

ROMANCE OF AN OLD BUREAU.

In the summer of 1867, after a prolonged course of Russian steppes, Crimean hill-sides, Moscow churches, St. Petersburg boulevards, Finnish lakes, and Swedish forests, I found myself at Berlin, and during the first week of my stay was busy from dawn to dusk in exhibiting, with the systematic industry of the genuine British tourist, the "sights" of that methodical city, which Mr. Murray's "Koran," in red binding, politely defines as "an oasis of brick amid a Sahara of dust," and "in studying all the minutiae of that pipeclayed civilization which appears to be the national army, in time to the music of the "Pas de Charge."

Just as my lightning fever was beginning to abate, a slight service, rendered in a pouring wet day in the park, brought me into closer relations with a pleasant-looking elderly German, who had frequently crossed my rambles, and more than once halted to exchange a few words with me in the frank, open-hearted fashion of the hospitable Teutonic race. Our acquaintance, however, was still in embryo, when, on the day of which I am speaking, the old man, having taken shelter under a thinly foliated tree, was in a fair way to be thoroughly drenched. I came to the rescue with my umbrella. Observing that he had got wet through before gaining his impromptu refuge, I insisted upon taking him to my lodgings (which were close at hand), and drying him thoroughly before I let him go; his own residence, as I found on inquiry, being at a considerable distance. The old man's gratitude knew no bounds, and next morning he reappeared with a hospitable smile upon his broad face, announcing that he had told "his folk" of my kindness to him, that his "Hausfrau" and his "kleine Gretchen" wished to thank me themselves; that, in short, I must come and eat tea-cakes with them that very evening, and smoke a German pipe afterwards, which Herr Holzmann, in common with the majority of his countrymen, regarded as the acme of human felicity. In order to secure himself against any evasion, he added, with a resolute air, that, as I might possibly lose my way, he would come and fetch me himself.

Punctual as death or a collector of water rates, Herr Heinrich Holzmann presented himself at the time appointed, and marched me off in triumph to a neat, comfortable-looking little house on the southern side of the town with a small garden in front of it. The garden was of the invariable German type; the same trim little flower-beds, accurate as regiments on parade; the same broad gravel walk, laid out with mathematical regularity; the same trellis-work summer-house festooned with creepers at the further end, and the same small table in the centre of it, are mounted by a corpulent teapot of truly domestic proportions, presided over in this case by two female figures, who, on our approach, came forward to greet us, and are introduced to me by my host as his wife and daughter. Frau Holzmann (or, as her husband calls her, Lieschen) is a burton, motherly, active-looking woman, apparently about fifty years of age, with that snug fireside expression (suggestive of hot tea-cakes and well aired sheets) characteristic of the well-to-do German matron, but a close observer may detect on the broad, smooth forehead, in those round, rosy cheeks, the faint but indelible impress of former trials and sufferings; and through the ring of her voice, full and cheery though it is, runs an undertone of melancholy that would seem to tell of a time in the far distant past when such a lass was only too habitual. The daughter, Margarethe—or Gretchen, as her parents call her—who may be about eighteen, is one of those plump, melting damels, with chin-blue eyes and traveled red hair, who never appear without a miniature of Schiller on their neck, and a paper of prunes in their pocket, and who, after flowing on for a while evening in a slow, steady, canal-like current of sentiment, will stop upon sucking pig and apricot jam with an appetite of which Dandies, the oyster eater, might have been justly proud. Both welcome me with true German cordiality, and overwhelm me with thanks for my courtesy to the head of the family, reproaching him at the same time or bringing me in before they have completed their preparations, and made everything comfortable for me; to give time for which little operation, Herr Heinrich marches me into a trim little dining-room opening upon the garden, and thrusts me into an easy chair and a pair of easy slippers, while I take a hasty survey of the chamber into which I have been thus suddenly ushered.

It is one of those snug, cozy little rooms, spotless in cleanliness and faultless in comfort, immortalized by Washington Irving in his description of the Dutch settlements in North America. The floor is polished like a mirror; the tasteful green and white paper (which looks delightfully fresh) is "airy weather" seems as fresh as the day it was put on; the broad, well-stuffed sofa, which takes up nearly the whole side of the room, seems just one made for the brawny beam-ends of some portly German burgher, or the restless, polio-limbed of his half-dressed big babies. Above the chimney-piece, along which stands the usual china shepherdesses, "Presents from Dresden," and busts of Goethe and Schiller, hangs a stately, highly colored medley of fire, smoke, and all the uniforms, rearing horses,

and overturned cannon, which some crabbéd Teutonic letters beneath it proclaim to be "Die Schlacht bei Königgrätz, 3 Juli, 1866," while facing it from above the sofa is a rather neatly done water-color likeness of a chubby, fair-haired lad, in an antique uniform, whom I rightly guess to be my host's soldier son William (a household word in his father's mouth,) now on garrison duty at Spandau.

But the object which especially attracts my attention is a tall, grim bureau of dark-oak, in the farther corner beyond the fire-place, decorated with those quaint old German carvings which carry one back to the streets of Nuremberg and the house of Albrecht Dürer. There stand Adam and Eve, in all their untrammelled freedom, shoulder to shoulder, like officers in the centre of a hollow square, with all the beasts of the earth formed in close order around them, and the tree of knowledge standing up like a sign-post in the rear. There the huge frame of Goliath, smitten by the fatal stone reels over like a falling tower, threatening to crush into powder the swarm of diminutive Philistines who hop about in the background. There appear the chosen twelve, with faces curiously individualized, in spite of all the roughness of the carving, and passing through every gradation, from the soft, womanly features of the beloved disciples to the bearded, low-bred, ruffly visage of him "which also was the traitor." And there the persecutor Saul, not yet transformed into Paul the Apostle (sheathed in steel from top to toe, armed with a sabre that might have suited Blue-ward himself, and attended by a squadron of troopers armed cap-a-pie), rides at full gallop past the gate of Damascus on his errand of destruction.

"The bureau must be a very old one," remarked I, tentatively. "It is, indeed; but that's not why we value it," answers the old man, with kindling eyes. "That bureau is the most precious thing we have; and there's a story attached to it which will never be forgotten in our family, I'll answer for it. I'll tell you the story one of these days, but not to-night, for we mustn't spoil our pleasant evening by any sad recollections. And here, in good time, comes Lieschen to tell us that tea's ready."

I will not tantalize my readers with a catalogue of the good cheer which heaped the table; suffice it to say, the meal was one that would have tempted the most "notorious evil liver" that ever returned incurable from Calcutta, and seasoned with a heartiness of welcome which would have made far poorer fare acceptable. Fresh from reminiscences of "Hermann and Dorothea," I could almost have imagined myself in the midst of that finest domestic group of the great German artist. The hearty old landlord of the Golden Lion, and his "kluge ver stindige Hausfrau," were before me to the life the blue-eyed Mädchen, who loaded my plate with tea-cakes, might, with the addition of a little dignity, have made a very passable Dorothea; while "brother Wilhelm," had he been there, would have represented my ideal Hermann quite fairly. Nor was the "friendly chat," wanting to complete the picture. The old man, warming with the presence of a new listener, launched into countless stories of his soldier son, who, young as he was, had already smelt powder on more than one hard fought field, during the first short fever of the seven weeks' war. Frau Liesbeth, who was an actual mine of those quaint old legends which are nowhere more perfect than in Germany, poured forth a series of tales which would have made the fortune of any "Christmas Number" in Britain; while the young lady, though rather shy at first, shook off her bashfulness by degrees, and asked a thousand questions respecting the strange regions which I had recently quitted; the sandy wastes of the Volga, and the voiceless solitudes of the Don—relies of former glory which still cling around ancient Kazan—wicker-work shanties inhabited by hawking Cossacks and Crimean caverns tenanted by Tartar peasants—battered Kerch and ruined Sebastopol—Odessa, with her sea-fronting boulevard, and sacked Kiev, with her dim catacombs and diadem of gilded towers—the barbaric splendor of ancient Moscow, and the imperial beauty of queenly Stockholm. It was late in the evening before I departed, which I was not allowed to do without promising once and again not to be long of returning.

And I kept my word; for the quiet happiness of this little circle, so simple and so open-hearted, was a real treat to a restless gad about like myself. Before the month was at an end I had strolled around the town with Herr Holzmann a dozen times. I had partaken fully as often of Frau Liesbeth's inexhaustible tea-cakes; I had presented Frau-in-Margarethe, on the morning of her eighteenth birthday, with a pair of Russian ear-drops, accompanying my gift (as any one in my place might well have done) by a resounding kiss on both cheeks, which the plump little Mädchen received as frankly as it was given. But the relentless divinity of the scythe and scythe-blade, who proverbially waits for no man, at length put a period to my stay in Berlin; and one evening, a few days before my departure, I reminded Herr Heinrich of his promise to tell me the history of the old bureau which had attracted my attention. The old man, nothing loath, settled himself snugly in the ample corner of the sofa, fixed his eyes upon

the quaint old piece of furniture which formed the theme of his course, and began as follows: "You must know, mein Herr, that in the year '53 business began to rather fall off with me (I was a cabinet maker, you remember,) and from bad came worse, until I thought something should really be done to put matters to rights. Now just about this time all manner of stories were beginning to go about of the high wages paid to foreign workmen in Russia, and the heaps of money that sundry Germans who had gone there from Breslau and Königsberg and elsewhere were making in St. Petersburg and Moscow. And so I pondered and pondered over all these tales, and the plighr I was in, and at last I thought of going and trying my luck as well as the rest. My wife and I talked it over, and settled that it should be done; and we were just getting ready to start, when one night a message came that my old uncle, Ludwig Holzmann, of the Freilich-Strasse (who had taken offence at my marriage, and never looked near me since,) was dying, and wanted to see me immediately. So away I went—my wife wanted to go, too, but I thought she had better not—and when I got there I found him lying in a kind of a daze, and nobody with him but the doctor and the pastor, who lived close by."

"So I sat down to wait till he awoke; and sure enough, in about half an hour, his eyes opened and fell full upon me. He raised himself in bed—I think I see him now, and with the lamp-light falling on his old, withered face, making it look just like one of the carvings on the old bureau, which stood at the foot of the bed—and said, in a hoarse whisper, 'Heinrich, my lad, I've not forgotten thee, although the black cat has been between us lately. When I'm dead thou'lt have that bureau yonder; there's more in it than thou think'st; and he sank back with a sort of choking laugh that twisted his face horribly. Those were his last words, for after that he fell into a kind of stupor and died the same night."

"When his property came to be divided, every one was surprised, for they had all thought him much richer. I got the bureau, just as he said; and, remembering his words about it, we ransacked each drawer from end to end, but found nothing but two or three old letters and a roll of tobacco; so we made up our minds that he must have been either wandering a little, or else that—God forgive him—he had wanted to play us one more trick before he died. In a few weeks more all was ready for our going, and away we went to St. Petersburg."

"When we got there, we found it not at all such a land of promise as the stories made it out; but still there was good wages for those who could work; and for the first year or two we got along well enough. But after a while in came a lot of French fellows, with new-fangled tricks of carving that pleased the Russian gentry more than our plain German fashions; and trade began to get slack and money to run short. Ah! mein Herr, may you never feel what it is to find yourself sinking lower and lower, work as hard as you like, and one trouble coming on you after another, till it seems as if God had forgotten you!"

The old hero's voice quivered with emotion, and an unwanted tremor disturbed the placid countenance of his wife, while even the sunny face of the little Fraulein looked strangely sad. "Well, mein Herr, we struggled on in this way for two years longer, hoping all ways that our luck would turn, and putting the best face we could on it; though many a time when the children came to ask me why I never brought them pretty things now, as I used to do at home, I could almost have sat down and cried. At last the time came when we could stand no longer. There was a money lender close by us, from whom we had borrowed at higher interest than we could afford, who was harder upon us than any one, (may it not be laid to his charge hereafter,) and he, when he saw that we were getting behind in our payments, seized our furniture, and announced a sale of it by auction. I remember the night before the sale as if it was yesterday. My boy Wilhelm was very ill just then, and no one knew whether he would live or die; and when my wife and I sat by his bed that night, and looked at each other and thought of what was to come, I really thought my heart would have broken. Ah! my Lisbeth, we have indeed been in trouble together."

As he uttered the last words the old man clasped fervently the broad, brown hand of his wife, who returned the pressure with interest, and, after a slight pause, he resumed thus: "On the morning of the sale a good many people assembled, and among them came the district inspector of police. He was a kind man in his way, and had given me several little jobs to do when I first came over; but he was not very rich himself, and nobody could blame him for not helping us when he had his own family to think of. However, I've no doubt he came to our sale in perfect good faith, meaning to give the best price for what he bought. 'Well, in he came, and the first thing that caught his eye was the old bureau, which stood in a corner of the room. It seemed to take his fancy, and he went across to have a nearer view of it. He began trying the grain of the wood—drawing his nail across one part, rapping another with his knuckles—till all at once I saw him stop short, bend his head

down as if listening, and give another rap against the back of the bureau. His face lighted up suddenly, as if he had just found out something he wanted to know; and he beckoned me to him. 'Do you know whether this bureau has a secret spring anywhere about it?' he asked; 'for the back seems to be hollow.' I said I had never noticed anything of the sort—no, indeed, had I; for, when we found that the drawers were empty, we looked no further. Now, however, he and I began to search in good earnest; and at last the inspector, who had plenty of practice in such work (since he entered the police, discovered a little iron prong, almost like a rusty nail, sticking out from one of the carved figures. He pressed it, and instantly the whole top of the bureau flew up like the lid of a box, disclosing a deep hollow, in which lay several packets of bank notes and government shares, about a dozen rouleaux of gold Fredericks, tightly rolled up in cotton, and two or three jewel cases, filled with valuable rings and bracelets—the whole amounting as we afterwards calculated, to more than 20,000 Prussian thalers."

"Well, you may think how we felt, saved as we were in the uttermost straits by a kind of miracle; and how we blessed the name of my old uncle, when we saw how truly he had spoken. The inspector (God bless him!) refused to touch a penny of the windfall, saying he was sufficiently rewarded by seeing so many good people made happy; so we paid our debts, packed up all that we had, and came back to our own folk and fatherland, never to leave it again."

New Advertisements.

GRANDEST SCHEME EVER KNOWN.

FOURTH GRAND GIFT CONCERT For the benefit of the PUBLIC LIBRARY OF KENTUCKY. \$12,000 CASH GIFTS, \$1,500,000. Every Fifth Ticket Draws a Gift. \$250,000 FOR \$50. The Fourth Grand Gift Concert authorized by special act of the Legislature for the benefit of the Public Library of Kentucky, will take place in Public Library Hall at Louisville, Ky., WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3d, 1873.

Only sixty thousand tickets will be sold and one-half of these are intended for the European market, thus leaving only 30,000 for sale in the United States where 100,000 were disposed of for the first concert. The tickets are divided into ten coupons or parts and have on their back the scheme with a full explanation of the mode of drawing. At this concert, which will be the grandest musical display ever witnessed in this country, the unprecedented sum of \$1,500,000, divided into 12,000 cash gifts, will be distributed by lot among the ticket-holders. The numbers of the tickets are to be drawn from one wheel by blind children and the gifts from another.

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PRICE OF TICKETS. Whole tickets \$50. Halves \$25. Tenths, or each Coupon \$5. Eleven whole tickets for \$500; 254 tickets for \$12,700; 112 whole tickets for \$5,600; 227 whole tickets for \$11,350. No discount on less than \$500 worth of Tickets at a time. The unparalleled success of the Third Gift Concert, as well as the satisfaction given by the First and Second, makes it only necessary to announce the Fourth to insure the prompt sale of every ticket. The Fourth Grand Gift Concert will be conducted in all its details like the Third, and full particulars may be learned from circulars, which will be sent free from this office to all who apply for them. Tickets are now ready for sale, and all orders accompanied by the money promptly filled. Liberal returns given to those who buy to sell again.

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