

Metzerott, Shoemaker

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METZEROTT, SHOEMAKER

“Omne vivum ex vivo.”

“What is your creed?”

“Jesus Christ.”

“What do you believe about him?”

“What we can. We count any belief in him—the smallest—better than any belief about him—the greatest,—or about anything else.”

DEDICATION.

“Laborare est orare.”

TO

The Clergy and the Workmen of America.

MAY THEY WORK AND PRAY TOGETHER
FOR THE COMING OF THE
KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

BOOK I.
LOVE.

METZEROTT, SHOEMAKER.

CHAPTER I.

KARL METZEROTT ATTENDS A KAFFEE KLATSCH.

Karl Metzerrrott, shoemaker, counted himself reasonably well-to-do in the world. It was a favorite saying of his (though he was not greatly given to sayings at any time, his days being so full of doings), that his Socialist opinions were not based upon his own peculiar needs; and that, when the Commune should supervene, as he fervently believed it must some day, he, Karl Metzerrrott, would be numbered rather among its givers than its receivers.

In truth, he had some reason for self-gratulation. He was young, strong, and able to earn a fair living at his trade; and his wife,—but stop! We have not come to her quite yet.

The shop where he bent over his lapstone for ten hours a day, excluding meal times, was an odd-looking structure, in a poor quarter of a city which we shall call Micklegard; and which, if any one should strive to locate, we warn him that the effort will bring him only confusion of face and dire bewilderment. For its features may be recognized, now here, now there, like those mocking faces that peered at Ritter Huldbrand through the mists of the Enchanted Forest.

The shoemaker's dwelling contained but three rooms. The front, a shingled frame building of one story, presented its pointed gable at the street like a huge caret, denoting that all the sky and stars, perhaps something further, were wanted by those beneath. This was the shop; behind it were the kitchen, looking out upon a small

square yard, opening on a not over-clean alley; and a bedroom above, whose front window peered over the gable roof, between the high blank walls of the adjoining houses, while the opposite one kept watch from the rear: and each, in its curtainless bareness, looked equally desolate and unsatisfied.

It was on a cold, dreary November evening that the shoemaker put aside his work somewhat earlier than usual, and, after carefully closing his shutters, stepped through the ever-open door into his little kitchen, which was almost as red-hot as the huge cooking-stove, filled with bituminous coal, that occupied nearly half the tiny apartment. The other half was over-filled by a gigantic four-post bedstead, on which two corpulent feather-beds swelled nearly to the tester, and were overspread by a patchwork quilt, gaudy of hue and startling in design. Fringed dimity curtains hung from the tester, until their snow-white balls caught the reflection from the glowing counterpane, when they were snatched away, as if from the possible soil of contact, and fastened in the middle of each side by an immense yellow rosette. Upon one side of the stove stood an oil-cloth-covered table, which served equally for the preparation and consumption of food; above it, a steep, narrow stair wound upward to the room above; and on the other side of the kitchen, basking in heat which would have consumed a salamander, were a small old-fashioned candle-stand, half hidden by a linen cover, wrought in the old Levitical colors of red and blue, and sustaining a cheap kerosene lamp; a slat rocking-chair, with patchwork cushions, and a tiny old woman bowed over a huge German Bible, bound in parchment, with a tarnished steel clasp and corners, and heavy smooth yellow leaves.

As her son entered, Frau Metzertott lifted her brown, withered face, and fixed her dark eyes and steel-rimmed spectacles upon him.

“You have quitted early this evening,” she said, in the *Platt-Deutsch* dialect, which, with the High German of the book on her knee, was her only mode of speech, though she had lived in America for nearly forty years.

He nodded briefly, and then, as if by an afterthought, added, “It is the evening of the Kaffee Klatsch at the Hall, and I will go there for my supper. There is a little concert to-night, and dancing.”

“And a few pretty girls, Karlchen?”

He smiled, not ill-pleased, but vouchsafed no further remark as he sprang up the difficult, crooked stairway to his bedroom.

The old woman looked after him with a slow shake of her head. “I wish he would marry one of them,” she thought. “There is room for a wife, up yonder, and it is hard doing the work alone. Besides, one cannot live forever, and, when I am gone, who will make his coffee and his apple cakes as he likes them?”

With a sigh, she fell to reading again.

It is quite possible that, on the sailing-vessel where her husband met and won her, and which, to afford him ample time for the operation, was obligingly blown out of her course so as to lengthen the voyage to America some three months or so, Frau Metzertott had her fair share of youthful attractiveness; but this had been swept from her by the scythe of Father Time, and the storm and stress of life had left her no leisure to cultivate the graces of old age. Of actual years she numbered barely sixty, and the dark hair under her quaint black cap showed scarcely a touch of gray; but the skin was as brown and wrinkled as a frost-nipped russet apple; and rheumatism and the wash-tub together had so bowed her once

strong, erect figure, that, like the woman in Scripture, she could in no wise lift up herself. She was dressed in a dark blue calico, marked with small, white, crooked lines, a brown gingham apron, and a small gay-colored plaid shawl over her rheumatic shoulders. Her feet were incased in knitted woollen stockings, and black cloth shoes; and her knotted brown fingers showed beneath black cloth mittens.

She did not trouble herself greatly with the preparations for her lonely supper, when her son, in his Sunday coat, had left her for the Hall; a fresh brew of coffee, a slice or two from the rye loaf, and a few potatoes dressed with oil and vinegar, which had stood in her corner cupboard since noon, supplied all her needs.

The dishes were washed, the kitchen tidied, after this frugal meal, and the mother had settled to her knitting, when there came a knock at the shop door. A pleased smile shone upon the old woman's face as she recognized the tap, and hastened to admit the person who had formerly embodied her dreams of a daughter-in-law, who should be the instrument of rest and ease to her old age. But the Anna Rolf who now passed through the dark shop into the glowing kitchen, had been for two years a comely young matron; Leppel Rolf, the stalwart young carpenter, having wooed and won her, while Shoemaker Metzertott sat passively under his lapstone. Rumor asserted that the fair Anna had been somewhat piqued by this same passivity; but, however that may be, it was certainly no love-lorn personage who now added the radiance of youth, health, and beauty to the glow of the fire and the yellow light of the kerosene lamp.

Yet Anna was not strictly a beauty, though her vivid coloring, sparkling eyes, and overflowing vitality had gained her that

reputation. She was simply a tall, well-made woman, with an abundance of silky black hair, a rich, dark complexion, and features which, like her figure, seemed likely to be sharpened, rather than filled out, by advancing years. She was dressed with a good deal of taste, in a new, black silk, with a bunch of crimson roses in her bosom; and her greeting was interfused by the consciousness of such array.

“So you are not at the Kaffee-Visite, Frau Metzertott?” she asked, laughing a good deal. Laughing was very becoming to Anna; she had such charming dimples, and strong, white, even teeth.

“Kaffee-Visite, indeed!” grumbled the old woman, taking, with her withered hand to her wrinkled brow, a leisurely survey of her radiant visitant. “What should an old woman like me do there? I drink my coffee at home, and am thankful. But, *Du lieber Himmel!* how fine you are, Anna! A new silk dress?”

“Of course,” said Anna proudly, “and all my own doing, too. Not a penny of Leppel’s money in it, from the neck to the hem. My earning and my making, Frau Metzertott.”

“*Ach, Herr Gott!*” sighed the old woman, smoothing down the rich folds, half enviously, not for herself, but for her son, whose wife might have worn them; “but what a clever child you are, Aenchen.”

“You see,” said Anna, “it was this way. You remember when I was first married we lived at his home, and when I had swept and dusted a bit, there was no more to be done, for Frau Rolf lets no one help with the cooking. I don’t believe she would trust an angel from heaven to work down a loaf of Pumpernickel for her.” She

laughed again, and Frau Metzertott added a shrill cackle as her own contribution.

“So, as twirling my thumbs never agreed with me,” continued Anna, “I just apprenticed myself to a dressmaker; for it is well to have two strings to one’s bow, and Leppel’s life is no surer than any other man’s.”

“But, Anna—?”

“Yes, I know, Mütterchen. It was a special arrangement, of course, not a regular apprenticeship. I was to give so many hours a day to work I already knew how to do, such as running up seams and working buttonholes; and she was to teach me to cut and fit. She knew me, you see, and wasn’t afraid of losing by the bargain.”

“I should think not!” said Frau Metzertott admiringly. She had heard the story at least a dozen times, and never failed to adorn the right point with the proper ejaculation.

“Well, then,” continued Anna, “what should happen but little Fritz came to town, and any one but me would have had enough to do at home; but I *never* give up!”—she drew herself up proudly—“and so, since I finished my course, I have earned enough money to buy this dress.”

“And yet you do so much besides,” said Frau Metzertott.

“Since his father and mother went to live with their son in the West,” said Anna, “I do all my own work, make my own clothes and Fritz’s, and take in sewing besides.”

“What a girl you are!” sighed the old woman. “But why are you home so early from the Hall to-night?”

“Leppel is gone to New York on business. There is some new machine he wants to look at. I wish he would let them all alone, and attend to his day’s work. I did not bargain to marry an inventor,” said Anna discontentedly.

“It is expensive going to New York,” said the old woman, shaking her head.

“It is expensive inventing,” said the young one, her brilliant face darkened by a shadow of real anxiety. “But, however, he must have his own way, and the money is his. So he was off from the Hall, when he had had his supper, and of course,” with a conscious laugh—“he would not leave me there without him.”

“No, no,” said the Frau, her withered lips expanding into a toothless smile, “you are much too pretty for that, Aenchen.”

“The new pastor was there,” said Anna, when she had playfully shaken the old woman by her bowed shoulders, in acknowledgment of this remark, “and, I think, the Frau Pastorin that will be.”

“So?” exclaimed the old woman eagerly; “who is she, Anna?”

“She came over on the same steamer as the Herr Pastor, and her name is Dorothea Weglein. It seems she had a sweetheart here in Micklegard, and came over to be married to him; but when she arrived he had died in the mean time, of something or other, very sudden, I don’t know what.”

“Poor child! And the Herr Pastor is courting her?”

Anna shrugged her shoulders. “It looks like it,” she said. “It seems she got a service place after her *Schatz* died. The Herr Pastor could

do better than that. But some one else was taken with her baby face and frightened ways, Frau Metzertott. Your son was eating her up with his eyes when I came away.”

“Did her *Schatz* leave any money behind him?” asked the Frau.

Anna laughed a little shrilly, as she moved towards the door. “You know they weren’t married, Mütterchen; so, if he did, it probably went to his relations. Well, it is two years since it happened; she will be easily consoled. Good-night, Fritz will be wanting me. I only ran over to tell you the news,” and she was gone, leaving the shop and kitchen darker and stiller than ever, by contrast.

Karl Metzertott, meanwhile, had walked briskly enough to meet his fate, but with small thought of new Herr Pastors or possible Frau Pastorins. He was his mother’s own son in appearance, every one had said, when both were younger; at present, the resemblance was less striking. Karl was a man of nearly thirty, who looked older than his years; of average height, strongly and squarely made, the shoulders slightly rounded by his occupation, the head a little large, with a fine, square brow, and a thick covering of coarse black hair. The eyes were keen and clear, the features strong and rugged. The skin was dark, not particularly fine, but clear and healthful; he wore neither beard nor mustache, and his manner showed no slightest consciousness of himself or his Sunday clothes.

But it is best that we should precede him, rapid as are his steps, and gain some knowledge of the scene whither he is bound. The Maennerchor of Micklegard held its collective head rather higher than any similar association in the city. In its own opinion, its members, or the majority of them, were more aristocratic, its clubhouse better fitted up, its auditorium larger, and its inventive

genius greater, than those of any contemporary. Nor shall I attempt to disprove this innocently vain assumption on the part of the Maennerchor, though vanity, whether innocent or the reverse, is said by some to be a part of the German national character. Others doubt whether such a thing exists as a national type of character. My own individual opinion is that, so far as it *does* exist, the Germans are no vainer, *au fond*, than any other people; but that what vanity they possess is of a surface, childlike type, more quickly recognized, but rather less offensive, than the vanity of, say, an Englishman.

But to return to the Maennerchor.

The managers had, of late, at the instigation of the Ladies' Chorus, issued invitations to a Kaffee-Visite, as it was officially termed; familiarly known as a "Kaffee Klatsch," or Coffee Scandal. The ladies were to meet at three o'clock, said the program (and we assure our readers that we translate from a veritable document), in the club-house parlor; from three to five was to be theirs alone.

"Needle-work, Gossip, Stocking-knitting," said the program, with a shriek of triumph. At five was to be served the "Ladies' Coffee;" from 6.30 to 8.30, "Supper for Gentlemen;" and this exceedingly unsociable arrangement having been carried to its lame and impotent conclusion, the concert, or *Abendunterhaltung*, would begin at nine, under the auspices of the Ladies' Chorus.

In its primary aspect, the Kaffee-Visite was emphatically what is jocularly known as a "Dutch treat." The refreshments were in charge of two or more ladies, in rotation, called the *Committee*, who undertook all the expense and took charge of the modest receipts, fifteen cents being the charge for each person's supper.

The receipts and expenses usually balanced with tolerable evenness, the gains of the *Committee* never amounting to a sum which compensated for their trouble, while anxiety of mind lest the incomings should not equal the outlay was written on their foreheads during the early part of the evening.

When Karl Metzertott arrived on the occasion we have selected for description, the "Ladies' Coffee" was over, and the little parlor was full of uproarious *Herren*, the ladies having repaired to the Hall upstairs. All parties were full of true German enjoyment, heightened by the independence and freedom from sense of obligation only possible at a real "Dutch treat." Everybody was host, everybody was guest; the *Committee* waited on the tables, and passed small jokes, with the coffee and cold tongue, and the *convives* roared with laughter as they disposed of the viands with a business-like rapidity, which, in part, accounted for the smallness of the profits.

Strains of music had already begun to resound from the Hall, as Metzertott finished his repast.

"The girls are enjoying themselves," he said, smiling, to his neighbor, who happened to be Leppel Rolf; but an obese little man opposite called out,—

"Enjoying? But how can they, with no partners to whirl them around? When I was your age, Karl, would I have been so lazy? No, my arm would have been round the prettiest waist in the lot long ago. Hurry, lazy fellow!"

There was a roar from the tableful at this sally, for the speaker was well known as the shyest of men where "ladies" were in question. It was even asserted that he had never found courage to ask the

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