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THE VILLAGE MAYOR.

From the German.

I.—INTRODUCTION.

I am, as you know, my young friends, the surveyor of woods and forests, and in this capacity I was obliged, some years ago, to make a journey to Amsterdam respecting some timber with which we had supplied the Dutch for ship-building, and about the payment for which they made great difficulties. I succeeded beyond expectation in my mission, and was returning in high spirits to Germany, when an accident happened which led to the adventure I am about to relate to you. With my servant Kruz, I had been travelling day and night, when one evening we were overturned at a little distance from a small town, the name of which I have entirely forgotten. Kruz was thrown from the carriage-box, and I fell from my seat, and knocked against the postillion with such violence, that he fell to the ground between the horses. The fore axle-tree of the chaise was broken, Kruz's arm was much hurt, and the postillion's nose cut. I suffered only from fright; and happily the horses did not attempt to run away. With much effort we reached the town, and I went immediately to the inn, and inquired for a wheelwright to repair my carriage. Both the landlord and postillion assured me that I must travel two miles farther, to Hard, where the best artisans of every kind resided. I was not much inclined to do this, particularly as Kruz was very ill. I examined his arm, and found that it was put out of joint.—The doctor, for whom I had despatched a messenger, came, lamenting that the surgeon had died the preceding week, and that the arm could not be set.

"You had better take your servant to Hard," said he; "there is a very clever surgeon there."

"What!—where is Hard?" I asked impatiently.

"A small village about two miles off."

"But how is it?" said I, "that the surgeon and artisans live in a village instead of in the town?"

"The mayor of Hard is a whimsical fellow; he manages everything there, and wishes to make the village into a large town. He is a millionaire, but very miserly. I know him well, but have nothing to do with him; for, between ourselves, he is an odd sort of character."

"Is there an inn at Hard?"

"Certainly; and a better one than this. The mayor established a bath there many years ago, and it is much frequented; but the doctor at Hard is an ignorant—a charlatan. The mayor took him there; he is an amiable man, but interferes in everything."

I resolved to send my carriage and servant to Hard; and the next morning, having bound the broken parts of the carriage together with a rope, I placed Kruz inside, preferring, as it was a fine morning, to walk to Hard.

II.—AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

About a mile from the town, the road suddenly became better. On both sides were rows of fruit-trees, the fields were rich with abundant crops, and there was scarcely a weed to be seen. The village lay before me. Instead of the houses being crowded together, as is usual in that part of the country, they were scattered about, each under shady trees, and surrounded by a garden. The church stood upon a hill in the centre of the village.

"You live in a paradise," said I to an old peasant; "this is the most fruitful soil I have seen in this country."

"Thank God, our crops never fail," answered he.

"How is it?" said I, "that your village is so scattered about?"

"It was burnt down fifteen years ago, and the government obliged us to rebuild it as you see. There is nothing very disadvantageous in it.—I have a long way to walk to church every Sunday; some have a greater distance. This is certainly unpleasant for old people and children, particularly in bad weather. But it was a frightful fire; only five farms, which happily lay at a distance, were spared."

I gave the peasant my hand and was about turning away, when he held it fast, and continued, "Why what a stout man you are grown! What good genius led you to Hard?" and he embraced me, adding, "Welcome here. Do you not know me?"

I was perplexed, and yet it struck me I had seen him before; suddenly I remembered who it was. "Englebert!" I exclaimed.

He answered in the affirmative, and the sound of his voice recalled to my mind my college life. I embraced him with emotion, forgetting all the evil I had heard of him.

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tell her I have found an old friend, who will breakfast with me. Let her set the table under the lime-tree, with wine, fresh butter, white bread, and raspberry vinegar."

I now related to him my history since I left college; I told him what brought me to Hard; and we conversed long upon many of our college companions. "And you," said I, "what is your history?"

"And I," answered Englebert, smiling—"look at me. You see what I am—a countryman, and the mayor of the village in which I live."

"How very remarkable!" said I. "How is it that you hide your noble talents in this unknown corner of the earth? Was it your free choice?"

"My free choice."

"Have you been long here?"

"Nineteen happy years."

"Tell me all—everything," said I, impatiently.

"Another time; I see my wife under the lime-tree. You will see my family all together. Come and breakfast with us."

We followed the path up the hill, and presently came to the lime-tree, under whose shadow sat an amiable-looking young woman, about thirty years of age, very slender, with pretty features, and clad quite simply. A child, scarcely six months old, lay upon her knee; another child sat at her feet, receiving some flowers from a red-cheeked, golden-haired boy, of about four years of age. Two elder boys—the one seven, the other ten—were standing behind their mother, each with a book in his hand; they were dressed in coarse stuff, and were barefoot. The rest of the party wore linen dresses.

The mayor introduced me to his wife, over whose face spread, at my salutation, a beautiful blush; he then knelt down before her, and very humbly and playfully asking her forgiveness for being so late at breakfast, pointing to me as his excuse. I soon became friendly with this charming family. The children seated themselves on the grass, round a wooden basin filled with fresh milk, which they ate with black bread. They placed before me white bread, fresh, delicious butter, water, raspberry vinegar, and a flask of old Burgundy.

"See," said Englebert; "I have not forgotten your dislike to milk."

All this appeared to me like a dream. The truly picturesque group before me—the unexpected meeting with Englebert—the finding him living like a peasant among peasants—a man who, at the university, had been distinguished for his talents and for his knowledge—all this seemed too strange for reality. He was certainly old in some things when at college, but his companions only thought him whimsical, like many other youths. Who could have imagined that he, whose talents qualified him for the most glorious, the most shining career, would have ended by being a village mayor and schoolmaster.

His Augusta (for so he called his wife) and his children loved him with inexpressible affection; and he fully returned their love. How could this man be so selfish, so unjust, so hard-hearted, as he had been represented to me? They said in the town that he was a millionaire. I doubted this; for I knew that his parents had been, during his early life, in only moderate circumstances; and the clothing and food of himself and his family were remarkably plain. I wished to examine this strange character more closely.

After breakfast we walked up the hill.

"I am sorry I have not sufficient room to lodge you under my straw roof," said he; "but in the hotel you will find everything convenient. I have established a bath there, which is much frequented; but as the bathing season does not commence until next month, you can have the best rooms in the hotel."

III.—THE HOUSEHOLD.

The wheelwright had already taken my carriage into his hands, and promised that it should be ready in ten or twelve days; but the mayor requested him to lay aside all other work until this was finished. The surgeon had set Kruz's arm; but it still remained much swollen, and there was no hope of removing him for another week. This involuntary delay was very welcome to me; for really Englebert and his lovely family so pleased me, that I considered myself fully compensated for the accident which led me thither. I became more and more interested about this strange man, and was daily more convinced that few men were so happy as he. His house resembled that of any other peasants, except that it stood in the midst of a well-kept vegetable and flower-garden; within the house there was the greatest cleanliness and simplicity. Not only Englebert, but even his wife and children, slept upon couches of leaves and moss: the linen was coarse, but dazzlingly white, and always clean; they used at meals either wooden plates, or else those made of the commonest earthenware: their usual drink was water, milk,

or weak beer. I went in one day at dinner time. My friend received me with smiles, and I joined in their repast. The food was good. We had first a nutritious soup, then delicate vegetables, baked beef, black bread, and small beer. This was all; but it seemed to me that I had never enjoyed a dinner more. The amiable mother sitting opposite to me, surrounded by her five red-cheeked children, Englebert joking merrily with them, the droll prattle and the beaming eyes of the little ones, the peace and content which reigned over all, made it seem to me a dinner in paradise.

The best apartment was used as justice-room and study. Here my friend, seated in his easy-chair, summarily dispensed justice, and settled disputes among his neighbors. This room contained the only luxuries which the family possessed. A writing-table stood at the window, there was a small but choice collection of books, maps, both of the earth and of the heavens, an electrifying-machine, an air-pump, a galvanic and a magnetic apparatus, and various philosophical and geometrical instruments. The study might also be called the drawing-room of the establishments; for here stood madame's piano, and in an empty mineral cabinet lay her best apparel.

"This is charming," said I; "but this room will soon be too small for all your family, dear Englebert. You must enlarge it."

"Not for ten years," he answered. The temple of our happiness is small, but the happiness therein is great. We have more than we want."

"And are you really so very happy thus, Englebert?"

"Look here," said he pointing to his wife and children; "see what blooming faces. A noble soul animates these little creatures. Here is my kingdom—my all! Mine is a life of reality, and not of appearance, like that led by those in magnificent cities. I have enough for my bodily wants, and a sphere of action for my mind. I certainly live separated from European refinement; but I see there," added he, pointing to his books, "I have the best, the immortal ones of mankind around me. Nature, the wonderful works of God, the promises of eternity, all belong to me. What more can I desire?"

I pressed his hand, and knew not how to answer him. I might have called him a dreamer, but I felt he was right in all he said. The further I became acquainted with him, the more I admired his unceasing industry. His business as mayor occupied much of his time; but besides this, he cultivated the meadows and fields round his house, although only so far as was necessary for his household wants; he read and wrote two or three hours every day, and instructed his two eldest children. These already knew a great deal, as they were well taught. They were acquainted with the scientific names and the properties of the trees, shrubs, herbs, and vegetables within their reach; they understood the geology of the mountains around them; they played with the philosophical instruments in the house, and had some knowledge of the stars and planets; even the little boy of seven years old told me that the sun was a more beautiful world than this; and though he could not yet understand the mountains of the moon, he enjoyed looking at them through the telescope. Augusta managed her household affairs, of which she was uncontrolled mistress, in the same spirit as her husband performed his business. She attended not only to the smallest trifle in the kitchen, but also to the fowls, the flax, the hemp, and the corn, and the various animals which belong to a farm.

"But," asked I again, "what brought you to this place? You shall have devoted your noble talents to the service of your country, instead of being only a village mayor in a foreign land."

Early on the morning of the following Sunday, which he had promised to devote to me, he joined me in the garden of the hotel. My breakfast (a cup of strong coffee) was placed in a vine-covered arbor, from which was an extended and beautiful view of the surrounding country. Englebert ordered milk and black bread to be brought there for him.

"I will now tell you," said he, "what fate drove me hither. Augusta and the children will call us, and when they are ready, we will all take a walk; then we will go to church: the cure and other good friends dine with us; and in the afternoon the young people of the village give a concert. There is a ball in the evening, and you must dance with us. Now, hearken with reverence."

IV.—THE SUPERFLUITIES OF LIFE.

"I left the university half a year after you did. My guardian had ordered me to remain there another year; but I put thirty louis-d'ors in my pocket, and set forth on my travels. I journeyed through Germany and Switzerland, from the Alps to Paris; then through France to Provence, whence I went by sea to Naples, then to Rome, and home by Vienna. I brought back two louis-d'ors in my pocket. I travelled generally on foot, taking only bread and water, now

and then wine, and sleeping in barns and stables.

"I returned from my journey just as my friends were going to advertise me in the newspapers. My guardian was very angry; but I found that a visit to foreign countries did me more good than a year's attendance at the professors' lectures. I was examined, and obtained great credit for my knowledge; and I was placed, at first without a salary, in a government office, in order to initiate me in business. I applied the next year for a place as jurist; but received for answer that my capability was not doubted, but being only three-and-twenty, I was too young. Very well, thought I, that fault will mend every day. The next year I applied for another situation. The president of the government answered, 'You have some fortune; why do you not dress better? Why do you wear such coarse stuff—your cannot appear anywhere thus?'—'The state, your excellency,' answered I, 'requires honest service from me, and not fine clothes.' The president was offended, and after giving me a slight bow, left me.

"There was at that time a quarrel between our court and a neighboring one concerning the right of possession of some abbey lands. The law appeared to give the right to our opponents; but I had accidentally found in the land-office some deeds relating to the affair, and which would decide it in our favor. I wrote a defence of our claims, had it printed, together with these deeds, dedicated it to the king, and sent it to the ministers. This paper brought me great honor. I received the order of merit—namely, a yard of ribbon to hang at my button-hole; and as I afterwards learnt, the government intended to do great things for me. Unfortunately, I knew there was nothing to be got by the ribbon, and I sent it back, assuring the minister that I had not written from vanity or interestedness, but from love of justice. I could not have worn the ribbon without blushing. This was interpreted to my hurt by every one, but especially by the court. The president told me I was a fool, and quite out of favor: I must not now expect a situation. Just at this time happened the death of my guardian, who had hung himself on my account, for I was now declared of age. He had spent not only his own property, but mine also. I was sorry for him. Had he told me what he had done, I should have pardoned him. All that belonged to him was sold, and nothing was left of my inheritance except eight thousand guilders (not quite seven hundred pounds.) His little daughter was placed in the orphan asylum. I pitied her much. 'That poor child has much more need of help than I,' thought I; 'for I am old, and can earn my bread.' I placed my eight thousand guilders in safe hands for her use, desiring that the interest should be appropriated to her education, and that it should all be given to her whenever she should marry. I was determined that she should not remain in the asylum if I could prevent it.

"Now came the question—what shall I do with myself? The state did not require my services. I had wished for advancement and employment—not so much to gain money, as to have a sphere of action. I wished to be useful; so much so, that I would have taken a place without salary, if people would have allowed me to live and dress after my own fashion. But I had been laughed at for this; so I shook my dust from my feet, and left my native country, hoping to be better appreciated elsewhere. I had property enough with me to be able to live a year in idleness; namely, about forty louis-d'ors.—When I was a boy, and went to school, I read in a book a treatise entitled 'The Superfluities of Life.' It was a very ingenious exposition of St. Paul's words, 'Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.' This made an extraordinary impression upon me. I had often wondered at the many superfluities which mankind make necessary to themselves, and for which they are content to become slaves. The fewer wants and wishes men have, the fewer cares and fears, the fewer vexations. He is the freest man who depends the least upon circumstances, conveniences, and customs. The treaties ended with these words—'Regard only what is substantial, and leave to fools the burdensome pleasure of attending to appearances.'

"I began as a schoolboy to follow this advice. I performed my duties, but denied myself all praise. I slept at night upon two chairs near my bed. I took neither tea nor coffee, neither beer nor wine—my drink was nothing but water. I did not use the tenth part of my pocket-money for myself, but bought with it books and maps for the poorer scholars. I rejoiced when the time came for me to go to the university, for then I should be my own master. I lived simply. People that I was poor; but I had money in abundance enough to help others. Those who were richer than I were loaded with debt. This simple mode of life displeased many in my native city. My friends wanted me to live better, but I was content with the cheapest food. My dress was clean, and in the fashion,

but very coarse. This was called unbecoming. I did my duty to all, but I paid no court to my superiors. I wished to be myself worthy of honor, and not to obtain it through fine clothes, flattery, and outward show. I did not smoke; I never played at cards; and therefore every one thought me strange. I always acted in accordance with my opinions; was content with little; helped others with my superabundance; was always happy, and never ill. I wanted nothing but a sphere of action. This I had not, because I was not like other people. Miserable those who expect their happiness from others.

V.—THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER.

"I roamed about Germany for nearly three months, but did not succeed in finding any employment; everywhere there was a 'but.' How foolish people are, thought I, to think ill of a man merely because he desires nothing but the opportunity of making his knowledge useful to others. I thought I should be doing the world and science a great service if I went to London and offered to go on a voyage of discovery to Senegal; and if the English refused my offer, I resolved to go at my own expense. With this determination I bent my course to the north-west.

"One evening I arrived very tired at the inn of a little town, and while I ate my frugal supper I amused myself by reading the newspaper. There I found an advertisement for a schoolmaster in a distant village. The salary was fifty guildens a year (about £4 English money), a house and firing free, and the produce of three acres of land. This was just the situation for me. Schoolmaster!—what a weighty calling. Might I not be the means of reformation to a whole village—the saviour of thousands? Might I not open the way to their improvement in industry, in morality, and in religion? And the pay—it was certainly small, but enough for me. Could virtue ever be rewarded by money? The salaries given by the state are in proportion to the knowledge required. A village schoolmaster requires but little knowledge, and has but little work; therefore the pay is small; but a court chamberlain, a court fool, a public singer, or dancer, has need of much talent; therefore either of these is paid more than all the schoolmasters in the country put together.

"I applied for the situation; my certificate was examined; and I was believed to be a boisterous, runaway student. This I let pass.—There was nothing said against my knowledge of arithmetic and singing; nevertheless, difficulties arose; and I could not blame the gentleman whose duty it was to choose a schoolmaster;—for I knew quite well that it was not usual for a man who spoke six or seven languages to apply for so inferior a situation. I believe I should not have been chosen had any other candidate appeared than an old deaf tailor, who was of course rejected.

"Listen," said the president of the school-commission to me; "the place shall be yours if, after a year's trial, we are satisfied with your conduct." I then received a paper appointing me schoolmaster, provisionally, and also a letter of introduction to Mr. Ploek, the cure of Hard, who was ordered to introduce me in the village.

"I was as happy as a king—if kings ever are happy—and I hastened to Hard. I found my abode a dilapidated hut, and dirty as a stable; every window half pasted up with paper, and my sitting room very dark, and without a stove in it. The only stove was in the schoolroom, in which apartment sixty-five children assembled daily.—The garden was full of rubbish, and the three acres of land were overgrown with weeds. The cure received me with an austere face; gave me some wholesome precepts; and introduced me on the following Sunday afternoon to his congregation, with many admonitions to the school children. This cure was a zealous and orthodox man, who thundered every Sunday with a powerful voice against all unbelievers. On week days, and in common life, he troubled himself but little about the welfare of his flock, and was content if his kitchen was well attended to, and if he was invited to all marriage and baptismal feasts. The villagers were poor, and almost savage; there was no lack of quarrelling, fighting, and lawsuits; every peasant was deep in debt; the soil was hardly cultivated; and the cattle were miserably managed. The mayor was the richest person in the village, for he was also the landlord of the only inn; and he who did not drink enough of beer, was sure to be punished in some way or another. The external appearance of the village, the rows of miserable huts, the interiors of which were dirty and disgusting, the coarse manners of the peasants and their wives, the rudeness of the children, and their ragged, dirty clothing—all told me that this was such a calling as I had desired; that here I had the opportunity of doing good; and I danced in my little room for joy till the whole house shook.

"The school funds were, as may be supposed, very low, and I set about repairing the school-house at my own cost. I had the windows men