discipline and the fetters of forced obedience ; and to protect themselves by the power of their rank, when some subordinate so far forgot himself as to behave like an ordinary human being and retaliate.

Human feelings and individual character did not as a rule fit into the stereotyped mould, consequently they were always suppressed as being a nuisance and inconveniencing the personal ascendancy which, thanks to the star sewn on his shoulder, all higher officers possess. But what was the use of worrying over it ?

Koehler went back to his quarters in a depressed frame of mind. On the way he met Gallwitz, whom he scarcely recognised in uniform, and who was busy inspecting his troop's kit for the manœuvres. The latter waved his gloves at his new comrade, who acknowledged the greeting coldly and passed on.

He had still to report himself to the commander of the battalion, but at present Major Preusse was busy doing accounts and did not wish to be disturbed. He had already had a notice left in Koehler's room by the orderly, to the effect that he should expect him at his office at 12.30. Both arrived punctually, and the extremely kind reception which he received from the Major, almost made Koehler forget his former grievances.

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"I cannot exactly congratulate you on being here," said Preusse, offering Koehler a chair, "but I am delighted to see you. Your father was an old school friend of mine. How is he?"

"He is very well, thank you, sir," answered Koehler.

"I am glad to hear it! H'm—have you reported yourself to Captain Baer yet?"

"I have, sir!"

"And what did he tell you about your work?"

"Nothing, sir. He only measured my collar."

"Of course, of course—that's just like poor old Baer," said Preusse, laughing heartily. "Well, well, you must try and get used to him. He is a bit fussy, isn't he? You understand—but you will soon get on all right with him."

"I hope so, sir."

"You hope!" cried Preusse, much amused. "You seem to me a young sceptic. Well, well, we shall see. By the way—I leave you to judge how far it is good for you to make friends with your comrades. But a little caution is always a good thing, and if you ever feel at all lonely, my wife will always be pleased to see you as often as you care to come. Now, good-bye, I have still some work to do at the mess. At present I am mess-president," he added in explanation. "If you have nothing better to do you might accompany me there, and I can introduce you to your future comrades at the same time."

During the "morning beer" and the lunch which followed Koehler had ample opportunity of studying his new brother officers. They were all different, and yet

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in appearance exactly like the usual type which he had grown to know only too well in his former station. The prevailing tone, however, was absolutely different. The scandalous and often doubtful conversation, which was carried on during the meal, the extremely free and easy way of behaving towards each other, and the coarse, unrestrained manner of speaking, disgusted Koehler beyond measure; but what struck him particularly was the insulting way in which they all spoke of their superiors, even before the mess waiters, without any objection being made by First-Lieutenant Schill, the senior officer present. The more or less scandalous stories which came to Koehler's ears on this occasion were perhaps extremely interesting, but left no doubt as to the morals of the regiment, which—without being a paragon of virtue or a model of all the proprieties—could not fail to be shocking to him. The conversation to-day, well sprinkled with spicy jokes, turned chiefly on the person of a Captain Vogel, who, as Koehler gathered from various remarks, lived with his six-year-old son in a house in the town, and let rooms to his brother officers. The last two lodgers had simultaneously given up their rooms, and were now relating, in the most unrestrained manner, the cause of their departure, thereby disclosing facts which made the other men's hair stand on end, more especially Koehler's, who was quite ignorant of the circumstances.

“A regular brothel, gentlemen!” said one of them at the conclusion of his interesting narrative, and seemed to be rather proud of himself for having turned his back on the house.

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The meal finished, Koehler accepted Schill's invitation to accompany him to his rooms in the town. Although he had not approved of Schill's passive attitude during lunch, yet Koehler was interested in this man who, from his appearance, might have been taken for the commander of a company. His quiet and reliable manner, his decisive way of speaking, and the serious expression of his handsome face, commanded a certain amount of respect, if not exactly sympathy, and Koehler wondered all the more that his appearance alone did not have the effect of keeping the conversation at mess within decent bounds. The two now left the mess-room, and strode silently down the street side by side. It was not until they had left the long wall surrounding the barracks behind them that Schill turned and said half aloud :

“All the walls have ears here.”

“What?” asked Koehler, who had not quite understood what Schill said.

“Oh—nothing,” answered Schill. “By the way, what did you think of the mess to-day, on your introduction to it?”

Koehler did not answer.

“Don't be afraid of saying what you think!” added his companion after a slight pause. “I should not be offended if you called it—bestial.”

“Do you really wish to hear my candid opinion?” answered Koehler, in an embarrassed tone. “Then I must say—but perhaps the circumstances were to blame—I mean——”

“I know—I know!” interrupted Schill, with a quiet laugh. “Look here, I have lived eight years in this

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village, and have never met anyone who has not turned up his nose at the very question I put to you. But it is a good thing to be reminded of it on these occasions, for one so easily becomes hardened, and ceases to take much notice of things which must strike others as incredible from an impartial point of view. Perhaps you wonder why I look on in silence, instead of interfering as I ought to. I used to do it sometimes, and each time it caused an uproar, so now I let them go their own way unhindered."

"I do not doubt that your position is a very difficult one," replied Koehler, "for some of the men seem to be somewhat—how shall I put it?—somewhat queer lots."

"Queer is a mild expression, I know a better."

"I had the opportunity yesterday afternoon of meeting Gallowitz, Von Rauch and——"

"Oh, that set," interrupted Schill, rather startled, "I am almost too late then. I had the—call it what you will—indiscreet, uncomrade-like intention of giving you an opportune warning, as I think it is a good thing to open the eyes of the uninitiated as to the circumstances of one or two of the men here, before he becomes more intimately associated with them."

"I am very grateful to you and can quite understand your wish after my experience of yesterday."

"I am glad of that ; but we will wait until we are in my den. I have already remarked that everything has ears. You will soon find that out for yourself."

It was not far to Schill's lodgings ; they were in one of the big houses situated in the chief street of the town, which made a pleasing impression seen from below.

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Whilst they were ascending the stairs Schill told his companion that he had lived here with his mother ever since he had been transferred from his last station. His room was a large simply-furnished apartment, the walls covered with book-cases, and on the writing-table, over which hung a large picture of the Emperor, lay a mass of books, manuscripts, and ordnance maps in the wildest confusion. The whole room gave ample evidence that Schill occupied his spare time in study.

“You seem to be very industrious,” remarked Koehler, with his eyes fixed on the writing-table.

“Well, yes,” answered Schill, “the little there is to do here is not sufficient occupation, and a special aim to work for is necessary, if one does not wish to join in the amusement of the younger officers.”

“Are you preparing yourself for an instructorship at a military college?”

“Yes,” answered Schill, sighing. “I am going to have one more try. I have failed twice already, but I am going to make ‘a triple idiot’ of myself, as it says in the ‘Terminus Technicus.’”

“But why, when you——”

“I tell you,” said Schill bitterly, “when a middle-class individual like myself comes from the frontier bringing only a little learning and a written report from his Colonel that he cannot recommend him, instead of a lot of good introductions and a list of swell connections, he may have all the knowledge in the world at his finger-ends, but all the same he will fail.”

“Don’t you get on well with the Colonel?” asked Koehler astonished.

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“No, unfortunately I do not!” was Schill’s answer. “At least at the last examination he wrote me a conduct report which left nothing to be desired, in the way of baseness. What I have done to him goodness only knows, but he simply cannot stand me.”

“But surely that was very——”

“Mean you were going to say? Yes, it is—but we are powerless against it. Conduct is called in Latin: *pectoralis reservatio et proprius motus*, and the things attributed to us by our superiors must be true, just, logical, etc., etc. They are not answerable to anyone for what they say, as it comes under the head of the proper maintenance of discipline. Would you complain to them that you had been calumniated?”

“Under these circumstances I should certainly think seriously about it, before I let the fruits of my best years be wasted.”

“You mean that it’s a pity about the work? Don’t say that—you see—but you must just make yourself quite comfortable—come and sit in my grandfather’s chair and light a cigar—please!”

So saying he pointed to a cigar-case and lighting a short pipe himself sat down in the well-worn office chair.

“You see,” he began again, “I should not like to give up my work. If one does not keep one’s mental abilities up to a certain pitch, they become blunted by the monotony of military work. The quantity of mental exercise that one gets out of one’s winter work is very meagre, to say nothing of the fact that most of us follow the old method of copying it all off two days before it is wanted. Above all, one does not get one’s

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money's worth out of military service. As long as an officer's work is confined to counting the bricks in the barrack-walls, varied by continually looking at his watch or the barrack-gates, to see if it is time to be released, or if the Captain is coming ; as long, I maintain, as that continues, military service is more than deadening to the mind. One can hardly wonder that most officers look upon it as a wearisome interruption of their leisure, and the rank and file as the cause of many vexations and of countless tricks. When we start remedying this mental lassitude in our private life, we begin to regard our military duties from a higher standpoint, and then even the monotonous recruit-drill becomes interesting. For, after all, it is a very interesting profession, in which one has to shape all sorts of different individuals and characters to the same end. We extend our knowledge of human nature enormously, gaining many a curious experience, and, above all, we are never bored. Then, we attain the desired result so much more easily if we do not treat our men as though they were all of the same pattern. We are forced, in self-defence, to find our satisfaction in our work, for what is there beyond ?

Koehler had been listening attentively. Never having regarded his profession in such a serious light, he felt almost as though his companion's words were a personal reproach.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, with some hesitation, relighting the cigar which had gone out, while Schill gazed out of the window with an air of depression ; then he sighed deeply and began again :

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“In order that you should not misunderstand me, I must say, were I to ask anyone to tell me honestly whether nowadays our profession would suffice a man who had high ambitions, they would have to acknowledge—sad as it seems—that it does not. All the beautiful ideals with which we started have faded to mere figures of speech; we see in ourselves nothing more than an easily replaced—or even under certain circumstances—useless wheel of a machine, whose work can be done quite as well by another. Should we disappear from the scene some day, it is just the same as though we had never existed. And if we go farther into the matter and ask: What use are we to the nation? We do not even know how to give a satisfactory answer. The beautiful dream of training the people may at one time have been the business of the army; but it is so no longer, for the good which the influence of military training effected has become a mere illusion, so that the advantages and disadvantages balance, unless we go over to the sceptics and say with them that the army is the school of social democracy.

“Certainly that overshoots the mark; but a decided and preponderating influence on the nation by military training exists, like many other things, only on paper. And what work is there left for us? To keep Germany’s enemies at bay! Good Lord, have we not ceased to believe in that? Can we obtain sufficient joy in our profession from this thought when we read daily how the various national alliances, the diplomatic relations of countries, and similar arrangements are causing the likelihood of a war to recede farther and farther into the distance?

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“As a last consolation we have the pride in our uniforms and our titles. Can we ‘on our word of honour’ look upon this pride as being fully justified? I say: No. Our position is no longer a sufficiently irreproachable one in the eyes of the world to enable us to wear our uniforms in the proud consciousness that glances of the highest respect only will be our portion; and I must confess, whenever I go amongst my fellow-men, I am tormented with the uncomfortable feeling that the respectful looks, to which I as an officer am entitled, are not nearly as numerous as the sneering comments and malicious remarks with which the sight of a uniform inspires all rightly-thinking people in these days.

“That is my belief, dear Koehler, and it is doubly painful for a patriot like myself.”

Schill had let his head drop between his hands, and was gazing thoughtfully out of the window at the grey autumnal sky, and Koehler thought he saw a furtive tear in his companion's eye. He himself felt strangely moved, for Schill's words had made a deep impression on him. They made him realise the intense pain which an ambitious, irreproachable and veteran officer like Schill, must have suffered to have formed such an embittered judgment of his profession through force of circumstances. Had it not all come honestly and truly, straight from his heart, like one complete word which had been built up letter by letter by the logical process of his own mind? And to every letter hung a drop of his heart's blood, joining them all together into one word which passed sentence of death on a world of ideals, hopes and joys.

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“You must not take it all so tragically,” Koehler said at last.

“More than one person has told me that before,” answered Schill with a sad smile. “To be sure I have become a pessimist; but do you imagine that the surroundings in which we are forced to live here are not the very ones to convert us to pessimism, unless we scrupulously avoid thinking seriously about anything, and merely perform our daily round like a machine?”

“When I was transferred here eight years ago on the formation of the regiment, I found a body of officers, who, like myself, were proud to guard one of our remotest outposts. But they left one by one, others came, and the garrison to-day has become what the authorities will not, however, acknowledge: a penal settlement for those who are being given their last chance of proving whether they will make up for past failings, and atone for their former sins which were the cause of their failure in other stations.”

“You are passing judgment on me by those words,” said Koehler, deeply stirred, “for perhaps you do not know that I have been sent here through getting into debt.”

“Is that all?” laughed Schill. “If one was to condemn you for that, then one might as well summarily dismiss the entire body of officers. He who throws stones at us for that reason should first prove that he would manage better under the same circumstances. An officer does not suffer any personal detriment through having had debts when he has once paid them, especially nowadays, when they have come to be con-

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sidered a necessary evil. But we have to call men 'brother officers' who by rights would come under the head of depraved characters, if they did not happen to wear the Emperor's uniform. Guard yourself from them."

"What I saw yesterday," answered Koehler, "certainly gave one some idea of what they were."

"Then you have seen it yourself, and you will not look upon me as a calumniator. I do not include Gallwitz, who is more fit to be in a lunatic asylum than to do an officer's work. I refer to men like Rauch, who had to efface himself from his former garrison on account of an illicit love-affair, and Kollmann who was mixed up in a very disreputable card scandal. However, it will suffice for to-day if I tell you to guard against these men, who are unfortunately not the only ones about whom I shall have to warn you. One blames them not only for their past, but for the way in which they have poisoned the entire regiment by their immoral way of living, and have already ruined more than one young fellow who in his ignorance has trusted them. If you keep your eyes open, it will not escape your notice that one or two of our seniors are not quite irreproachable either. You will soon see this; and then living in such surroundings as these, we are still supposed to believe in that fairy tale: the honour of belonging to the noblest profession in the land! Good Heavens!"

Schill had become quite excited, and getting up from his chair, threw his pipe with such force on to the writing-table that his guest looked up at him with a startled expression.

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“Excuse me,” he said, “but my blood boils when I think of it all.”

A long pause followed. Schill had seated himself on the sofa, and was absently turning over the leaves of a periodical in silence. Koehler was likewise silent, thinking over all his companion had said. His head was so full of it that it seemed to him as though he had dreamed a confused dream, and awakened to the horrible conviction that this dream was no passing flight of the imagination, but the truth in its most brutal form.

He experienced a desire to be alone, and getting up, shook hands with Schill and begged to be excused. Whilst thoughtfully descending the stairs, Koehler felt that he had left behind in Schill's room the few ideals which until now had helped to give him some pleasure in his profession. Yet he firmly believed, from Schill's grasp of his hand on saying good-bye, that, for the first time in his life, he had found a true friend in the circle of his brother officers.

CHAPTER III

THE autumn manœuvres were over !
On the evening before the enrolling of the recruits, six young fellows were sitting in the inn of their native village round a table well supplied with bottles of wine, over which hung an oil-lamp burning dimly. The pale, reddish-yellow glow lit up the small, smoke-darkened room so feebly that one could hardly recognise the few faded pictures on the walls, or even the highly-coloured portrait of the Kaiser over the stove. The one thing plainly visible was the half-withered oak wreath hung round it by Ernst Grube and George Weidner, who were celebrating their departure with their friends. To-morrow morning they were to present themselves at the rendezvous about three miles distant as future dragoons in the Emperor's army, whence, in charge of an officer, they would proceed with their comrades to their new quarters.

The autumn wind howled outside, and drove an endless chain of heavy grey-black clouds over the sky. The pale moon peeped at intervals from behind the dark mass and, throwing a feeble ray from time to time through the lattice window of the inn, lit up the figures at the table in silhouette against the greyish white-washed walls ; then, swiftly disappearing again behind the clouds, left a pale yellow margin at the edge of the blackness. The merry songs with which the evening had begun had ceased ; silent too were the thundering cheers for which Grube had called for the Kaiser and

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the regiment. Grube's brother Wilhelm sat before the worm-eaten spinnet in the corner with his head sunk on his breast. Hitherto he had accompanied the noisy songs as well as he could ; now, like the rest of the company, he sat lost in thought. The approaching departure of his brother made him very unhappy. Had he not been his only friend and untiring help in the management of their father's farm since their parents' death ? For Sophie, the sister, did not care much for her household duties, but preferred to gad about with the village youths, or to go and gaze at the shop windows of the neighbouring town, returning home late in the evening laden with all sorts of finery and rubbish, to the great annoyance of her brothers.

One thought oppressed him above all others : how much longer would he live ? The serious lung affection from which he suffered robbed him of the hope of ever seeing his brother again.

Ernst might, from all appearances, have been thinking the same thing, for he also sat silently at the table, with his head supported in his hands, hardly noticing what the others were saying. For him, there was not only the parting from his delicate brother, and the sister whose frivolity he had been able, to a certain extent, to hold in check by his personal influence, but also from Mary Siebert, his sweetheart, to whom he must bid farewell, in the painful consciousness that two rejected lovers welcomed his departure as giving them an undisturbed opportunity of making advances towards the object of Grube's affections, whose constancy was not her strong point.

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George Weidner, on the contrary, was quite happy. Not only because he painted a soldier's life in rosy colours to himself, but more particularly because at last he was escaping from the strict supervision of his father ; for old Weidner ruled his son with a rod of iron, the latter's frivolous disposition coming continually into conflict with his father's solid and old-fashioned principles.

"So you see yourself a 'non-com.' already, my boy," shouted Weidner, slapping his future comrade boisterously on the shoulder.

Grube looked up half scornfully, half reproachfully, taking no notice whatever of the loud laughter of the others.

Weidner, who laughed loudest at his own attempt at a joke, now got up, and, pushing William off the stool, began playing the accompaniment of a song with excruciating discords, and, with the exception of the two Grubes, all joined noisily in the singing.

Evidently the wine was beginning to affect their speech ; nevertheless the little room was soon filled with the wildest shouts and noises ; once more glasses were clinked all round, and Weidner called to the bar for yet another bottle.

Thus things became lively again. William Grube had already disappeared from the room, and his brother, who could not stand the noise and drinking, followed him shortly afterwards. His departure was the signal for a shower of coarse witticisms at his expense. But he paid no heed, wishing only to be alone with his thoughts.

He did not see his brother anywhere outside. The

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wind had gone down a little, and the moon was shining clearly in the sky, whilst the last dark bank of clouds was vanishing behind the horizon. At that moment the melancholy tones of the village clock rang out in the clear freshness of the autumn night, and the howling of a watchdog in the neighbouring village completed the wailing music which echoed like a funeral dirge across the quiet land, bathed in glistening moonlight.

Grube walked slowly down the village street. It was now silent, only the wind blew softly through the rustling foliage of the giant chestnut trees, which reared their russet branches on either side of the street.

On reaching the outskirts of the village near his own house he sat down on an old bench by the wayside. A strange feeling came over him to-day that he was not only bidding farewell to his home but also to life itself. Was he not leaving behind in the uncertain hands of Fate all that had hitherto been dearest and most precious to him? What would happen to them all before he returned? Grube rose almost involuntarily and walked towards the cemetery where the tombstones shining in the moonlight seemed to beckon him on. He wanted to see for the last time the grave of his parents. His footsteps almost startled him as he drew near to the peaceful abode of the slumbering dead, and his shadow seemed a gloomy spirit following wherever he went. When at last he knelt before his parents' grave, he felt like a thief who was robbing the dead of their repose in order to find peace for his own rebellious soul.

He knelt long on the damp earth, holding secret spiritual communion with the beloved dead and receiving

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their comforting words, and it was not until he heard the mournful sound of the village clock once more that he came back to reality and thought of the living who were calling him, and among them the one person who must have been waiting for the last hour to say good-bye. Always good-bye! The word struck as cruel as death itself. Rising, he hastened back to the village, for he had promised to pay his sweetheart a farewell visit.

His nerves were excited. Sometimes he would suddenly look back, or stand listening, as though he saw or heard some ghostly presences now behind, now beside him, which always melted away into moonlight when he strove to recognise them. As he neared his house it seemed to him as though a shadow glided rapidly along the path before him to disappear between the trees planted on either side, and when he reached the spot where it had vanished, he heard a subdued whispering. Ernst was vexed with himself for harbouring such fancies. Was it worthy of a future soldier to be afraid in the dark like a timid child? Then he thought he heard the whispering again—louder this time than before. With one stride he was at the other side of the chestnut tree, and saw his sister in the arms of a young fellow from the neighbouring village.

This sight brought him forcibly back from the land of dreams and fancies to reality. A sudden fury possessed him; Sophie, with a scream, ran into the house, leaving the two men face to face and ready for a fight.

“What business have you with my sister?” hissed Grube, shaking with rage and agitation.

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“What’s that to you?” retorted the other defiantly, clenching his fists.

“To me?” roared Grube, beside himself with fury. Hitting his opponent over the head with his walking-stick he felled him to the ground, where he lay unconscious.

It was the first time that Grube had ever attacked anyone. For the moment he was seized with paralysing terror, and the next it seemed to him quite a matter of course, in fact almost a sacred duty, to knock down the man who had dared to lay hands on his own flesh and blood in the person of his sister. To-morrow he would have to turn his back on his home and would no longer be able to keep a watchful eye on Sophie, which up to now had been his duty; but he could still take the responsibility for what happened to-day.

Without vouchsafing another glance to his victim he passed on to his sweetheart’s home. He had now shaken off his depression and felt like a man who had fought for his own. Lights were still burning in Marie Siebert’s house, and the loud laughter which could be heard through the open window, showed that she was not alone.

Grube’s surmise that he would find his two rivals there proved correct, for they were just taking leave of her. He did not acknowledge their greeting, and on their endeavouring to revenge themselves by saying maliciously: “You seem to think you are a dragoon already,” he looked contemptuously at them and answered through his clenched teeth: “If I was I’d soon give you one in the mouth with my sabre.”

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In view of Grube's threatening attitude and the rising anger in his eye, they agreed to beat a retreat, but gave vent to their feelings by laughing long and scornfully as they stumbled down the stairs. To make their revenge quite complete they started singing as they went down the street a song of the reserves which they had learnt from the hussars who were quartered in the place last year.

Grube flung himself wearily down on the gaily-patterned sofa ; it seemed to him as though the events of the evening were perhaps a premonition of the bitter disappointments awaiting him during his term of service.

"What were you doing with those two?" he asked Marie in a surly tone, without raising his eyes from the ground.

"Any one would think we were already married, to hear you!" replied Marie flippantly.

"I asked you what you were doing!" said Grube angrily. Crossing the room with long strides, and taking hold of her arm he began shaking her violently.

"They asked me to go to the fair," stammered the girl, who was frightened at the anger in Grube's blazing eyes.

"And shall you go?" he continued, taking hold of her arms still more firmly.

"Leave hold! I shall do what I like!" cried Marie, endeavouring to free herself from Grube's grasp.

Grube let her go, giving her a ringing box on the ear, which sent her weeping into the corner of the sofa.

"Now you know the answer!" growled Grube through his teeth, sitting down on the bench in front of the stove.

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A quarter of an hour went by, and Marie still sat crying on the sofa, whilst Grube stared gloomily at the floor. At last he got up slowly, went over to Marie, and held out his hand, saying—

“Now, be a good girl and stop crying; you see what happens when anyone deceives me! I must go now. Take care of yourself. I shall be back on leave at Christmas. Goodbye!”

“Goodbye!” whispered Marie, looking up at her lover with a frightened glance.

Grube turned away without another word, and went downstairs, but on gaining the front of the house, he thought he heard a timid “Goodbye!” called after him. Marie stood at the window, watching her lover till a turn in the road hid him from her sight.

This was Grube’s farewell to his future bride. On the way home he caught sight of the staggering figures of his friends in the distance. Weidner was humming fragments of a vulgar street song, the others accompanying him with wild yodels, and Grube was very glad that he had locked the door of his house behind him.

It was dark in William’s room, and on striking a match Grube found his brother lying fully dressed on the bed motionless as a corpse, with an ashen face and eyes burning with fever; his breath came rattling and wheezing from his chest, and he was so weak he could hardly articulate. Ernst was used to this sight. It occurred whenever William had one of his frequent bouts of coughing, but to-day a cold shudder went down his back at the sight of his brother, who looked so like a dying man.

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“Poor old fellow!” said Ernst, stroking his hot cheeks and sitting carefully down on the edge of the bed.

The match had burnt out, but the moon was shining so brightly into the room that no lamp was necessary. It was only dark at intervals when some little wind-cloud passed over the face of the moon, and then William’s rattling breath sounded almost gruesome. Ernst remained some time in silence. Sad misgivings began to fill his mind as to his brother’s state of health, just as they had oppressed William himself only an hour or so earlier.

The thought of losing his brother had never struck him so forcibly as at this moment when it lay like a dead weight on his mind. The pity he felt for the poor young fellow gave him a choking sensation in his throat, and he could hardly keep back the tears which his brother must not see.

“Look here, William,” began Ernst after a while. “I must go away to-morrow. We have always been good friends, and now I shall be here no longer.” He stopped and struggled once more with his tears. “How you are to manage it all,” he began afresh, “I hardly know. But I always think, that if we do our duty, as our parents taught us to do it, then it will be all right. You will be one hand short, but I shall not have gone beyond recall, and shall be able to come and see you sometimes. But so long as you are alone always ask yourself: ‘How would this action strike me in another?’ If it seems to you to be right for other people, then well and good. We have no friends, for we have always gone

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our own way together, and you must not believe anyone who makes up to you, for their intentions are not honest. And remember, William, to take the cattle in soon, for it is already getting cold out of doors, and the meadows are damp. And don't give the dun cow fresh hay, then she will be all right. You must send me the account-books every week, do you hear? And then, William, about Sophie—never let her out of your sight. You know she is not like her mother. If you cannot manage any other way, you must lock her up in her room—anything to keep the girl respectable! I was in the cemetery just now. Oh, William, I can hardly believe that I must go!”

William had not heard the last words, for he had fallen asleep. His chest heaved more regularly, his breathing became quieter, and the fingers grew slack of the hand which his brother held in his.

Ernst got up noiselessly. At that moment the moonlight was eclipsed, but one last ray, softened by the shadows of the quivering leaves, fell like a caress upon the sick man's brow. A moment later, the remaining pale streaks of light died away into the darkness which, like an evil spirit, stole through the lattice window of the sick man's room. Ernst Grube crept silently away and, weeping bitterly, climbed the stairs to his attic.

* * * * *

Shortly before six o'clock the next morning, Ernst Grube stood at the door of Weidner's house, for they were to accompany each other to the rendezvous. He carried his small amount of baggage in a hand-bag, and in the pocket of the black Sunday coat, which he had

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inherited from his father, was a supply of bread and butter which Sophie had put on the breakfast-table for him. She herself had not appeared, for her conscience smote her with regard to the affair of the previous evening, so Ernst had written the words: "Remember our parents!" on a piece of paper, which he left on the kitchen table. Weidner kept him waiting a long time, and it was not until Grube had called him repeatedly that he appeared, pale and dissipated-looking, and clad in his Sunday suit. He greeted his friend laconically, and then, with drooping head, tramped along at his side in silence.

The sun hung like a blood-red ball in the cold blue of the East, and a streak of milk-white, transparent mist lifted itself from the pale gold stubble fields on the right, where the dew-drops, like crystal beads, hung flashing in the morning light. The poplars, bordering the road, threw their long, deep violet shadows across the yellow green meadows to the left, and the mill-stream flowed through them like a glassy thread in the silvery light, a glistening streak between its emerald green banks.

Weidner inhaled the fresh morning air in deep breaths, for his head still ached from the unusual consumption of wine the evening before. Perspiration streamed from every pore and walking appeared to be a sore trouble to him. He leant on his stick like a decrepit old man, and on reaching the first milestone, sat down gasping.

Grube had no doubt as to the cause of Weidner's condition. Consequently, he said nothing and went on slowly until his comrade was able to catch him up again.

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They walked on silently, side by side, Grube busy with his thoughts and Weidner with his feelings, which became more unbearable at every mile.

“Damn it all, I feel so bad!” he managed to say, in a sepulchral voice, and Grube could not suppress a furtive smile, when he looked at his companion’s ghastly face.

“How funny it is!” thought he to himself, “that those people who behave as though they could lift the very world off its hinges can be simply done for by the fumes of a bottle of wine.”

Suddenly Weidner leaned against a tree, gave an awful groan, and brought up the entire contents of his stomach, by which process his best Sunday suit suffered a good deal.

“Thank God I’m rid of it all!” groaned Weidner, much relieved, and continued his journey, though somewhat perturbed at the state of his coat.

“Are you going to present yourself to the lieutenant in that condition?” asked Grube, laughing. “You will make a good impression.”

Weidner looked at the speaker aghast. That point of view had not occurred to him; for a moment he stared helplessly around, then, putting his bundle down on the road, strode through the wet grass to the stream, and began to clean himself carefully.

But the harmless water of the streamlet was not equal to removing the stains of red wine from his light Sunday suit, so Weidner returned to Grube very little cleaner than he left him, and they continued their interrupted journey. Despite the repeated entreaties of his gasping companion, Grube walked briskly on, for he did

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not wish to be unpunctual in his first military service. When at last the clock towers of the town became visible through the morning mist they had to hurry still more, for it was only a few minutes to the appointed hour.

Two rows of young men, arranged according to height, were already drawn up in front of the Town Hall. Each carried a small trunk, and they made a bright picture in their varied assortment of garments. On the right flank stood a tall and immaculately-dressed young man in a top hat, who introduced himself to Lieutenant von Rauch, who was to accompany the recruits, as Baron von Scharf, and handed him a letter from his father, which contained a request to give his degenerate son a sound thrashing on every possible occasion.

“We’ll soon cure you!” murmured Rauch after perusing the letter. Then throwing a contemptuous glance at this sprig of nobility, he ordered him then and there to throw away his eyeglass, which hung round his neck by a broad silk ribbon.

The recruiting sergeant of the district was making up for the days when he had been a recruit himself, and was shouting at the men like the messenger of the Last Judgment. On catching sight of Grube and Weidner, he rushed at them like a fury roaring:

“Now then you damned set of dawdlers, get along and report yourself to Lieutenant von Rauch.”

“Why are you so late?” said Rauch impatiently, to Grube who was the first to report himself.

“Excuse me, sir—” began Grube nervously.

“I’ll soon teach you to call me ‘sir,’” interrupted

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Rauch, "excuse me 'Herr Lieutenant,' you should say. We shall soon knock your dawdling ways out of you. Take your place in the front row, you lout!"

Grube slunk away like a whipped dog, and was shoved into a gap in the first row by the sergeant, while Weidner approached Rauch.

"What do you think you look like, you pig?" roared Rauch afresh.

Weidner did not answer at first, then he replied, with blazing eyes—

"Excuse me, sir, but I am not a pig."

"Hold your row, you fool of a peasant!" cried Rauch, purple with rage. "You do not seem to know that you are already under military discipline! Sergeant, put him down to be reported at once!"

"Yes, Her-r-r-r Lieutenant!" bawled the sergeant in answer, and the gaping street boys had bets as to which could imitate the roll of his r's best.

The sergeant now read out all the names in turn in a stentorian voice, and after each man had replied "Here!" he informed Rauch, trying to stand at attention and bow at the same time, that "All was in order."

The non-commissioned officers of the dragoon regiment who accompanied them now counted the sections, fell in line themselves, and, wheeling round, the next minute they were marching to the railway-station amidst the cheers of the street boys.

The journey was long. The recruits, who were tightly packed in third-class carriages, had ample time to think over the offensive things that Rauch and

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the sergeant had said to them. Neither were the non-commissioned officers who were superintending the transport over gentle in their speech or actions, so that most of those who the day before had sung "Oh, to be a soldier!" with enthusiasm began to think that they had been a little previous in their hymn of praise to the profession. The smart baron, to whom travelling third class was quite a novelty, looked upon himself as a martyr among sinners and flicked every bit of dust off his frock coat with his polished finger nails, looking back regretfully on his school-days, and wishing he had then made better use of his time so that he might have passed the examination which would have let him off with one year's service. He unpacked his dainty luncheon from his leather hand-bag, amid the amused glances of his fellow-travellers, and eat it thoughtfully, while comparing his elegant patent-leather shoes with their countrified foot-gear. It was not until he noticed the sergeant's suggestive clearing of his throat that he thought of offering him a portion of his meal, an offer which the former made no pretence of refusing, managing also to hint in the course of conversation that he was an ardent smoker, and especially enjoyed a good cigar after his meals.

Lieutenant von Rauch sat in his second-class compartment and was informed by the senior non-commissioned officers at every stoppage that all the "raw recruits" were still there.

The men had long since finished the provisions which they had brought with them, and welcomed the sergeant's announcement that "feeding time" would be

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at ten o'clock ; and although there were still some hours to wait till then, the homesick, disappointed and hungry party brightened at the news.

The longed-for meal, however, was not as great a treat as they expected, and all hopes as to quality and quantity were dashed to the ground on the appearance of some extremely watery soup. The small piece of sausage served with it was just enough, as Weidner elegantly expressed it, to fill his hollow tooth, and some even had the experience of watching their neighbours enjoying the portions which should have been theirs. Those who happened to have a little pocket-money bought other things to supplement their meagre supper from the manager of this impromptu canteen. The baron would not, of course, touch anything, but dined, as it behoved a nobleman, at a small table in the corner, amusing himself by pinching the cheeks of the pretty waitress. At the conclusion of his meal he asked the permission of the cigar-loving sergeant to take a walk up and down the platform, as the air in this "booth" resembled that of a monkey-house. The sergeant, in the hope of further regalements, readily consented.

When Lieutenant von Rauch had finished his elaborate meal in the room specially prepared for the officers' mess, and each recruit had received a woollen rug as a protection against the cold during the night journey, all the names were read out again.

This time they were, unfortunately, not all "present," for the Baron was missing. Had the officers who were sent to look for him known that he was now well on his way to Berlin, they would not have troubled to shout his

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name incessantly into the darkness of night. They were, however, soon obliged to acknowledge the sad fact, that the recruit Baron von Scharf had either met with an accident or deserted, and the train went on again, twenty minutes late.

The result of this was that Lieutenant von Rauch commanded that no man was to be allowed out of the carriage for the rest of the journey. "I'll soon teach the dogs how to behave," he said to the deeply chagrined sergeants.

It was a long while before the transport train reached its destination. According to orders it was obliged to leave the rails clear to all regular passenger-trains, consequently, hours were spent waiting at some of the larger stations. At last the morning came, and the non-commissioned officers were busy shouting harsh commands to the weary recruits to get out of the train. The latter were so worn out with the journey, that not even the cheerful sound of a march played by the regimental band could raise their saddened spirits, and those who before could hardly wait for the moment when they should don the king's uniform had had all their pleasureable anticipations knocked out of them, a feeling of anxious curiosity taking its place. No one spoke, and all moved automatically forward in step to the music. The colonel of the regiment stood ready to receive them in the barrack square, accompanied by the captains of the squadrons, who proceeded to distribute the recruits to the various troops. They sampled with critical glances the "raw material" lined up before them, whilst the lieutenants loitering about made sarcastic

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remarks on the somewhat peculiar appearance of some of the yokels in their Sunday garments.

"Well, I never saw such a crew," said Lieutenant von Kollman, in the presence of the recruits, to Koehler, who was standing near him engaged in an animated conversation with Schill. "They're a regular band of cripples."

"They cannot all be as handsome as you," returned Koehler, with a glance at Kollman's knock-kneed legs, and went on talking to Schill.

In the meantime the colonel was dividing the recruits into lots, and, an hour later, they were marching in troops, under the guidance of the sergeants, to their various quarters.

Grube and Weidner had, thanks to their stalwart figures, been allotted to the first troop, and, in consequence, were under the same sergeant and shared the same quarters. Weidner rejoiced openly over this, but Grube listened indifferently to his demonstrations of joy, this arrangement not being at all to his liking. He realised that his countryman was not destined to make many friends among the authorities, and as he had determined to stand by Weidner through thick and thin, especially now that they were in the same troop and shared the same room, he feared with reason that some day he would find himself entangled in some unpleasant affair through Weidner's thoughtlessness.

Lieutenant von Rauch did not hear any complimentary remarks about himself on reporting the disappearance of the recruit Baron von Scharf. Colonel von Held was not only annoyed at the thought of the proceedings which would result, but disappointed of the

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chance of satisfying his curiosity as to the Baron himself, whose father had written him a similar letter to that which Rauch had received.

Krantwurst, the fat sergeant of the first troop, was full of activity.

“I’ve never had such a lanky lot as this before,” he grumbled angrily to himself, for he found great difficulty in getting uniforms to fit the new recruits. Weidner’s long arms and legs caused him a great deal of trouble, for the largest coat had the shortest sleeves, and the longest trousers were so tight that the seams cracked when Weidner got into them. A fatigue jacket was the only thing to be found that fitted, and Weidner, to his great disappointment, was obliged to content himself with this, whilst his comrades were each given their full-dress uniforms, which however were not very beautiful in appearance. Nevertheless, said the sergeant—“Now, you have all been given perfect things, and the devil take you if you don’t take care of them!” But the blue cloth had a faded appearance, the collars were no particular shade, and the place where the sword-hilt had rubbed, looked as though it had never been any colour at all. Nevertheless, it was the king’s uniform, and most of them surveyed themselves proudly in the long glass in the passage.

That evening troop No. 1 found themselves sitting round the spotlessly scoured table, and the light from the big hanging lamp shone brightly on the metal of the swords and helmets which the recruits were polishing with great energy. Sergeant Gross was unceasingly active during this performance, initiating his new sub-

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ordinates into the art of cleaning their things, often lending personal assistance.

“Boys,” he would say, “do you realise what it is to belong to the 1st troop of squadron A? It means that you are the ten finest fellows in the whole corps.”

The recruits soon began to have confidence in their cheery sergeant, who spoke so pleasantly to them, and made harmless jokes now and then, accepting with a smile the laughter which followed. Sometimes he would blow a bugle, and explain its meaning.

“Now, listen to me a minute, boys,” he would wind up, looking at the clock whose hands pointed to 8.30, and, pursing up his lips, he would whistle the tune of the evening tattoo. “When you hear that, then you jump into your bunks double quick; and when the reveillé sounds in the morning, then you tumble out of your bunks double quick. D’ye see?”

With this the duties for the day were done. Weapons were hung in the arms cupboards, swords and sheaths separated, helmets put away under the paper bags in the cupboards, the table washed, and three jugs of water fetched by the room orderly. Then the call which Gross had just whistled was blown in earnest, and the recruits crept into their clean beds. The climbing process by which they reached the topmost berths seemed very strange to them, and they bitterly regretted the indispensable chamber utensils they were accustomed to at home, but all were glad that the longed-for bed-time had at last arrived. When, half an hour later, Gross crept out of his cubicle, which was nothing more than a larger cupboard, he satisfied himself that all his recruits

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were in the arms of Morpheus and, turning out the lamp, he went to bed himself.

The bugle call, which had been so gladly welcomed the evening before, was heard with less enthusiasm the following morning. But Sergeant Gross was already at his post, and soon turned out the tired sleepers by his good-natured raillery.

“Troop No. 1 should be No. 1 to arrive in the stables. You don't want to disgrace yourselves before ‘the gees,’ do you? They will already have had their breakfasts, and will be treading on your corns if you are late!”

A few moments afterwards Gross was marching in quick time with his troop to the stables, where, according to the forage-master's instructions, he pointed out to each man the horse he was to groom. Weidner was given one called “Anna,” who greeted her future groom—who had dashed into her stall full of enthusiasm for his work—with a well-aimed kick, which sent all the grooming brushes and rubbers flying out of his hand, and when he sought shelter by her neck from her hind legs she seized him in her teeth by his one and only coat, tearing out a large piece, to say nothing of a portion of the shirt underneath.

Grube, on the contrary, whose “Zebaoth” stood in the next stall, had first to induce him to get up, for in spite of Gross's assertions, he was not yet quite awake; but when at last he got on his legs, he sniffed his new comrade with a pleased air, whinnying with satisfaction when he felt the touch of the currycomb on his neck.

“Now then, at it with a will, men!” cried Gross, who

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was standing by, and seizing a currycomb, proceeded to give an example of how it should be done.

The men of Troop I had reason to congratulate themselves on their friendly sergeant, for nothing was heard from the other portions of the building but swearing and reproofs. After each recruit had cleared away the manure and refuse from the piece of asphalted gangway belonging to his stall and bedded down his own horse, his stable duties were ended, and after some coffee at the canteen the first riding-lesson took place.

The large, open riding-yard lay behind the barrack buildings, and was surrounded to-day by numerous spectators who were looking forward to the highly-amusing spectacle afforded annually by the recruits' first riding-lesson. The onlookers were not disappointed, for the would-be cavalymen on being mounted on the stirrupless saddles struggled wildly to sit upright, but invariably slipped down on to the horses' necks.

One recruit, whose restive steed returned him promptly and in none too gentle a manner to Mother Earth, got up howling like a small child, and declared that he "would not mount again for any money," and on the riding-instructor replacing him roughly in the saddle, immediately slipped off the other side.

The majority of the horses, however, were kind, and leaned over to the left side to enable their riders to mount more easily; some even went so far as to turn and grasp their riders by their trousers, giving them a lift up. At last they were all in the saddle, listening attentively to the instructor's directions, with the exception of Weidner, whose Anna galloped *ventre à terre*

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right across the square, with the agonised recruit hanging frantically round her neck. When she returned, carrying her tail proudly, to her place in the division, she had thrown her rider on to the sand by a sudden swerve.

Gallwitz went from one division to another with a kodak, taking snapshots of the men struggling for the mastery over their horses to add to his "Album of handsome Men." This album contained not only photographs of the rank and file, but also snapshots of his superiors, taken in comic situations; for example, one of Riding Master Baer, which Gallwitz had taken, during the last manœuvres, whilst the former had been in an undignified position. But the *chefs-d'œuvre* of this album were a series of photographs representing Grete seated on Kollmann's grey charger in the costume of Eve. These had been taken in Kollmann's quarters, for the faithful "Abdul" would follow his master upstairs, and had often been known to partake of a glass of champagne at the mess.

It was not until the sergeant had announced the arrival of the Riding Master by a loud whistle that Gallwitz relinquished his occupation.

* * * * *

Lieutenant von Koehler had been handed over two divisions of recruits to instruct. First-Lieutenant Schill who had served during the manœuvres in Riding Master Baer's squadron, and had been now transferred to this one, was entrusted with the instruction of the non-commissioned officers and men of the second year's service.

Riding Master Baer attended to-day's lesson from

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beginning to end, and declared that Koehler, who was instructing here for the first time, had done so all wrong ; according to his own opinion he always knew everything better than anyone else, in spite of the fact that he was known to be the worst rider in the regiment, and was not worthy of his title. Being found fault with was nothing new to Koehler, but this everlasting assumption of superior knowledge was too much of a good thing, and already during the manœuvres he had begun to look on his work with dislike. He always knew beforehand that every plan he made would be upset by Baer, who would pronounce it wrong. He had never yet succeeded in pleasing him, and often after having taken endless trouble with his men, Baer would merely say, in his abrupt manner, that he had better go and read up his instruction books. At the same time it would have been useless to try to find out Baer's interpretation of the various branches of instruction, for in the course of time he had formed a set of regulations of his own, and the officers under him had to act accordingly. Even Schill, of whom it was said that he knew all the rules and regulations backwards and could repeat them in his sleep, had received a strong hint, during the last manœuvres, to observe the imperial order that any personal alteration of the field-service regulations was liable to result in dismissal—and only to-day Baer had read the all important preface to the book of riding instruction to Lieutenant von Koehler in a tone of reproach—" To act according to these rules from henceforth and to admit nothing further except with my sanction which will be made known through the War Office."

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But for Baer such words existed only on paper.

His regulations were his gospel, and woe to those who went against them! For the rest, he ruled with a pedantic regard for minor details. Frederick the Great's words: "*Aimez donc les détails, ils ne sont pas sans gloire. C'est le premier pas qui mène à la victoire,*" was a motto well suited to him.

It is true that he, like many other people, quite misunderstood the real meaning of these words, which hung over his writing-table in gold letters, although they were never intended to be applied to the narrow outlook of a small-minded pedant. During the manœuvres Schill had been reproved by Baer for carrying out an independent movement without orders, and had answered in the words of the regulations:—

"Every officer should be ready to risk his own personality in the fulfilment of his duty—regardless of future vindication—in all situations—even the most unusual—without waiting for orders as to details."

Whereupon the angry riding-master would have liked to bring him before a court-martial for breach of discipline.

The mental restrictions of this man, his limited outlook, which never got beyond the laborious principles and prejudices of the pedant, closed his eyes to the ideas and views of other people, and the narrow standard by which he was wont to measure everyone, combined with his deep-rooted egotism, made him cantankerous on all occasions. Disagreeable criticism or favourable opinions were both equally obnoxious to him if they did not happen to agree with his personal views.

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Koehler was especially hurt by the riding-master's censure to-day, for he did not at all like being reproved before his recruits on the first day of his instruction, and instead of the pleasure with which he had come on duty that morning, he was now conscious only of extreme annoyance, which effectually did away with all keenness for his work. He felt that his authority had been trodden under foot in the presence of his subordinates, and he himself put to shame before the non-commissioned officers, whose efforts had been approved by Baer as being in accordance with his old-fashioned notions. So Koehler commanded his sergeants to continue the instruction, whilst he himself stood by his squadron in a state of suppressed rage watching Baer walking back to the barracks. When he had disappeared from view, Schill came up to Koehler and said with a weary smile:—

“Cheer up; I have not fared much better; he declared that my methods, which I have gathered from years' experience, and which no one else has found fault with yet, were ‘sheer lunacy.’”

“Then he can look after his business by himself,” answered Koehler angrily. “I'm hanged if I will stand any more of this sickening blowing up!”

“Steady on,” said Schill with a bitter laugh. “You will have to get used to it by degrees.”

“But to be hauled over the coals before one's men for every little fault is too much of a good thing. I am not an officer for that.”

“Good God!” sighed Schill. “What is one an officer for at all. Judging by Baer one would imagine

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that one was there either as a butt for his vile temper, or as a means of carrying out his numerous fads. At the best one is only a wheel of the big drilling machine, and that is something; for nowadays the pleasing occupation of superintending drill is the quintessence of military thoroughness. If one makes a mistake during the field exercises it does not much matter, for the tactics are only imaginary, after all; but if, during inspection, one man's nose is allowed to protrude an inch beyond the others, or any of his straps to be wrongly fastened, it is a deadly offence and can cost one very dearly. But there! These pettifogging details are good enough for such high aims. Is the Colonel any different to Baer, or the General any different to the Colonel? Both are more concerned as to whether everything is correct at an inspection than whether a so-called military ideal or the genius of a great general lurks in their brains. They may not all be such sticklers for detail as Baer, but most of them have been, some time or other; and one must 'jump with the cat,' for that is the only way to get on. Intelligence is the least thing required!"

"Thank God!" laughed Koehler ironically.

"You may be sure," continued Schill, "that the thoroughness of one in authority is less the result of his intelligence than of his strength of character, which comes far more into the question.

"Then it does not say much for the characters of these same officers."

"To a certain extent, yes. The broadest minded of us who undergoes this course of education in 'buttons

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and straps'—by which we earn our daily bread—must end in becoming pettifogging Philistines. Our best qualities run into extremes when we are made to conform to false principles, the energetic becoming fanatics and the reflective indolent. When day by day we have to climb down from the height of our wider out-look—at least our would-be wider out-look—to the level of such pottering details, which are really the business of our non-commissioned officers, we become just what Baer is.”

“I should like to be in some battle with him, if it was only to see how he would behave on being charged by the enemy,” sneered Koehler.

“Well,” laughed Schill, “he would probably hurriedly inspect the men’s accoutrements. But, thank heaven, we have also others in whom the soldier has not yet been quite killed by these everlasting inspections and parades. A man like Baer and his kind would go to the wall at once when there was really anything serious going on. I have no anxiety on that score, and the French would get as bad a hiding now as they did in the year '70. But unless a change comes soon it will become a serious matter, for this drawing-room service is playing the deuce with all sense of responsibility and self-reliance, two things absolutely indispensable to the winning of battles.”

“Battles! There are none to win nowadays,” laughed Koehler, “we are now merely an ‘educational force for the nation.’”

“Quite right! I should like to know what it is that draws men into the service, when we do nothing but

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worry their lives out with petty annoyances all day long. They must get just as sick of it as we do, for things are forced upon them daily which induce opposition, bitterness, dislike and want of interest in all that goes to make a soldier."

"One can hardly blame the men, if they lose all enthusiasm for their profession. 'Tis bad enough for us officers to have to put up with the everlasting chicanery of a riding-master, but the rank and file are never rid of the yoke of the non-commissioned officer."

"Then again, one can hardly blame the non-commissioned officers if they make use of a free hand occasionally; since it has become the fashion to regard the non-commissioned officer of a troop as a sort of nurse, and to haul him over the coals for every button left unfastened among his men, it is natural—or, at least, only human nature—that he should hand down a moral cuffing, received from the higher authorities, in some more practical form. Then there is always a great outcry, and the wretched non-commissioned officer who, through excessive keenness in his work, or the sheer necessity of avenging himself for the continual bullying by his superiors, orders too severe a punishment, or hits a man, is, in nine cases out of ten, dragged before a court-martial and degraded for the rest of his life."

"The papers, at any rate, make a good thing out of it, for they are full of cases of ill-treatment of soldiers."

"I am the last to admit that a man can be treated anyhow, but all these gaping critics who conjure up a crime against humanity out of every well-deserved box on the ears, and will next demand the introduction of

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rights for the recruits by their twaddle about humanitarianism, have, most of them, never been soldiers. Only those who have been in a similar situation to the despised offender can understand how often such a blow arises out of pardonable anger, and is in many instances only too well earned. Show me any officer of higher rank in the Army who, at one time or another, has not hit a man out of pure enthusiasm for his work. I acknowledge that I do not look upon it as a particularly noble deed to hit a defenceless man, or call him all sorts of offensive names, and I do not want to defend brutal superiors; but I repeat that energy turns to brutality when continually suppressed by circumstances, and prevented from being the means to an end. Therefore I say a non-commissioned officer who strikes at the right moment is preferable, in my opinion, to the weakling who lets the fault pass without reproof for fear of the consequences of infringing some rule of the men's rights. The blow which the officer gives with the best intentions ought not to injure him morally in anyone's eyes."

"Finally," replied Koehler, "what does it matter to a young peasant if he does get a rap on the knuckles for once? He has been accustomed to being knocked about at home, where our class would only receive a jobation, and the majority of them would look upon it as a matter of course and a part of their instruction, if they had not been already primed with the notion that the least 'ragging' was an insult to their honour, and every rough bit of handling a ground of complaint. But that is the weapon we have put into their hands as a defence against the oppressive

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zeal of their superiors, rendering the lives of the non-commissioned officers more difficult than ever."

"Those are just my views!" answered Schill excitedly. "One cannot be too careful to guard against deliberate ill-treatment and unscrupulous brutality; but this conventional drivel about humanitarianism, which is increasing every day, is a sign of the decadence of the times and the military spirit cannot cope with it."

At the conclusion of his speech Schill accidentally turned round and found Sergeant Rickert standing behind him in a pensive attitude.

"Well, Rickert," he said kindly, "you didn't hear anything, did you?"

"Not a word, sir," answered Rickert in his deep voice; "but Herr Oberleutnant is quite right!" So saying he went away, thoughtfully stroking his snow-white moustache.

Meanwhile 11 o'clock had struck. The riding division marched back to the barracks, most of the recruits being very glad to get off their horses, and the officers' riding-lesson now began, which was held by Major Preusse at the racecourse. He laid special stress on teaching the gentlemen the practical side of the riding instructions as contained in the handbook on the subject, following the text of the latter as closely as possible, in order that they should be able to make use of their knowledge when teaching the recruits. He did not stop to consider that his efforts would probably find little favour with the majority of his superiors, who, according to their opinions, had invented far better methods of their own.

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At the close of the riding-lesson Kollman was in the habit of giving an exhibition on "Abdul," who performed various circus antics, such as going on three legs, dying, dancing, etc., and on Preusse's leaving the ground, Gallwitz treated them to an indescribably comic take-off of the Major's wife riding in a paper-chase.

For this purpose he rode as on a side-saddle, falling off at the hurdles, after suddenly giving a perfect imitation of the good lady's scream and pretending to arrange the skirt, which was supposed to have flown over his head. Unfortunately the gracious lady had recently afforded her husband's officers this spectacle at a gymkhana. Koehler was very annoyed at Gallwitz's performance, for he looked upon it as most ungrateful towards the ever-helpful Major, who always stood by his comrades at all times, both on and off duty, and would sooner part with his last penny than refuse any of them who came to him in pecuniary difficulties. They all liked to visit him, for his wife kept open house and a hospitable table for all his guests. Koehler was consequently disgusted at the way they made fun of her behind her back, and seized an opportunity of saying so, but was rewarded by a few sarcastic remarks.

Koehler personally was fast friends with Preusse, having often been a guest at his house under Schill's escort, and felt very much drawn towards this man, who invariably lent a willing ear to other's troubles, and could always find an excuse for everyone, although he kept the strictest watch over his own actions. To be allowed to listen while Preusse and Schill discussed political, scientific, or subjects of general interest, made

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up for some of the miserable hours which, thanks to Baer's care, were of frequent occurrence.

Preusse was a friend in whose presence one felt raised above the petty worries of the daily routine, and fell unconsciously under the spell of the ambitious and far-seeing spirit of a man who was an example of uprightness both in his work and private life, and who was staunch to his Kaiser and his profession, looking at both from a higher standpoint than the majority of his fellow-officers. It was quite natural that the highly-gifted, but at the same time modest and retiring, Major should not harmonise with a pedantic, self-conscious and unapproachable man like Colonel von Held. Consequently, not only had the relations between the two always been strained, but it was extremely doubtful whether the Major would ever receive his expected promotion, for he had many proofs of the sort of character which the Colonel would give him to the authorities. Nevertheless, Preusse never let a word of criticism escape him with reference to his Colonel, and never failed to accept his continual censure with an absolutely correct bearing, which, however, only made the Colonel more spiteful than ever. Nothing would have pleased the latter more than to engage Preusse—whose mental and personal superiority was oppressive to him—in a discussion, so that he might report him as a “difficult subordinate.” For this reason his intercourse with Preusse was always marked by an uncourteous severity, in the hopes that the Major would be driven to answering him back; but so far his efforts had been fruitless.

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As Koehler left the race-course, he found the sergeant of his squadron waiting outside the door.

“The Colonel wishes to speak to you, sir.”

“The Colonel?” asked Koehler, astonished. “Yes, I’m coming.”

“Excuse me, sir—I think the Colonel wishes to speak to you about just now!”

“About just now? What do you mean?”

“I mean about the time when you were talking to Lieutenant Schill, sir.”

“Did he notice that, then?” asked Koehler, astonished.

“Not the Colonel himself, sir; but the Riding-Master sent me to go and look.”

“And you informed him that we were conversing with one another?”

“Yes, sir; and the Riding-Master informed the Colonel.”

“Good!” said Koehler, shortly, and proceeded to the regimental bureau.

Colonel von Held hardly took any notice of him as he entered, clicking his spurs sharply together, but remained sitting in the office-chair in front of his writing-table. This annoyed Koehler, who once more brought his spurs together with a loud click. Now the Colonel glanced ominously in his direction.

“I report myself according to your commands!”

Held got up slowly, and put his cigar-end to one side.

“Riding-Master Baer has informed me,” he began in a cutting tone, “that you make use of your riding lesson to carry on a conversation with the other officers. You know as well as I do what a bad example that is for the

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men who have just entered the service. If you do not like your profession, and have no sense of duty, you can seek some other occupation. I dismiss you with a reprimand. Thank you!"

The Colonel returned to his writing-table, whilst Koehler, trembling with rage and disgust, left the room, and, passing through the ante-room, was followed by the knowing glances of the secretary and the orderlies.

Koehler was not so angry at the reprimand itself—although it was his first in eight years of military service—as at the cause of it, and the deceitful way in which Baer had put him under the sergeant's supervision, denouncing him upon the information of one of his subordinates. He could not help thinking also, that the punishment was unfair, for only the day before the Colonel had ridden by and saluted a group of officers who, instead of superintending the exercises of their men, were recounting, amidst loud laughter, Gallwitz's latest jokes, which he had brought back from the manœuvres. Why should not these men have been punished too? asked Koehler of himself. Why had not the Colonel reprimanded them on the spot, instead of implying by his attitude that he tolerated such things, or, at most, was indifferent to them?

Koehler was furious, and determined to complain of the Colonel's behaviour to Major Preusse, so went off at once to look for him, finding him, genial as ever, in the office of the mess, busy helping the mess sergeant with the monthly accounts. They went together to the reading-room, and Koehler began to explain his case,

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winding up with the request that Prusse would undertake the *rôle* of mediator on this occasion.

The Major listened attentively, and remained silent for a short while. Then he began, shaking his head to and fro thoughtfully :

“ Dear friend, let me tell you something. If you wish to hear my own private opinion on the matter, well and good, I will give it you. From a judicial point of view there is undoubtedly cause for complaint, but to complain of one’s colonel is a nasty business, and a thankless one for him who plays the part of intermediary. I realise that in this case it is my duty to fall in with your wishes and act as mediator for you, and I will do it willingly enough, but you may be sure that nothing will come of it. If you get justice done you, then you will have the Colonel down on you for ever. You might as well clear out at once ; for a senior officer can always—if he wants to—find a *corpus delicti*, out of whom he will take his revenge, sooner or later, and that does not seem to me worth risking in this case. Then do you suppose for a moment that the Brigade Commander—who is practically the court of complaint—would listen to Lieutenant von Koehler with his bad record ? He would be sure to agree with every word his beloved Colonel said. Don’t you think he would do all in his power to shield Held ? It would be the same thing in the higher court. Moral : leave it alone and pocket your feelings. That is the best advice I can give you.”

“ But I cannot possibly ignore such an injustice, sir ! ” urged Koehler, “ my self-esteem rebels against it, to say nothing of——”

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“Your self-esteem?” interrupted Preusse. “My dear friend, when you are a few years older, you will look elsewhere for your self-esteem than to the spiteful vagaries of your superiors. Do you know where my self-esteem lives? There!” striking his breast, “there it lives and no one can take it from me, else I should have lost it long ago. Believe me, even a veteran like myself will have to stand many another attack on it; but the unpleasant things I hear go in at one ear and out of the other—and have you ever heard anyone call me a moral coward?”

Koehler looked down rather sheepishly. This man, with his proud resignation, impressed him; his arguments seemed so convincing that Koehler had no longer any doubts as to taking Preusse’s advice. At the same time, the thought of having to put up with the insult without taking any further notice of it was galling to him, and he said to Preusse:—

“But couldn’t it be done in some other way—I mean couldn’t one make the Colonel realise somehow that he——”

“Well, yes,” interposed the Major—“I know a way. If you like I will go to Held in your name and inform him that, judging by his reprimand, you feel that he is for some unknown reason exceptionally dissatisfied with you, as he subjected you to exceptional treatment. Therefore, you ask, through me, for instructions how to behave in future in order to give him the same satisfaction other officers appear to do. Will that suit you?”

“If you would be so kind, sir—certainly, I think it is a very good idea.”

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“Right!” said Preusse, shaking Koehler’s hand. “I will let you know the result to-morrow.”

Preusse went back to the mess sergeant, and Koehler returned, considerably relieved, to his quarters.

At eleven o’clock the next morning Major Preusse, in full uniform, was announced to the Colonel. Held received him in his usual disagreeable manner, listened in silence to what he had to say and, when Preusse had concluded, replied: “Do I understand that this is a complaint made by Lieutenant von Koehler, Major, or does he wish to call me to account through you?”

“Call you to account?” answered Preusse modestly. “No, sir. As an old officer I should not have had anything to do with him in that case. Lieutenant von Koehler only asked for information how to behave correctly in future.”

“I cannot decide on an answer at this moment,” said the Colonel grimly. “You can state the grounds of your complaint in writing, in the form of a report, and send it in to me this afternoon. I thank you.” So saying he sat down again at his writing-table, leaving the Major standing there in confusion.

Preusse went at once to Koehler and told him of the result of his interview with Colonel von Held.

“Now we shall have to be careful,” he said, “else we shall both be getting into hot water.” Thereupon they proceeded to compose the desired report in the most cautious language, and punctually at twelve o’clock it lay on the Colonel’s writing-table.

Exactly twenty-four hours later Lieutenant von

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Koehler stood before Colonel von Held, and was informed that he was to answer for himself before a court-martial for "questioning his superior's actions." Meanwhile he was suspended from duty until further notice.

Both Koehler and Preusse were speechless. The latter had looked upon the Colonel's command to write a report as a piece of boorishness, and was disgusted beyond measure at the unworthy thought which he must have been entertaining at the time.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," he kept on murmuring to himself, endeavouring at the same time to comfort Koehler in his misfortune. Things were not much better for Preusse himself, for he was quite certain that he would be drawn into the business as an accomplice in a case of breach of discipline, if the court-martial did not end in acquitting Koehler.

The two were frequently together during Koehler's suspension, Schill, who quite shared their views on the subject, making a third. But they did not all feel quite so hopeful as Koehler's counsel, who looked upon the case as already won; for to them it seemed hardly likely that the district commander in his position of judge would be untrue to the standpoint expressed in the statutes, which ran: "An officer who has once had a verdict against him must be condemned!"

All the moods and doubtful charms of "suspension from duty" were no longer new to Koehler, and this time he went through just the same experience as in his last garrison.

"Comradeship is a compulsory living together, in which each individual, with but few exceptions, only

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stands by his neighbour as long as it suits his convenience, and as long as no situation arises which would entail the smallest sacrifice of his convictions, or personal comfort, on the altar of conventional, neighbourly love."

The whole corps showed remarkable conscientiousness in carrying out the Colonel's wishes that a suspended officer should be cut off from all intercourse with his fellows, and refused to look upon his honour as stainless until he had had every speck removed from it by a total acquittal. When Koehler, accompanied by Schill, met some of his brother officers, whilst exercising his charger, they bowed to him as though he were a complete stranger, and seemed highly astonished that such a criminal should carry his tarnished honour in broad daylight amongst his fellow-men.

Three weeks after the day of suspension the court-martial took place. Colonel von Held and Major Preusse were called as witnesses, and besides the officers of an infantry regiment from a neighbouring garrison, who were ordered to appear as judges, two military advocates sat at the green table, upon which stood a crucifix. One of the latter, an intelligent-looking man of attractive appearance, conducted the proceedings; the other appeared as Public Prosecutor. The latter sought to make up for the want of intelligence in his face by assuming a strange and threatening judicial aspect, which had just as comic an effect as his speech, delivered in the most atrociously paragraphed German, which described Koehler as an undisciplined and inferior individual, devoid of all military qualities, so that Preusse,

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who was in no laughing mood, could not help whispering to Koehler in fun, "By Jove, what a bad lot you must be!"

At the conclusion of the speech by the counsel for the prosecution, the counsel for the defence began his reply. He pointed out that it was impossible to find any breach of discipline in the case before them, especially when a Major, grown old in the service, had sanctioned it, and had undertaken to be the means of communicating with the Colonel. The transaction, he argued, could only be looked on as *bonâ fide*, and having been done with the best intentions.

At the conclusion of his defence none of the people present had any doubt that the case would end in an unqualified acquittal.

It did so; but an appeal was made to refer the decision to a higher court, and the Brigadier General greeted this decision with the words, "I also hope that they will find him guilty." The higher court-martial, which assembled shortly afterwards, condemned Lieutenant von Koehler to eight days' confinement to quarters for "questioning the authority of his superior."

Major Preusse escaped censure. Koehler's sentence caused the Colonel the liveliest satisfaction, and he gave the affair a place of honour amongst the remembrances of those moments which served to maintain his belief in the thoroughness of his military service; for he had given those who doubted a fresh justification of his motto: "Smart in service." Sometimes, however, a curiously oppressive feeling came over him, like the pricking of a guilty conscience, when he thought of the Lieutenant

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behind the lowered blinds of his dreary quarters, nursing the smarting wound inflicted by his Colonel. In these weary hours of loneliness and bitter disenchantment, Koehler buried the remains of those ideals which had encouraged him in his professional career ; for was it not evident that to live untrue to oneself, for mere life's sake, was, after all, a kind of moral death ?

CHAPTER IV.

ASTORM had occurred again in the Koehler family.

This time, however, Benno was not the cause, but Lilly, who had at last made up her mind to marry her old admirer, First-lieutenant Weiss, after a long and arduous courtship.

Old Major von Koehler, whose habitual pessimism had turned to hopefulness now that Benno's affairs were satisfactorily settled, and that the latter, according to his letters, was getting on all right, seemed the least perturbed, when Lilly, on returning from a party one evening, announced, her face glowing with happiness, to the speechless horror of her mother and Edith, that she was actually engaged.

During his frequent visits to the house, the Major had grown to believe that Lilly's future husband was a man of open and honourable character. He imagined he could safely trust Weiss with the future happiness of his beloved child, and he also realised that his love for Lilly would enable him to face any sacrifice which circumstances might render necessary, which, indeed, would actually *be* necessary unless Aunt Stänzchen departed from her traditional ideas and received the middle-class lieutenant as a worthy member of the von Koehler family; in that case, pecuniary affairs would be simplified. He had nothing to give them himself, and Lilly only possessed thirty pounds in the Savings Bank. It was obvious that the marriage could not take place on that; therefore he secretly hoped the aunt

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would gradually ignore her principles on learning the worth of his future son-in-law. He knew Stänzchen well enough to realise how very susceptible she was to the subtle flattery of a gallant cavalier, and Weiss must be told of this.

The hint was not necessary. Lilly's *fiancé* had not entered into the engagement quite regardless of circumstances, as she herself had done ; his great inclination towards her was founded to no small extent on the well-filled purse of her Aunt Stänzchen, from whom, he had been frequently informed, his future bride would some day receive a considerable fortune. He had already decided, if possible, to obtain possession of this money before the old lady's death, and intended to bring the most winning side of his personality, and the charms of which he was fully conscious, to his assistance, never doubting his success for a moment.

He was not disappointed. It is true that the aunt, on Lilly's personal declaration of the happy event, went from one fainting fit into another, and was hysterical for some hours ; but on consideration of the fact that the engagement had been announced, and therefore there was nothing to be done for fear of public opinion (which was the second most important element in Aunt Stänzchen's life), she proudly resigned herself to the inevitable, and even went so far as to allow herself to be persuaded by Lilly to give audience to this inferior being, who had been raised to the height of connection with her family.

During the first visit she exhibited a certain amount of condescension ; the second visit she was quite overcome

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by the young man's charms, and, finally, she was inconsolable if he did not go to see her every day ; so much so, that old Koehler often jokingly asked his daughter if she was not jealous. Stänzchen, however, did not like it at all when the Major spoke of her "young lover," and handed her a daisy to pluck, or told the story of Wallenstein, who married an old and wealthy woman whilst still quite a young man. Her visits to the Koehler's house became few and far between, and more than once she pleaded a headache when Lilly or her mother went to see her. The Major called this a new "trait of originality," and did not trouble himself any further over it. Altogether, he had become quite different lately. Whether it was because a uniform was continually in and out of the house ; that Benno always wrote the same contented letters, telling him of his friendship with Preusse and Schill, so as not to worry his father ; or that it was a weight off his mind to have Lilly's future assured, whilst Edith was taking measures to procure a situation as governess—the old man was now seldom seen in one of his bad humours. He always seemed cheerful, and gave his spontaneous humour full scope, only swearing when he went into the general sitting-room and found all the chairs, tables, sofas and window-seats, covered with linen, lace, dress materials and reels of cotton ; or heard the sewing-machine humming all day long, for his wife worked with untiring energy at Lilly's *trousseau*.

So time went on. Lilly's eyes became brighter every day, her whole person seemed turned into a living poem by the magic of the God of Love, and in the evening,

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when her lover came to see her, she was—as Koehler was wont to express it—quite oblivious to her surroundings.

Weiss's conscience sometimes reproached him at the sight of Lilly's boundless love and happiness, for he could not honestly say that his love for her had as much to do with the engagement as more material considerations. What the innocent girl mistook for the fervour of requited affection was only passion on his part for this pure and childlike being, whose budding charms fanned the flame of his instinctive desire. When she was lying in his arms, full of almost unearthly happiness, and dreaming of the paradise of love, he was only conscious of the warmth of this fresh young body through the light dress—the sole moral symbol of the conventional restraint enforced by the period of engagement.

The wedding was to take place at the end of the winter. Weiss thought he would have won over Aunt Stänzchen sufficiently by that time to induce her to allow them an income to marry on, even if she was not prepared to hand over the whole dowry at once.

In order to obtain the official consent to his marriage, it was only necessary to give a formal undertaking that the regulation sum would be forthcoming, an arrangement to which Aunt Stänzchen had already lent a willing hand. She had become wax in Weiss's fingers, and seemed to be living through the romance of her bygone love affair, having quite overcome her prejudice against his inferiority of birth.

Weiss was secretly triumphant at the success of his tactics. When he once found out that Stänzchen took all his attentions as proofs of his personal admir-

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ation, it was easy to trade on her emotions. For this purpose he left no stone unturned, overwhelming her with flowers and small presents, and Stänzchen was touched beyond measure to think that her despised admirer saved up his money, even at the end of the month, in order to be able to buy her flowers. Latterly Weiss had been struck with the idea of adding a verse of poetry (taken from an almanac and suited to each day) to his floral tributes, in which Stänzchen, with her vivid imagination, sought to find some hidden word of love. On finding it, she would compose a stilted poetical answer and send it to Weiss in a rose-coloured envelope. She had no idea, of course, of the convulsions of laughter these effusions caused at the mess, where Weiss read them gratis to an appreciative audience ; or of the amusement she afforded her favourite by the clothes she wore for his edification. In order to receive her guest with sufficient honour at tea-time, she had unearthed, out of the furthest corner of the attic, a very *décolleté* rococo costume, which had been the fashion in the days when she was engaged, implicitly believing Weiss's assurances of her youthful appearance.

The Koehlers shook their heads suspiciously over this strange change in the aunt's behaviour.

"Well, really, she has gone quite off her head!" said the Major one day, returning from a short visit to Stänzchen. "It's a fact, absolutely clean off her head!"

He had met his future son-in-law there, and the things he had had the opportunity of observing surpassed his wildest imaginations.

Lilly was annoyed at her aunt's monopolising her

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fiancé two evenings a week, for Stänzchen had insisted on his company at supper on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

In time this state of affairs became irksome to Weiss. Not because the hours he was constantly obliged to sacrifice to Aunt Stänzchen were waste of time, for he rightly admitted that the result of this comedy was of great importance. Nor because he thought it contemptible to encourage the old lady's folly. He did not trouble himself much about that, for if an old woman chose to have such crazy ideas, and develop a passion in her old age, the result of which was highly amusing, it was her own fault. His doubts proceeded from another cause: who could say how far Aunt Stänzchen would carry this affair? She was cracky enough for anything, and, in any case, a bitter disappointment was inevitable for her. The result was easy to see: Stänzchen would realise that she had been meanly duped, and then her purse-strings would be drawn tight just when her help was needed.

A few days before Christmas Weiss was to have supper with Stänzchen by way of taking leave of her, for he hoped to spend the festival with his parents in Berlin. The table was covered with all sorts of delicacies, and adorned with a beautiful bouquet of roses, whilst in the corner stood "Widow Cliquot's" greeting.

Stänzchen received her guest in an elaborate *matinée* of dark violet silk, with a red rose pinned coquettishly in her hair. Her whole appearance expressed the desire to charm, and on Weiss offering her the usual salute

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she pressed her hand with such vehemence against his lips that it was positively painful to him. Then, taking him affectionately by the arm, she led him to his place at the table.

During the meal Stänzchen was touchingly attentive to all his wants, keeping his plate well supplied with the daintiest morsels, plying him incessantly with the old wines, which the guest enjoyed considerably more than the society of his hostess, and pressing him continually to empty the large Venetian wineglass, to which Weiss made no objection. Finally, she peeled an Italian pear for him, and shared a "Phillipine" which she found "by chance," having cracked a few dozen nuts before doing so. Her voice rang clear and sweet, and on her guest's reminding her during dessert of her poetical abilities, she drew a rose-coloured sheet of paper out of her low-cut bodice, and casting a languishing glance at Weiss, began in a voice trembling with emotion—

IN MAY.

What time of our life is like beautiful May?
When is it we taste all the wondrous delight,
Of real and true love, in the strength of its hey-day,
Our senses o'ercome by its vanquishing might?
When is it we feel we must shout for sheer joy,
In the wealth of our love, that no power can destroy?
When is it our life is a beautiful day-dream?
When is it the thoughts of true love reign supreme?
When is it we notice the song of the birds?
When do our shining eyes say more than words,
And glow as though lit by the sunlight's bright rays,
At the visions unfolded of life's golden days?

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It is in May, in May, in May!
For the old or the young, for love knows no decay;
Installing itself in our hearts, there to reign,
And bringing the days of *my youth* back again,
With the thrills of delight that over one come,
At the thought of the joys in the life just begun;
The passion of love beckons wildly to me,
My breast fills with hope that quenched it may be . . .

Stänzchen got no further, but, producing a lace handkerchief, proceeded to dab her moist and shining eyes, "glowing as though lit by sunlight's bright rays"; glancing coyly the while through the lace edge at Weiss. The latter was staring thoughtfully, first at his dessert plate, then at his glass, filled with sparkling champagne, and watching the endless little string of pearls rise to the surface and fizzle away into nothing. The iron did not appear to be hot, but Stänzchen did not give up all hope. The memory of the happiness which had proved so deceptive in her youth, had always remained with her, growing gradually into an intense yearning, which had ripened lately into an almost exasperated determination to obtain a glance into the kingdom of love, and taste its pleasures at any cost. All sense of discretion and decency gave way before this stubborn and passionate desire which had fanned her woman's instinct to an almost youthful nervous fire, whose glow could only be subdued by the cold douche of a great disappointment, or by complete satisfaction. Stänzchen now held out her right hand across the table to Weiss, who grasped it, looking questioningly at her the while. This seemed to her a suitable moment for continuing her poem,

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and she began afresh, at the point where she had left off:

My breast fills with hope that quenched it may be,
The lips love's rapturous kisses await
Till the joys of fulfilment their ardour abate;
The blood is warmed by passionate fires
And fills us with love's strongest, fiercest desires;
That is the time of our life that's like May,
Whatever our age, love will have its own way!

The Lieutenant grew hot and cold, for Stänzchen pressed his hand fervently at the end of each line, and on his smilingly assenting to her languishing question: "Do you know what it is to have such feelings, dear friend?" he suddenly found her sobbing on his breast.

* * * *

When Weiss walked along the dark streets to his lodgings after midnight, he thought to himself, with a cynical smile—

"I am quite sure that even Ben Akiba never went through such an experience."

Stänzchen had to pay dearly for her passion. At all events, it was a good thing for Koehler, and the best Christmas present Lilly could have had, when Weiss informed them that the aunt had promised him a preliminary allowance of £25 a month. It was a complete mystery to the Major how his son-in-law had contrived to make Stänzchen open her purse so wide; in the meantime, the knowledge that she had done so sufficed, for now the financial side of the affair was on a sound basis. What struck everyone as peculiar was that

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Stänzchen repelled, almost rudely, all attempts at thanks on the Koehlers' part, and exhibited a feeling bordering on hatred towards Lilly, whom she had formerly made so much of.

Everything was very quiet at the Koehlers' on Christmas Eve. Aunt Stänzchen for the first time within the memory of man had written to excuse herself, and was celebrating the festival alone. In return for their modest gifts, amongst others a new embroidered coat for Sweet, the pug, from Lilly, she had sent an almond cake, the Major waiting in vain for the usual box of cigars, and his wife for the customary winter dress. Lilly had parted from Weiss with a heavy heart when, three days earlier, he had gone away for Christmas "to put his affairs in order," as he said. Benno had received no leave at all from Colonel von Held, although the Major himself had written urging "family reasons."

The two sisters sat with their parents in a depressed mood round the modest Christmas tree, seeing no glamour in its twinkling lights, and taking no pleasure in the silently falling snow, when the large flakes, catching the light from the wax candles, fell like stars against the window-panes. The Major's wife was sitting with Benno's letter in her lap, her hands folded over it, gazing into space with tearful eyes. Edith sat at the table with wrinkled brow and compressed lips, turning over the leaves of a Latin grammar which her father had given her that evening. Lilly, with burning cheeks, sat huddled up by the stove, furtively drying an occasional tear, while the Major, with a pipe which had long since

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gone out between his lips, thoughtful, silent and serious like his surroundings, reclined in his leather armchair in the corner. Even Pieps, the old canary, looked miserably at them, as much as to say : " We have never had such a wretched Christmas before ! "

Meantime Benno, in his quarters, was unpacking his basket of washing which had just arrived, and which contained not only clean clothes, but a cake made by his mother, a handful of cigars from Lilly, a printed Christmas card from Edith, and a letter from his father, together with the photograph of the engaged couple.

He studied his fellow-officer's face long and seriously, for with this man rested the future happiness of his favourite sister. It is true he had known him personally in old days, but now that he came to look earnestly at the photograph there was something which did not please him in the face, and he put it down with a sense of dissatisfaction. His father's somewhat serious letter did not help to cheer him either. Was it not the first Christmas he had spent away from home, and all the dear remembrances of his childhood and later years flashed through his mind, leaving him keenly alive to his loneliness.

He cut a slice of the cake and, munching it thoughtfully, sat down by the stove, the glowing coals of which filled the room with a cosy light. Long he sat absorbed in melancholy introspection, while outside in the keen night air the church bells rang clearly over the town.

It was not until a rousing bugle call was blown in the barracks, that he got up slowly, and buckling on his

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sword, went out. The well-known bugle-call sounded strangely in his ears to-day, almost like a desecration. It sounded for the distribution of Christmas gifts amongst the soldiers. "Everything is done by calls and commands with us," he thought to himself, as he descended the stairs; "even when the Christ Child comes into the barracks, out of the cold night, he is received with the same bugle-call which is blown for 'stables'; and when the Christ Child has fulfilled his mission in the barracks, he is sent back to heaven with a 'Right about turn—march!'"

All the non-commissioned officers and men, who were not on leave, were already assembled in the room belonging to the 1st troop. A Christmas tree decorated with coloured paper, tinsel and candles, and reaching almost to the ceiling, stood on Gross's washing-stand, and on the dressing-table the presents bought out of the regimental money-box were spread out.

Riding Master Baer, who was also present, received Koehler's salute with a meaning glance at the clock, and proceeded to argue with the Sergeant, who had not put the five apples per man, next the stockings, but next the cigars, although he had especially ordered the reverse. Then he turned his attention to the men, amongst whom he detected some whose neckerchiefs showed a hair's breadth above their collars; finally venting his wrath on a fat trumpeter who came too late for the chorale. Even Lieutenant Schill, who appeared covered with snowflakes, and as white as a snowman, just as the chorale was beginning, did not escape an official rebuke.

This "celebration" did not last long. After the

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chorale Baer made a short speech, in which he described himself as the "father of the squadron," and then disappeared with a curt nod into his office.

The men hastily collected their things: socks, soap, pipes, cigars, pocket-knives, and woollen under-garments, and proceeded to their quarters where a barrel of beer awaited them.

Only one man was missing from troop No. 1, for neither Sergeant Gross nor his men had been given any leave, as at the last inspection they had appeared with oiled instead of waxed saddles and harness. The former treatment gave them a better polish, and Gross had purchased the oil out of his own pocket, being rewarded by an official reprimand and the assurance from Baer that he was an absolutely useless non-commissioned officer and might go and bury himself along with his entire troop.

The missing member of the 1st troop was Grube. He had been informed one day that he was to be court-martialled for assaulting a man with a stick shortly before entering the service, and was undergoing fourteen days' imprisonment in the regimental prison, only to leave it soon after the new year with a blot on his name—a man for whom there would be no promotion, and who would be looked down on by his comrades and superiors as branded—branded because he had fought for his honour. Grube's unhappiness this Christmas was not so much due to the fact that he would have to spend it in the cold narrow cell, where nothing could be seen or heard of the Christmas festivities, and where the cold December wind blew through the cracks of the small-barred window, but because he feared for his

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brother's life, for some friends of Sophie's chastised lover had spread the news of his imprisonment in the village, and it had reached William's ears. The sudden shock had laid him on his bed again, and he was now feverish and tormented by dreadful fits of coughing. All this was in Sophie's letter, which a non-commissioned officer had just brought as a Christmas greeting from home. His only bit of pleasure had been that, after the tattoo, Weidner had climbed along the drain-pipe on the roof, as far as the window of Grube's cell and shoved a large buttered roll, done up in a piece of newspaper, through the bars. This thoughtful act made him feel that he was not quite deserted, and he resolved never to forget Weidner's kindness as long as he lived.

The Christmas festivities did not last long under military routine. Any recruit or non-commissioned officer, who was the least bit inattentive, was sure to hear Baer's favourite expression :—

“Are you still hanging on the Christmas tree ?”

Work was begun with renewed vigour, if not with any great enthusiasm, for the most important part of the riding instruction was to come—the preparation for the general riding inspection. Three days after Christmas there were no signs that the great festival of the year had just taken place.

The officers who had gone away on leave had not yet returned to the garrison. Among the sub-lieutenants, with the exception of Koehler, there was only Gallwitz, who swaggered round the snow-covered riding-ground in a shapeless fur overcoat, and if the east wind blew very

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cold would draw a flask of brandy from his pocket to put fresh life into his benumbed limbs, or smoke a cigarette.

The Colonel had all his business correspondence brought to him at his house, only going out into the cold winter air when he received an invitation to shoot, or when he wished to make some expedition in his private sleigh drawn by three regimental horses, harnessed in the fashion of a troika. The riding-masters felt fairly secure from irksome supervision, and only appeared occasionally for a few moments at the barracks, so that the work of instruction lay almost entirely with the sergeant and non-commissioned officers.

“If only it was always like this!” old Sergeant Rickert would say sometimes. “Everything goes twice as well when there is not that everlasting fault-finding.” Many shared his opinion, on seeing how well the drilling-machine worked without its officers. But they overlooked the imperative need for the existence of a chain of subordinates imbued with a sense of duty and responsibility; and they did not perceive that this continuous chain, reaching from private to Field-Marshal, formed the entire basis of army organisation, because each individual member of it is responsible to the immediate link above and below him for what is done or left undone. For it is only owing to the fact that no single rung on the military ladder affords a pause from the sense of responsibility, or permits a man to be his own master or judge—even the highest officer, like the king, is answerable for his people—that this great organisation exists, which permits no standing still, and keeps all its members, from the highest to the lowest, forever striving and toiling.

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But such reflections did not occur to any of the non-commissioned officers when their superiors occasionally turned their backs on them, which generally happened at the time of annual festivals. On these occasions the sense of responsibility slackened, discipline was not enforced as usual, and the result was a long list of more or less serious offences. This was especially the case in Baer's squadron, for the more he tormented his men by his irksome oppression the more license they took when his absence gave them the chance of breathing freely for once. Consequently the devil was loose in Squadron A at festival times, and a vast number of punishments for breach of discipline was the inevitable result, which only made the Riding-Master more strict than ever.

Weidner was on stable duty on New Year's Eve. The non-commissioned officer in charge had left soon after feeding time, having told his men, in case of sudden inspection, to say that he had gone out for a moment, and then to send word to him at once in the room of the second troop. An inspection on New Year's Eve was, however, most improbable, as the officers always spent it away from the barracks at various entertainments.

Weidner and his two comrades, who were likewise on duty, had no desire to spend their New Year's Eve without some sort of amusement, and quickly concocted a plan amongst the three of them. Weidner disappeared to fetch a drink, returning an hour later in the company of a woman, who was no stranger to the other two, for she washed for the non-commissioned officers and men, and was well known to all of them. Those who managed to get into her good graces, or to pay double

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the amount of her periodical bills, were allowed to join the ranks of the many to whom she did not refuse a *tête-à-tête*.

Weidner was, thanks to his personal appearance and well-filled purse, a special favourite, which accounted for her having accompanied him to the stable, which was filled with a comforting warmth. The guest sat down with the three comrades in the straw, and drank copiously of the wine which Weidner had brought from the canteen. Before long she was hopelessly drunk, and when, an hour later, Lieutenant Schill came to change the stable guard, he was not a little astonished to find his washerwoman half hidden in the straw in a strange costume.

For this New Year's joke Weidner received eight days' imprisonment from the Colonel, and was sent to the cell he knew so well from outside, and which had only just been vacated by his friend Grube, who had left it looking hollow-eyed and pale. At the same time Colonel von Held gave Baer a severe lecture in private over the want of discipline in his squadron, which the latter repeated in still more forcible language to his subordinates.

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First-lieutenant Weiss had not yet returned from Berlin. Although on taking leave of his parents three days after Christmas he had said he was going back to his *fiancée*, he made use of the remainder of his leave, up to January 5th, to pay one last visit to his mistress of many years' standing, before his marriage put an end to such intercourse. At the same time he knew quite well, that he would not be too particular in this respect

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in the future, for he considered the marriage tie to be unworthy of our enlightened 20th century ; therefore he arranged to allow her so much a month, promising to double it as soon as he "had got hold of all that cracked old woman's money."

He had not the slightest doubt that he would shortly succeed in doing so, for had he not found a way through Stänzchen herself, to the contents of her purse? A lot could be done before February 10th, the wedding day, and a speedy settlement of his debts was very desirable, for the numerous creditors who comforted themselves with the prospect of his marrying money, were not likely to wait long after the ceremony to send in their claims. But Weiss had no doubts as to whether he would succeed or not, for Aunt Stänzchen's letters gave ample proof that her passion had not abated, but had, on the contrary, increased considerably since she had tasted the sweets of love.

Poor Lilly was bitterly hurt, when her lover's letters became fewer and farther between. At first he had written every day, and she had read his letter over and over again, despite the fact that she looked in vain for the fervour he displayed when he took her in his arms and kissed her. But he had warned her that he was not a good correspondent, so she tried to comfort herself with this assurance, which Weiss considered sufficient excuse for only sending her later on a few lines on a postcard. In reality it was because he found it embarrassing to write to and tell Lilly of his boundless love for her, whilst his mistress sat beside him, and her kisses were burning on his lips. However the few moral scruples he possessed were soon

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overcome by his sophistical views of life, and he took to only glancing carelessly through Lilly's loving letters, whilst a whole packet of Aunt Stänzchen's manuscripts lay unopened and unanswered in his trunk. The latter wrote to him almost daily, generally concluding the letter with a love poem, effusions which Aunt Stänzchen could now reel off by the dozen. She herself had only received two picture postcards written in a restaurant, one short letter, and a request by telegram for money, the last of which she promptly answered by sending the desired sum.

The thought of Weiss's approaching marriage with her rival Lilly, oppressed her heavily, the only thing she could find any comfort in being the fact that Weiss nevertheless belonged in heart to her alone. As he would still remain in the place after his marriage she might continue to dream of the joys of love, even though she would have to share the possession of her lover with another.

* * * *

At last Weiss's conscience smote him, and he returned to his garrison. His mistress accompanied him to the last station but one before his destination, taking leave of him sadly, for this was the last honeymoon they would be able to spend with one another for some time. Lilly was ready to receive him at the next station, showing her pleasure at his return like a child, and on reaching his lodgings he found a note requesting him to go and see Aunt Stänzchen at once.

The regiment was working at high pressure, for the birthday of the Commander-in-Chief was approaching,

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with the result that parades and drills were held with untiring energy, whilst all other work was put aside. Numbers of the non-commissioned officers and men were let off duty for whole afternoons and evenings, to attend the rehearsals for the special performances on the 27th of January. Each company not only celebrated the day by a grand banquet and a ball, to which the men invited their sweethearts, but there were also performances of military plays. The rehearsals were superintended by an officer, and put down in the parole book as work.

First-lieutenant Weiss was ordered to take over this occupation, and welcomed it as an excuse for not spending every evening with his *fiancée* or Aunt Stänzchen, whose increasing passion was growing repulsive to him. A sensual man like Weiss, was only attracted by a woman until he had possessed her completely, after which he experienced a more or less involuntary dislike for the person who, up till then, had been the object of his desires. Thus it was that he now began to feel a strong distaste for Aunt Stänzchen's company, for she did not even possess the advantages of youth, which alone might have prevented his inclination from turning to repulsion, and kept his passion alive for a short time. But as, on the other hand, he was bound to keep on good terms with her for obvious reasons, he was glad to have found a good excuse for not visiting her so often—and the same with Lilly; for his compulsory intercourse with Stänzchen only increased his impatience for this pure, unsullied girl, and he gladly avoided her house until the time when he should make her his own.

The 27th of January had come. For the first time

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for years the old major took his beloved uniform out of the cupboard, and accompanied Lilly to the parade, which was held in the Market Place. He also accepted an invitation for himself and his wife, from his former comrades, to the entertainment in celebration of the great event, but refused the regimental dinner for economical reasons.

Edith was away at the time, having gone in person to apply for a situation as governess, with the intention of taking up her position at once under an assumed name, should she obtain it ; thus attaining her desire in life.

Lilly preferred to remain at home, for Weiss had promised, in response to her earnest entreaties, to come and see her some time during the evening.

The major strutted up and down the room all day in his finery, stopping frequently in front of the long glass, surveying himself long and thoughtfully, twirling up the ends of his military moustache, smoothing out the creases in his no longer perfectly fitting coat, and straightening the back which had become somewhat bent in the course of years. When the charwoman who had been called in to do the work in honour of the great day, broke his oldest pipe, he swore at her as though she were a recruit, and regretted not being able to order her "three days' arrest."

At eight o'clock Major von Koehler went to the festivities of the 6th company of Weiss's regiment. His wife accompanied him, and Lilly remained at home crocheting lace for her *trousseau*. Her cheeks were burning with excitement at the thought of the expected guest, and she counted the hours impatiently as they

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went slowly by. Whenever the sound of a step reached her through the window, which, despite the cold, she kept wide open, she would look out, breathless with excitement. But each time it proved to be only some uninteresting person in the shape of a drunken soldier, a policeman, or a servant girl hurrying to the soldiers' ball. It was never her lover—he *would* not, and *would* not come.

Weary with waiting and nervously listening to every sound, she laid down her work, and putting the lamp on the end of the piano, subdued its glare by wrapping a newspaper round it. Then she lay down on the sofa, and after several ineffectual efforts to rub the sleepiness out of her eyes, she gave herself up to the arms of Morpheus, in the sweet hope of being roused up by a kiss from her *fiancé*.

When Weiss came at last, about eleven o'clock, he received no answer to his repeated knocking, so opening the door he went in noiselessly on seeing Lilly lying on the sofa. For a while he stood gazing on the charming picture. Lilly lay there smiling in her sleep, a loose coil of fair hair falling over her shoulder, and her soft bosom in the square-cut bodice gleaming in the subdued light. Sometimes her lips would move as though for a kiss, and she would stretch out her hands as though trying to grasp something.

Weiss sat down by the sofa. The champagne, of which he had drunk freely, made him giddy, and sent the blood racing wildly through his veins, and on drawing his chair still closer to Lilly's resting-place, his imagination was aroused by the lovely form lying near him.

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The knowledge that the purity and innocence of this girl belonged to him fired his blood and fanned his desire into a fierce flame. . . . Suddenly he bent over Lilly and clasped her with burning passion in his arms.

* * * *

The marriage of First-lieutenant Weiss with Lilly von Koehler took place a week earlier than had been arranged, because—so it was announced—Weiss could then more easily obtain leave for the honeymoon. Whilst Stänzchen was suffering from fearful hysterics at home, the Koehlers' guests were sitting before a well-covered table in the best hotel in the town, regaling themselves at her expense, and wishing the young couple every happiness in endless toasts and verses. And whilst the violins were tuning up to play for the dancing, a group of people stood at the station, taking tender leave of Lilly before she began to tread the path of life at her husband's side, accompanied by the blessings of the entire family.

CHAPTER V

THE winter was over.

Riding-Master Baer's squadron had been accounted the smartest at the review, for he thoroughly understood the Colonel's ideas on the subject of the training and turning out of a squadron of cavalry, and followed his wishes even to the smallest detail. Consequently Colonel von Held could find nothing to complain of in the men's riding, or the horses' paces. For he was blind to the more serious defects, if he found that his own special fads as regards superficial matters had received scrupulous attention. This flattered his vanity, therefore he meted out special praise to each division of Baer's squadron—even Koehler's coming in for a share. The Riding-Master, however, did his best to spoil the latter's pleasure at the unusual praise by saying to him afterwards :

"Your division did not please me at all. If I had been the Colonel you would have heard something quite different."

Schill, on the contrary, was not only taken down by Baer but also by the Colonel, with all the skill the latter possessed in this art. The first division he presented, the *Handwerksburschen*, composed of the soldier-servants and of men who plied various trades in the barracks, could hardly be expected to ride well, as they only had two lessons a week and the worst horses of the squadrons. Von Held briefly designated the division's efforts as "a disgusting exhibition," and in order to be

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consistent in his condemnation of Schill's pupils, did not alter his criticism for any of the other divisions, although he made use of less sweeping expressions. Even the performance of the special division, composed of the older non-commissioned officers, on which Schill had placed great hopes, did not please the Colonel, although the mounts which had been given to the division in November, from the China Expedition, had become really well-trained horses. All the thanks that Schill got for his winter's trouble was an almost insulting criticism, and he was not quite sure whether he would not lodge a complaint against Baer.

For the first time Koehler saw his friend, who usually bore all the annoyances and discomforts of the Service with stoic indifference, really depressed.

"How I envy a stone-breaker!" sighed Schill, on the way back to his lodgings after the review, accompanied by Koehler. "He pockets his wages at night, and knows what he has done, whilst we worry ourselves to death all the year round only to receive a few oaths in the way of thanks at the end of it. There is never the slightest attempt on the part of our superiors to try and find out any cause for praise. I am sick of it all!"

"I am very sorry for you, my dear Schill," said Koehler. "Now if I had had such bad luck, I should not have been surprised, for I have not troubled myself much about my division, as Baer takes away all pleasure in one's work. Rickert had all the trouble and I got all the praise. 'Tis more than ludicrous."

Koehler went up to Schill's rooms with him without any invitation. It seemed to him the natural thing to

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do, not to leave his friend alone in such a mood, but to remain with him until he had relieved his feelings by talking it all over with a congenial spirit.

Schill had been very depressed of late, although he would not acknowledge it, trying to conceal it by assuming a false gaiety over his work. But Koehler noticed it all the same. It was almost as though this man, who was usually of so equable a temperament, had suddenly lost all his habitual equilibrium in a severe mental struggle, the result of which was still uncertain. To-day, especially, his friend seemed quite different. The disappointment he had suffered, which, after all, was nothing in comparison to some of his former experiences, seemed to have shaken him in his inmost soul, and to have been the culminating point of a growing sense of anger which was ready to burst into flames at any moment. On entering the room Koehler was startled at the furious way in which Schill first hurled his sword into the corner, and then, striding across to his writing-table, proceeded to tear up the manuscripts lying there and fling them into the wastepaper-basket.

“What are you doing that for?” asked Koehler amazed.

“What am I doing it for? Because I mean to chuck the whole job!”

“Chuck it all! What *do* you mean?”

“Nothing more than that I intend to send in my papers.”

The words he tried to say stuck in Koehler’s throat.

“Yes, yes, old man; I mean it seriously!” laughed Schill bitterly, noticing Koehler’s amazement. “I

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have thoroughly considered the matter, and come to the conclusion that I've had just about enough of it, and as I don't believe I am so absolutely useless yet, I mean to prove my right to existence elsewhere."

"But, in heaven's name, what are you going to do?"

"I am not quite sure myself; perhaps they will give me some civil post when I send in my resignation at all events, I shall try my best to get something of the kind to do, so that I may not be quite useless to the State."

"Do you mean it seriously?" asked Koehler, who still looked on this as the outcome of a sudden burst of anger, rather than the result of serious consideration on Schill's part.

"In bitter earnest!" answered Schill with a sigh, dropping wearily into his writing-chair.

Koehler was silent. The sudden prospect of losing the one true friend he possessed was a great blow to him, and he was quite overcome with sorrow.

Although he had known for some time that Schill's greatest desire in life was to occupy some position which would satisfy his love of work, and supply a fruitful field for his talents, he did not imagine the moment of parting to be so near. He knew as well as Schill the many difficulties which lay in the way of an officer who wished to enter upon a civilian career. Only those who had influential friends, or were possessed of considerable means, could venture to take the step of starting a new life, the conditions and requirements of which were not only quite different, but almost impossible to fulfil without a special education. And Koehler knew that his comrade

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possessed neither means, nor influential friends nor relations; but stood quite alone in the world. How then could he reckon for certain on obtaining some civil post? Surely he was too sensible for that? Could not the men be counted by legions who starved whilst waiting for long-expected berths, who, moreover, might wait till eternity, unless they got a place in Heaven first?

“Won’t you reconsider your decision?” said Koehler anxiously.

“No, no, dear fellow,” answered Schill sadly. “As far as my resignation is concerned, I have done with thinking it over, and as yet I have had no time to consider the future.”

“But, according to my ideas, that should be the first question to be considered, dear Schill,” observed Koehler.

“Certainly, at least in so far as it is doubtful whether a lieutenant who has once resigned will ever get any other work. The practical knowledge which he acquires does not fit him for any other profession, and the little that might have fitted him for something else, has been forgotten. He has forgotten, for one thing, how to get on with those who earn their own bread with their heads or their hands. These know the struggle for existence in all its varied *nuances*, and what they have gained is the result of years of hard toil. The world, on the contrary, endows us with ‘pomp and circumstance,’ and with that halo of glory, unattainable to the other classes, and expects us to treasure its fair gifts. We only know the lighter aspects of the fight for life: the struggle against boredom. The result is that two spheres have been

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created, in which the principles, conditions, views, and means to the end, are so totally antagonistic, that they separate people as effectually as though they belonged to different races, one of which is only there to contrast with the other, and to provide it with working material. All mental and social intercourse has been stifled, by a sense of inferiority on the one side, and arrogance on the other.

“Then, all at once, a man who has cast off the gay attire of his world, wants to go over to the other camp, because the old position no longer satisfies him, or because men have cast him off as an ‘undesirable’ or a ‘marked’ man. He is received by the other side with mistrust, all doors are closed against him, unless he happens to have influence. He is refused even bread, after being used to eating cake ; no one gives him credit for any knowledge beyond what was necessary in his former career, upon which we set such store ; his views are laughed at, and his principles meet with nothing but disapproval. And even when he has stood the test necessary for his new life, and suffered hunger, sorrow, and disappointment, he is only received with hesitation. Yet the old tradition leaves him an aristocrat to the end of his days, while its heights still remain unattainable. That is the equivalent of ‘sending in your papers,’ as the lieutenants say.”

“You put it well, Schill,” said Koehler thoughtfully. “You are quite right, too. Only I have never seen things in that light before.”

“You see,” continued Schill, “in spite of all this, I have dared to go over to the other camp. It will not be

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easy, dear Koehler ; you can be sure of that ! But at all events, it will be easier for me now than it would have been ten years ago, for at that time I said with my friend Byron :—

‘ I become
Portion of that around me ; and to me
High mountains are a feeling.’

And I consoled myself for all the things I found hard to bear with the thought that I was a lieutenant, and must put up with them. Had I been obliged to discard my uniform in those days it would have gone against the grain, but now I see things differently. In time one’s heart and head learn to go different ways. The love which I had in my heart for my profession has been torn out bit by bit, and there is no longer any necessity for my head to pay any attention to the dictates of my heart ; and my head bids me : ‘ Go and take up your life afresh elsewhere, for you are useless here, and wasting your time.’ Therefore I have made up my mind to go.”

Schill said the last words in a voice choked with tears. He was silent for awhile, then, looking across at Koehler, began afresh :—

“ I may tell you, Koehler, that my decision is not the result of a desire for change, or of a fit of temper.”

“ All the same, I fear that you will regret this step some day.”

“ Regret it ? Never ! ” answered Schill decisively.

“ But you will long to put on your uniform again, if I know anything about you.”

“ Perhaps ; but only in one case—if there was a war.”

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“Well,” replied Koehler, shrugging his shoulders, “there isn’t much hope of that ; but in my opinion it is rash to be too positive about it, one way or the other.”

“You must remember, my friend, that nowadays a war does not spring up on the spur of the moment as in days gone by. It is true that the anxiety to maintain the balance of power in Europe is the best evidence of the predatory instinct in all of us. The weakest countries have most to fear from its disturbance. But what is a war in these days? The height of our present day culture is such that one hardly dares to think of the social upheaval which such an event would cause, or of its far-reaching effects. We are taught by history that a war is followed by a period of stagnation, if not of actual retrogression for both parties engaged, even for the conquerors. Nations, and those who hold themselves responsible for them, tremble at the thought of such an event. That is why the rulers draw nearer to each other every year in personal contact ; whereby they strengthen international relationships even if they do not unite their people’s sympathies with those of other countries. Added to all this, there is the great idea of humanitarianism, which, although not a decisive factor in the maintenance of peace, is in reality one of its chief causes. Finally, with what nation should we want to go to war? At the most we should sometimes like to show our teeth to our English cousins, when we see how they trade on the good nature and enforced reserve of their German neighbours. But to go to war with them, by God, no! A war on land with England would be highly unchivalrous on our

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part, for they could not raise a worthy opponent for a single German army corps out of the ruins of their army. The possibility of a naval encounter does not enter seriously into the question, for such an event would not engage the entire sympathies of the nation in the same way as a war on land. Interest in the navy, in spite of all the plans for the fleet and naval manœuvres, does not enter into the German nature. He is a soldier *par excellence*, not a sea-dog, simply because the geographical conditions of his country are such that he has practically nothing to do with the sea. Should the question of a naval war ever seriously arise, the chances would be the same for each side, despite Albion's bragging about her navy. Both parties would reconsider it thoroughly and pocket their pride, as they do not really want to go to war.

“Now let us consider our hereditary enemy from the west. No reasonable person believes any longer in the fable of the hereditary German enemy. At any rate, it would be a strong proof of our want of national pride and lack of faith in ourselves if we were to be afraid of being blown up by a bomb thrown by the decadent Third Republic. France has become to-day a harmless neighbour, whose scandals amuse us, and whom we have to thank for the latest ladies' fashions. The only thing we resent about her is that she overwhelms us with the degenerate productions of her play-manufactories. And our grim eastern neighbour? He has first to recover from his Japanese thrashing, and I don't quite see what is suddenly going to make us go to war with him, for in the whole history of the world no

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German cock has ever crowed across to Russia, and no Russian eagle has ever stretched out its claws towards Germany. We have too few interests in common to engage in warfare, and the few we have are arranged by diplomacy to the mutual satisfaction of both countries. Those are my views on war, dear Koehler, and now you will understand why it is that the whole theory of war seems nothing but a farce to me."

"But the other aim of the army—to guard the internal security of the country—is no illusion," broke in Koehler.

"From my point of view it is just as great an illusion as the other. From what side is an attack on the foundations of the empire likely to come? From social democracy? No; however much that spreads, it will never dare to lay a finger on the foundations of a monarchy. It is not strong enough for that, and never will be, for it is not the number of the party that denotes its strength, but its unity. And a party, the majority of whose members ignore the original ideas on which it was founded, or have only followed the red flag out of a desire to give vent to their feelings of opposition, will only run its head against the stone wall of monarchy. A monarchy is the most natural form of government for all mankind, especially for Germans, who have never known any other. And when, as in Germany, such rule is constitutional, and hits the happy medium between the anarchist tendencies of a republic and the despotism of an absolute monarchy, it gives equal chances of development to all parties. A single party striving against the monarchy will never become a ruling factor,

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therefore we need no army to keep down the disturbing element—only a guard in case of emergencies.”

“I should not like to give my opinion on the subject,” said Koehler thoughtfully. “My feelings are the same as yours, but I do not know enough about politics to discuss the matter.”

“We are not supposed to trouble ourselves about politics,” answered Schill, trying to smile. “But with regard to the questions we have just been discussing, we must have some opinion, unless we have gone about the world with our eyes shut, and I really cannot see why an officer, from whom the greatest interest in his nation is expected, should know nothing about politics. It is not necessary for him to side with a party, which, of course, should not exist for him. But just ask any officer you happen to meet if he knows what parties exist in the country and what their tendencies are; at least half of them will be completely ignorant of the subject. Surely that is a pitiful condition of things, when the chief props of a nation know nothing whatever of its political affairs.”

“You would think so!” said Koehler laughing; “but I must confess that I myself am one of these ‘pitiable props.’”

“One cannot blame you, any more than the others. The system is to blame, which hinders, rather than encourages, any mental activity on the part of officers, and is quite satisfied if a lieutenant passes the usual examinations, without troubling to ascertain if he has any further intellectual ambitions. It only expects a man to acquire the necessary amount of prestige on all

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occasions—a thing which can be picked up even by the most brilliant specimen of stupidity. But as for prestige, ‘the devil take the damned thing!’ say I with all my heart. What’s the good of prestige when there is only an empty head or a bundle of swagger behind it. In 1870 we had prestige, because we had good cause to be proud of ourselves; to-day most of us have no claim to it but swagger. But after all, we officers are not so much to blame if we enhance our rank by a full dose of prestige, when we consider how, in all classes, the element of external show (which is a symptom of decadence) has become so prevalent. It is the same with morals, which have, in all times, suffered from the progressive culture of a nation. Culture brings us very near truth, which is the greatest enemy of all religion, *alias* morals.

“Good and bad approach each other in the conception: means to an end. We are in the same position to-day that the Romans were in at the height of their prosperity, and, if we continue as they did, our fate is already written in the history of the world. It will be the same thing over again, but with different scenery and effects. And what shall we say of the means to the end, especially in our own case? I am sorry to say we must often shake our heads over the means, and put a note of interrogation after the end.”

Koehler did not answer at once. His friend’s views, which he had expressed in such an abrupt and unvarnished manner, were quite new to him. Meanwhile he was ashamed of confessing this to his comrade, and found himself therefore in the position of a man to whom has been attributed more strength of judgment than he

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actually possesses. Finally, he said hesitatingly to Schill :

“ I should lie if I were to tell you that your view of these different questions is quite clear to me. Perhaps that is because I have never thought seriously of these things.”

Schill laughed slyly.

“ Well, my friend,” he said, “ ’tis the same with most of us. The majority of our officers take too careless—or, I might say, superficial—a view of their position. That which is not actually forced on us by circumstances does not enter into our consciousness ; and to learn the tardy lessons taught us by extraordinary events, we must be specially adapted—either half-sceptics or half-hypochondriacs—else the whole thing will escape us, like a story without a point. The more glamour clings about a thing the heavier are its shadows. So it is with the position of an officer.”

“ Well,” answered Koehler, “ this much I *do* know : that in time I shall realise the justice of your opinions, even though at present they seem a confused tangle of ideas.”

“ I only hope that your realisation will not eventually lead you where it has led me. You see yourself, I am beginning life over again.”

“ But do tell me, for heaven’s sake—surely you have some plan in your head ? ”

“ Only in a general way. But of this I am certain : I shall not go to America to black shoes. There are plenty of our comrades who have done this or similar things. What astonishes me in them is the entire lack

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of pride in their Fatherland. Otherwise they would not give everyone ocular demonstration of our ill-treatment of men who formerly filled honourable positions, and were entrusted with affairs of the highest importance, degrading them to the level of pickpockets and loafers through some small slip on their part. The wrongs of innumerable retired lieutenants have already become a social problem, which we shall be forced to consider more closely because it is a disgrace to our nation. For my part, I cannot claim to have anything done for me, as I leave the Army of my own free will and have neither been driven, nor bullied, out of it."

Schill's proud resignation and self-confidence made a deep impression on Koehler. He was filled with admiration for this man, who had taken upon himself to start a new life with his old mother, who was entirely dependent upon him, in order to satisfy the ambitions which had no scope in his present existence. His mental activity had never come to a standstill, therefore, in his case, the gulf between the old life and the new one upon which he was entering was in some sort bridged over. Koehler felt small and commonplace beside his friend, whose mental superiority almost put to shame his own weakness. But, at present, all other feelings were overwhelmed by the sorrow of losing Schill.

"I wish we had never been friends," he said to Schill, as he was preparing to go; "then I should not be so miserable at the thought of losing you."

"Friends we shall always remain, dear Koehler," answered Schill earnestly, "even though we must part." He shook hands with Koehler, and the latter went back

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to the barracks feeling as though he had buried his best friend.

Colonel von Held could not believe his eyes when one morning he found Schill's resignation laid on his writing-table. He read the document through many times, one part in particular causing him considerable annoyance, for he thought he could detect something in the nature of an accusation in the lines, which ran as follows :—

“I no longer find that complete satisfaction in my profession, which is necessary for those who are to devote themselves entirely to the King's service, and in spite of having rigorously performed my duty, to the best of my abilities, I have never been able to win the recognition of my superior officers.”

Von Held thought of the last review. It struck him now that perhaps he had been a little too severe in his criticism of Schill's men.

At all events, it seemed to have been the direct cause of the latter's decision to resign. At the same time, thought he, the lieutenant must have had the idea in his head beforehand, for Held did not imagine for a moment that the man whom he had always looked upon as apathetic and deliberate would act on the impulse of the moment without some deeper reasons for doing so. But it was not the fact of his behaviour towards Schill having hindered the latter's career that troubled Held—such considerations did not enter into his egotistical and hard nature; it was rather the thought of what the General would say when he heard of the voluntary resig-

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nation of an officer who had served so many years. There would certainly be inquiries which would be difficult to answer, and, what was worse, he might request a personal interview with Schill. The result of such an interview might be very uncomfortable for the Colonel, so he decided to try to make Schill alter his decision, and, as he wished to conceal any trace of personal motives in his action, he sat down at once and endorsed his papers as follows: "Sir, I have to inform you that your resignation papers cannot be handed over to the authorities in their present form, which does not comply with the existing regulations. They can be sent in to me again when they have been made to conform with these same rules, which require essentially that other reasons, besides purely personal ones, should be given for a resignation, and, without these, the proceedings can go no further."

He had not long to wait for Schill's answer. A fresh copy of the document, which had been rendered useless by Held's endorsement, arrived immediately, with the following reply: "I beg to inform the regimental authorities that I am unable to put my reasons for wishing to resign in any other form."

Von Held was furious. The slightest contradiction annoyed him exceedingly, and Schill's cool answer made him mad with rage. He became more and more conscious of the dangerous position he was in, and was extremely uncomfortable in his mind. He was aware, too, that Schill knew as well as he himself did, that his objection to the form of the lieutenant's resignation could not hold good, because the rule he had quoted did not really

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exist. There was nothing left but to try and ingratiate himself with Schill, so he sent for him, then and there.

Von Held received Schill with unusual affability. Although he was secretly aggravated at the latter's composed bearing, and would have liked to box his ears, he was too clever a diplomatist to show it, so put a good face on the matter and began :

“Your desire to resign has come to my knowledge. I take it for granted that your decision is the result of careful consideration.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Schill firmly.

“Good,” continued Held. “Then it is not my business to hinder your decision. Your candour does you credit, sir, and I have the greatest respect for a man who strives to preserve his individuality under all circumstances. There is, however, one remark I should like to make—that with regard to your qualifications as an officer, I have always been perfectly satisfied with you, my dear fellow, and so has Riding-Master Baer.”

“Excuse me, sir,” answered Schill, “I have always been led to believe exactly the opposite from your remarks.”

“But, my dear fellow,” cried Held jovially, “you mustn't look upon every little grumble as a condemnation of all your services It is a fact that I shall be very sorry indeed to lose you, for you have always been a good and thorough subordinate.”

Schill was silent, looking at him questioningly in the meantime.

“H'm,” continued the latter, who was nervously fidgeting with his sword-hilt, “then there is the manner

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in which your resignation is drawn up, which I do not think advisable . . . ! Of course, I speak entirely in your interests, dear Schill."

"I must tell you, sir, with all due respect to your opinion, that I do not intend to alter anything I have written."

"But do listen to me first, my dear Schill!" Held interrupted, half amicably, half impatiently. "What I say is, that your reasons for sending in your papers are of very little interest to the authorities. All they require to know is the bare fact that First-Lieutenant Schill, of the Dragoons, begs leave to resign, etc., etc."

"But I feel that a precise explanation of my reasons for leaving the army is due to his Majesty."

"His Majesty?" Colonel von Held smiled knowingly. "Well, yes, all that sounds very nice, but do you really suppose that our Sovereign will ever hear or read a word of your resignation? Never, dear Schill, although it says: 'His Majesty has been pleased to attend to,' etc., etc., but it is impossible for him to see to all these things personally. Your case is one for the Minister of War."

"I am not responsible for all that, sir."

"No, no, of course not. But I wanted to tell you that it is absolutely immaterial on what grounds you wish to resign, and it must be of importance to you to get some small pecuniary advantage out of it, besides your nominal pension as lieutenant."

"That was not my intention, sir."

"Well, how would it be . . . I mean, couldn't you plead some slight bodily disablement?"

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“No, sir.”

“Well, well,” laughed Held nervously. “When one has served as long as you have, one has a right to something extra, which would do to pay one’s rent afterwards, anyway. Of course, this is all in your own interests, dear Schill; you understand that!”

“I could not do such a thing with a clear conscience, sir.”

“Good heavens, what’s the good of a clear conscience in these days! We cannot afford to be too particular; others are not! When we have served over ten years we have, to a certain extent, a *right* to a special reward.”

“I have asked that of His Majesty in the form of a civil post.”

“Nothing besides that, my dear fellow?” cried Held, endeavouring to control his growing impatience. “Don’t be a fool, but take all you can get! For instance, you can say you have varicose veins, an unsound lung, or even cholera itself if you like; the doctor writes a certificate, I witness it, and with a stroke of the pen you get £50 a year more. That is not to be despised.”

Schill considered for a moment, whilst Held looked at him impatiently in a state of nervous expectation.

“No, sir,” said Schill at last, firmly and seriously, “I prefer to send in my resignation in its original form.”

He stared at him amazed. He realised that there was nothing to be done with such a stubborn fool. What was he to do? Should he beg him to alter his mind? No, he could not bring himself to that. He had never asked anyone a favour, and would not do so now; besides, it would be showing his weak spot. He

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turned away slowly, with his back towards Schill, and said almost rudely :

“As you will, but do not complain later of want of generosity on the part of the authorities. I have always wished you well. Thank you.”

Schill saluted, and went.

* * * * *

The news that the senior first-lieutenant of the regiment had sent in his papers, when his promotion to the rank of Riding-Master was imminent, provoked general surprise. Above all, the fact that Schill was leaving the service from his “convictions” caused much comment, for a similar case had never been known.

“Can’t understand it,” said Gallwitz at mess one day. “Surely it’s a grand thing to be a dragoon! Chap says he’s leaving because of his convictions! What are convictions? Must be mad as a hatter.” The other young officers expressed themselves in a similar and characteristic vein, at mess, where Schill no longer appeared, having obtained leave till his resignation was formally accepted. “From his convictions; ’tis a solemn fact!” became a regular saying among them. Schill had been right when he said that the majority of officers were so taken up with exterior details and superficial fads, that it seemed to them sheer madness for a man to look behind the scenes and let his pleasure be spoiled by the disillusionments he was certain to experience in consequence. According to general opinion such a man was either a neurotic, or posed as a weeping philosopher.

Some of the elder men thought it over in silence, not

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venturing an opinion on Schill's decision. Probably they sympathised with him in some things—but of course no one understood him like Koehler. Major Preusse pressed his hand silently, and whispered as though he was saying something forbidden :

“ I tell you what, Schill, 'tis the same old story of the skin which does not fit. A young fellow like you can slip out of it when it gets too tight, but for an old chap like myself it is impossible ; it has grown to my flesh, and I must stay in it, even when it nips so hard that one would like to cry out.”

Among the recruits also were some whose former enthusiasm for a soldier's life had given place to very different sentiments. The fascination and glamour which surrounded a soldier's life and stirred the enthusiasm of lads and young men, concealing its darker side, had gradually faded. Everything had turned to dull routine, even the very things which formerly appeared so attractive. Everyday life, with its troubles and annoyances, was just the same in the army as anywhere else, only the clothes differed. Those clothes, the very sight of which was once enough to make our hearts beat quicker ; the delight in which custom stales, until at last they resemble a rigid coat of mail, which restricts us bodily and mentally, forcing even the emotional life into a narrow groove, and crushing individuality under the yoke of discipline.

The dragoons, Ernst Grube and George Weidner, belonged to that class who were only soldiers because they were obliged to be. With all their hearts they

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yearned for freedom, for the sense of restriction had long since become irksome to them.

Neither of them had an easy position in the squadron, still less in troop No. 1. Since Sergeant Gross had taken his civilian clothes from the cupboard and said good-bye to them, crying bitterly the while, a different spirit pervaded the troop. Gross had been punished by Baer with three days' arrest for having forgotten to wear his China medal when in full dress uniform, and had resigned rather than be disgraced before his men. A man called Vogt filled his place and was hated by the entire squadron; for instead of ruling like Gross, by kindness and a good example, he did so by brutality and insults, besides knowing next to nothing about his work.

But Baer had put Troop No. 1 in his charge, as, according to the Riding-Master, it was composed "entirely of criminals." As a matter of fact, there was scarcely an unpunished member in the whole troop. Baron von Scharf figured prominently amongst the offenders, for he had been fished out of a doubtful locality in Berlin and punished by a month's imprisonment; then came Grube with fourteen days' arrest; then Weidner with eight; finally a number of others, with the customary three days which Baer had given since the New Year for every small offence. None of them being able to look down on the others, they all hung together; consequently they endured all the more at the hands of Gross's successor, whose daily abuse and ill-treatment exacerbated them to the last degree. When he was in a good temper he would send a recruit on an errand to the canteen, for-

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getting to give him the necessary money, and should the unfortunate man venture to remind him of his debt he would look at him threateningly, as much as to say, "Cheeky brute, you should be pleased at the mere fact of doing something for me!"

But Vogt's ill-humours generally predominated, for Baer was always worrying him, in his turn. Every bit of abuse he received from the Riding-Master he passed on to his men without fail, and showed great talent in inventing new tortures for his wretched subordinates. If, on coming back to the barracks drunk at midnight, he saw the slightest speck of dust anywhere in the room, he would turn the whole troop out of bed to sweep it up; whilst he himself stood on a chair urging them on with a whip. The room orderly who had once forgotten to fill a water-jug right up to the brim, had the contents of the same poured over him, and was made to go backwards and forwards from the pump in the courtyard with a glass to refill it, besides being knocked about into the bargain. If any man showed the slightest objection to Vogt's treatment, even by the expression of his face, he would be made to stand in some painful posture till he fell down. The "aristocratic hound" had to bear an extra amount of "ragging," and on the Baron's being reprimanded by Baer for having dirty hands, Vogt commanded him to undress that evening and stand in a foot-bath, whereupon he turned the whole troop on to scour him with their scrubbing-brushes till they drew "the pig's blue blood." Finally he seized a brush himself and ill-treated the poor wretch with it.

Sergeant Vogt did not know what a dangerous game

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he was playing. His brutality filled the men with growing hatred, and bound them still closer together, so that finally the troop was against him to a man. No complaint had been made as yet, for all feared the Riding-Master's anger ; meanwhile, things were working up to a head.

About this time the troop was employed one evening, long after the bugle-call had sounded for bed, in preparing for a big field-day. As soon as they had finished one thing, Vogt would come along and tell them to do it over again, and would souse their sword-belts in the water on detecting the smallest spot left untouched by the pipeclay. Other things he would make dirty on purpose, making good use of his fists all the while. When at last he left the room, at eleven o'clock, the men went to bed, with the prospect of being awake at three the next morning.

That night they were all in a state of fierce indignation, and some said they were determined to complain the next day. The Baron went on sobbing long after the lamps were turned out, and Grube was trying in vain to control his rage at the way in which Vogt had bullied him all the evening about his former offence. Riding-Master Baer did it often enough, and never failed to refer to him, when drilling, as "that fellow who was had up for assault." Grube had to exercise great self-control not to answer back, but it was too much of a good thing to have this thrown in his teeth at every opportunity by Vogt, who, without provocation, assaulted them all in turn daily.

Shortly after twelve o'clock Vogt returned in his usual drunken state.

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“Now then, you lazy blackguards, snoring already!” he shouted in a loud voice, which woke them all up, and, striking a match, he at once caught sight of some of the remains of the cleaning materials on the floor, which the men had forgotten to sweep up.

He then staggered over to the slate, hanging on the wall, to see who was the orderly for the day, and, on reading Grube’s name, strode across the room and, grasping him by the feet, pulled him out of bed so that his body fell with a dull thud to the floor.

“Sweep that up, you pig!” roared Vogt.

“Grube obeyed, fearing the worst from Vogt’s drunkenness, if he did not at once comply. He brushed up the heap of dirt, Vogt meanwhile standing over him with the candle; but on his preparing to get up from the floor, Vogt shouted—

“Carry it all away in your snout!”

Grube made another effort to rise.

“Do you hear me, you beast of the dung-heap?” howled Vogt furiously, and seizing Grube by the scruff of the neck, he pressed his face down into the heap of dirt.

The other men watched the scene from their beds in breathless suspense. Suddenly Weidner and the Baron sprang up simultaneously, and rushing at Vogt, the latter threw him on the ground, whilst Weidner seized a belt and hit blindly at him with it as he lay there. The next moment Grube rushed up, with the sheath of a sword in his hand, and struck him a blow on the head which rendered him unconscious.

By this time all the men were out of bed, and now

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stood speechless round the sergeant, down whose forehead a little trickle of blood was flowing. But no one moved or made any attempt to lift him up; they all stood there, looking first at Grube, then at his victim. The door opened, and the non-commissioned officer on duty entered. He had heard the noise in his room, and thought it meant one of those favourite "visitations" to the troop, during which, acting on a kind of lynch law, a masked figure executed rough justice on an unpopular character, laying on the prescribed number of blows with a strap or a stick, according to the severity of the sentence.

He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Vogt, surrounded by the men, lying as though dead on the floor. Drawing nearer, he observed the wound on his head.

"Who has done this?" he asked, looking round.

"I, sir!" answered Grube.

The "non-com." looked him up and down, with an almost pleased smile, saying:

"Well, you're a smart chap! This will be a pretty mess!"

Then he left the room, still with the same smile, to return a moment later accompanied by the sergeant.

"What's all this damned tomfoolery about? But, good Lord, he *has* caught it!" growled the sergeant through his moustache, on catching sight of Vogt and Grube, who was now the only man left standing by him. But even the sergeant said nothing further, only ordering the non-commissioned officer on duty to see that no one left the room. He then went away himself.

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An hour later Baer rushed breathlessly into the room, white as a sheet, shaking with agitation, one hand nervously clutching the hilt of his sword, as though he were entering a robber's den. At this moment Vogt recovered consciousness, gazed round in a bewildered way, as though just awakening out of a dream, and struggled to his feet on seeing Baer.

The Riding-Master sent the wounded sergeant at once to the hospital. Then he went into the matter with the men themselves, and afterwards held a whispered conversation with the sergeant in the doorway. When the latter returned without Baer, he commanded the men not to say a word about the affair to anyone, the non-commissioned officer on duty receiving the same order. Grube was sentenced to three days' arrest, the reason given in the punishment-book being : for insubordination to the sergeant of his troop.

* * * *

What Colonel von Held was afraid might happen actually *had* happened. A few days after Schill sent in his papers to the General, His Excellency himself appeared one morning, quite unexpectedly, at the barracks, and mixing quietly with the squadron, which was just starting for a sham fight, discovered that the Colonel did not superintend their movements in person, but simply sent sealed orders with regard to them, thus gaining an extra hour over his breakfast-table. The General then mounted one of the squadron chargers, and trotting quickly away, arrived at the top of a hill which afforded a good view of the field of action. Here he came to a halt amongst some elm-trees. He

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was awaiting Lieutenant Schill, who, as soon as he received the General's command, had hurried off to get some riding-breeches out of his bag, which he had already packed, and to borrow a horse from the barracks. An hour later he arrived on his foam-covered charger, and was greeted with special kindness by His Excellency.

The conversation, which lasted some time, was carried on, as they sat on the turf, without any official constraint; at the conclusion of the interview, the General shook Schill warmly by the hand as they parted. Schill rode back to the barracks in a contented frame of mind, drinking in the balmy air of May to its full extent. It was his last ride upon a regimental mount.

Suddenly, at a bend in the road, he came upon a rider, whom he recognised at once as the Colonel.

"Where is he?" gasped Held, pulling up his horse.

"Over there!" said Schill, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder.

Von Held dug in his spurs, and went off again full gallop. When at last he found the General, he was too breathless to stammer out a word of greeting. This interview also lasted some time, but the orderly was puzzled to know why the Colonel remained with his hand at the salute for fully thirty minutes without the General asking him to take it down. Finally, the latter galloped away at a pace with which Held's twelve-year-old and worn-out chestnut could hardly compete.

The General waited to watch the field-drill, greeting the Major with the words—"Good morning, dear Preusse!" A few minutes later he rode off to the nearest station.

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Towards the end of May, Schill's farewell dinner took place, for his resignation had been accepted by the authorities, "in consideration of the fact that First Lieutenant Schill has in view a post in the Civil Service of His Majesty, the King of Prussia."

When he found himself sitting for the last time in the circle of his comrades, it was all he could do to suppress the rising tears, especially when Preusse, who took the place of the Colonel, then on leave, spoke the farewell words and handed him a silver goblet as a parting gift.

On leaving the mess towards midnight, Schill broke a leaf off the oak-wreath surrounding the Emperor's picture and put it carefully away in his pocket-book.

CHAPTER VI.

THE newly-married couple were entertaining for the first time.

The furnishing of the villa which they had rented on the outskirts of the town, had taken all the spring to complete, and they had thought it best not to attempt to entertain until house, kitchen and cellar were in good order, for Weiss wanted to show his friends how well he had done for himself. Meanwhile, one invitation followed another all through the winter, and the young couple were hardly ever free from engagements.

To-day, almost all the officers of the regiment, accompanied by their female belongings, were present in Lilly's drawing-room. Everyone felt kindly towards the bride, especially the Colonel's wife, who made a great fuss of "her youngest daughter."

On these occasions Weiss was more amiable to his wife than usual, for the way in which everyone admired her youthful beauty, and paid her attentions, flattered his vanity. He wished to awaken envy in them all, and experienced a feeling of proud satisfaction on observing the covetous glances his fellow officers threw at his wife.

Lilly could not complain in a general way of too much love on her husband's side. His caresses grew rarer and rarer every day, and whereas, when they were first married, he hardly ever left the house except to go to his work, now he was continually away from home, even at meal-times, and often remained till late at night

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at the club. If Lilly ever ventured a word of remonstrance he was cross and disagreeable, and if, on returning home, he found her sitting dreaming in the corner of the sofa, her eyes swollen with crying, he would be angry with her, and make use of coarse expressions in his irritability. He repelled her caresses roughly, unless he felt in the mood for sensual gratification, when he would shamelessly expect her to yield to his every caprice. The involuntary disgust which Lilly felt for these outbreaks of coarseness, and the lower instincts of her husband, was overcome at present by her boundless love for him, and a single loving word, or a kiss given of his own accord, made her quickly forget all her bitterness, and fanned the fire of her love to a renewed glow.

“I suppose he cannot help himself,” she would think, comforting herself by this self-deception, “and does not realise how inconsiderate he is at times,” and then she would be as charmed with him as in the days of their engagement.

To-day Weiss was exhibiting an extra amount of amiability towards her in the presence of his fellow-officers, even kissing her on the lips as they left the table, which the ladies thought “sweet” on the part of the “turtledoves.” The men laughed, and one old captain, who was a confirmed bachelor and woman-hater, shook his head and said: “The fellow is head over ears in love. Disgusting!”

Lilly was beaming with happiness and looked quite a picture in her white silk dress. Nobody would have guessed that she had been in the kitchen all day superintending the preparations for the meal, in order to please

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her husband, who had said the day before: "I wish the whole town to talk of my dinner."

Thanks to their host's excellent taste in wine, his guests had stuff such as they had never tasted before, and the champagne flowed so freely that after dinner the Colonel tapped Weiss on the shoulder in a friendly manner, and said, holding up his finger and pretending to scold him: "Too luxurious, my friend. You will make humble fellows like us feel quite embarrassed." The other men had nothing to complain of as regards quantity or quality, and when later on they were sitting chatting, with first-rate cigars between their lips and Hennessy's "Three Star" brandy in their glasses, the unanimous opinion was that it was "awfully well done."

No one knew that none of the providers of all these delicacies had been paid a penny. The Lieutenant's banking account was looked upon as inexhaustible. The world judged by the expensively furnished villa, the thoroughbred chestnuts, the two menservants in smart liveries, and finally the dog-cart with indiarubber tyres which Weiss drove to the barracks every morning and kept waiting for hours in front of the club till he went home again. His bill at the mess had also run into enormously high figures, and on his omitting to pay it on the first of the month "because of heavy losses on the Stock Exchange," the stories of his wealth increased enormously. For to have had losses on the Stock Exchange implied the existence of stocks and shares, the possession of which in addition to his regular allowance was quite unusual.

In reality it was Aunt Stänzchen who had to com-

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plain of the heavy losses. But it served her as a good excuse—greatly to his vexation—for not granting Weiss a lump sum down besides the monthly allowance of twenty-five pounds. She made no apologies for not doing so; on the contrary, she exhibited a somewhat distant and cold manner towards him, which did not at all harmonise with her former warmth.

Weiss knew quite well the reason of Stänzchen's attitude towards him, for his visits had become less and less frequent, and he had given her to understand, more by his behaviour than in words, that he was tired of this unnatural flirtation. Aunt Stänzchen, in her state of nervous anxiety lest her dreams and castles in the air should all vanish, had not failed to understand these hints. She was deeply hurt that Weiss no longer valued her love; and the tears she wept to relieve her aching heart were not so much at the thought of losing her lover, as the result of the injured pride of a woman who has offered her whole self to a man who has scorned her offer. At the same time her dislike to Lilly had grown to a bitter hatred; for in her she saw the being who, with the radiance of youth, had eclipsed her own waning charms, and absorbed all the feelings of a man over whom Stänzchen thought she alone possessed a dearly bought and specially privileged right.

For this reason she did not attend the young couple's first dinner-party. The sight of her rival caused her almost physical pain, and she did not think she would be able to see them together without losing her self-control.

Weiss was not sorry Aunt Constance did not come, for he did not think that her elderly beauty would be any

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special ornament to his dinner-table. His fellow-officers, however, were very disappointed not to see the mythical aunt, for Weiss had told them so many good stories about her, and frequently read them her poetical efforts. Still, her reasons for not coming caused Weiss some thought, for if this gradual cessation of their relations were to be followed by a corresponding decrease in the number of her cheques, he did not know what would happen.

He had, therefore, no choice in the matter. The only way which led to Stänzchen's money-bags and made their contents available—until a large portion of them was safely captured, when the curtain was welcome to fall again—was by keeping the fire burning in her bosom, and prolonging the comedy by a few acts; sustained, meanwhile, in his growing disgust, by the consciousness that the result was worth it.

So Weiss made a martyr of himself and laid his heart once more at the feet of the huffy old lady, in a well-thought-out, diplomatic and highly theatrical scene, winning her's once more in return.

Stänzchen appeared anxious to make up for the deprivations of the last few months, and developed a passion which far exceeded her former efforts, and which made her insist on Weiss being with her whenever he was not on duty. Weiss made the best of this turn of affairs to pay off some of his debts, which had increased considerably of late, for Stänzchen was in the habit of putting a banknote secretly in his pocket when he embraced her at parting. As she was obliged to buy and keep her happiness by the liberal expenditure of her

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money, she wished to enjoy it to the full extent, and paid for it at its full value.

Lilly was more than surprised at this—as she supposed, sudden and intimate—friendship between the two. She did not know what their relations had been before her marriage. Her people had not told her anything about the intimacy, for they looked on it as merely a diplomatic stroke on the part of the son-in-law which, although he seemed to be carrying it a little too far, would naturally end after the wedding. Weiss, too, had always given her other reasons for his absence.

Naturally she could not understand what Weiss had to do with Stänzchen during whole afternoons and half the nights. At the same time it was pleasanter for her to know he was with her aunt than at the club, from which he seldom returned quite sober. His behaviour, however, did not change for the better ; on the contrary, his irritability increased, and his temper grew daily worse, increased by his annoyance at his Captain's complaints about his carelessness and want of interest in his work. If his love for Lilly revived for a moment, he showed it by such coarse attentions that she was filled with disgust, and gradually came to prefer her husband in any other mood.

As time went on, Lilly became used to her loneliness. Her pain and bitter disappointment in her marriage, from which she had hoped for such bliss, gradually turned to silent resignation, and she bore her sorrow like a martyr, learning to live her life within herself. She lost her good looks and her pretty figure, for she was on the way to become a mother, and this change in the charm of her

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appearance was not calculated to revive the dying love of her husband.

The estrangement between them grew worse every day. Lilly seldom saw her husband, as he spent his leisure hours either at the club or with Stänzchen, whilst Lilly remained alone with her thoughts. Unfortunately a coolness had also sprung up between her and her parents. At first old Koehler had only shaken his head over his son-in-law's extravagant way of living, knowing his circumstances well enough to be sure he must be living beyond his means, since it was not possible that Stänzchen's meanness could be transformed into such liberality as to allow of such expenditure. Chancing to hear that Weiss had raised a large loan by mortgage on the expected legacy, he requested a personal interview and told him what he thought of his conduct. The result was a heated dispute, after which Koehler avoided his son-in-law's house, and as Lilly, in her blind love for her husband, resented her father's accusations, she, too, quarrelled with the old man, and he left the house sorrowfully. Lilly was too ashamed to take the first step towards reconciliation, as it would look as though she were blaming Weiss herself. She would rather bear her troubles alone, for her own people could not help her, and she was too proud to ask for their sympathy.

Weiss's friends seldom came to the villa now. His degeneration, his irritability, his cantankerousness, and the way in which he bragged, had robbed him of his friends' sympathy and made him more than one

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enemy. Gradually rumours of his circumstances and other questionable stories got about, so that most of his friends were reserved in their bearing towards him. At last only a small clique remained, comprised of those who were still drawn to him by his champagne and cigars, or to whom he lent his horses. Weiss was in the habit of bringing those few remaining friends to his house and gambling with them far into the night, so that Lilly could hardly sleep for their noise and loud laughter after she had withdrawn from the supper-table. But of late even these guests stayed away, with the exception of a Lieutenant Schönfeld, who came to tea sometimes without Weiss.

Lilly felt truly grateful to her husband's young brother-officer. Was he not the only being she had to speak to, with the exception of the servants? The continual loneliness had made her almost shy of her fellow-creatures, and Schönfeld's visits were quite an event.

Schönfeld was honestly sorry for his friend's wife. Although no word of complaint as to her suffering passed her lips, it did not require much penetration for anyone who possessed a feeling heart to see it in her eyes, which looked sadder than ever when she tried to smile. If anyone passed by the house, Lilly was generally to be seen, sitting with a pale face on the window-seat of her boudoir, gazing out with a dreamy expression at the sky. Weiss was seldom at home when Schönfeld came to see his wife, and would never have heard of his visits had not Lilly informed him whenever he called :

“Schönfeld was here to-day.”

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“H'm,” was Weiss’s usual answer.

At first he did not take the slightest interest in Lilly’s visitors. If he enquired occasionally, it was only to find out which of his friends still kept up with his wife. It was not until Lilly’s reports became more and more frequent that he would look at her questioningly, or make some deprecating remark.

“I cannot refuse to let him in when he comes,” Lilly observed once timidly, whereupon he answered :

“As far as I’m concerned you can invite the whole regiment.”

Lilly made no reply, but mentally resolved to give the Lieutenant a hint to visit her less frequently, since his coming every day seemed for some reason to annoy her husband. Often when he came home in the evening he would ask in a sneering voice :

“Hasn’t your Schönfeld been to-day ?”

But, despite Lilly’s hints, Schönfeld came more and more often. Ever since she had told him of her loneliness, and of the pleasure his visits gave her, he thought he was doing her a kindness by coming as often as possible. While drinking their coffee they would talk about all sorts of harmless things, such as the little affairs of the garrison. Sometimes Schönfeld would tell her about his work, or the book he was reading, or amuse her with some story of his schooldays. Then Lilly would try to smile, although she had almost forgotten how. It was only natural she should look upon these visits as nothing more than a pleasant change.

Weiss, however, was filled with a growing sense of uneasiness at the frequency of his comrade’s visits. He

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could not bear the thought that the latter might seize the opportunity of winning Lilly for himself, which would be all the easier now that he had made her so susceptible to any kindness by his own neglect. Therefore he did not think it at all unlikely, judging her from his own standpoint, that she would one day give herself to her admirer, and so find consolation for all that was wanting in her own husband. But it was only his own egotism, not his love for Lilly, which made this thought unbearable to him. The torments of jealousy stirred within and worried him incessantly. At the same time he developed a fierce hatred of the man who he imagined to be betraying his conjugal rights. Now that another desired her, Lilly appeared desirable to him—that is to say, as long as she could keep his sensual passion alive. He would easily have got over her loss; but to share her with a rival—the mere idea made him mad with rage.

He tried to reconcile Lilly once more; but his efforts met, for the first time, with absolute indifference on her part, and he even noticed a look of repulsion on her face when he kissed her. All this only strengthened his suspicions, and her attitude toward him made his blood boil; but he struggled to maintain his self-control, in order not to spoil his plan at the outset. If only he could find out the truth! He must do so, at any price!

He was not destined to find out anything from Lilly, for she maintained a sceptical attitude towards his protestations, repelled his caresses, was reserved in her answers to his questions, and indifferent to the anguish she could read in his eyes. She knew instinctively the reason of her husband's trouble, and could see quite

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clearly the struggle which was going on in his soul. Because she knew the cause of his sufferings, nothing moved her; neither the smouldering fire in his eyes, nor the nervous state of mind which he tried to disguise under a calm exterior. Still less did she triumph over his misery, for she realised, only too well, that it was not caused by his love for her, but for himself; he was merely agitated lest his own rights should suffer. So Lilly would not yield. Perhaps Weiss might learn a lesson, which would compel him to take serious counsel with himself—meanwhile all sentimentality was weakness. Lilly's recent sufferings had steeled her heart and taught her to resist her own emotions. The woman in her was awakened now that all her youthful dreams had been destroyed, and pride had arisen out of the ruins.

So Weiss found no relief for his tormenting doubts. He would have to seek some other means of regaining his peace of mind.

Schönfeld came regularly as usual. Hardly a day passed that he did not visit Lilly.

Weiss now determined to take them by surprise.

One afternoon, when Schönfeld was having coffee with Lilly, he noticed that his companion was more reserved than usual. She hardly spoke, but looked sorrowfully at him now and then, and altogether seemed quite changed. This made Schönfeld uncomfortable. He was not aware of having done anything to offend her, and did not possess sufficient tact, in his simple-mindedness, to guess at the cause of her altered manner. As she grew more

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and more silent and reserved, he finally asked, in his usual kind-hearted way :

“Are you cross with me?”

“Why should I be cross with you?” answered Lilly with a sigh.

Schönfeld was silent.

Suddenly Lilly got up, and holding out her hand to him, said in a pleading voice :

“Do not come here so often, dear friend, people are talking about us.”

“People—are talking about us!”

Schönfeld was startled beyond measure, and stared at Lilly in amazement.

“I’m awfully sorry, for your sake,” he stammered at length. “Allow me to take my leave at once.”

“If you promise not to be angry with me, and to come and see me sometimes,” answered Lilly, her voice trembling a little, and her eyes filling with tears.

“I, angry with you?—I am only very sorry for you,” replied Schönfeld with a pitiful smile, and kissing her hand he took his departure.

Just as Schönfeld entered the passage, he saw Weiss coming furtively in at the front door. He went up to him, and shaking hands, said :

“Good afternoon, Weiss—I’ve just been to see your wife.”

“Oh, have you?” stammered Weiss, who seemed very embarrassed, for he blushed violently.

Schönfeld looked at him enquiringly for a moment. Weiss could not return the look, but gazed over the other’s head.

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“Won’t you stay a bit longer?” he asked.

“Thanks very much,” replied Schönfeld, “but I must be off to my work. Good-bye!”

Weiss watched him go, deep in thought. His carefully laid plan had been spoilt by his tardy entrance. His whole being was filled with the thought of the injury done to him by another, and his anger rose to such a pitch that an outburst was imminent.

But he controlled himself for the moment and, clenching his teeth, went to his own room. For a long while he strode up and down trying to collect his agitated thoughts, and think it all over calmly.

An hour later he went across to Lilly’s boudoir, and found her reading a book which Schönfeld had lent her. His wife scarcely noticed his entrance. She answered his greeting with polite indifference, and, after walking one or twice up and down the room, he came to a standstill in front of her, and said, with forced calmness: “Well, and what news did Schönfeld bring?”

“News? None,” answered Lilly quietly.

“What have you been talking about the whole afternoon then?”

“Schönfeld was only here a few minutes.”

“So you quarrelled, did you?” said Weiss, pretending to joke about it.

“Quarrelled? What should we quarrel about?” replied Lilly, shrugging her shoulders.

“He seemed rather funny when he left,” persisted Weiss.

“He was probably rather sad.”

“Sad?” Weiss began to get excited.

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“Yes, sad. I am too.”

“Why?” said Weiss, trying to suppress his agitation.

“Because now I have lost the one person I had to speak to, by asking him not to come any more.”

“Do you miss him so much then?” asked Weiss abruptly.

“Certainly I do!” replied Lilly.

“Why, Lilly . . . why do you miss him? . . . tell me Lilly!” said Weiss, coming close to her and feeling for her hand.

“Why? What a strange question!” answered Lilly, with a disdainful shrug.

Weiss let go her hand and went back a few paces, his eyes blazed, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

“Why?” he shouted, loudly and threateningly, “I know why!”

Lilly started violently at the tone of his voice.

“If you know, then your questions are superfluous,” she answered, without looking up.

“Yes, indeed,” shouted Weiss, louder still. “You think, that behind my back you will——”

He did not finish his sentence, the look in Lilly’s eyes, which she raised slowly to his, enforced his silence.

“I am used to your being disagreeable, but I did not know you could be vulgar as well!”

The words struck Weiss like a blow; and he remained staring at Lilly, seeking for a suitable reply.

Suddenly she got up and turned to leave the room, her eyes full of tears.

“Lilly!” cried Weiss. But she paid no heed and

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walked to the door sobbing bitterly. "Lilly!" he cried, once more, "forgive me if I have wronged you," and hurrying after her, he seized her hands from behind.

Lilly stood still and buried her tear-stained face in her handkerchief.

"We do not understand each other," she sobbed; whilst Weiss put his arm round her and drew her close to him. Then he kissed her passionately again and again, drying her tears with his burning kisses.

* * * * *

That evening the young couple sat down to a gaily-decorated dinner-table. All the electric light was turned on; among the crystal dishes a large bouquet of roses exhaled its perfume through the room, and the two lingered long over the champagne. Every word was a caress, every glance a kiss, every kiss a reconciliation.

* * * * *

The feast of love was followed by a night of love. On awakening the next morning, Weiss looked at his wife, still asleep by his side. Her hair was untidy, her face had grown pale and drawn, her figure was no longer beautiful, and there were dark shadows under her eyes. He looked at her a long time, and the more he looked the more his dislike for her grew. This was the woman for whom he had sacrificed his pride, and whom he thought was desired by another.

Morning too often shows us the pleasures of the previous night stripped of illusion's glamour and overshadowed by the sense of satiety. The charm of novelty which things possess in our eyes when we still desire them has given place to the uncomfortable conviction

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of their uselessness when once we have obtained them, and we experience either disappointment or regret.

Weiss dressed without awakening Lilly, and went off to the barracks. On his return that afternoon she saw at once from his expression what sort of mood he was in, and spared him her caresses, for which he appeared to have no inclination.

The following days did not bring about any change in his demeanour, and at the end of a week, she was ashamed that she had allowed herself to be the victim of his selfish and dishonourable game. That day, and the night which followed, now seemed to her an insult to her pride, a passing dream, to which she had clung so closely that she hardly knew how to console herself since it had all ended in disenchantment.

The continued struggle between his own inclinations and the force of circumstances made Weiss more discontented and irritable every day. It was not so much a question of Lilly; he was used to seeing her in a state of silent resignation and was not touched by it in any way, so that the ties which bound them together did not oppress him at all; it was his relations with the insatiable Aunt Stänzchen which tried his patience to the utmost. He had tried to put her off by intentional brutality in their relations, but had achieved quite the opposite result. Every hour of the day or night which he spent with her increased her devotion, and Weiss hardly knew what to do to save himself from the demands she made on him. He acquiesced because he was obliged to, for his pecuniary position had become very precarious.

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The money constantly supplied by Stänzchen was immediately absorbed by his numerous creditors, so that often he had nothing but a sovereign in his pocket, and could only give Lilly half the housekeeping money. When he tried to talk seriously with Stänzchen about the expected legacy, she was offended and spoke of the long life she would enjoy now that he himself had brought back her youth. She invariably excused herself for not advancing him larger sums on the ground that the money market was in a bad way and the moment unfavourable, although at any time some trifling political event might improve the situation.

Weiss consoled himself with these excuses, and did not observe that they were merely a diplomatic stroke on the part of the aunt to bring down the price of love.

It was not until there was danger of the interest not being paid on his mortgage, that he approached Stänzchen really in earnest.

The Aunt showed no disposition to grant his request. At first she begged him not to disturb the poetry of their intercourse by talking of material things. Then she went back to the same old excuse. It was not so much a spirit of miserliness that prompted her actions, as the fear of loosening the ties that bound Weiss to her. These she knew would endure just as long as he required her pecuniary assistance. When he was no longer dependent upon her, he could forsake her without risk to himself. She did not know how much she tried his temper by her conduct, which circumstance, however, was destined to be the rock on which her ship should split.

The rupture actually came when one morning Weiss

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arrived very early at her house in an excitable condition and demanded immediately a cheque for a large sum. She hesitated to advance the desired amount, whereupon he lost control of his temper at the prospect of not being able to meet a debt of honour due that afternoon. He spoke of their unnatural relations in the most revolting terms, and destroyed all Stänzchen's bliss by declaring in conclusion that he would have nothing more to do with her.

Needless to say, his hasty conduct caused him bitter regrets. Later, when he had calmed down, he was disturbed by the thought that perhaps he had said things in his anger which could not be made good. At the same time he comforted himself with the reflection that the old lady was caught too fast in his net ever to get free, and was almost surprised that a messenger did not arrive the same evening with the cheque and one of Stänzchen's inevitable pink notes. Doubtless he would come to-morrow.

The next morning, quite early, the messenger came. He announced that Fräulein Konstänze von Koehler had been gathered to her fathers during the night.

There was a rumour of poison.

* * * * *

Lilly was expecting her confinement. She kept away from her husband's sight as much as possible during this time, for he invariably grumbled at her appearance, vented his temper on her, and reproached her with not having brought any dower on her marriage. Weiss was tormented by creditors. It literally rained bills and orders to pay his debts, whilst he himself had scarcely a

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shilling in his pocket, for he had exhausted all his credit and no one would wait any longer after Stänzchen's death. He was also threatened with a summons before a court of honour for non-payment of his gambling debts, and both Lilly and his unfortunate subordinates suffered from his intense irritability. One day he went so far as to accuse his wife of extravagance when she asked for the housekeeping money, and, on her resenting such an accusation, he had used violence to her.

As the day approached for the reading of Stänzchen's will, Weiss's irritability increased. Lilly dreaded that day even more than her confinement, which was preceded by giddiness and fainting fits. Her apprehension at the reading of the will was founded upon a letter she had received as a last greeting from her Aunt Stänzchen, who had left twenty-four closely written sheets, revealing her relations with Weiss and all his baseness. She concluded by saying that his wife had made him what he was : a man capable of throwing such insults in her face, and added that Lilly's influence on Weiss had always been a degrading one.

This was Stänzchen's revenge !

The contents of this abusive and libellous letter left Lilly untouched. She regarded the whole affair as merely an episode. Her cup of sorrow and disappointment had long since been filled to overflowing, and her husband was already lost to her. What she learnt of his conduct through Stänzchen's letter only caused her to shake her head over him, but did not give her the least pain. Weiss found this letter the same evening on Lilly's writing-table and, seized with curiosity as to its

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contents, picked it up and read it. His rage knew no bounds, and he accused Lilly of communicating with Stänzchen behind his back, and of having suggested her revenge.

He answered Lilly's indignant protests with coarse oaths, and shook her so roughly that she fell in a faint on the floor. Her mother, whom she had sent for in her anxiety, was refused admittance, and her father, who came hurrying to the house to see what had happened, had the door shut in his face.

The day of the reading of the will had come. Weiss represented his wife, and all the rest of the family had assembled for the occasion. Whilst the Koehlers pulled long faces over the reading of it, which disclosed the fact that Stänzchen had left her entire fortune to the poor, Weiss was as white as a sheet, for the clause referring to him ran as follows :—

“First-Lieutenant Weiss receives the sum of £1,000, which has already been paid him.”

The will concluded with these words :—

“I hope therefore that my dear relations will not grudge the poor their legacy. I do not wish any expenditure to be made on flowers for my grave. My one request is : Remember me kindly in your thoughts.”

During a violent quarrel with his wife, in which his pent-up rage overstepped all bounds, Weiss struck her violently, after having dragged her, screaming for help, into his room, and on her falling senseless to the floor, he kicked her in his blind fury.

It was not until his rage had exhausted itself, and he

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was able to take a calm view of the situation, that his inhuman conduct dawned slowly upon him.

First-Lieutenant Weiss left the town by the night express to escape his creditors, the results of his doubtful money transactions, and the inevitable summons to appear before the court of honour.

That same night his wife brought a still-born son into the world.

CHAPTER VII.

SCHILL'S departure left no gap in the regiment. A comrade from the Guards, who, by reason of a duel, had made himself impossible in his own troop, was put in his place, and filled it quite completely. He passed for an able officer, possessed excellent moral qualities, and was greatly respected by his comrades. His energetic bearing and the manner in which, through the influence of his personality, he kept all those comrades whose tone displeased him, within bounds, soon procured for him, not only authority in his capacity as senior at mess, but also the regard of his superiors, whom he had won by the circumspect and independent manner in which he carried out his regimental duties. Moreover, he intended to profit by the quietness of the frontier-garrison to prepare himself for the military college examination.

But all the greater was the void left by Schill in the heart of his friend.

Koehler had felt lonely and forsaken since the day he accompanied him to the station. Even Schill's numerous letters failed to distract him from the melancholy moods which oppressed him daily more and more. He withdrew almost entirely from his comrades, only joining them at table, or in the ordinary arrangements at the club. Most of them took this amiss, and called him a prig. But since Koehler had shed some of his simplicity, and had learned to see many things and many persons in a different light, he had conceived an ever-increasing

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dislike to some of his comrades. To all this was added the constant vexations and differences in his relations with Captain Baer. It is true that he had gradually grown accustomed to the latter's peculiarities and surly manner, but still there was often cause for serious annoyance, and his pleasure in his profession gave way more and more to very different feelings.

His pecuniary circumstances were also in a very bad way. Since his aunt's death the monthly allowance of fifty marks had ceased, and he was, in consequence, obliged to eke out his existence on the scanty allowance which he received from his father. The disastrous experiences in his former garrison, however, kept him from outrunning the constable, and, by the exercise of great frugality and economy, he just managed to get through.

In consequence of two younger men being put into the regiment, Koehler was asked to take lodgings in the town. He was really glad of this, for whereas hitherto, the allowance for the room in barracks had been deducted from his pay, it was now given to him for rent, and he was thus enabled to get a much quieter and better lodging for a smaller sum.

Captain Vogel seized the opportunity to draw Koehler's attention to a vacant lodging in his own house. He so strongly enlarged upon the advantages of living with a comrade, and named so low a rent, that Koehler resolved to consider the matter.

Captain Vogel rented the whole of the house in question, and was in the habit of letting rooms to comrades, though always pretending that he was only the agent of the landlord. It was pretty generally known

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that he himself really pocketed the money paid for rent. And this source of gain, although not exactly befitting his position, was, perhaps, excusable, as he was in poor circumstances. It was further known that the young housekeeper living in the house was Vogel's mistress, and that her child was also his. The "Vogel-house" was therefore, in bad repute with the respectable citizens of the little town, and when the Captain's "lady" went shopping, she had to run the gauntlet of contemptuous glances. His comrades, as men of the world, overlooked all this, for they spent many a lively hour in the "Vogel-house."

For a year past the Captain had been short of lodgers, since the last had quarrelled with him on account of unpunctuality in their payments, and consequently had much to say against him and his housekeeper. They naturally kept the real cause of their leaving to themselves, alleging as sufficient reason the disorderly management of the "Vogel-house." Koehler, therefore, hesitated for some time. He reflected, however, that he could arrange his own life as he chose, and his lingering doubts were dispelled by Vogel's persistent persuasions, and by the fact that it would hardly be possible to find a cheaper lodging.

So, one fine day, Kohler migrated to the Vogel-house. His comrades wagged their heads, and were not sparing of more or less jocular remarks, but Major Preusse shook his doubtfully, and regretted that he had not known of Koehler's intentions beforehand.

Koehler soon made himself very comfortable in his new home. If the noise of the child disturbed him at

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times, he soon learned to set against this the advantages which this lodging offered in contrast to his former one, and he did not in the least regret his decision.

Captain Vogel had invited his lodger to be his guest on the first evening. On this occasion Koehler had become acquainted with the housekeeper, whom he had hitherto known only by sight. She behaved both at table and at other times exactly as if she were really the Captain's wife, accepting the title of "gracious lady" as a token of respect justly due to her.

The evil reports about "Hanna Vogel" did not seem justified by what Koehler was able to observe during the evening. They must at all events have been maliciously exaggerated, for Hanna impressed him most agreeably. She was charmingly cordial, most attentive, and quite pretty into the bargain, while her bright humour made both men laugh more than once. In addition the house-keeping seemed exemplary in its perfect order, so that Koehler could not make out why so many disparaging remarks should have been made on this subject.

The first visit was not the last. Henceforth Koehler spent almost all his free evenings, and very often his afternoons also, in the Captain's apartments, which were on the ground floor; his own rooms being situated on the first floor opposite to those of Hanna. At first he certainly felt some scruples about taking daily advantage of the Captain's hospitality, the latter's impecunious circumstances being well known to him, but Vogel made light of these ideas, and seemed greatly pleased at Koehler's regular visits.

Thus, in the course of time, a kind of friendship sprang

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up between the comrades, unhampered by any considerations as to their military duties, since they belonged to different troops. Koehler told his father all about it.

The Major was not very pleased with this state of affairs. He considered it unnatural that a young lieutenant and an old captain should be such close friends. He knew from his own period of active service that such friendships frequently end in a quarrel, or are suddenly broken off one fine day through some unforeseen professional contretemps. He therefore continued to warn his son against too great an intimacy, even though Benno received these objections with careless reassurances. Schill, too, was by no means gratified when he learned who was his successor in Koehler's friendship. He knew the Captain almost better than anyone in the regiment, after serving with him for six years, three of them as his first lieutenant. He, also, warned Koehler most strongly and urgently, but after receiving the same kind of replies as old Major von Koehler, he ceased to refer to the matter in his subsequent letters, which became gradually rarer. Koehler himself was firmly persuaded that everything unfavourable said or thought about the "Vogel family" could only proceed either from malice, or from want of personal acquaintance with the real worth of the Captain. No well-meant advice could therefore keep him from cultivating more intimate relations with his two friendly fellow-inhabitants, and soon he grew to be looked upon quite as one of the family.

One day, as Koehler was again deploring to Vogel his reluctance to share their daily meals without ever making any return, the Captain briefly proposed that he should

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contribute a certain monthly sum to the household expenses : a proposition in which Koehler at once joyfully acquiesced, as he felt that the only uncomfortable part of his relations with Vogel would thus be removed. He now cultivated this friendship all the more assiduously, and resolved to make up for all the material benefits already received, so as to rid himself of any unpleasant feeling of obligation. He therefore provided Frau Hanna's kitchen with the refrigerator she had so long desired, sent in numerous delicacies, presented the small son with toys, handed one day to Hanna a magnificent bouquet of roses and, knowing Vogel to be an inveterate smoker, placed in the Captain's room a box of imported cigars "for general use." These extravagances were certainly not justified by the present state of his finances, but he considered them absolutely necessary and therefore had these purchases put down to his account.

The intimate friendship between Koehler and Vogel exercised an unfortunate influence upon the relations of the former with Captain Baer. Baer and Vogel were like cat and dog. This inimical feeling had spread to their respective squadrons, so that the men eyed each other askance, and even blows were occasionally known to pass. When it was known on a field-day that Baer and Vogel were to be on opposite sides, the announcement was received with delight, for it had once happened that the two captains had attacked each other in the open field, without waiting for their men, and each had asserted that the other was his prisoner. Baer was therefore now able to kill two birds with one stone, as he tormented his lieutenant with redoubled energy, and he

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positively cudgelled his brains to make every word tell against both men.

All Koehler's repeated efforts to get transferred to another troop fell through. Colonel von Held considered Koehler's treatment by his captain the surest means of keeping the lieutenant, whom he looked upon as extremely indiscreet and frivolous, out of mischief. He was particularly anxious just now that there should be no "scandal" in the regiment, his chief having given him one more year of trial in his present position, intimating this fact to him with the words: "I hope to be able to form a better opinion of you at the year's end."

Koehler found some consolation in listening to Vogel's diatribes upon the "Monster Baer." They often passed the whole evening talking of nothing but his eccentricities, Hanna chiming in with many malicious and witty remarks.

Thus Christmastide approached.

Last year Koehler had been prevented by his military duties from spending Christmas with his parents, this year he preferred to spend it with the Vogel family. Their relations had become so intimate that it seemed quite natural to all of them to celebrate the chief festival of the year together, and the preparations which Hanna had already begun to make gave every prospect of an agreeable holiday.

It was not only a feeling of *friendship* for Hanna and Vogel, however, that kept Koehler back: he felt a certain inclination for his "foster-mother," and she—apparently—felt the same for him. With Koehler this was possibly

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less the effect of Hanna's charms—for such the elderly girl possessed only in a limited degree—than of the fact that she was the one woman with whom he had come into close contact during the eighteen months he had passed in the garrison. For the unapproachable daughters of the townspeople saw a seducer in every lieutenant, and even the salute of an officer was sufficient to compromise a girl in the eyes of her fellow-citizens. He loathed intercourse with that all-too-obliging lady Grete, and therefore had hardly met a member of the other sex, except the womenkind of his brother officers, who were mostly plain and atrociously attired. Daily intercourse with a girl whose unscrupulous immorality was clearly shown by her association with Vogel, had necessarily a certain charm for him, and the involuntary feeling that Vogel had not been Hanna's first lover brought with it the self-evident certainty that neither would he be her last. This consciousness, which gradually grew to conviction, that the woman before him might one day belong to him just as well as to anybody else, awoke a secret desire for Hanna in Koehler's breast. He would certainly have felt it wrong to yield to this wish. For even if Hanna was not legally Vogel's wife, she absolutely assumed the position, for their manner of living together was in every way distinct from the usual "intimate relations." There subsisted therefore a somewhat higher moral standard in this free marriage, which, according to the character and personality of those concerned, approaches almost to that of a legal union: at times—when such ties are based on true and selfless love alone—they may even rise superior to the usual

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marriage-morality, which knows no laws but those of conventionality.

These were Koehler's feelings, which expressed themselves in a sense of duty : to consider the relations between Vogel and Hanna as a true marriage, and to stifle any desire for Hanna as immorality bordering upon adultery.

Hanna's liking for the good-looking young Lieutenant von Koehler arose from far different feelings. She had no disposition to indulge in ideal meditations upon duty and sin ; where the male sex was concerned she knew only the desire of the senses, associated with a wish for external advantages, which the man of her choice must have to offer her.

Vogel and Koehler seemed to her about equal as regards the latter point. But the sensual love, of which she had long ago had enough from Vogel, seemed something new, and therefore attractive, when offered by another. This attraction was heightened by the belief, rooted in the instinctively feminine over-estimation of self, that Koehler desired in her not only the Eve but the woman. For involuntarily she sought in another, before she could love him, the higher feelings to which she herself was a stranger. That she also carefully hid her inclination, was due not so much to devotion or consideration for her former lover, as to her ignorance of how far she could trust in Koehler's *penchant*, without risking the disappointment which might follow an over-hasty action on her part.

Captain Vogel complacently played gooseberry. It had not escaped his keen eye that there was something in the air. But for the present he acted the simpleton,

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and secretly laughed in his sleeve. It was no deep feeling but merely habit, that bound him to Hanna. He was too good-natured to separate from her suddenly. Besides he would have missed her, if he did not wish to give up a great part of his comfort. But the thought of separation had long lain dormant in his mind. He had already weighed the possibilities of marriage several times—less from sentimental than from pecuniary reasons—and the existence of Hanna had always been an impediment. As long as she was not provided for in one form or another, he seemed debarred from all chance of a separation. His only hope, therefore, was that some day Hanna would, of her own accord, attach herself elsewhere and leave him of her own free will. He therefore hailed the growing inclination between the two with secret pleasure, all the more that contrary to former cases it was not on Hanna's side alone, but apparently quite as much on Koehler's. This fitted in with his calculations. Therefore he always pretended to be perfectly easy when he found the two alone together, and was more amiable to Koehler than ever.

The longing for home which Koehler had felt so bitterly on the Christmas Eve of last year did not trouble him this time. It was true that when he had read his father's and mother's letters their agonised words of grief at Lilly's fate passed like daggers through his soul, but his sorrow for Lilly—which had been redoubled—and his sympathy for the parents' distress both paled before the festive feelings which possess every one at Christmastide.

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Koehler had not been sparing in presents for Hanna. The comparative indifference which the Captain—as father of the family—had shown with regard to the preparations for Christmas, had incited him to be all the more generous. He bought the Christmas-tree, and decorated it himself, as he had been wont to do in his childhood; he bought whole mountains of fruit and confectionery, taking, on the credit of his uniform, what he could not pay for in cash. Among the items were two dresses for Hanna, a valuable ring, various household articles, and—as crowning point—a splendid set of furs. The festive meal was not forgotten, nor the accompanying wines—nothing was too dear for him. All his good resolutions scattered like chaff before the wind, leaving nothing behind but one brief pang of remorse, which passed as quickly as it came.

Hanna, too, made the most of her modest means, giving Koehler the best presents and Vogel hardly anything. The latter seemed quite contented, however, and gave vent during the holidays to an almost exaggerated gaiety. He thought he had every reason to believe his secret plans successful. The way in which Koehler had rushed into expense on Hanna's account left no doubt as to the ardent state of his feelings.

Now it only needed a little diplomacy to entice the two into the trap and to close it at the right moment; then they might sit in it, while he could cheerfully go his own way.

Two days after Christmas the Captain informed his astonished companions that he intended to go away on the following morning for a week. The object of his journey

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was, first, to leave the two to themselves for a week, and, secondly, to take soundings in his own neighbourhood with regard to a future marriage. For Vogel no longer doubted that his hopes would be punctually fulfilled, especially when through his absence he threw a temptation in their way which the couple certainly would not be able to resist.

But he was mistaken. Koehler could not bring himself to overstep those barriers which his views upon the sanctity of free marriage had led him to adopt, and every time Hanna had unconsciously brought him near to the point he always recoiled from the last step, as though he saw some warning figure of Nemesis lurking in the background. He never exceeded the customary kiss of the hand, and Hanna, who would not offer herself to him, but wished to be won in as romantic a scene as possible, stopped just where Koehler stopped. Koehler himself took her coyness for virtue.

Vogel was greatly disappointed to find on his return that the two, instead of having come closer together, were, if anything, somewhat estranged, and still far from having, as he had hoped, attained the object of their own and his wishes. He was not sure either whether this peaceful state of affairs was before or after the storm? If before, he had returned too soon, and had come upon the scene only as a kill-joy—if after, he had come too late, and would have to try to profit by some subsequent opportunity.

His observations soon told him that he had come back too soon. The iron was still hot, and he tried to

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strike it by absenting himself for whole days at the Club, or going out hunting. Each time he returned, he found the same picture: two people, who were not even any longer able to conceal their burning desire for each other, but who were afraid to take the last step towards the fulfilment of their wishes, either from practical, or moral, considerations.

This stand-still in his calculations annoyed him. For the investigations he had made in the direction of a possible matrimonial find had been satisfactory. He had but to stretch out his hand. His only plan therefore was to wait. But he waited in vain. The fruit which had not thriven in his absence, ripened still less in his continual presence, which was a reminder to Koehler of those considerations which had been the real obstacle to the final step. It is easier to betray a man behind his back than to his face; therefore Koehler now took no further initiative.

Vogel grew tired of the long suspense. He took counsel with himself how to force the situation. For forced it must be. It did not suit him either to play the simpleton any longer, or to let slip a favourable opportunity of marriage, only for the sake of awaiting the end of a flirtation, which very possibly might come to nothing. Besides he was weary of playing the part of the deceived third party.

There were several methods of bringing about a solution. But one seemed too transparent, the other too risky, the third too far-fetched, and the situation required a rapid decision, which would go at once, and surely, to the point.

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After long reflection Vogel made up his mind. One morning when Koehler had gone on duty, he went half-dressed into Hanna's bedroom, and without much circumlocution, informed her that for pressing reasons, which he had hitherto withheld from her, he intended to marry.

Hanna stared at him with wide-opened eyes.

"To marry?" she exclaimed hoarsely.

"Just so," replied Vogel carelessly. "Why should you be so very surprised. You knew things could not go on like this for ever!"

"Oh, you mean wretch!" sobbed Hanna, and buried her head in the pillows.

Hanna's outburst of grief touched Vogel, for it had every appearance of being genuine. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and felt for her hand. He sat so for some time, while Hanna cried into her pillows in a heartrending manner; then he said hesitatingly:

"Let us talk sensibly for once."

Hanna slowly turned her face towards him, and strove to master her tears.

"You see," he said, "I am now at an age when I must marry, if I am to marry at all. You may imagine that my inclinations do not lead me that way—but there is nothing else for it, because, from the money point of view, I have come to the end of my tether."

"And what is to become of me and your child?" said Hanna, beginning to sob again. "I suppose I can go and beg my bread!"

"But my dear child!" said Vogel consolingly, "who

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says anything of the kind? Don't you see, I have been thinking that a pretty girl like you——”

“Can soon find another lover, you mean? Oh, how inexpressibly mean you are!” She sobbed so that Vogel had hard work to pacify her.

“I meant nothing of the kind,” he said at length. “You and I can speak quite openly to each other. We are certainly very fond of one another, but not so desperately that we absolutely cannot live apart!”

“I could not live without you,” gasped Hanna.

“Oh, nonsense. That is only your imagination. Look here, all you have to do is simply to go on living here—I will continue to pay the rent—and Koehler is so fond of you that——”

“How on earth do you know that?” cried Hanna in astonishment, while her tears suddenly dried up.

“Why a blind man could see that!” laughed Vogel. “He is simply waiting until I——”

“No, he does not want anything from me,” replied Hanna tearfully, and instantly knew that she had given herself away.

“Oh ho, and how do you know that?” asked Vogel with a roguish smile.

“Because—oh, because I have a feeling that it is so,” Hanna stammered out.

“Well, there you are mightily mistaken. I don't mind betting you that he is yours whenever you like. He just seems to me a wee bit shy.”

“And even if I had him, what good would it do me?” She turned away again, and broke into fresh tears.

“Well, but Koehler is a nice, good-looking fellow, he

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has money—and is surely more suitable in age to you than I am, isn't he?"

"And then what am I to do when one day he is tired of me, like you?"

Vogel smiled knowingly. He looked round as if to make sure that he was unheard, then he said softly, almost in a whisper:—

"Dear me, Hanna, you are not generally so stupid. You must know quite well how to get hold of such an inexperienced boy—I mean it is easy enough to work it so that he marries you."

Hanna listened intently. She almost held her breath as she asked:

"And how, pray?"

"Attend!" said Vogel mysteriously. "But give me your word that you will never betray what I am going to tell you. I only want to do what is best for you. Koehler is in love with you. Be amiable to him, get a promise from him—and—a possible baby even might settle the matter."

Hanna looked searchingly at Vogel for a moment. Then she suddenly laughed aloud, and fairly shook with merriment. The practicability of the idea entered into her mind like a joyful ray of light.

"You really are awfully sharp!" she cried, still laughing.

"Oh, well," said Vogel, also laughing; "but it is quite true!"

"But if—— No, it is *too* ridiculous!" and she shook again

"What do you mean, *if?*"

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“If he doesn't——!”

“Oh, interrupted Vogel, laughing; “I understand! You little rascal! As if I were not still there too! I have proved it.” Vogel proudly smote himself upon the breast. “Nonsense!”

* * * * *

Captain Vogel had made matters quite clear between himself and Hanna. He intended to go off again next morning about “family affairs,” not to return before Hanna's telegram announcing victory should call him back. Koehler wondered that Vogel should absent himself just before Hanna's approaching birthday; but Hanna whispered privately to him:

“We will keep it by ourselves.”

And she kept her word. When Koehler returned from duty on the day in question, and, laden with presents, came to offer his congratulations, she formally invited him to supper, only stipulating that he should see that there was “something decent” to drink.

At supper-time the table was decked out with all the delicacies that Hanna's cooking was able to produce. She was also most fascinatingly amiable, giving him her hand to kiss every few minutes.

“What a pity that my old man is not here!” she remarked several times.

Koehler nodded—and both were glad that he was *not* there.

“Are we not awfully comfortable to-day?” said Hanna, rubbing her hands in sheer enjoyment after she had cleared the table. “If you don't mind, I'll just go

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and tidy myself up a little bit." With that she turned towards the door.

"Pray don't trouble to lace up your feelings!" replied Koehler.

Hanna threw him a mock-offended glance, and disappeared.

Koehler meanwhile sat down in the comfortable arm-chair by the fire, lazily puffing his cigar-smoke up to the red-shaded hanging-lamp, so that it veiled the ruby light with softly-curling clouds. Yes, it really was cosy to-day! This delightful stillness, the luxurious warmth of the fire, the comfortable sensation of having a good meal inside you, and the pleasant anticipation of Hanna—all this conduced towards a contented, peaceful frame of mind. His wine-tinted imagination led him to thoughts of Hanna, showed her to him as she slipped out of her frock, in order to don an easy tea-gown, from which her white shoulders shone forth. Koehler was so wrapped in his dreams that he hardly saw Hanna as she noiselessly stole into the room, clad in a cream-coloured *matinée*. Pleasantly surprised, he rose from his chair.

"Do you like me in this?" she said with a coquetish glance, turning herself swiftly round so that the hem of her wrapper disclosed her ankles and a glimpse of blue silk stockings.

"Charming!" declared Koehler, looking at her with languishing eyes.

She tip-toed under the lamp in her little patent-leather shoes, and turned down the light.

"There, now we shall be still more cosy," she said,

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going to the sofa, and sinking down upon it in a most unconstrained attitude. Then she raised her arms, so that the lace-trimmed sleeves fell away from them, and buried them under the knot of her jet-black hair. Her right foot hung over the edge of the sofa, the patent-leather shoe fell to the ground, and in the coquettish movement which the foot made to pick it up, the ankle again became visible, as well as the form of the leg beneath the thin dress-material.

“Now tell me something!” she said softly to Koehler, who stood beside her, his burning glances encompassing her form. She had never seemed so beautiful, so charming to him, so desirable, as in the unconstrainedness of this attitude.

“What shall I talk to you about?” he replied.

“Tell me something sweet!” she breathed with a bewitching glance of her eyes, and took hold of the arm of the chair, as if to draw it still nearer to her.

Koehler was silent. He looked at Hanna with an ardent smile. Then he slowly bent down to her, and seized her hand.

“You want to hear something sweet?” he whispered, as Hanna returned the pressure of his hand. “I love you, Hanna.”

She laid her other arm about his neck, drawing his head down so close to her that Koehler felt her warm breath, as she whispered:

“In what way do you love me, Benno?”

“In what way? So that I want to kiss you.”

“Kiss me—and love me for always?”

“Yes, Hanna!”

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“And always remain true to me, Benno?” With this she pressed his hand to her throbbing bosom.

“Yes, Hanna, for ever!” he breathed back.

“And never forsake me?”

“Never!”

“Then kiss me.”

And he kissed her with a passion which took stormy possession of his whole being, stifling every other emotion.

* * * * *

The next morning Vogel received the triumphant telegram. He returned the same evening.

Koehler was not a little surprised next day to find Hanna in quite a different mood from what he had expected. He received a hesitating “Come in!” in answer to his knock, and saw Hanna sitting quite dejected at the window. She hardly returned his kiss, and looked at him reproachfully.

“What is the matter with you, Hanna?” asked Koehler, surprised.

“What should be the matter with me?” she replied, with a shrug of her shoulders, still gazing mournfully out of the window.

“But something is wrong with you! Are you ill?”

“Ill? Oh, no!” she answered, with a dismal laugh.

“But do speak! What has happened——”

Hanna looked at him questioningly for a long time, then, turning her face slowly away, she hid it in both hands, sobbing bitterly.

Koehler was utterly at a loss. Only after he had

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entreated Hanna to tell him the reason of her sorrow did he get her to whisper through her sobs :

“ I have done what was wrong—and it is your fault.”

Koehler was almost struck dumb.

“ My fault, Hanna ? ” he stammered.

“ The fault of both of us—that we should have deceived one who has not deserved such a thing.”

Koehler did not know what to answer. He sank down on the sofa and remained for some time immersed in gloomy thought ; then he went over to Hanna at the window, and sought to still her weeping. But she declined to be comforted. She put aside all his excuses, until finally he gave up saying anything more to her.

“ But what, in God’s name, is to come of the whole thing ? ” he sighed in despair.

“ I shall tell him everything.”

Koehler grew pale.

“ Hanna,” he cried excitedly, “ that would be folly ! ”

“ Call it what you like—I shall tell him all the same. I shall know no peace until he has forgiven me.”

“ Hanna ! ” again pleaded Koehler. “ If you do not want to make me unhappy——”

“ I must tell him—or I shall die ! ”

Koehler stood a moment, staring helplessly at Hanna, then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he left her.

This was a hard blow to him, such as he had not expected as the close of the romantic love-*idyll* of the evening before. In despair, he paced his room and reflected upon his position. But he saw no way out of it. That Hanna would carry out her intention and

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confess their fault to Vogel seemed to him quite certain after her insane behaviour. And what would happen then?

He did not go near Hanna again that day. When, towards evening, he thought of making a last attempt to bring her to reason, Vogel's man replied in answer to Koehler's question:

"The gracious lady is ill, and can receive nobody."

He was therefore obliged to await the inevitable. He did not see the Captain either. He only heard him come home from the station shortly after midnight, and go into Hanna's bedroom. They met first in the barrack-yard next morning.

Koehler saw at once from Vogel's almost rude greeting that his suppositions were correct, and when towards mid-day he went home, Vogel's orderly immediately came to meet him with the message—

"The Captain would like to speak to the lieutenant at once."

With beating heart Koehler knocked at Vogel's door. The Captain bowed formally, and began in official, icy tones:

"I have asked you to come here, in order to get from you an explanation of what has taken place during my absence."

"I can do nothing more," replied Koehler, "than to express my liveliest regret for my behaviour."

"And with that I suppose you consider the matter settled?"

"By no means, Captain. I am quite ready to give you satisfaction."

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“I do not require satisfaction, sir. The only person whose honour has suffered, is yourself, since you have abused the confiding trust of a comrade in the vilest manner. The satisfaction which you are ready to give does not belong to me, but to her, upon whom you have brought misfortune by your unscrupulous conduct. Or is it possible that you should expect me to keep this person for another day in my house?”

“I am prepared to provide for her future, Captain.”

“That has nothing to do with me. You must do as you think best. I have only asked you here in order to express my indignation at the manner in which you have trodden my unbounded confidence under foot. Shame upon you, Herr von Koehler! That is all I have to say!”

Vogel bowed coldly, Koehler did the same and went away.

The comrades rejoiced, when they heard the news from their respective orderlies, that Koehler had been turned out of the “Vogel house,” bag and baggage, and had taken the Captain’s mistress with him. He had been caught on the twig so carefully limed for others by the master of the “Vogel house” before now, and many were the scornful and mocking smiles that poor Koehler had to endure.

Koehler found new lodgings close to the barracks, while Hanna went to live at the other end of the town, so as to be able to receive her lover’s visits undisturbed. These were certainly not very frequent, for since circumstances had forced her to become entirely his own,

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Koehler felt an increasing aversion from her. He had also to solve the problem whence he was to find the money for Hanna's expenses. She had no idea of economy, but made demands which Koehler had no possible means of meeting. For some time past he had not been able to make his allowance do even for himself, for his creditors and the tradespeople who had provided Hanna's costly presents were becoming restive. The unspeakable terror which he felt of a complaint being made against him at headquarters, drove him to devote all his ready money to the gradual discharge of his debts, so that for the whole remainder of the month he was at his wit's end. A small loan, at usurious interest, from the "Regimental Jew" was speedily swallowed up by his vindictive creditors, and those who received nothing, continually threatened to expose him at headquarters.

In his desperate need he turned to Schill.

Schill was greatly surprised, when, after a long silence, he suddenly received a letter from his former friend, and that a registered one. The correspondence between the two had entirely ceased with time. Koehler's conscience always smote him when he thought of his friend. Schill on the other hand, when his advice about the "Vogel house" had been unavailing, and even seemed to give offence, had virtually given Koehler up. He therefore hailed his friend's letter with special pleasure. The contents, however, awoke mixed feelings in his breast. Schill was certainly pleased to learn from Koehler that he had left the "Vogel house," but the urgent request for money that followed upon this news surprised him. His long-felt apprehension that Koehler

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had taken to evil courses seemed now to be justified, and this grieved him deeply; the money question itself was quite a minor consideration. Schill's circumstances permitted him to come to Koehler's assistance. Since, after a short preparation, he had obtained a brilliant position in an arms manufactory, he had been beyond all pecuniary cares, and was even able to maintain his old mother in something like luxury. His former pay as first lieutenant had been slender indeed as compared to his present salary. He accordingly put the requested thousand marks in an envelope, together with the following lines.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“Most willingly do I comply with your request as regards the sum of money, which you will find enclosed in this letter. Do not take it amiss, however, if I tell you that I would rather give you back your promise as to its repayment. In my opinion you are not at present in a position to undertake the discharge of such a debt, and it will be much better for you just to repay me at your own convenience.

“It is with much pleasure that I hear of your resolve to change your abode. I did not refer to this subject in my last letter, which I am sorry you never answered, because I saw, only too well, that you and I should not agree about it. Experience will have shown you—let us hope without serious detriment to yourself—that Vogel is not a man with whom an honourable officer can associate on intimate terms, except at the risk of having his confidence rudely betrayed one fine day. I therefore congratulate you on your decision.

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“Things are well with me—better than I should once have dared to hope. I find unbounded happiness and pleasure in my all-engrossing profession, a happiness and pleasure which I only wish I could share with you.

“When are you coming to see me?”

“With a hearty hand-shake,

“Always yours,

FERDINAND SCHILL.”

Koehler read this letter with mixed feelings. The passage about Vogel was especially painful to him. He could not conscientiously reproach the Captain with anything, and it lay heavy upon his conscience that any question of misplaced confidence was just the reverse of what Schill had pictured to himself. Anyhow—Schill had sent the money. That was the great thing and freed Koehler from his most pressing anxieties. He hastened to despatch numerous postal-orders, and, by the evening, had only a few gold pieces left which he took to Hanna with a heavy heart. It vexed him to think that this young person, who had no right to aspire to anything special in life, should claim fifty marks a week for housekeeping money, while his mother kept the whole family on half as much, and did the household work herself, for which Hanna kept a servant. But he dared not raise any objections, as, on most of his visits she lamented afresh all that she had given up for his sake. Swallowing his indignation therefore he paid in silence.

Matters went on like this for awhile, but very soon it was the old story: debt upon debt, and no money to

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pay with. For by far the greater portion of Koehler's pay went into Hanna's pocket, while he himself had to obtain any necessaries on credit. His mess bill also began to mount up seriously, so that Preusse, reluctant to notify Koehler to the Colonel as an "unpunctual payer," more than once dipped into his own pocket to defray these accounts.

It was impossible that this state of things should continue. Questions of money apart, Koehler had become so weary of his mistress that it was quite an effort to him to visit her. There was one particular reason for this. A suspicion had been awakened in him, that the whole recent course of affairs had been brought about by some manœuvre on Vogel's part, and that he and Hanna had been deliberately brought together.

The news of Vogel's engagement, which followed close upon his separation from Hanna, gave Koehler involuntary cause for thought. The more Koehler turned this over in his mind the more probable did it seem to him, and his anger against Vogel as well as against Hanna increased daily.

After long consideration he resolved to inform Hanna by letter of the breaking-off of their connection. She could take it as she liked—it was all the same to him—for any sentimentality in the face of his parlous situation seemed sheer lunacy. Major Preusse also, to whom he confessed his position, gave him some good advice, and therefore he sent his orderly one day with a carefully-composed letter to Hanna's lodgings.

The orderly had hardly got back when Hanna herself appeared. She was in a state of great excitement, her

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appearance was untidy, in her hand was the communication she had just received.

“So that’s the kind of man you are!” was the only greeting she vouchsafed to Koehler. “You seem to have a short memory.”

“Oh, pray don’t make a scene, Hanna!” answered Koehler, who was painfully agitated. “What we have to say to each other—or rather what I have already written to you—can be settled quite quietly.”

“I suppose I may say a word as well as you!” cried Hanna pettishly.

“I see no sense in your upsetting yourself still more,” returned Koehler quietly. “I have informed you of the essential facts.”

“Then I will also inform you of an essential fact. You have every expectation of becoming a father!”

Koehler stood as if thunderstruck. He was not prepared for this. While he was struggling for words Hanna looked at him with a cynical smile, saying:

“You see now that you triumphed a little too soon. Besides, dear friend, you gave me a promise, which I am going to make you keep, as I have not deserved that you should throw me on the streets.”

“What promise?” stammered Koehler.

Hanna smiled at him triumphantly.

“I remember that someone once promised that he would never forsake me. Do you know who that was?”

“Slut!” snarled Koehler, in a furious wrath.

“Do you regret it now? I’m so sorry!” said Hanna sharply. “You should have thought of that before.”

“Get out of this, you hussy!” cried Koehler, over-

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powered by passion at the artifices of the woman. And as Hanna made no movement to leave the room, he shouted again threateningly :

“Get out, or I will have you thrown out!”

“Oh, I am going,” said Hanna calmly, turning towards the door. “I shall find out how to get myself righted.” And, with an abrupt “Good-bye!” she departed.

Koehler was beside himself. He suddenly saw through the whole tissue of lust and deceit by means of which they now thought to entangle him, and to thrust upon him obligations, the fulfilment of which were the responsibility of another.

He remembered Schill's warnings, and all his comrades' hints which he had regarded as slanders ; everything now seemed clear to him, and he resolved to defend himself to the best of his ability.

The claims which were sent to him next day by a lawyer, on Hanna's behalf, showed him that he was the victim of a plot, against which he was powerless to stand, if he did not want the affair to go before a court of justice. Whether he would actually let it come to this he had, for various reasons, not yet been able to make up his mind.

Koehler's steadily-growing misunderstanding with Captain Baer had not failed to influence his naturally gentle and weak character. Since the rumours which were current about Koehler had come to Baer's ears, the latter thought himself perfectly justified in making the life of his frivolous lieutenant as unbearable as possible.

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He was well aware that the Colonel looked on with satisfaction. Hardly a day passed therefore without some difficulty between the two. The means which Baer employed to get his subaltern continually into fresh difficulties seemed quite inexhaustible, so that if Koehler profited by one mistake to avoid some future error, he was certain to be pronounced wrong on every occasion. The consequence was that he *never* succeeded in pleasing the Captain.

The non-commissioned officers and men of troop No 1. had, at first, been on Koehler's side. But when the latter, irritated by the Captain's constant fault-finding, began to vent his anger upon his subordinates, their sympathy gradually changed to indifference, which deepened into resentment when he habitually visited those whose neglect was accountable for an outburst on Baer's part, with abuse, and sometimes even with personal violence. Things came to such a pass that Baer never punished any man who was reported by Koehler for neglect of duty. He always fastened the blame upon the officer, accusing him of setting a bad personal example, if not indeed of exercising a really unfavourable influence upon the men. So that it almost came to be the rule that Baer should make his lieutenant answerable in the most unreasonable fashion for every trifle, whilst the men grew accustomed to see Koehler censured for their own carelessness, and to get themselves out of their worst scrapes with merely a growl of reproof.

The training of the recruits was now nearly at an end, and the grand final inspection was close at hand. In every squadron "high pressure" was again the order

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of the day, and even those gentlemen who at other times of the year did not trouble themselves much about the service were all day long at barracks, busying themselves with the approaching review.

Baer's temper was, as usual at such times, simply unbearable. The pettifogger appeared at every moment, and the whole troop groaned beneath the exaggerated demands of its Captain.

A few days before the review Koehler reported two lance-corporals, who had been guilty of a breach of discipline almost amounting to a refusal to obey orders.

Baer was furious, as he wished to lay the blame as usual upon Koehler's "personal conduct." He gave the two corporals three hours extra drill, ordering Koehler to superintend it, "so that he might, through his presence, have an opportunity of regaining the men's respect, lost to him by so regrettable an incident."

Koehler boiled over with indignation when the sergeant brought him the message, couched in these words, and he made up his mind to make his "presence" so felt that both men, whose transgression he was to be forced to expiate in his own person, should recover their "lost respect" by means of a little extra work.

The punishment drill was fixed for the afternoon. The two corporals appeared in full uniform. Koehler began by making them "trot" at the double five times round the exercise-yard. When at last he allowed them to halt, the men could hardly stand upright. He shouted "Change arms!" Then—"On guard!" at which they had to hold out their swords at arm's length straight in front of them. In this position they were supposed to

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“get their breath.” But almost as soon as they extended their arms, they seemed incapable of sustaining the position, and while Koehler, who stood by with his own sword drawn, motioned the ever-sinking sword-points up again, one of the corporals let his arm fall to his side. Koehler roared at him, and he came to position again, only to let his arm drop once more, with an insolent air of suppressed rage.

“Arm up!” bellowed Koehler, irritated beyond endurance by the corporal’s manner. The man did not move, but only looked Koehler impudently in the face, meantime stiffening his arm when the officer attempted to force it up. At this a gust of passion swept over Koehler. “Arm up!” he cried once more, and when the corporal did not stir from his position, he struck him in the face with his drawn sword, so that the man fell to the ground covered with blood.

The sight of the prostrate soldier had the effect of a stream of cold water upon the officer’s excited senses, and a distinct and terrible consciousness of the inevitable consequences of such an act fell upon him like a blow. He went icy cold, and as he stooped to lift the wounded man turned so giddy that he nearly sank down beside him. The corporal lay motionless. Koehler ordered his comrade to fetch an assistant from the infirmary, and when he saw them coming out of the barracks he left the spot and hastened to his lodgings.

Next morning the news ran like wildfire through barracks and town that Lieutenant von Koehler had shot himself with a No. 71 carbine. Heavy responsibilities, fear of being court-martialled for ill-treatment of a sub-

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ordinate, and finally a breach of promise action brought by Hanna Vogel were alleged as reasons for the rash deed.

By Major Preusse's directions Major von Koehler was not informed of his son's fate in the usual way, by telegram. Preusse himself, in his capacity of old comrade and school friend, undertook the long journey to the dead man's father, so as to break the news in as gentle a manner as possible.

On leaving the train at the old Major's place of abode, Preusse met Schill. As he was reading in the paper that very morning about the severe ill-treatment by a Lieutenant von Koehler of two lance-corporals in a dragoon regiment, he had received a letter from Benno himself. He opened it with anxious foreboding and burst into tears when he finished it. The letter ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR SCHILL,

“You will know the fate that has overtaken me before this letter reaches you. But as the only friend I have ever had in my life, I want you to learn from my own lips why I have chosen to leave that life by my own act.

“I am filled with nothing but hatred, dissension, rebellion and bitterness. Those who have disgusted me with life have also taken away my nerve. I am powerless to cope with the vulgarity with which I am surrounded, and each day of my life for a long time past has been a curse to me. All my hopes, my dreams, lie broken at my feet—through my own fault. Why did I not, like

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you, try to obtain a means of existence in which a human being can be—and remain—himself? Why was I too dazzled to follow your example, instead of riveting myself to a profession which has choked in me all good instincts, all pleasure in work, all strength of will, and love of my Fatherland, and only brought me pain, bitterness and moral death? I did not heed your warning, because I was deceived by others, and had lost, in the struggle with their baseness, all power of remaining master of myself. But neither the consciousness of a frivolous life, nor the false step which has made a criminal of me, are responsible for my death. I yield to the superior power of those who have broken my life, and also robbed me of the strength to build up a new one in which I could have atoned for the sins of the past. Forgive me for all this, my dearest Schill, and do not mourn for me as lost, for that I was already. Comfort all who have loved me. My parents and my sisters will be comforted best by you. Farewell! All happiness in your future life. Do not forget yours faithfully in death,

"BENNO VON KOEHLER."

Such was Koehler's farewell greeting.

Preusse and Schill had exchanged the firm hand-shake of old friends, but their mutual grief for their comrade, and the knowledge of the heavy task before them, prevented them from giving full expression to their pleasure. After Schill had given the Major Benno's letter to read, they agreed that the former should go by himself to break the sad news to Koehler's family. Preusse therefore took the next train back to his

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garrison, while Schill proceeded to carry out his melancholy duty.

He sat for a long time with the broken-hearted old man, who, neither by words nor tears, betrayed the grief that was in his mind ; who, even in pain, did not forget he was a soldier—not even in the cruellest pain that could have befallen a father. Only when they shook hands at parting, did the Major's eyes glisten with tears ; it seemed to him that with the departure of Benno's friend went also the very last of his son.

An apoplectic stroke during the night put a termination to his life.

The tolling church bell, borne upon a howling wind, sounded one melancholy April day in the Koehlers' native town. Icy showers mixed with sleet, drove in sheets through the roads and streets ; heavy, grey-black, lowering clouds swept over the sky, and the sun, sad as a weeping eye, broke at rare intervals through a milky-white veil of mist, and shone upon the numerous mourners who were assembling before the Major's house. A host of people had come to render the last homage to the poor, well-beloved Major and his son.

Benno's body, which his friend Schill had had brought home at his own expense, lay in a leaden coffin beside that of his father. Both bodies were to be interred in the Koehlers' family vault.

Besides an escort of infantry in honour of Lieutenant von Koehler, the regimental band from the garrison, with their instruments, stood in front of the house. Almost the whole of the officers corps was present,

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together with many civilians, who, without having been personally acquainted with the major, were sincerely grieved at his tragic end and at that of his son. Countless wreaths and flowers had been sent to the house, and now covered the canopy of the funeral car.

At the widow's request the funeral ceremony took place in the house. The chaplain of the garrison pronounced the last blessing over the dead, and expressed in touching words the sympathy which had been universally called forth by the sad fate of the two officers. The widow, leaning on Schill's arm, stood close to the coffins. In her deep mourning, she looked as homely as of yore. Not a tear, not a muscle of the pale face gave evidence of the anguish which wrung her heart; patiently she endured this final blow with the same resignation with which she had met all her other troubles, during a life in which the cup of sorrow had been presented to her in every possible form.

Near her stood the unhappy Lilly. Matured by suffering, she resembled her mother in her mute resignation. Grave, almost gloomy, was the pretty face, in which the tender lines of girlhood had given place to an expression of deep melancholy.

Edith stood in the background. She was ashamed to shed the tears to which she would so gladly have given vent, for she realized keenly, for the first time, that she had dearly loved both those who were now to be carried to their last rest. She looked very miserable, her slender form, tall in its sombre garments, and her harsh features had assumed an almost defiant expression.

As the coffins were borne from the house, the escort

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presented arms, and the band played a chorale, while the mourners took their places behind the funeral car. In front of this, the major's two orders—the second of which he had received as a consolation on his retirement—were carried on a velvet cushion. The coffins, adorned with the helmets and swords of the deceased, were almost buried in flowers and palms.

A damp cold wind greeted them in the cemetery spraying icy rain into the faces of the funeral procession. Sparkling drops, as if Nature were weeping over the dead, hung on trees and flowers, grass and tombstones. And when the wind carried down into the town the crack of the triple salute, mingled with the chords of the chorale, many a listener said: "Now they are laid in the cold earth."

The widow who, sitting at her open window, heard the threefold echo of the shots, broke into bitter weeping.

The mourners went silently away, but a sharp, snarling "Change arms!" sounded, and to the rousing strains of a march the infantry moved off to the barracks.

They had been carried out in pomp and splendour, and Dame Sorrow stepped into the father's place at home. It is true that she was no stranger in the Koehlers' house, but now she made her entrance to depart no more until Happiness should turn her out. But when would Happiness come? And whence——?

Schill had not yet gone away, and was helping Frau Koehler to put the family affairs in order. He was firmly resolved not to go before he saw her and her daughters comfortably settled one way or another.

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After long hesitation, Edith, at his suggestion, had applied for a teacher's post at the girls' school in the town, which was immediately conferred upon her out of respect for her father. As she forthwith brought home an advance on her salary, one pressing care was lifted from her mother's shoulders. Contrary to all Frau Koehler's expectations, her deceased husband's pension for the month of May had not been paid, and a petition written by Schill at her request was disposed of in the following terms ". . . and in view of the fact that Major a. D. von Koehler has already departed this life, we cannot grant the above-mentioned petition addressed to us for the continuation of a pension due for life only."

Edith's situation was some compensation to Frau von Koehler for the reduction of her income through the loss of her husband's pension. She was certainly not more free from care than she had been in the past, but she was used to battle with difficulties, and to get the better of these had been until now the only pleasure of her life.

After much deliberation, Lilly determined to accept an invitation to visit Schill's mother. Her last doubts were dispelled by a most friendly letter from the old lady, who was not only glad of company for her lonely days, but anxious above all to do a kindness to the sorely-tried Koehler family.

It was true that it made Lilly's heart bleed to forsake her own mother, so bowed down with grief, but she yearned to break off all connection with the town where her presence only awoke pity in others, and which held

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so many sad memories for herself. Therefore one day she departed, accompanied by Schill.

Lilly soon felt happy with Schill's old mother. The two women understood one another perfectly; and while Frau Schill took the tenderest care of her foster-daughter, Lilly tried to anticipate every wish of her hostess. In the first place she undertook the housekeeping, that she might once more have an occupation, and displayed the virtues of a little housewife to such a degree that the Schills grew more enchanted with her every day. The dinners that she cooked always earned undivided applause; her careful hand was to be recognised in everything. The tears were ready to start to Frau Schill's eyes at the mere thought of Lilly having to leave her some day.

Meantime Lilly herself had not begun to think of her departure. The letters from her mother and Edith were as cheerful as could be under the circumstances, and she felt therefore that she could lead as purposeful a life here as at home, where her presence would be a heavy tax upon Edith's slender income.

Schill himself seemed to have no idea that he would one day have to part with his "little sister," as he fondly called Lilly. When, late in the afternoon, he left his office for home, he hurried on purpose not to waste one moment of his leisure, spent in Lilly's company. Their love for Benno, and the consciousness that they had both been awakened by bitter reality from many a dream in the struggle for existence, created an involuntary bond of union between the two, which from the very first

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proved a mutual attraction. And as Lilly took an immense pleasure in spending the whole evening helping Schill with his homework, and so by degrees grew indispensable to him also, a spiritual communion arose between them, drawing them ever closer together.

Lilly, freed from the weight of her past in these surroundings, began to feel a newly-awakened pleasure in life. Now, her charms blossomed out into the full beauty of ripe womanhood, which, chastened by sorrow, began in the happiness of content to unfold like a rare flower in the sunlight. Body and mind progressed in unison, and the magic of her personality shone around her like a halo.

Schill, too, had changed. In former days, when he came home from the factory, tired and depressed, he generally went for a short walk, then had supper with his mother, and afterwards sat up over his books until far into the night. At times he hardly opened his mouth, so that his mother used to tease him, saying :

“ Have you lost your tongue ? ”

He was always quiet and grave, and it was quite a whole year since he had laughed, but since Lilly's advent his spirits had risen visibly. He sat for hours in the evening chatting with her about all sorts of things, his gravity changed into quiet, peaceful pleasure in existence, and he was often so gay that his mother, shaking her head, would say :

“ My boy, my boy, something must be the matter with you ! ”

Upon which he would laugh still more heartily.

Lilly frequently accompanied her “ little brother ”

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upon his daily walks. On Sundays they generally went for longer expeditions, for Lilly, like Schill, was an ardent lover of Nature, and in the free air of their beautiful pine-woods they were more deeply and more warmly penetrated with the beauty of life than if they had been forced into the society of indifferent, commonplace people. On such days they wandered about at random in the country, heartily amused at some primitive meal in a village inn. Often they would linger for hours in some lovely woodland spot.

So the time passed and the summer drew to an end. The relations between "little brother and little sister" became more intimate day by day, to the great joy of Schill's mother. In the early days of September the two went for another long excursion. They wandered about the woods the whole of the afternoon, for the sun shone delightfully warm, and it was quite beautiful under the pine trees, so sheltered and so mysteriously quiet. The wind strayed lazily through the tree-tops, whose rustling sounded now like an alluring voice, now like a melancholy song, now like a solemn prayer.

* * * * *

The sun had already begun to turn red, and was hardly visible above the borders of the forest, when Lilly and Schill reached their favourite spot. It was at the top of a slope, in a gap at the edge of the wood, and offered splendid views over hill and valley. The wanderers sat down silently on the moss-covered seat and enjoyed the magnificent spectacle of Nature. Below, delicate cobwebs of evening mist encircled the weed-grown pool like a shimmering girdle. Bog-grass shone

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softly green through it, like dead-coloured silk through a transparent fabric. Behind them the night already gloomed through the pines; boughs and twigs seemed welded into a dark green mass, the edges of which the setting sun just touched with a golden glimmer. In the spaces between the hills, blue vapours stole out of the valleys, melting to a hazy violet in the glow upon the summits. Solitary tree-giants stretched their mighty dark-green tops out of the veiling mist, holding themselves in sombre majesty above the vaporous fog. As far as eye could reach the blue-grey masses of mountains, which looked like side-scenes pushed one behind another, grew fainter and more shadowy, until the remotest ridge melted into the glimmer of the sunset sky.

“When we see the world at our feet in this heavenly calm,” said Lilly softly, as if she did not wish to disturb the sacred stillness of the forest, “we could almost fancy that we were the only human beings in it.”

“Let us think for once that we *are*,” replied Schill.

“In that case much in our lives would have been spared us.” Lilly sighed deeply, and gazed with half-closed eyes at the dazzling sunset.

“Do not let us complain any more about that, little sister. Our past has taught us to seek our world for ourselves—and tell me, is it not a much more beautiful one than the world down there?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“And in this world, which belongs only to us, we can also be quite alone—if we like.”

“But that would be rather solitary,” answered Lilly,

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and shut her eyes, as if the blood-red glow of the sinking sun hurt them.

“Solitary? Just as solitary as now, for we are thinking that we *are* alone. And is not that pleasant, little sister?”

“Heavenly!” whispered Lilly.

“Then it must always be so.”

Lilly looked down in silence, her chin resting on her hand.

“Would you *like* it to be always so?” asked Schill after a short silence, looking up at Lilly.

“Yes!” answered Lilly almost inaudibly.

Schill took her hand.

“We only need to wish it, Lilly,” he said.

She slowly turned her head and looked him inquiringly in the eyes.

“Shall we wish it, Lilly?” he whispered, and pressed the hand which he was holding warmly clasped.

Lilly bent her head in silent assent, and Schill took her joyfully to his arms.

CHAPTER VIII

“**S**MART in service !”

Such was the motto of Lieutenant-Colonel Preusse, who had been appointed to the command of the regiment in the place of Colonel von Held. For when one day His Excellency the Commanding General had appeared like a bolt from the blue in the barrack-yard, he had to have the Colonel fetched out of bed to be present with him at the field exercises for the day. After that, they had a short explanation, and Held suddenly vanished from the scene. His paladin Baer followed him a few weeks later.

Lieutenant-Colonel Preusse certainly acted up to his motto in a very different manner from the Colonel. Even to the smallest details, he immediately organized a radical reform of the regiment and purged it from all the elements of which he did not approve. He kept a severe eye upon those gentlemen whom he had not yet been able to catch napping, so that at the first possible opportunity he might hurry them into the military Tartarus of retirement. With all this he aimed strenuously at stern conscientiousness, putting every personal consideration on one side directly it infringed in the least upon impartial justice.

Captain Vogel was also among the victims. When it was rumoured one day that Vogel had broken off his engagement, and, persuaded by Hanna, had again taken possession of the “Vogel house” with her, Preusse played the spy and cleansed the nest of its decoy-birds,

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who now—so gossip says—in the guise of a happy married couple, still carry on their lodging-house profession in a small watering-place.

Several other officers who were also on the black list did all that was possible to avoid giving Preusse the smallest excuse to get rid of them.

It soon became known throughout the army that Preusse's dragoons had been transformed into a really model corps. For the Lieutenant-Colonel was indefatigably active in the service, and had already passed the test of a highly successful inspection by His Excellency.

The autumn manœuvres were now drawing to an end. The troops were already on the home-march, which for most of them lasted several days. The "old soldiers," at the point of being discharged, had never marched so good-humouredly to the rhythm of the songs, as now, when with each kilometer, the moment of freedom came a little nearer. They were all in the most cheerful mood, which found vent as often as they crossed another division, or when, shrouded in a thick cloud of dust, a troop of cavalry caught them up and rode past.

"Tin soldiers, pack-thread boys!" the infantry marching-columns shouted, when cuirassiers or hussars passed by. "Kilometer-swine!" was returned by the horsemen, or "burrowing-moles!" when the "ragged-footed Indians" belonged to the engineers' corps. The "volunteer" * doctor trotting at the rear had generally

* Of one year's service.

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to bear the last brunt of the repartee, and had to put up with being hilariously called a "Moses-dragon," "saw-bones," or "plaster-box." Past and done with was the camping out, with its icy-cold rainy nights, and the stereotyped commissariat menus—barley-soup, "stick-jaw with barrack hailstones," or "ammunition ;" peas and sauerkraut, known as "clay and gun-wadding," or canned food, of which the smell was quite enough, and which from its pea-soup colour was termed "mixed paint," or "gaiter-buttons and crocodile-bacon," when it consisted of lentils and pickled pork.

Before the general manœuvres, squadrons No. 1 and No. 2 of Prusse's regiment had to be sent to fixed quarters, as suffering from some infectious complaint, and therefore unfit to take part in the work of the last days. They were quartered in a village on the return-route, and were to remain there until the end of the quarantine, especially as they, themselves, were not to come into contact with the rest of the regiment on account of possible infection. It was intended to discharge the reservists from this point, and, after the return of the regiment, to replace them by substitutes from the garrison.

The men of the two squadrons did not at all object to the present arrangement. They led a very pleasant life in their quarters ; except for the care of their horses, they had hardly any duty, and were resting from the fatigue of the past manœuvres. The non-commissioned officers did the same, as well as the officers ; both captains had gone home until the conclusion of the manœuvres, as they expected neither a review, nor a visit from headquarters.

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But should it happen that a prying superior should pay them a visit, they had simply "gone a-hunting."

The reservists made no secret of their pleasurable feelings at their anticipated release. Every evening, after tattoo, the non-commissioned officer of the day found an agreeable task in driving out the tipplers from the two village inns. As soon as he appeared, they offered him a "farewell drink" in the good old style. When at last, with many kind words, he had persuaded them to go away, they slunk into a side-street, and collected again to continue their carouse behind curtained windows, as soon as the non-commissioned officer had withdrawn to his quarters. Old reserve-songs were then struck up once more, and should a superior officer chance to pass by, he heard nothing, and thought—

"They are not to be blamed for being merry."

Baron von Scharf had thought of a special joke. He bought from the man on whom he was quartered, ten bottles of old home-grown wine, added a box of good cigars, and proposed to summon the whole "punishment-squad" to a solemn goose-feast at his quarters. The feast was to be on the last day of the manœuvres, as the captains were expected back on the following evening. As a souvenir of the time they had spent together in the regiment, the Baron had ordered from the neighbouring town, for each of his comrades, a reservist's riding-cane, with monogram and a tassel of the regimental colours attached.

Lieutenant-Colonel Preusse had got leave from the General to absent himself from the last day of the

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manœuvres, in order to pay a final visit to the detached squadrons, before he went back to the garrison. One morning, therefore, he covered on horseback close on fifty kilometers, accompanied only by Sergeant Rickert. The orderly was to remain with the baggage-wagons. Rickert had been attached to the staff during the whole of the manœuvres, and had done the work of the regimental clerk, who was on the sick-list, so excellently, that Preusse could hardly do without him.

The day was hot. After a long night of ceaseless rain, a real July sun streamed down upon roads cut up by the heavy artillery, so that the horsemen found it hard riding. They trotted silently side by side, Preusse sometimes making a curt observation that had just occurred to him, and Rickert noting down the Lieutenant-Colonel's orders as he went.

They had ridden fast the whole afternoon, and already more than two-thirds of the journey lay behind them when Rickert's mare suddenly went lame. The sergeant got down and examined her shoes. The near hind shoe had come off, and a nail had penetrated the hoof. It was impossible to ride her farther without the risk of laming her seriously, and Rickert, with a heavy heart, had to lead his mare for the remainder of the way.

"Never mind, Rickert!" said Preusse. "I'm a little done myself. I'll go at a walk up to quarters."

Rickert pulled a discontented face.

"It's the first time that anything of the sort ever happened to me, Colonel," he muttered into his white moustache; "that a cavalryman like me should have to march beside my mount."

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“To think such dreadful things should happen to you in your old age!” said Preusse, laughing, and looking compassionately down at the sergeant, who in the sweat of his brow was tramping through the dust, looking gloomily ahead.

For some time they marched on in silence. Twilight had already fallen and a slight drizzle had begun. Rickert automatically put one foot in front of the other, and the tired mare hobbled behind him at such a distance that the reins were quite taut, and she had to stretch out her neck to avoid trotting, in order to keep up with her master.

Rickert's feet hurt him so much in his heavy riding boots, which were never intended for walking, that he could only get along on his toes, and hobbled almost as badly as his mare. He panted all the time, and kept wiping the sweat from his brow with his red handkerchief.

The Lieutenant-Colonel was sorry for the old man. “Poor fellow,” he thought, “he has his years of service behind him just as I have, and hasn't found them any easier! Come here, Rickert,” he said, pulling up his horse, “get up on my bay; my back aches, I should like to walk a bit.” He stood up in his stirrups and began to dismount.

“Excuse me, sir!” said Rickert shyly. “That won't do. If anyone were to see such a thing, he would think, ‘there's a well-disciplined non-commissioned officer!’”

Preusse laughed and got down.

“But if it's an order, you will do it, won't you?”

“Then I have no choice,” replied Rickert with a

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bewildered smile, as he caught the bridle and wearily mounted his officer's bay. He led his own mare beside him.

Preusse strode along by his side with the elastic step of a sturdy orderly, and the rider had to spur his horse in order to keep up with him.

Meantime it had become quite dark. The rain became heavier, and they could hardly see a yard in front of them. At last towards eleven o'clock they reached the village where the 1st and 2nd squadrons had their quarters. Preusse mounted again, and remained in the street, while Rickert went to the inn, where lights were still burning, to get quarters, or to inquire the address of the local authorities, in order to find a lodging.

Just then the feast of the "punishment squad" at Baron von Scharf's was drawing to an end. The wine had been a great success, and when it had run short, the Baron had gone down to the cellar and fetched up a fresh supply, while his landlord was already snoring in his feather-bed. This second little supply vanished down the thirsty men's throats, and changed their hitherto jolly humour into wild excitement. Those who had not followed their host's example—who had long ago collapsed in a corner of the room—descended the steep steps of the house with infinite difficulty, intending to betake themselves to their quarters. There were, however, only one or two of them who were fit to walk. They staggered about the street hopelessly drunk, shouting disconnected bars of the songs sung earlier in the evening.

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Preusse, who was still waiting on horseback in the street, heard two men approaching, bawling incoherently, and guessed from the style of their ditty that they were dragoons. He rode on a few steps, as far as the melancholy light of the street-lamp, and drew up somewhat to one side, so that he could recognise the men as they came into the light. They advanced until they were just beneath the lantern, when the Lieutenant-Colonel rode up, and in a loud voice commanded them to halt. The first of the two dragoons slipped as quick as lightning into a side street, while the other, taking no notice of Preusse's order, went yelling on his way. Preusse urged on his horse, and drew up straight in front of the dragoon, thus blocking the latter's road. "I order you to halt!" cried Preusse again. "Do you not see that you have your colonel before you?"

The dragoon stopped one moment, then went on with a malicious and besotted laugh. When Preusse once more tried to bar his way, he struck the officer's horse on the chest with his riding-whip, so that it reared up. Preusse was not prepared for this movement on the horse's part; he had the reins tight, and the bay overbalanced and fell backwards, carrying his rider with him. Rickert came out just at the right moment to seize the dragoon as he was running away, and dragged him, fighting tooth and nail, to the lantern, in order to identify him. Preusse had meantime picked himself up, and was leaning, with a violent pain in his right arm, against the wall of a house. The bay stood by, trembling. A passing sergeant came up to the group inquisitively, and was not a little astonished to perceive his commanding officer.

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He soon grasped the situation and, leading the horse by his bridle, accompanied Preusse to his own quarters. Rickert meanwhile took the dragoon to the guard-room, which was in a shed conveniently near the street.

When, an hour later, Rickert left the stables, after feeding and watering his mare, he betook himself to the Lieutenant-Colonel. He found him in the company of an army doctor, who was attending to the compound fracture of his arm.

“Well, Rickert, what do you say to this?” he cried, smiling in his pain at the sergeant as he came in.

“Confounded brutes!” snarled Rickert furiously. “However, the rascal is behind lock and key, Colonel. He is dead drunk!”

“If I had known that, I should have let him off!” Preusse said to himself thoughtfully. “Who was it, Rickert?”

“The dragoon Grube from the 1st Squadron—already once punished for personal violence!”

Grube's case excited attention and interest far beyond the limits of the garrison. It also proved disastrous to the Captain of his squadron, because Baer's successor in the Service was now obliged to follow him into private life. Preusse had reported him to the General for repeated “absence from quarters under grave circumstances.” Whereupon his Excellency recommended the undisciplined commander of the squadron to send in his papers. He was seen for the last time at the court-martial on Grube, where he had been summoned as witness, and then disappeared on leave, until the

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weekly Service paper should one day announce his resignation.

Grube himself, "for gross violation of respect," was sentenced to prison for eighteen months. All the efforts of his counsel had not been able to secure a lighter verdict, nor the fact that he had committed the deed when in a state of absolute inebriety. Meanwhile Grube, in spite of most strenuous advice from his counsel and the hope of a shorter term of punishment, obstinately refused to give up the name of the man with whom he had been drinking that evening. He also stoutly denied that it was trooper Weidner who had been in his company. Consequently the latter and the Baron von Scharf came off with flying colours, and a few days after the occurrence were able to join in the general cry of "Home we go!"

Weidner went away immediately, but the Baron allowed himself just one more funny little joke. He hired a mediæval-looking chariot with two coachmen on the box, and thus made a round of farewell visits to his superiors, who had shown him such "kind attentions." Of course he was nowhere received, but left his visiting-card, on which was inscribed:—

JOACHIM OTTOKAR FREDERICK BARON VON SCHARF,

*Ex-trooper of dragoons and formerly a member
of the "punishment squad."*

Lieutenant von Rauch received in a registered letter

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a cabinet photograph, with an inscription and dedication as follows :—

“ Called out on October 3rd, 1900.
Deserted on the same date.
Caught on January 5th, 1901,
Discharged on October, 1st, 1903.”

Gallwitz found this dedication so “idiotically original” that he inserted the portrait into his “album of handsome men.”

CHAPTER IX.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL PREUSSE recovered but slowly from his injury. The fractured bones had healed badly through want of skill on the part of the staff-surgeon who had been called in that night, and it had been necessary, in order to prevent the arm from becoming permanently useless, to break and reset it. The complete restoration of the injured limb seemed hardly to be hoped for in consequence of the first unfortunate blunder.

The instant that Preusse was pronounced "cured" by his doctor he packed up his best uniform and set out on a journey. He had had an invitation to the wedding of his old comrade Schill with Frau Lilly Weiss, *née* Fräulein Koehler. Lilly had obtained a legal divorce from her husband, and had given her "little brother" her hand in marriage. Everyone warmly sympathised with the glad change in the unhappy woman's circumstances, and a large number of congratulations and good wishes of all kinds poured in upon the wedding-day. For obvious reasons, the wedding was not to take place at Lilly's home but at Schill's, and only a few of their most intimate relatives and friends were present. Of these, Frau von Koehler alone was missing. Mortally wounded both in body and soul through the heavy blows of Fate, her life was slowly ebbing out, for an acute aggravation of her old heart complaint had for months past kept her in bed. The mother's absence sensibly depressed the

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spirits of everyone, and when Lilly on her wedding-morning received her mother's good-wishes, written in a tremulous hand, she broke down, weeping bitterly.

Schill no longer held his old position in the factory. Thanks to his indefatigable industry and intelligence he had been made head of the testing department of the firm, in which post he enjoyed not only an independent sphere of activity, but also a high salary. Shortly before his marriage the firm had bought, as the official residence of their new manager, a charming villa, so Schill's worldly affairs now prospered.

A few days after their marriage the young couple visited Frau von Koehler and the graves of their beloved dead, on which occasion Lilly also laid a wreath upon Stänzchen's grave, as if in quiet reconciliation.

After First-lieutenant Weiss's disappearance all trace of him had been lost. The regiment had instituted no search for him or his whereabouts—only his dismissal was announced in the weekly Service Gazette shortly after his flight.

All the more zealously, however, was he pursued by irate creditors. The bank which had advanced him 10,000 marks, on the strength of a deed, bearing Stänzchen's forged signature, was specially indefatigable in its efforts to trace Weiss's abode. Advertisements and police enquiries remained perfectly fruitless; the fugitive was supposed to have gone abroad a long time ago.

But Weiss had not managed to get abroad. He had first gone to Berlin and there found shelter with his mistress. The latter had received a monthly allowance

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of two hundred marks after Weiss's marriage with Lilly, and allowed herself to be persuaded, when one day the first lieutenant himself appeared with empty pockets instead of her money, that sooner or later he had expectations of a large legacy. So they were poorly housed in two rooms on the third floor of a Berlin lodging-house. The lovers took up their "profession" again, earning therewith a sufficiency, Weiss undertaking the part of a swell, and, while she received visits from gentlemen, he lounged about the streets, or squandered the money which he received every evening. His appearance, to which he knew how to impart a certain style, won for him not only the entry to the better restaurants, but also the acquaintance of other loafers and epicures. They looked kindly upon the jovial *soi-disant* "Austrian Count," and gradually smoothed the way for him into various clubs. Here, however, there was no credit, but only card-playing, and after Weiss had refilled his pockets by means of a sum borrowed from the head-waiter, he was considered a very lucky player.

The improvement in his pecuniary circumstances soon allowed him to move into an apartment "appropriate to his rank." His mistress, of whom he had soon grown weary, had no idea of her quondam lover's address, and was inconsolable; while Weiss opened heart and purse in quick succession to many other good-looking women, of whom he found no lack in the dancing-halls and among the shop-girls. They all liked him, the smart, rich "Nazi," who, with his cropped head and clean-shaven face, really looked like a "sporting Count" when he appeared with his eye-glass and top hat.

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Weiss's plan was to win a respectable capital, and then to leave his fatherland for good and all, and to create for himself a new existence in America. Therefore every evening he was first at the card-table of a club to which he had the entry, and the last to leave. His luck astounded his fellow-gamblers. He hardly ever lost, and had already completely "cleaned out" more than one old hand, while the number of I.O.U.'s, which he put away every evening in his letter-case, was considerable. The Count was certainly good-humoured, for if a debtor could not immediately discharge his debts of honour, Nazi tapped him on the shoulder, saying, in a friendly way :

"I am not in a hurry—there's plenty of time."

If the loser, surprised at his leniency, stammered out a few words of thanks, he would add, in a languid manner :

"Pray don't make any fuss about it, old man."

Weiss's coffers became full, and he was glad of it. For since one day in the Café Bauer he had been idly turning over the *Fliegenden*, and discovered an excellent portrait of himself, accompanied by a police advertisement, he had felt rather uncomfortable. He said to himself that of course no one could possibly recognize him on account of his skilfully transformed appearance, yet the vision of the Public Prosecutor with arms outstretched towards him began to haunt his dreams, and every time the bell rang it went through him like a flash of lightning.

He could not continue thus. But his coffers were not yet full enough, and to fill them quickly a few

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small expedients were necessary. It was a fact that the Count developed a new run of luck at play, and his losses now almost touched vanishing point. Now and then he lost a small sum with a magnanimous smile in order to be able to win a much larger amount immediately afterwards.

The circle of players became gradually smaller and smaller. No one ventured to play with "Nazi," as a loss was a dead certainty ; so the man with "the devil's own luck" often found himself alone in a club chair in some corner of the smoking-room, sipping his champagne, or, for form's sake, reading a sporting paper. The number of his debtors was still considerable. Should he succeed in collecting his outstanding debts, he might leave this place, which he had made too hot to hold him, and start afresh in the New World. He therefore took one debtor after another aside, reminded him of the long-overdue I.O.U., and mentioned a date for payment.

"It is time, old boy," he said to each ; "Nazi must have his money."

One day several new guests were introduced who took part in the play during the evening. Warned of Nazi's incredible luck, at first they ostentatiously declined to play with the "Count," but finally allowed themselves to join in his game.

Nazi quietly triumphed.

"This is luck," he thought to himself. "Now I shall pull it off," for he hoped in a single evening to win from the newcomers as much as his debtors were withholding from him. So he primed himself with "Dutch courage," and arranged the play for high stakes. He

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did not go far. In the middle of the game, which nearly all the members of the club were following with intense interest, one of the new-comers rose, introduced himself to the terrified Count as a detective, and, showing a warrant, requested him "to come along without giving trouble."

The Public Prosecutor was as happy as a king at having caught in the person of the Hungarian Count not only a card-sharper, but also the long-wanted first-lieutenant of dragoons. This was the close of Weiss's career.

CHAPTER X.

ERNST GRUBE had worked out his punishment.

It was a lovely April day when, in the early morning, he crossed the threshold of the prison gates, behind which, separated from his fellow-creatures and from the world, he had wasted eighteen months in solitary confinement. The mental torture through which he had passed during that time had left its impress upon his worn, melancholy features, and had added years to his apparent age.

Was he dreaming, or was it true, that now his longed-for liberty was his own again, that he was breathing the soft air of spring-time? That he was looking the smiling sun in the face once more, after having seen for long months only its faint reflection in the musty atmosphere of an abode where the refuse of humanity expiated behind iron and stone the guilt of human frailty where, forced to forget a future life in the necessity of enduring the present one, the last spark of youthful blood was extinguished in one's veins? Sense of honour, pride, and respectability—all were gone. It was as a man branded for life that he returned among his fellows, to bear the contempt of long years as penalty for having forgotten the duty of a moment.

Grube stood still at the edge of the nearest field. His eyes, unaccustomed to the bright light, involuntarily closed before the rays of the dazzling morning sun, as he looked up to where a twittering lark soared skywards,

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seeming to him a something unknown, never seen before, a phenomenon of Nature. Then he saw the yellow-green tips of the young corn tremble as if shivering in the wind, and the early flowers unfolding their starry blossoms. He gazed about him as one in a dream. "You are free!" his mind clamoured joyously; and a thrill of pure delight ran through his whole being. "Free, free, free!" He could have shouted it to every tree, to every stone, and when with indifferent mien a farm-labourer passed by, it seemed strange to Grube that he did not offer his hand nor called to him: "I rejoice with you that you are free!"

But suddenly another imperious voice silenced this inward exultation. "Why should he rejoice with you—a criminal? Must he not despise you?" thought Grube after the labourer had gone by.

He stood still, thinking, and the more he gave rein to the thought the heavier did it weigh upon him. All his pleasure, all his just-renewed sensations of warmth and joy in life were stifled by this newly-awakened certainty. "You are an outcast in the eyes of men. When they see you they will nudge each other and whisper: "Look, he has been in prison!" Fathers and mothers will warn their children against you, and will hold you up to them as a warning of how guilt is punished, and the sinner dishonoured and outlawed for the rest of his life.

A deep sadness came over him. A gloomy picture of a joyless future rose suddenly before him, a future which now hardly seemed worth living, since it must daily, hourly remind him: "All those among whom you live despise and abhor you."

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He thought of his home. What would the people say when he passed through the village street? Would they not show him the door when he, an erstwhile member of the community, now dishonoured, once more sought admission among them? And what did home look like now, after four and a half years' absence?

Disastrous news had already reached him. His brother William was dead. Marie Siebert had long since taken up with another lover. On his return home his friend Weidner had acquainted him with the saddest of tidings about his sister—what more dreadful could be in store for him?

William's loss hit him the hardest. The poor fellow had counted the hours to the return of his brother, and just when he almost fancied they were to be reunited, he had learned the verdict of the court-martial. His frantic grief laid him low with a violent fever, from which he never recovered; a few days after the news, he succumbed to his lung complaint.

Grube walked on, absorbed in his gloomy thoughts. In order to get to the street leading to the station, he had taken a road at the back of the town. He shrank from the more crowded thoroughfares, for he feared every look, feeling that it might wound him still more deeply, as even the mere thought of other people had already done. He no longer saw Nature clad in her smiling and vernal joy—he was only conscious of an almost physical pain, which weighed upon his senses with paralysing power.

Grube reached the station, and took a ticket to the

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town nearest to his native village, the same town from which, years ago, he had set out on the fateful journey to embark upon his new career in life.

It was late evening when he arrived. He had purposely chosen the train, so as to avoid crossing the village by daylight.

Slowly he walked down the familiar country road. The moon was in its last quarter, and afforded but scanty light, so that he could hardly distinguish the fields and meadows on either side of the road ; only the mill-stream shone softly in the valley and showed the way to the village. Here and there a lingering remnant of snow gleamed above the dark, ploughed-land, like a small glistening island, or strips of bright green young crops marked the edges of the wayside. The air was balmy, and a timorous breeze bore down a warmly caressing breath from the plains above.

Grube walked on as one in a dream, staring before him, lost in contemplation of his own tall shadow, which ran at his feet in the waning light of the horned moon. Out of the dark night stole, like floating pictures, the past, the present, the future, hurrying along in confused panorama, now melting together, now separating, throwing vivid reflections mingled with dark shadows across his mind.

Grube stood still, clasping his forehead. He felt the cold sweat upon it. Slowly he raised his head, and gazed into the dark. He seemed to see a young man coming to meet him with nimble steps, in whose features he thought he recognised his own of years gone by—those fresh, almost boyish features had been his,

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when, long ago, he had passed by this way for the last time on his journey to the town. Nearer and nearer came the youth. When he was close enough to see the man advancing towards him, his face paled with sudden fear, his eyes dilated into a look of intolerable anguish—and the apparition suddenly melted into the shadows of the night.

Grube struggled to become master of the distracting thoughts that coursed through his brain. He quickened his pace, and soon saw the first light of his native village shine through the darkness.

Everything was quiet in the High Street. The dim old lantern at the Burgomaster's house was burning as of yore; the broken pane, which turned towards the street, was still unattended. A dog barked at the footfall in the night, and the sleepy watchman, just stumbling on his round with pike and horn, took no further heed of him than of a stranger.

Grube stopped before Weidner's house. Looking timidly round to make sure that he was unobserved, he softly whistled the accustomed signal, with which he had been wont to call his friend to the window. For a long time no one appeared, but at last the curtain was drawn and a head became visible. Grube drew nearer to the window.

"Man!" softly exclaimed Weidner, with wide-opened eyes. "Is it you, Grube?"

"Myself," said Grube's deep voice.

"Good God! Where did you come from?"

"Where should I come from? Out of prison!"

The window was slowly closed, and a moment later

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Weidner appeared at the door. The comrades silently clasped hands. Then, still silent, they went to Grube's home. Only when they stood at the entrance to the house, did Weidner put a question or two to Grube, who returned short, almost abrupt answers. Alarmed by men's voices, Sophie came to the door, but as soon as she became aware of her brother's presence, with a loud cry as though she had seen a ghost, she fled from the room through the opposite entrance.

Grube crossed the threshold with lagging steps. He looked around him, slowly examining the walls, the ceiling, the corners, the furniture. He drew the back of his hand across his eyes, sank down in the old armchair, and gazed moodily at the floor.

Weidner sat down at the other end of the room and took his tobacco-pouch out of his pocket. But he spoke no word. He felt that he had so many questions in his mind, he did not know where to begin. He therefore deliberately lighted his pipe, and stared straight in front of him.

At last Grube slowly looked up. His glance fell upon the coloured portrait of the Emperor. It was still hanging there, crowned with the same oak-wreath with which he had borne it into the inn on the day of his farewell-feast. Two faded leaves lay upon the wooden frame, as though they had already rested there for a long time.

Grube arose and walked to the picture. He looked gloomily up at it for a while, then stretched out his arm and lifted it down from the nail. He tore the oak-wreath from the frame, crushed it like crackling paper in his

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hand, and cast the remains under the stove-bench ; he was just proceeding to destroy the portrait with one blow of his fist, when Weidner sprang out of his corner and caught him by the arm.

“Stop, friend !” he cried.

Grube dropped his arm slowly and the two men stood looking each other in the eyes.

“He never did you any harm !” exclaimed Weidner, and with that he took the picture out of his friend’s hand and placed it on the ground. Grube allowed him to do as he pleased.

“Who said that he never did me any harm ?”

“I say so !” replied Weidner, springing quickly from his chair.

“Oh, of course, if *you* say so !” Grube answered, with a half-suppressed, half-sneering laugh. “I am a Social Democrat, and the sooner you know it the better.” He took hold of the picture again.

“What has the picture to do with your being a red republican ?” returned Weidner excitedly. “The man can’t help it, and knows nothing about how such as we get treated. Hang the picture up again.”

“Knows nothing about it !” said Grube bitterly. “Doesn’t he though ! As if I hadn’t read about it myself !”

“What have you read !” asked Weidner.

“That he doesn’t *wish* to know anything about such as we !” replied Grube gloomily and angrily. “I wrote to him just what had happened to us from prison, and also begged for a reduction of the sentence, and do you know what they answered me ? That he *would* not. And

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so with all the rest, he would not trouble himself about any of it."

Weidner gazed questioningly into Grube's eyes. He was silent for a while, then, apparently quite calm again, he sat down upon his corner-chair, saying :—

"Don't believe it, Ernst. I tell you again, he knows nothing about it—they tell him nothing ; they tell him what is nice and pretty, but what is bad they keep to themselves, because it is their own fault that it is so. But I'll have nothing done to him up there !" he cried hotly. "He means to be good to all of us, and therefore I hold him dear. Hang up the picture !"

Grube did not stir.

"I tell you, if we are to remain good friends hang up that picture !" Weidner cried again loudly and threateningly.

Grube obeyed in silence. He lifted the picture on to its nail again.

"No offence, Ernst," Weidner said kindly, holding out his hand. He then wished him good-night, and went away. Grube put out the lamp, and lay down on the stove-bench to sleep.

Summer was well advanced before Grube, so far as the time of year would allow, could get through the most urgently necessary work on hand.

It was by no means an easy task to compass. Brother William had not been able to devote himself to field labour for a long time past, and the land had not even been ploughed since his death. The few cattle had been tended by Weidner's care. The cows stood lean and

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hungry in their stalls, the provision of fodder was at an end, and if Grube sought to beg a neighbour to help him out with food for the cattle, his answer was generally a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

Grube had turned his sister out of doors only a few days after his arrival. During his absence she had become the light-o'-love of the place, and the rumour of her wantonness still nightly attracted youths from the neighbouring villages, who retired disappointed when they learned that her brother had sent Sophie about her business as soon as he had reached home.

So Grube laboured from early morn to late evening, hardly permitting himself a short hour of repose when, at midday, the sun's rays were scorchingly hot, and the neighbouring workers all sought a shady spot in which to eat their dinners.

But however hard he might work, he found neither rest nor peace. A painful burden weighed ever harder and heavier upon his mind, nipping in the bud every impulse towards joy in life, or liberty. And if, after the heat of the day, he ever ventured into the village inn, the drinkers there laid their heads together whispering, and hardly troubled to return his salute. He was everywhere shunned as if he had been a devil, and the village children took to their heels when he walked down the street.

He saw his whole life crushed under foot. He grew gloomier and more reserved day by day. The slightest opposition aroused his anger, and even Weidner himself hardly dared to look up his comrade any longer, fearing the wild outbursts of passion which seized upon Grube at the least word of contradiction. Grube was therefore

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gradually left quite to himself, hardly exchanging a word with anyone from week's end to week's end—only the old watch-dog remained faithful to him, following at his master's heels up hill and down dale.

One midsummer evening, on returning from his work in the fields, Grube found a letter from the headquarters of the district. He listlessly opened it, and stared horrified at the contents—it was an order to join the army for a month's autumn manœuvres.

The news came as an utter surprise to Grube. He had certainly been aware that he would be in the reserve after his compulsory service, but he had not anticipated being called out *this* year, at any rate.

In a furious rage he flung the letter on the ground, and rushed about the room in the greatest excitement. All the bitter feelings against the Service, that seemed to have gradually died down in him, but which were really only changed into more deeply-rooted hatred, broke out again, and let loose a storm of the wildest agitation, which vented itself in the most ferocious oaths and curses against the military order. For this present summons seemed to Grube in his blind, reckless rage to involve the utter downfall of all that he had yet hoped to retrieve from the misfortunes of the past.

But there was no help for it! He would have of his own accord to obey this summons to the ruin which now seemed inevitable. He recognised now with absolute certainty that he was no longer sufficiently master of himself to be able to put up even for a few days

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with a life of blind self-denial and automatic subordination. The personality which, under the influence of untoward circumstances and surroundings, he felt had matured within him, was not that of a man who willingly sacrifices himself to the caprice of others. A sterner character, compact of an iron stubbornness, now dwelt in him, which in the despairing defence of his moral existence would recoil from no means that would promise him—the bound victim of fate—mental freedom and the right to a life worthy of a human being.

In his excitement Grube had failed to remark that the sun had long sunk behind the forest, and that night had set in. He now slowly mounted to his room to retire to rest. As he lighted the candle, he noticed a parcel wrapped in a linen cover lying in the corner of the room. In his indifference to all his surroundings, he had paid no attention to it until now. He went up to it inquisitively, and saw lying on the floor a second long-shaped parcel, which seemed to contain a sabre—then it flashed upon him that after his arrest, the officials had sent his extra kit to his home—here it still lay, dust-covered, and forgotten. Grube undid the wrapper sewn round his military tunic, hung the latter over the back of a chair, and unpacked the sabre. For a long time he looked at the glittering thing, weighed it in his hand, then withdrew the blade from the sheath. Suddenly his eyes flamed, and with furious strokes he struck blindly at the tunic, accompanying each slash with a curse. Only when the garment fell in tatters from the chair, did he pause in his mad rage. He took the blade by either end, broke it like a piece of rotten wood, and

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flung it into the corner, sending the tattered tunic after it with a kick.

The sensation of having glutted his rage, seemed in some measure to calm him. He almost felt a certain relief from the oppressive dejection which had weighed upon him, and with one last savage look threw himself down upon the bed.

The news soon spread itself in the village, "Grube is called out again!" The peasants exchanged their conjectures with growing variance of opinions as to how he would get out of his service, for no one seemed to doubt that he would certainly shirk it. "He has nothing more to lose," said some; others thought that he would run away some fine day, to disappear for ever.

Therefore, they were all astounded and wofully disappointed in expectation of a sensation, when, on the appointed morning, they saw Grube, bag in hand, stride down the village street. His mien was gloomy, his look resolved; and when under a battery of many curious eyes, he disappeared at the end of the village, the peasants all shook their heads.

* * * *

Grube had no easy position in his reserve-troop. He was immediately greeted by Rickert, the sergeant of the squadron, with the words, "So there you are again!" and threateningly looked at askance. He had to bear many a joke about his past from his former non-commissioned officers. Even his old comrades, many of whom had been called out as well as himself, did not spare him more or less harsh and unpleasant comments. His superiors unfortunately

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mistook his reserve and depression for disaffection and refractoriness, and therefore overwhelmed him with vigorous reproofs and abuse. Grube silently pocketed every affront—but his anger grew, and when one day the sergeant called him “a dog who’d been licked already,” he had to set his teeth to prevent himself from striking him in the face with his fist.

So each day brought him a fresh annoyance, and each annoyance added a spark to the burning flame that raged within him. Up till now he had been able to fight down the temptation towards ungovernable fury, but only a slight impetus was wanted to open the flood-gates and let forth the whole power of his long-nourished, daily-provoked and terrible hatred.

During the last days of the fourth week of service the reservists wound up with carbine-practice at the regimental shooting-range. The men called out to shoot stood in front at the firing stages. The others were collected some yards to the rear of the shooters, smoking their pipes or whispering together in groups. Grube also took his pipe out of his pocket, and asked a comrade for a light.

“I’ll have nothing to do with you!” replied the man, turning away, while the others applauded his words with suppressed laughter. Grube made one step towards his comrade, and caught hold of him.

“What was that you said? Say it again!” he hissed out through his teeth, and, trembling with wrath, shook the man so that his carbine fell to the ground.

Just at this moment the commander of the regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Preusse, appeared on the scene.

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The high bushes on either side of the path had concealed him, so that he came upon the men unawares.

Grube let his victim go, and stood at attention with the others.

“What is your name?” asked Preusse harshly.

“Grube, sir,” answered he sullenly.

Preusse looked sharply at him. Slowly he seemed to recognise Grube, who was no stranger to him, and an involuntary anger ran through him as he saw this man, who once already had put his own life in danger, now attacking one of his comrades in an unwarrantable manner.

“You do not seem to have learnt in prison how a soldier should behave!” he said in tones of sternest rebuke. “I shall have to punish you!”

At this moment the non-commissioned officer called upon Grube to shoot.

Grube never knew how he got to the platform, nor how he suddenly came to be standing in the ranks of the shooters; he only felt the loaded weapon in his right hand, and a mad fury seemed to be splitting his very brain.

A flash of fire struck Preusse in the face, and he sank backwards to the earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE verdict of the court-martial against the reservist Ernst Grube condemned him to twenty years penal servitude. Excessive remorse had stretched the murderer of Preusse on a bed of sickness. For weeks he wrestled with a terrible nervous fever, which only the iron strength of his constitution could prevent from being fatal. Very slowly did he win back to strength, continually re-prostrated by a fresh access of delirium.

The infirmary attendant was the only one who had any idea that it was not merely the body of the unfortunate man that was sick. He heard the confused cries, the blood-curdling shrieks, which burst from the patient at sight of the terrible phantasms of his fever; he saw how, as soon as he regained consciousness, he turned himself to the wall in heartsick anguish; and when one evening Grube earnestly begged him to give him a sufficient dose of the opiate with which his bodily pains were alleviated, to release him from his sufferings of soul as well, the good man was only sorry that he was obliged to deny his request.

Three months after his murderous assault Grube was taken between two armed soldiers to the district jail.

Stupefied through excess of mental pain he walked like a broken-down old man between his escort, and when, late in the evening, the iron-bound door of his cell clanged behind him, he felt neither sorrow nor heartache. A new life seemed to have opened out

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before him, which stifled all consciousness of life, removed him from the sphere of other men, and taught him the meaning of life in death.

Grube lay down on the hard plank bed, and was presently deep in merciful sleep. A ray of light as fine as a hair, stole through a crack of the cell-door, fell upon his closed eyes, aroused his sleeping consciousness, and awoke the spirit of his dreams.

On a massive foundation of porphyry a tower reared its proud head to the sky. The light of the setting sun lit up its battlements with red-gold flames, and an eagle took its soaring flight above. Millions of human beings, clad in homely, dull-coloured garments, pressed round the foot of the tower in a confused mass, lifting eyes full of wistful longing to its gleaming summit. Steep stairs led upwards, which seemed to bend beneath the weight of the beings clambering up step by step; some panting painfully, others in wild haste, many storming up merrily, while on their way they carelessly pushed down the fellow-creatures who thronged about them, into the abyss below. Right at the top, quite close to the battlements, a dense crowd, clad in gold and silver armour, were climbing the last steps, noisily greeting the eagle, and never looking back at the mass of humanity who would not—or could not—follow them. Higher and higher, rose the glittering throng, while from the hum of the people below came, louder and louder, voices of warning. Now they were at the top. Their garments were bathed in the golden light of the sun—then all at once the tower began to totter, shrill outcries and shrieks were heard, and with a fearful crash it split

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asunder, burying all who were upon and around it. But the eagle, with terrified flutterings of its wings, alighted upon the pedestal of the tower, whose foundations still showed inviolate and undaunted amid the ruins.

The ray of light that shone through the door of the cell was suddenly extinguished—Grube awoke. Hardly knowing where he was, he struck his forehead and rubbed his dazed eyes. Suddenly he heard a sound from the yard outside, as if soldiers were marching.

“Present arms!”

“Relieve guard!”

“No fresh orders. Countersign: Dear Fatherland.”

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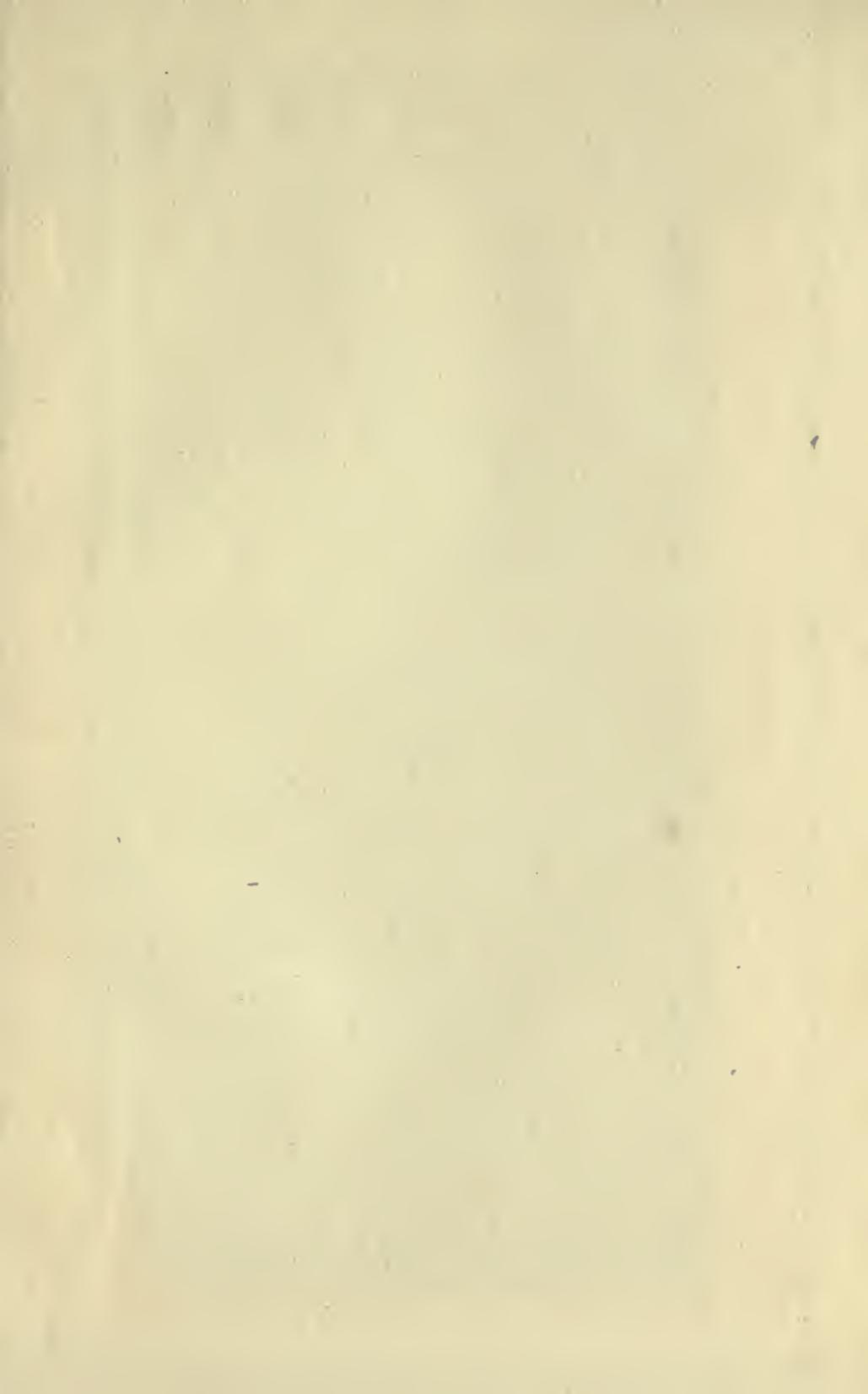
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