

Literature, &c.

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THE INTERCEPTED LETTERS.

A TALE OF THE RIVOUAC.

THE green slope of a hill, at the base of a southern spur of the Pyrenees, presented, upon a spring night of the year 1827, a scene of unusual life. The long grass, rarely pressed save by some errant mountain goat, or truant donkey from the plain, was now laid down and trodden beneath the feet and hoofs of a host of men and horses; the young trees, neglected by the wood cutter in favor of maturer timber, resounded beneath the blows of the foraging hatchet. Up to the centre of the hill, an avenue, bare of wood, but not less grass-grown than the other portions of the slope, communicated with the steep and rocky path that zigzagged up the face of the superior mountain. On either side of this road—if such the track might be called, that was only marked by absence of trees—several squadrons of cavalry, hussars, lancers, and light dragoons, had established their bivouac. There had been hard fighting over that ground for the greater part of the afternoon; but with this the horsemen had little to do. On the other hand, the fragments of smoked paper strewn the grass showed that musketeers had been busy, and many cartridges expended, amongst those very trees, where the enemy had made a vigorous stand before he was driven up and finally over the mountain by the queen's troops. A little higher, where less cover was to be had, dead bodies lay thick; and there had been a fair sprinkling of the same, in great part despoiled of clothes by the retiring Carlists, upon the luxuriant pasture the Christiano cavalry now occupied. From the immediate vicinity of the bivouac, however, these offensive objects had, for the most part, been dragged away. The infantry were further in advance up the mountain, and on the right and left. The enemy having vacated the plain on the approach of a superior force, the cavalry had scarcely got a charge, but had, upon the other hand, a large amount of trotting to and fro, of scrambling through rugged lanes, and toiling over heavy fields. They had also a pretty view of the fighting, in which they were prevented taking a share, but which their brass bands frequently encouraged by martial and patriotic melodies; and they had received more than one thorough drenching from the heavy showers that poured down at brief intervals from sunrise till evening. The sun had set, however, in a clear blue sky, the stars shone brightly out; the air was fresh rather than cold, and, but for the extreme wetness of the grass, the night was by no means unfavourable for a bivouac. This inconvenience the men obviated, in some measure, by cutting away the long rank herbage with their sabres, in circles round the fires, made with some difficulty out of the green moist branches of oak and apple-trees; and which, for a while, gave out more smoke than flame, more stench than warmth.

It chanced to be my turn for duty that night; and this prevented my following the example of most of my brother officers, who after eating their share of some Carlist sheep, (the lazy commissariat mules were far behind,) wrapped themselves in their cloaks, with logs or valises under their heads, and with the excellent resolution of making but one nap of it from the moment till the reveille sounded. I was not prevented sleeping, certainly; but now and then I had to rouse myself and go the round of the portion of the encampment occupied by my regiment, to see that the horses were properly picketed, the sentries at their posts, and that all was right and conformable to regulation. Then I would lie down again and take a nap, sometimes at one fire, sometimes at another. At last, a couple of hours before daybreak, I was puzzled to find one to lie down at; for the bivouac was buried in sleep, and the neglected fires had been allowed to die out, or to become mere heaps of smouldering ashes. I betook myself to the one that gave the greatest symptoms of warmth, and on which, just as I reached it, a soldier threw an armful of small branches. Then, falling on his knees and hands, and lowering his head till his chin nearly touched the ground, he blew lustily upon the embers, which glowed and sparkled; and finally blazed up, casting a red light upon his brown and mustached countenance. I recognized a German belonging to my troop. We had several Germans and Poles, and one or two Italians and Frenchmen, in the regiment; some of them political refugees, driven by want to a station below their breeding; others, scamps and deserters from different services, but nearly all smart and daring soldiers. This man Heinzl by name, was rather one of the scampish sort; not that he had ever suffered punishment beyond extra guards or a night in the black hole, but he was reckless and unsteady, which prevented his being made a sergeant, as he otherwise assuredly would have been; for, in spite of a very ugly physiognomy of the true Tartar type, he was a smart-looking soldier; a devil to fight, and a good writer and accountant. He had been a corporal once, but had been reduced for thrashing two Spanish peasants, whilst under the influence of *aguardiente*. He said they had tried to make him desert; which was likely enough, for they had certainly furnished him with the liquor gratis—an improbable act of generosity without an object. But he could

not prove the alleged inveiglement; the civil authorities, to whom the boys had complained, pressed for satisfaction; and it was necessary to punish even an appearance of excess on the part of mercenary troops, often too much disposed to ill-treat the inoffensive peasantry. I had a liking for Heinzl, whom I fancied above his station. He spoke tolerable French; had rapidly picked up English in our regiment; and expressed himself, in his own language, in terms showing him to spring from a better class than that whence private soldiers generally proceed. Moreover, he had a mellow voice, knew a host of German songs, and although not a tithe of the squadron understood the words, all listened with pleased attention when he sang upon the march Aradt's dashing ditty in honor of Prince Blucher—every note of which has a sound of clashing steel and clanging trumpet, Hauff's milder and more sentimental.

'Steh' ich in finst'rer Mitternacht.'

and other popular *Soldaten-lieder*. Not very frequently, however, could he be prevailed upon to sing; for he was of humour taciturn, not to say sullen. He would drink to excess when the chance was afforded him; and although he could bear an immense deal either of wine or brandy without its affecting his head, he was oftener the worse for liquor than any other foreigner in the squadron, with the exception of one infernal Pole, who seemed to enjoy the special protection of Bacchus, and would find means to get drunk as the sow of Davy when the rest of the regiment were reduced to the limpid element.

Having got up a respectable blaze, Heinzl produced from his satchel a small wooden pipe and a bag of tobacco; filled the former, lit it at the fire, and with an 'Erlauben Sie, Herr Lieutenant,' (he usually spoke German to me,) seated himself at a respectful distance upon a fallen tree trunk, on one end of which I had taken my station.

'A cold morning, Heinzl,' said I.

'Very cold, Herr Lieutenant; will you take a schnapps, sir?'

And from the breast of his jacket he pulled out a leather-covered flask, more than half full, from which I willingly imbibed a dram of very respectable Spanish brandy. Considering the absence of rations, and our consequent reduction, since the preceding morning, from beef, bread, and wine, to quivering mutton and spring water, I at first gave Heinzl infinite credit for having husbanded this drop of comfort. But I presently discovered that I was indebted for my morning glass to no excess of sobriety on his part, but to his having fallen in with a Spanish canteen-woman, whom he had beguiled of a flaskful in exchange for two lawful reals of the realm.

The cordial had invigorated and refreshed me, and I no longer felt inclined to sleep. Neither to all appearance did Heinzl, who sat in an easy soldierly attitude upon his end of the log, gazing at the fire and smoking in silence. It occurred to me as a good opportunity to learn if my suspicions were well founded, and if he had not once been something better than a private dragon in the service of her Catholic majesty. We were alone, with the exception of one soldier, who lay at length and apparently asleep, upon the other side of the fire, closely wrapped in his red cloak, whose collar partially concealed his face.

'Who is that?' said I to Heinzl.

The German rose from his seat, walked round the fire, and drew the cloak collar a little aside, disclosing a set of features of mild and agreeable expression. The man was not asleep, or else the touching of his cloak awakened him, for I saw the firelight glance upon his eyes; but he said nothing, and Heinzl returned to his place.

'It is Franz Schmidt.'

I knew this young man well, although he belonged to a different squadron, as an exceedingly clean, well behaved soldier, and one of the most daring fellows that ever threw leg over a saddle. In fact, from the colonel downwards, no man was better known than Schmidt. He was a splendid horseman, and had attracted notice upon almost the first day he joined, by a feat of equestration. There was a horse which had nearly broken the heart of the riding master, and the bones of every man who had mounted him. The brute would go pretty quietly in the riding school, but as soon as he got into the ranks, he took offence at something or other—whether the numerous society, the waving of pennons, or the sounds of the trumpet, it was impossible to decide—and started off at the top of his speed, kicking and capering, and playing every imaginable prank. The rough-riders had all tried him, but could make nothing of him. Still, as he was a showy young horse, the colonel was loath to have him cast; when one day, as we went out to drill, and Beelzebub, as the men had baptised the refractory beast, had just given one of the best horsemen in the regiment a severe fall, Schmidt volunteered to mount him. His offer was accepted. He was in the saddle in a second; but before his right foot was in the stirrup, or his lance in the becket, the demon was off with him, over a stiff wall and a broad ditch, and across a dangerous country, at a snappish pace. Schmidt rode beautifully. Nothing could stir him from his saddle; he endured the buck-leaps and other eccentricities of the head strong steed with perfect indifference, and amused himself as the flew over the country, by going through the lance exercise, in the most perfect manner I ever beheld. At last, he got the horse in hand, and circled him in a large heavy field, till the sweat ran off his hide in streams; then he trotted quietly back to the column. From that hour he rode the beast, which be-

came one of the best and most docile chargers in the corps. Beelzebub had found his master, and knew it.

The attention Schmidt drew upon himself by this incident, was sustained by subsequent peculiarities in his conduct. The captain of his troop wished to have him made a corporal; but he refused the grade, although he might be well assured it would lead to higher ones. He preferred serving as a private soldier, and did his duty admirably, but was more popular with his officers than with his comrades, on account of his reserved manner, and of the little disposition he showed to share the sports or revels of the latter. Before the enemy he was fearless almost to a fault, exposing his life for the mere pleasure, as it seemed, of doing so, whenever the opportunity afforded. He did not cotton much, as the phrase goes, without any one, but in his more sociable moments, and when their squadrons happened to be together, he was more frequently seen with Heinzl than with any body else. In manner he was very mild and quiet, exceedingly silent, and would sometimes pass whole days without opening his lips, save to answer to his name at roll-call.

To return, however, to Master Heinzl. I was resolved to learn something of his history, and, by way of drawing him out, began to speak to him of his native country, generally the best topic to open a German's heart, and make him communicative. Heinzl gave into the snare, and gradually I brought him to talk of himself. I asked him if he had been a soldier in his own country—thinking it possible he might be a deserter from some German service, but his reply was contradictory of this notion.

'All my service has been in Spain, sir,' he said; 'and it is not two years since I first put on a soldier's coat, although in one sense, I may say I was born in the army. For I first saw light on the disastrous day of Wagram, and my father, an Austrian grenadier, was killed at the bridge of Znaym. My mother, a sutler, was wounded in the breast by a spent ball whilst supporting his head, and trying to recall the life that had fled forever, and although she thought little of the hurt at the time, it occasioned her death a few months afterwards.'

'A melancholy start in the world,' I remarked. 'The regiment should have adopted and made a soldier of the child born within sound of cannon, and deprived of both father and mother by the chances of war.'

'Better for me if the regiment had, I dare say,' replied Heinzl; 'but somebody else adopted me, and by the time I was old enough to do something for myself, fighting was no longer in fashion. I might think myself lucky that I was not left to die by the road-side, for in those days soldiers' orphans were too plenty for one in a hundred to find a foster-father.'

'And who acted as yours?'

'An elderly gentleman of Wurzburg, at whose door my mother, overcome by fatigue and sickness, one evening fell down. Incapacitated by ill-health from pursuing her former laborious and adventurous occupation, she had wandered that far on her way to Nassau, her native country. She never got there, but died at Wurzburg, and was buried at the charges of the excellent Ulrich Esch, who further smoothed her dying pillow by the promise that I should be cared for, and brought up as his child. Herr Esch had been a shopkeeper in Cologne, but having early amassed, by dint of industry and frugality, the moderate competency he coveted, he had retired from business, and settled down in a snug country-house in the suburbs of Wurzburg, where he fell in love and got married. Since then several years had elapsed, and the union, in other respects happy, had proved childless. It was a great vexation to his worthy man, and to his meek, sweet-tempered spouse, when they were finally compelled to admit the small probability of their ever being blessed with a family. Herr Esch tried to draw consolation from his pipe, his wife from her pet dogs and birds; but these were poor substitutes for the cheering presence of children and more than once the pair had consulted together on the propriety of adopting a child. They still demurred, however, when my mother's arrival and subsequent death put an end to their indecision. The kind-hearted people received her into their house, and bestowed every care upon her, and, when she departed, they took me before the justice of peace and formally adopted me as their child. For some months my situation was most enviable. True that, old Hannechen, the sour housekeeper, looked upon me with small favor, and was occasionally heard to mutter, when my presence gave her additional trouble, something about beggar's brats and foundlings. True also that Fido, the small white lapdog, viewed me with manifest jealousy, and that Mops, the big poodle made felonious attempts to bite, which finally occasioned his banishment from the premises. I was too young to be sensible to these small outbreaks of envy, and my infancy glided happily away; when suddenly there was a great jubilee in the house and after eight years of childless wedlock, Madame Esch presented her husband with a son. This event made a vast difference in my position and prospects, although I still had no reason to complain of my lot. My worthy foster-parents did their duty by me, and did not forget, in their gush of joy at the birth of a child to their old age, the claims of the orphan they had gathered up at their door. In due time I was sent to school, where, being extremely idle, I remained unusually late before I was held to have amassed a sufficient amount of learning to

qualify me for a seat on a high stool in a Wurzburg counting-house. I was a desperately lazy dog, and a bit of a scape-grace, with a turn for making bad verses, and a ridiculous ideas on the subject for liberty, both individual and national. My foster father's intention was to establish me, after a certain period of probation, in a shop or small business of my own; but the accounts he got of me from my employers were so unsatisfactory, and one or two mad pranks I played caused so much scandal in town, that he deferred the execution of his plan, and thinking that absence from home, and a strict taskmaster, might be beneficial, he started me off to Frankfort-on-the-Maine, where a clerk's place was ready for me in the office of the long-established and highly respectable firm of Schraube & Co.'

Here Heinzl broke off the narrative strain into which he had insensibly fallen, and apologised for intruding upon me so commonplace a tale. But he had got into the vein, I saw, and was willing enough to go on; and, on my part, I was curious to hear his story out, although I had already assigned to it, in my mind, the not unnatural termination of flight from a severe employer, renunciation by the adoptive father, and consequent destitution and compulsory enlistment. I begged him to continue, and he did not need much pressing.

'Frankfort is a famous place for Jews,' continued Heinzl, 'and Jews are notoriously hard men of business; but the entire synagogue might have been searched in vain for a more thorough Hebrew in character and practice than that very christian merchant, Herr Johann Schraube. He was one of those persons who seem sent into the world for the express purpose of making themselves as disagreeable as possible. A little, bandy-legged, ill made man, with small ferret's eyes, and a countenance, expressive of unbounded obstinacy and self conceit; he had a pleasant way of repeating his own words when he ought to have listened to the answer, was never known to smile except when he had made somebody miserable, or to grant a favor till he had surlily refused it at least half a dozen times. His way of speaking was like the snap of a dog. Everybody about him hated and feared him; his wife and children, his servants, his clerks, and even his partner, a tall strapping fellow who could have crushed him with his foot like a wasel, but who, nevertheless, literally trembled in presence of the concentrated bile of his amiable associate. I anticipated a pleasant time of it under the rule of such a domestic tyrant, especially as it had been arranged that I was to live in the house. Accordingly, a bed chamber was allotted to me. I took my meals, with some others of the clerks, at the lower end of the family dinner table, and passed ten hours a day in writing letters and making out accounts. My scanty moments of relaxation I was fain to pass either out of doors or reading in the counting house; for although nominally treated as one of the family, I could see that my presence in the common sitting room was anything but welcome to Schraube and his circle. Altogether I led a dog's life, and I make no doubt I should have deserted my blotting-book and fled back to Wurzburg, had I not found one consolation amongst all these disagreeables. Herr Schraube had a daughter of the name of Jacqueline—a beautiful girl, with golden curls and laughing eyes, gay and lively, but coquettish and somewhat satirical. With this young lady I fell in love, and spoiled innumerable quires of post paper in scribbling bad poetry in praise of her charms. But it was long before I dared to offer her my rhymes; and, in the mean time, she had no suspicion of my flame. How could she possibly suspect that her father's new clerk, of whose existence she was scarcely conscious, save from seeing him twice or thrice a day at the furthest extremity of the dining table, would dare lift his eyes to her with thoughts of love. She had no lack of more eligible adorers; and, although she encouraged none of them, there was one shuffling lout of a fellow, with round shoulders and a sullen countenance, whom her father particularly favored, because he was exceedingly rich, and whose addresses he insisted on her admitting. Like everybody else, she stood in much awe of old Schraube; but her repugnance to this suitor gave her courage to resist his will, and, for some time the matter remained in a sort of undecided state, stupid Gottlieb coming in usually to the house, encouraged and made much of by the father and snubbed and turned, into ridicule by the vivacious and petulant daughter, both of whom, probably, trusted that time would shance each other's determination.'

'Such was the state of things when, one evening as I sat in the counting-house hard at work at an invoice, a servant came in and said that Miss Jacqueline wished to see me. A summons to appear at the pope's footstool would not have surprised me more, than this message from a young lady who had long occupied my thoughts, but had never seemed in the least to heed me. Since I had been in the house, we had not exchanged words half-a-dozen times, and what could be the reason of this sudden notice? Without waiting to reflect, however, I hurried to her presence. She was seated at her piano, and a quantity of music scattered about; her first words dissipated the romantic dreams I had begun to indulge on my way from the counting-house to the drawing-room. She had heard I was clever with my pen, and she had a piece of music to copy. Would I oblige her by doing it? Although I had never attempted such a thing, I unhesitatingly accepted the task, overjoyed at what I flattered