

Stories in Light and Shadow

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"Unser Karl"

The American consul for Schlachtstadt had just turned out of the broad Konig's Allee into the little square that held his consulate. Its residences always seemed to him to wear that singularly uninhabited air peculiar to a street scene in a theatre. The facades, with their stiff, striped wooden awnings over the windows, were of the regularity, color, and pattern only seen on the stage, and conversation carried on in the street below always seemed to be invested with that perfect confidence and security which surrounds the actor in his painted desert of urban perspective. Yet it was a peaceful change to the other byways and highways of Schlachtstadt which were always filled with an equally unreal and mechanical soldiery, who appeared to be daily taken out of their boxes of "caserne" or "depot" and loosely scattered all over the pretty linden-haunted German town. There were soldiers standing on street corners; soldiers staring woodenly into shop windows; soldiers halted suddenly into stone, like lizards, at the approach of Offiziere; Offiziere lounging stiffly four abreast, sweeping the pavement with their trailing sabres all at one angle. There were cavalcades of red hussars, cavalcades of blue hussars, cavalcades of Uhlans, with glittering lances and pennons—with or without a band—formally parading; there were straggling "fatigues" or "details" coming round the corners; there were dusty, businesslike columns of infantry, going nowhere and to no purpose. And they one and all seemed to be WOUND UP—for that service—and apparently always in the same place. In the band of their caps—invariably of one pattern—was a button, in the centre of which was a square opening or keyhole. The consul was always convinced that through this keyhole opening, by means of a key, the humblest caporal wound up his file, the Hauptmann controlled his lieutenants and non-commissioned officers, and even the general himself, wearing the same cap, was subject through his cap to a higher moving power. In the suburbs, when the supply of soldiers gave out, there were sentry-boxes; when these dropped off, there were "caissons," or commissary wagons. And, lest the military idea should ever fail from out the Schlachtstadt's burgher's mind, there were police in uniform, street-sweepers in uniform; the ticket-takers, guards, and sweepers at the Bahnhof were in uniform,—but all wearing the same kind of cap, with the probability of having been wound up freshly each morning for their daily work. Even the postman delivered peaceful invoices to the consul with his side-arms and the air of bringing dispatches from the field of battle; and the consul saluted, and felt for a few moments the whole weight of his consular responsibility.

Yet, in spite of this military precedence, it did not seem in the least inconsistent with the decidedly peaceful character of the town, and this again suggested its utter unreality; wandering cows sometimes got mixed up with squadrons of cavalry, and did not seem to mind it; sheep passed singly between files of infantry, or preceded them in a flock when on the march; indeed, nothing could be more delightful and innocent than to see a regiment of infantry in heavy marching order, laden with every conceivable thing they could want for a week,

returning after a cheerful search for an invisible enemy in the suburbs, to bivouac peacefully among the cabbages in the market-place. Nobody was ever imposed upon for a moment by their tremendous energy and severe display; drums might beat, trumpets blow, dragoons charge furiously all over the Exercier Platz, or suddenly flash their naked swords in the streets to the guttural command of an officer—nobody seemed to mind it. People glanced up to recognize Rudolf or Max "doing their service," nodded, and went about their business. And although the officers always wore their side-arms, and at the most peaceful of social dinners only relinquished their swords in the hall, apparently that they might be ready to buckle them on again and rush out to do battle for the Fatherland between the courses, the other guests only looked upon these weapons in the light of sticks and umbrellas, and possessed their souls in peace. And when, added to this singular incongruity, many of these warriors were spectacled, studious men, and, despite their lethal weapons, wore a slightly professional air, and were—to a man—deeply sentimental and singularly simple, their attitude in this eternal Kriegspiel seemed to the consul more puzzling than ever.

As he entered his consulate he was confronted with another aspect of Schlachtstadt quite as wonderful, yet already familiar to him. For, in spite of these "alarums without," which, however, never seem to penetrate beyond the town itself, Schlachtstadt and its suburbs were known all over the world for the manufactures of certain beautiful textile fabrics, and many of the rank and file of those warriors had built up the fame and prosperity of the district over their peaceful looms in wayside cottages. There were great depots and counting-houses, larger than even the cavalry barracks, where no other uniform but that of the postman was known. Hence it was that the consul's chief duty was to uphold the flag of his own country by the examination and certification of divers invoices sent to his office by the manufacturers. But, oddly enough, these business messengers were chiefly women,—not clerks, but ordinary household servants, and, on busy days, the consulate might have been mistaken for a female registry office, so filled and possessed it was by waiting Madchen. Here it was that Gretchen, Lieschen, and Clarchen, in the cleanest of blue gowns, and stoutly but smartly shod, brought their invoices in a piece of clean paper, or folded in a blue handkerchief, and laid them, with fingers more or less worn and stubby from hard service, before the consul for his signature. Once, in the case of a very young Madchen, that signature was blotted by the sweep of a flaxen braid upon it as the child turned to go; but generally there was a grave, serious business instinct and sense of responsibility in these girls of ordinary peasant origin which, equally with their sisters of France, were unknown to the English or American woman of any class.

That morning, however, there was a slight stir among those who, with their knitting, were waiting their turn in the outer office as the vice-consul ushered the police inspector into the consul's private office. He was in uniform, of course, and it took him a moment to recover from his habitual stiff, military salute,—a little stiffer than that of the actual soldier.

It was a matter of importance! A stranger had that morning been arrested in the town and identified as a military deserter. He claimed to be an American citizen; he was now in the outer office, waiting the consul's interrogation.

The consul knew, however, that the ominous accusation had only a mild significance here. The term "military deserter" included any one who had in youth emigrated to a foreign country without first fulfilling his military duty to his fatherland. His first experiences of these cases had been tedious and difficult,—involving a reference to his Minister at Berlin, a correspondence with the American State Department, a condition of unpleasant tension, and finally the prolonged detention of some innocent German—naturalized—American citizen, who had forgotten to bring his papers with him in revisiting his own native country. It so chanced, however, that the consul enjoyed the friendship and confidence of the General Adlerkreutz, who commanded the 20th Division, and it further chanced that the same Adlerkreutz was as gallant a soldier as ever cried *Vorwärts!* at the head of his men, as profound a military strategist and organizer as ever carried his own and his enemy's plans in his iron head and spiked helmet, and yet with as simple and unaffected a soul breathing under his gray mustache as ever issued from the lips of a child. So this grim but gentle veteran had arranged with the consul that in cases where the presumption of nationality was strong, although the evidence was not present, he would take the consul's parole for the appearance of the "deserter" or his papers, without the aid of prolonged diplomacy. In this way the consul had saved to Milwaukee a worthy but imprudent brewer, and to New York an excellent sausage butcher and possible alderman; but had returned to martial duty one or two tramps or journeymen who had never seen America except from the decks of the ships in which they were "stowaways," and on which they were returned,—and thus the temper and peace of two great nations were preserved.

"He says," said the inspector severely, "that he is an American citizen, but has lost his naturalization papers. Yet he has made the damaging admission to others that he lived several years in Rome! And," continued the inspector, looking over his shoulder at the closed door as he placed his finger beside his nose, "he says he has relations living at Palmyra, whom he frequently visited. Ach! Observe this unheard-of-and-not-to-be-trusted statement!"

The consul, however, smiled with a slight flash of intelligence. "Let me see him," he said.

They passed into the outer office; another policeman and a corporal of infantry saluted and rose. In the centre of an admiring and sympathetic crowd of *Dienstmadchen* sat the culprit, the least concerned of the party; a stripling—a boy—scarcely out of his teens! Indeed, it was impossible to conceive of a more innocent, bucolic, and almost angelic looking derelict. With a skin that had the peculiar white and rosiness of fresh pork, he had blue eyes, celestially wide open and staring, and the thick flocculent yellow curls of the sun god! He might have

been an overgrown and badly dressed Cupid who had innocently wandered from Paphian shores. He smiled as the consul entered, and wiped from his full red lips with the back of his hand the traces of a sausage he was eating. The consul recognized the flavor at once,—he had smelled it before in Lieschen's little hand-basket.

"You say you lived at Rome?" began the consul pleasantly. "Did you take out your first declaration of your intention of becoming an American citizen there?"

The inspector cast an approving glance at the consul, fixed a stern eye on the cherubic prisoner, and leaned back in his chair to hear the reply to this terrible question.

"I don't remember," said the culprit, knitting his brows in infantine thought. "It was either there, or at Madrid or Syracuse."

The inspector was about to rise; this was really trifling with the dignity of the municipality. But the consul laid his hand on the official's sleeve, and, opening an American atlas to a map of the State of New York, said to the prisoner, as he placed the inspector's hand on the sheet, "I see you know the names of the TOWNS on the Erie and New York Central Railroad. But"—

"I can tell you the number of people in each town and what are the manufactures," interrupted the young fellow, with youthful vanity. "Madrid has six thousand, and there are over sixty thousand in"—

"That will do," said the consul, as a murmur of Wunderschon! went round the group of listening servant girls, while glances of admiration were shot at the beaming accused. "But you ought to remember the name of the town where your naturalization papers were afterwards sent."

"But I was a citizen from the moment I made my declaration," said the stranger smiling, and looking triumphantly at his admirers, "and I could vote!"

The inspector, since he had come to grief over American geographical nomenclature, was grimly taciturn. The consul, however, was by no means certain of his victory. His alleged fellow citizen was too encyclopaedic in his knowledge: a clever youth might have crammed for this with a textbook, but then he did not LOOK at all clever; indeed, he had rather the stupidity of the mythological subject he represented. "Leave him with me," said the consul. The inspector handed him a precis of the case. The cherub's name was Karl Schwartz, an orphan, missing from Schlachtstadt since the age of twelve. Relations not living, or in emigration. Identity established by prisoner's admission and record.

"Now, Karl," said the consul cheerfully, as the door of his private office closed upon them, "what is your little game? Have you EVER had any papers? And if you were clever enough to study the map of New York State, why weren't you clever enough to see that it wouldn't stand you in place of your papers?"

"Dot's joost it," said Karl in English; "but you see dot if I haf declairet mine intention of begomming a citizen, it's all the same, don't it?"

"By no means, for you seem to have no evidence of the DECLARATION; no papers at all."

"Zo!" said Karl. Nevertheless, he pushed his small, rosy, pickled-pig's-feet of fingers through his fleecy curls and beamed pleasantly at the consul. "Dot's vot's der matter," he said, as if taking a kindly interest in some private trouble of the consul's. "Dot's vere you vos, eh?"

The consul looked steadily at him for a moment. Such stupidity was by no means phenomenal, nor at all inconsistent with his appearance. "And," continued the consul gravely, "I must tell you that, unless you have other proofs than you have shown, it will be my duty to give you up to the authorities."

"Dot means I shall serve my time, eh?" said Karl, with an unchanged smile.

"Exactly so," returned the consul.

"Zo!" said Karl. "Dese town—dose Schlachtstadt—is fine town, eh? Fine vomens. Goot men. Und beer und sausage. Blenty to eat and drink, eh? Und," looking around the room, "you and te poys haf a gay times."

"Yes," said the consul shortly, turning away. But he presently faced round again on the unfettered Karl, who was evidently indulging in a gormandizing reverie.

"What on earth brought you here, anyway?"

"Was it das?"

"What brought you here from America, or wherever you ran away from?"

"To see der, volks."

"But you are an ORPHAN, you know, and you have no folks living here."

"But all Shermanny is mine volks,—de whole gountry, don't it? Pet your poots! How's dot, eh?"

The consul turned back to his desk and wrote a short note to General Adlerkreutz in his own American German. He did not think it his duty in the present case to interfere with the authorities or to offer his parole for Karl Schwartz. But he would claim that, as the offender was evidently an innocent emigrant and still young, any punishment or military degradation be omitted, and he be allowed to take his place like any other recruit in the ranks. If he might have the temerity to the undoubted, far-seeing military authority of suggestion making here, he would suggest that Karl was for the commissariat fitted! Of course, he still retained the right, on production of satisfactory proof, his discharge to claim.

The consul read this aloud to Karl. The cherubic youth smiled and said, "Zo!" Then, extending his hand, he added the word "Zshake!"

The consul shook his hand a little remorsefully, and, preceding him to the outer room, resigned him with the note into the inspector's hands. A universal sigh went up from the girls, and glances of appeal sought the consul; but he wisely concluded that it would be well, for a while, that Karl—a helpless orphan—should be under some sort of discipline! And the securer business of certifying invoices recommenced.

Late that afternoon he received a folded bit of blue paper from the waistbelt of an orderly, which contained in English characters and as a single word "Alright," followed by certain jagged pen-marks, which he recognized as Adlerkreutz's signature. But it was not until a week later that he learned anything definite. He was returning one night to his lodgings in the residential part of the city, and, in opening the door with his pass-key, perceived in the rear of the hall his handmaiden Trudschen, attended by the usual blue or yellow or red shadow. He was passing by them with the local 'n' Abend! on his lips when the soldier turned his face and saluted. The consul stopped. It was the cherub Karl in uniform!

But it had not subdued a single one of his characteristics. His hair had been cropped a little more closely under his cap, but there was its color and woolliness still intact; his plump figure was girt by belt and buttons, but he only looked the more unreal, and more like a combination of pen-wiper and pincushion, until his puffy breast and shoulders seemed to offer a positive invitation to any one who had picked up a pin. But, wonderful!—according to his brief story—he had been so proficient in the goose step that he had been put in uniform already, and allowed certain small privileges,—among them, evidently the present one. The consul smiled and passed on. But it seemed strange to him that Trudschen, who was a tall strapping girl, exceedingly popular with the military, and who had never looked lower than a corporal at least, should accept the attentions of an Einjahriger like that. Later he interrogated her.

Ach! it was only Unser Karl! And the consul knew he was Amerikanisch!

"Indeed!"

"Yes! It was such a tearful story!"

"Tell me what it is," said the consul, with a faint hope that Karl had volunteered some communication of his past.

"Ach Gott! There in America he was a man, and could 'vote,' make laws, and, God willing, become a town councilor,—or Ober Intendant,—and here he was nothing but a soldier for years. And this America was a fine country. Wunderschon? There were such big cities, and one 'Booflo'—could hold all Schlachtstadt, and had of people five hundred thousand!"

The consul sighed. Karl had evidently not yet got off the line of the New York Central and Erie roads. "But does he remember yet what he did with his papers?" said the consul persuasively.

"Ach! What does he want with PAPERS when he could make the laws? They were dumb, stupid things—these papers—to him."

"But his appetite remains good, I hope?" suggested the consul.

This closed the conversation, although Karl came on many other nights, and his toy figure quite supplanted the tall corporal of hussars in the remote shadows of the hall. One night, however, the consul returned home from a visit to a neighboring town a day earlier than he was expected. As he neared his house he was a little surprised to find the windows of his sitting-room lit up, and that there were no signs of Trudschen in the lower hall or passages. He made his way upstairs in the dark and pushed open the door of his apartment. To his astonishment, Karl was sitting comfortably in his own chair, his cap off before a student-lamp on the table, deeply engaged in apparent study. So profound was his abstraction that it was a moment before he looked up, and the consul had a good look at his usually beaming and responsive face, which, however, now struck him as wearing a singular air of thought and concentration. When their eyes at last met, he rose instantly and saluted, and his beaming smile returned. But, either from his natural phlegm or extraordinary self-control he betrayed neither embarrassment nor alarm.

The explanation he gave was direct and simple. Trudschen had gone out with the Corporal Fritz for a short walk, and had asked him to "keep house" during their absence. He had no books, no papers, nothing to read in the barracks, and no chance to improve his mind. He thought the Herr Consul would not object to his looking at his books. The consul was touched; it was really a trivial indiscretion and as much Trudschen's fault as Karl's! And if the poor fellow had any mind to improve,—his recent attitude certainly suggested thought and reflection,—the consul were a brute to reprove him. He smiled pleasantly as Karl returned a stubby bit of pencil and some greasy memoranda to his breast pocket, and

glanced at the table. But to his surprise it was a large map that Karl had been studying, and, to his still greater surprise, a map of the consul's own district.

"You seem to be fond of map-studying," said the consul pleasantly. "You are not thinking of emigrating again?"

"Ach, no!" said Karl simply; "it is my cousine vot haf lif near here. I find her."

But he left on Trudschen's return, and the consul was surprised to see that, while Karl's attitude towards her had not changed, the girl exhibited less effusiveness than before. Believing it to be partly the effect of the return of the corporal, the consul taxed her with faithlessness. But Trudschen looked grave.

"Ah! He has new friends, this Karl of ours. He cares no more for poor girls like us. When fine ladies like the old Frau von Wimpfel make much of him, what will you?"

It appeared, indeed, from Trudschen's account, that the widow of a wealthy shopkeeper had made a kind of protege of the young soldier, and given him presents. Furthermore, that the wife of his colonel had employed him to act as page or attendant at an afternoon Gesellschaft, and that since then the wives of other officers had sought him. Did not the Herr Consul think it was dreadful that this American, who could vote and make laws, should be subjected to such things?

The consul did not know what to think. It seemed to him, however, that Karl was "getting on," and that he was not in need of his assistance. It was in the expectation of hearing more about him, however, that he cheerfully accepted an invitation from Adlerkreutz to dine at the Caserne one evening with the staff. Here he found, somewhat to his embarrassment, that the dinner was partly in his own honor, and at the close of five courses, and the emptying of many bottles, his health was proposed by the gallant veteran Adlerkreutz in a neat address of many syllables containing all the parts of speech and a single verb. It was to the effect that in his soul-friend the Herr Consul and himself was the never-to-be-severed union of Germania and Columbia, and in their perfect understanding was the war-defying alliance of two great nations, and that in the consul's noble restoration of Unser Karl to the German army there was the astute diplomacy of a great mind. He was satisfied that himself and the Herr Consul still united in the great future, looking down upon a common brotherhood,—the great Germanic-American Confederation,—would feel satisfied with themselves and each other and their never-to-be-forgotten earth-labors. Cries of "Hoch! Hoch!" resounded through the apartment with the grinding roll of heavy-bottomed beer-glasses, and the consul, tremulous with emotion and a reserve verb in his pocket, rose to reply. Fully embarked upon this perilous voyage, and steering wide and clear of any treacherous shore of intelligence or fancied harbor of understanding and rest, he kept boldly out at sea. He said that, while his loving adversary in this

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