

THE LAST OF THE HOSTELRIES.

Once upon a time, on my way through the world, I had occasion to stop over night at a little Canadian village called Krahwinkel. It owes its odd name, I may say in passing, to the first settlers, who were Germans, and whose heirs possess the land to this day. The journey was made by stage, and, unluckily for me, it was just about the turn of the year when our winter weather is at its wildest. The country through which I passed looked inexpressibly dreary. There had been a January thaw, which had taken off all the snow. As a matter of course, this was succeeded by a severe frost, which left the roads full of deep ruts. The sky was covered with clouds, and a little snow had fallen, but not enough to make sleighing possible or to cover the nakedness of the desolate fields. The cold wind blew the loose, dry wreaths of it about the brown stubble, now sowing it evenly and now driving it into little heaps. At such a time, the most uncomfortable way of travelling that can be imagined is by Canadian stage. I know of nothing worse; dromedary-back must be a joke to it. In the first place, the make of the vehicle renders keeping warm in it an impossibility. The cover, instead of shielding you, merely serves to keep in and concentrate the cold which leaks up from the floors and blows in from the front. The frost penetrates the most voluminous wraps, ulster, fur cap and gauntlets; overshoes are feeble defences against it. The discomfort is aggravated by the snail's pace at which the carriage crawls along. If it went fast you could bear it—for let not the word "stage" mislead the inexpert. The Canadian stage bears only the faintest family likeness to the stage coach of English fiction. It resembles the "flying mails" of Dickens and De Quincey only in having four wheels. The horses are always poor and old. The stage itself is never new; it rattles, it jolts, it pitches, it throws the passengers from side to side; in a word, it is only to be resorted to when all other methods of travelling fail. This particular stage was like all the rest. There was a sharp wind blowing in our faces, and the last ten miles of rough road left me numb with cold and utterly miserable.

The short winter afternoon was merging into night when the stage lumbered into the long main street of Krahwinkel. It drew up before the single hotel of the place, and out of the buffalo robes I crawled, perfectly stiff with cold. The driver's beard bristled with icicles, icy spikes hung from the horses' noses, and their flanks were white with their congealed breath. The hostelry was a plain stone house, two storeys high, and not very promising in its appearance, for in America you cannot expect cleanliness or good food except in city hotels, a country tavern is never comfortable. A lean to shed, open to the street, had been built at one side for waiting teams, and a pump with its ice-crusted watering-trough stood in front. The driver carried my portmanteau into the house and I followed him. The door opened directly into the bar-room, a low, dark-ceilinged room, the walls of which were ornamented with a few gaudy hand-bills. At one side three homespun farmers were gathered round the stove, talking politics. I caught the words "John A.," "Mail," "Blake" and "Globe" as I entered. Opposite the door was the bar. The dingy counter and shelves were graced with a few black bottles, decanters and cigar boxes. Here Jacob Schmidt, mine host, met us, and to him the driver handed over my portmanteau. The landlord was a short, thick set, brown-bearded German, arrayed in a brown cardigan jacket. He was a slow, deliberate man of few words; saying little because speech required him to take his pipe out of his mouth. The driver told me next day that he had the reputation of being the best hotel-keeper for three counties round, and the richest; a reputation, I am bound to say, he well deserved. Out of one of those black bottles Jacob poured some particular old schnapps which revived and partially thawed me. Then he picked up my portmanteau, led me out into a cold, dark passage and threw open a door, out of which there came a blaze of light. Half blinded, I stumbled in and Jacob withdrew.

It took me some time to realize where I was. The transition was too abrupt and unexpected. The first thing that I really saw was a huge coal-stove right in front of me, every one of its mica panes blazing red. Then I was aware, as the old ballads say, of one—two—three young women who were by no means bad looking. Then a piano, a sofa, arm chairs, tables, pictures gradually arranged themselves before my sight, and I perceived that I was standing in a snug, well-appointed parlour. The change from the bleak winter road, the jolting stage, the cheerless bar-room, to this torrid zone of comfort was almost too much. I began to think that I was the victim of some new Arabian Night, and recalled vaguely the one-eyed calender in the castle of the forty obliging beauties. Jacob had apparently thought introductions unnecessary; so I was quite at a loss to explain my presence there. The situation would have been awkward if one of the young ladies had not been equal to the occasion. This throwing a total stranger upon their hospitality seemed nothing unusual. She came forward with a smile and asked me if I wouldn't take off my coat and come up to the fire. This was enough to break the ice, and a conversation sprang up; but I did not care to come any nearer to the fiery furnace that glowed in the middle of the room. On the sofa at one side I was quite quite near enough to make the process of thawing out a pleasant one. At this safe distance I had a good opportunity to observe my fair entertainers and distinguish between them. They were all about a size, and

bore an unmistakable family likeness to one another. They were dressed very much alike in plain, neat frocks of good material. Two had black eyes and hair, but one had rosy cheeks and the other was noticeably pale. These seemed to be the eldest and the youngest of the trio. The third girl was unlike her sisters in having brown hair and eyes. I never heard their names, so I christened them for convenience Black Eyes, Brown Hair and Pale Face. Their ages would probably range from sixteen to one or two and twenty. Evidently they were mine host's daughters. This was their living room, and Jacob, in the simplicity of his heart and contempt of modern notions, had made his transient guest a member of his family for the time.

I was just pleasantly warmed through again, feeling conscious once more of hands and feet, and we were deep in a four-cornered discussion of the weather when a bell rang, and the girls told me it was for supper. I plunged once more into the cold, dark passage, and found my way to another room on the same flat, well lighted and quite as comfortable as the one I had just quitted. It was not like a room in a tavern but in a well-to-do farm house, and conspicuous for neatness and order peculiarly German. Here I found about half a dozen men sociably seated around one large, well-set table, and chatting like old acquaintances. What a welcome sight that generous board presented to the gaze of the famished traveller. Besides preserves and hot cakes, cold meat and fried sausages, home made bread and country butter, there was a large earthenware dish containing some sort of pie. I cannot say what it was made of, beyond that it was brown and rich and savoury, and there was very little of it left when we rose from the table. It was like nothing I ever saw or tasted anywhere else. Probably the recipe was a family secret, and the patty a dish as peculiar to this tavern as the "pudding" is to the "Cheshire Cheese." Brown Hair and Pale Face waited on us and handed us our steaming cups of tea and coffee without any abatement of their quiet self-possession. Black Eyes was invisible; in command at the base of supplies, the kitchen, by right of seniority, I imagined.

When the meal was over the other men went off—most of them were in business in the village—while a few adjourned to the bar-room to smoke a quiet pipe with the landlord. For my part, I returned to the parlour, which was empty, and amused myself turning over the books strewn on the piano, looking at the pictures and so on. I felt like myself again, and began to despise the powers of cold and winter. The parlour seemed to be in the heart of the house. There were windows on one side only, and they were deep and heavily curtained. Behind the stove were two doors, which seemed to open on bed rooms. In one corner stood a sewing-machine, which I had not observed before, and a work-basket, well filled, beside it. The pictures were those to be seen everywhere in the country,—a large wood-cut of "Faith, Hope and Charity" in a gilt frame, which had been given as a premium with some newspaper or other; the "Meeting of Wellington and Blücher at Waterloo;" two bright companion chromos—"Wide Awake" and "Fast Asleep." The other decorations were some mottoes in Berlin wool, and a wreath of wax flowers in a deep square frame. The piano was a good one, of native manufacture, and must have cost a pretty penny. Some sheet music was lying about—"Silvery Waves," "The Maiden's Prayer," "Home, Sweet Home," with variations; a couple of "Song Folios," and a number of "Liederschatz." The carpet was new and everything as tidy as it could be. It was the snuggest cosy corner I had found in my wanderings for many a long day. Presently the girls came back into the room, and made no secret of the fact that they had been washing the dishes and "clearing up" generally. They immediately proceeded "to entertain the company" in the orthodox way. Miss Black Eyes showed me the family photograph album: "poppa" and "me when I was little," and a long array of uncles, aunts and cousins. This custom of showing the visitor the album is a good one. It serves as an introduction to the family history, appeals to and gratifies your love of anecdote, humanity and the picturesque. In this way I learned a great deal about the generations of the Schmidts. Their mother was dead, and although they did not need to do so, they kept house for their father and did nearly all the work. They did not like living in a tavern, and had long been coaxing him to give the business up. "Poppa" did not need to keep a hotel for a living, they told me with a touch of pride. It came out that they understood German, but did not speak it among themselves. They had attended the country high school and had been taught music, as the presence of the piano testified. Once or twice their father had taken them, in fair time, to that centre of civilization, Toronto. They were fond of dancing, like all German girls, and chatted eagerly about the "balls" and "parties" that were always going on in the winter. They were so bright and lively and thoroughly unaffected, it was hard to think of them as daughters of taciturn, smoky old Jacob and his Cardigan jacket.

They had brought in with them another member of the family, namely, a shaggy brown dog, who forthwith curled himself up on the mat behind the stove. He was not allowed to enjoy himself very long, for Miss Pale Face, who was evidently much petted by her elder sisters, and accustomed to have her own way in the house, roused him from his lair and proceeded to put him through his tricks. He was old, stiff in the joints, and in no pleasant humour at having his nap disturbed; but his mistress bullied him into showing off his various accomplishments. He "begged"

and "spoke" and "said his prayers" with his nose between his paws on the back of a chair. He would not touch a bone that was "bought on trust," but worried it when told that it was "paid for." He really was a very accomplished dog, and his disgust at it all and air of performing under protest kept us laughing. At last he was released and went back to his mat, growling over the unreasonableness of human beings.

Then it was Miss Pale Face's turn to be put through her facings. After much persuasion, her sisters got her to play and sing. She played well enough, not in concert style to be sure, but none of us were critical or hard to please. I asked for something from the "Liederschatz," and she gave us "Der Tyroler und sein Kind" in fair style.

"She's been taking lessons two years and that's the only tune she knows," said Miss Brown Hair teasingly.

But this was a libel on the fair pianiste, and she showed it to be without foundation by singing several others, which was probably what that artful minx, Brown-Hair, intended. At last, she declared that it was somebody else's turn, and I tried to induce Brown Hair to take her place. No, she couldn't and wouldn't sing.

"Then you play, don't you?"

"I play in the kitchen," said the pert thing.

And so the evening went. It was half past ten before I knew where I was. I got up and apologized for keeping them up so late, for they were not city girls who can afford to turn day into night; they must be astir long before daylight next morning. After many protests that it was early, and so on, Pale Face brought Jacob. We said good-night and I followed my guide to my chamber in the second storey. It was tidy and clean like the rest of the inn, but cold as Greenland. There was no fire, and the lamp showed the window panes all furry with frost. But after toasting by that coal stove all evening, I was almost impervious to the cold. In a few moments I was between the blankets and sound asleep.

Next morning I resumed my journey. Early as it was, I was the only one at breakfast; the other boarders had finished their meal and dispersed. Miss Pale Face waited on me, but I did not see the others. When I came to settle with Jacob, I was surprised at the smallness of my bill. I am ashamed to say how little I paid for my entertainment, but he would not take more. Then the stage lumbered up to the door and I embarked again. All that day in the cold I kept pondering, by very force of contrasts, the incidents of my pleasant evening, and wished in vain that such another hostelry would greet me at the day's end. Since that day I have never seen Krahwinkel, though it is much easier of access now. The stage no longer runs and a spur of railway connects the little village with the rest of the great iron net-work of the province. Sometimes I have wished to go back and find out how Jacob and his pretty daughters flourished; discover if they ever succeeded in coaxing him to give up the tavern; and, if so, what has become of it and them? Is it kept as of yore? Or has some one taken it off Schmidt's lands and allowed him to retire? At any rate, I have never found harbourage like it anywhere, and I note it as a curious survival of old-fashioned comfort and hospitality. Again, I was afraid to return, lest what I saw might spoil my recollections of that pleasant winter's evening long ago. Sometimes I have doubts as to whether Krahwinkel or its hostelry ever really existed. It is my "Schloss Boncourt." Every detail of the room and every feature of my entertainers' fresh faces is plain before me at this moment, and yet I have a desolate sort of conviction that there is not a stone of it remaining, and that the plough scores long furrows over the site of that old-time, wayside inn.

ARCHIBALD MACMECHAN.

Waiting.

Drifts my boat so softly,
Floating down the stream,
Lulled to visioned slumber
Here might poets dream.
Yet my sky is hazy,
Chill the water touch,
And the landscape's pictures
Please not overmuch.
Can the air be sweet, love,
Can the sky be blue
While we may not meet, love,
While I wait for you?
Deeper grows the twilight,
Creeping silently;
O'er the glistening waters
Strong the shadows lie.
All the air is lovely,
Even the water-spray
Dashing o'er the boulders
Seemeth sad to-day.
Even the tall white birches,
Yesterday so fair,
Seem like spectres standing
In the empty air.
Come, my own, and gladden
All my spirit's day;—
Drear would e'en be heaven
If you were away.

SOPHIE M. ALMON.