

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP

What a glorious thing it is to have a holiday, a little allotment of time all your own, upon which you need not pay duty to any man living, and within the compass of which if you be a scholar, no one can plague you about the date of the Hegira, or "exact political significance" of the Lacinian rogations, nor any shock fall upon you if you be a man of business, from alarming telegrams respecting the fall of Utopian consols, or the "unhealthy depression" of the Cludland Atlantic Grand Central railway. Surely there is no one living who does not appreciate such a furlough, from the fourth form boy who overeats himself at Warwick or Kenilworth, on the half-yearly holiday, damped only by the horrid recollection that work begins again next day, up to the wearied merchant prince who follows out his doctor's prescription of "complete change of scene," by making Rome or Switzerland as like London as possible for two months every year.

Somewhat after this fashion (had I felt inclined) I might have soliloquized, as I sat looking down upon the good town of Heidelberg from the terrace of the "Molken-Kur,"—a little wooden auberge perched upon a projecting bluff, in which a few *soi-disant* invalids play at curing themselves by eating the greatest possible amount of curds and whey. And, certainly the scene before me deserved more than a passing glance. Above rose the great sloping crest of the Konigstuhl, with all its waving woods, upon which the fading sunshine lingered lovingly; all around lay the leafy hillsides, between which, like a thread of gold, glittered the winding stream of Neckar; immediately below me lay the narrow streets and tall grim houses of the quaint little town, above which the vast red towers of the castle stood out in the glow of sunset like pillars of fire; and far out on the plain beyond, breaking with its shining curves the monotony of the vast green level, I could just deary the board, smooth flow of the parent Rhine.

But at this moment my reflections are broken in a sufficiently unromantic way by the concussion of a huge steeped-crowned hat, which, driven by the wind, ricochets off my shoulder, and is just rolling over the brow of the hill when I sprang forward and clutch it. Turning to look for the owner, I find myself face to face with a quiet, pleasant looking old gentleman, with a frilled shirt and black silk stockings, the very image of the glass dwarf in Wilhelm Hauff's "Haltes Herz," evidently a man of some note by the respect with which the *habitués* made way for him.

"Many thanks, mein Herr," says the old man, as I restored his errant head-gear. "I am not quite so supple now as I was when I took the prize at the Freyburg Volksfest, forty-three years ago, before I ever thought of becoming a professor. It's only you English who can keep up with your training forever."

"How did you guess that I was an Englishman?" asked I, somewhat surprised; for, indeed, with a beard like a Pasha's and a face bronzed by the sun of Egypt and Syria, my appearance is anything but Anglo-Saxon.

"No one but an Englishman would have caught that hat as you did," answered the Professor, with a little chuckling laugh; "it's just in their nature to jump up and run after anything that passes. Ah, if you English would only employ your irrepressible energies in the cause of science, what might you not achieve! But no; you do not care to learn."

"Do us the justice to believe, Herr Professor, that the nation which produced Bacon and Newton has still some reverence for science."

"They were mighty men," replied the old gentleman, with a reverential bow of his gray head; "but I am speaking of the nation at large, not of a few exceptional celebrities. Ach Himmell! what a set they are, those English! A fine life they led me when I first began to practice medicine down yonder in Saxony. The first thing in the morning kling! kling! at my door. What is it?" "An Englishman who has broken his leg in trying to climb the Teufelsborn, which no one ever ascended yet."

I set the Herr Engländer's leg, and leave him pretty comfortable. Not half an hour after kling! kling! again. "What now!" "A Englishman who has been half drowned in swimming across the Elbe against the current for a wager. I roll the Herr Engländer in warm blankets and bring him round. Before I have well settled in my chair again, kling! kling! once more. "Mein

Gott! what's the matter?" "An Englishman who has tried to run twelve miles within the hour, because some one said he couldn't, and has broken down under the strain." Mein Herr, "I am sorry to have to say it, but your countrymen are equally devoid of fear and reason. There is but one man in England whom I can truly reverence, and his name is Herr Carlyle!"

"Mr. Carlyle, why he's an old friend of mine! I saw him the last time I was in England. I'm glad you admire him."

"Did you, Mein Herr? did you really?" says the old man, with unmistakable interest. "Tell me all about him, I beseech you; he is a great man—worthy to have been born a German!"

And for nearly twenty minutes we sit in judgment upon the biography of Frederick the Great, till the strokes of seven, booming from the town below, warn the professor that it is time to be going home.

"You must come with me, Mein Herr," says he, rising from his seat; "no excuse, I beg of you. It shall never be said that Justus Weissenbart met with a friend of the Herr Carlyle without making him welcome; and besides, I've got something to show you which I think will interest you."

The old man's hearty manner was not to be resisted; and a quarter of an hour later I stood before the door of a tall grim-looking stone house at the corner of the market platz, the curiously carved front of which showed that it had seen more than one century. But if its outside was stern and unpromising, its inside was comfortable in the highest degree; and so I thought when I found myself seated over a substantial German supper, in the professor's snugger, and heard the old man's cheery voice bidding me fall to and spare nothing.

While eating, I found time to glance around the room, which (save for its antique furniture and heavy cross beams of oak) differed but little from the countless other laboratories that I had seen in various towns of Southern Germany; but one object arrested my attention—a human skeleton planted upright in a corner, presenting a pistol menacingly with its fleshless hand. The professor noted the direction of my eyes, and smiled significantly.

"That's the curiosity I was speaking of," said he; "it has a history of its own, which is worth hearing. When we have finished supper I'll tell it to you."

And, accordingly, as soon as the meal was over, Herr Weissenbart settled himself comfortably in his great easy chair, lighted an enormous German pipe, which the most seasoned "fox" in the university would have found it hard to smoke out, and began as follows:

"At the time that I bought this house, mein Herr, I had just entered upon the happiest period of my whole life. I had at length attained the modest competence for which I had long labored in vain, and could say to myself when I sat down in the easy chair in the evening and lit my pipe: 'Now, Justus Weissenbart, thou hast done all that the earthly and corporal parts of thee demand for its sustenance; henceforth thou art free to serve the cause of science, and it may be, even to add a little grain of knowledge to the sum of human learning. I went to work with all earnestness. I filled my house with rare plants, rare fossils, rare minerals. I paid high for curiosities of every kind. I once paid a handful of thalers for the carcass of a donkey, which exhibited a singular malformation of the spinal column. Its dissection led me to one of the most interesting discoveries which I have ever made. An, mein Herr! you, who are a man of amusement and adventure, cannot fathom the delight I felt in cutting up that glorious donkey!"

"But once before in my whole life did I experience the same pleasure, and that was when I was called in, a little while after I first came here, to treat a patient whose case exhibited some very unusual and perplexing symptoms. I examined him; I reflected; the truth flashed upon me, I flung my hat on the ground, and embracing the sick man with rapture, cried out: 'I congratulate you, my friend! You have received a disease which has been unknown for the last six centuries!'"

The idea of such consolation administered to an invalid was too much for my gravity. In spite of all my efforts to compose myself, I laughed till I was fairly exhausted; and Herr Weissenbart very good humoredly joined in the merriment, though evidently without the least suspicion of having given any cause of it.

"Well, mein lieber Herr," he continued, "you will doubtless have remarked it as a singular law of nature that whenever a man lives all by himself in a particularly old shabby-looking house, he invariably acquires the reputation of being immensely rich. Perhaps my paying so high for fossils and skeletons gave some color to the myth in my case; but at any rate I was soon known in Heidelberg as the 'rich Professor Weissenbart,' and my friends began to warn me that if I did not take care I might some day chance to get robbed."

"Now at that time I had but one servant, who had been with me many years, and was getting old and feeble. Every one said that he was not enough to take care of the house himself, and that I'd better

have a younger man to help him; but I didn't like to vex poor old Johann by seeming to think that he was past work, so I just let things go on as they were. He was a capital servant, and did his work well as man could do; but he had one failing. Every now and then when the chance offered, he would"—a significant gesture of the professor's hand as if lifting a glass to his lips, completed the sentence.

"H'm! rather a bad fault in a man upon whom the safety of the house depended," observed I.

"So I thought," answered the professor; "and more than once I doubted whether it might not be as well to take a friend's advice after all, and engage a second servant. But I kept putting it off, and putting it off, till at last I got punished for my hesitation, as you shall hear."

"One night I had sent John out to do some marketing, and was expecting him back every minute. As a rule, whenever he went abroad he took the house key (of which I had a duplicate) along with him; so that nobody could get in till he came back, unless I chose to let them. He was very punctual on the whole; but this time, ten—fifteen—twenty minutes passed, and there was no sign of him. I began to fear that he might have taken a glass too much, when, all at once, I heard far down below, a noise as if the house door had been suddenly opened and shut again, and then a step coming up the stairs right toward my door. I have a quick ear of my own, and it struck me directly that the tread was firmer and heavier than old Johann's. I guessed at once that there had been foul play somewhere, and for a moment I thought of locking my door and calling for help through the window; but on second thoughts I decided that it would be better to let the intruder (whoever he might be) come right up to me, and see what he really wanted."

I looked at the professor with involuntary admiration. To hear this little, delicate, benevolent-looking old gentleman talking so coolly of deliberately allowing a robber (perhaps more than one) to march right into his room at night, without stirring a step to give the alarm, simply because "he thought it better to see what he wanted"—had a really heroic flavor about it; and I bent eagerly forward to hear the sequel of the adventure.

"The door opened," continued my friend, "and in came a tall, burly fellow with a black mask on his face and a pistol in his hand. The moment he was in, he locked the door behind him, put the key in his pocket, and came forward to the table where I was sitting."

"Now, my old un," said he, with a chuckle, "we've got the house all to ourselves. Your servant is lying fast asleep under the club room table at the Thirsty Fox. Drugged beer's a fine thing to make a man sleep sound, and he won't wake much before to-morrow morning. In the meantime, out with your money, or you're a dead man."

"He cocked the pistol as he spoke, and levelled it at my forehead."

"You will think, mein Herr, that I must have been frightened; but, strange as it may seem, I was not. Had I met this man in the street, or out in the open country, he would have been on his own ground, but here, within the walls of my laboratory, he was on mine. He came to me in the guise of a new experiment, and I felt him in my power. Before he had done speaking I had tried him in my own mind, condemning him and sentenced him to death."

Soft and pleasant as the old man's voice was, there was a hard metallic ring in it just then, and an ominous impression of the small, delicate mouth, which showed me, for the first time, what this quiet, good humored scholar might be capable of doing. In truth, the cruelty of passion or revenge is as nothing to that of science. Parrhasius crucifying his slave in order to gain a more vivid idea of the sufferings which he painted, Michael Angelo studying with cool analytical keenness the loathsome minutiae of the plague hospital—Dr. Le Catt keeping horses and dogs alive for weeks under his scalpel, only to inflict upon them more varied and complicated tortures—such examples are terribly suggestive; and I could not help thinking that, had I been a robber, I should have been very loth to entrust myself to the tender mercies of my friend the professor, supposing his power of destruction to be commensurate with his will. After a pause, he resumed—

"Well, I can't resist you," said I to the robber assuming a look of terror such as I had not worn since I went up for my first examination as a candidate at Jena. "I'll give you all I have, and when you have taken it, I hope you'll be satisfied and do me no further injury."

"Oh, I'll be satisfied when I touch the money, never fear, old boy," answered he with a laugh. "Come, out with it quick."

"It's in that bureau yonder," replied I, throwing a key on the table; "help yourself."

"I need not tell you, mein Herr, that in the whole bureau there was not a single pfennig, but he went toward it to unlock it, which was all I wanted."

"Ah, you wanted to get a chance of sticking him from behind, I suppose," said I secretly marvelling at the strategic ability of this man of letters.

"Mein lieber Herr," returned the professor, with an air of grand contempt, suggestive of Socrates "setting down" Protogoras, "science does not fight with such coarse material means as these. I

have told you that I regarded this man in the light of an experiment and I acted accordingly. If you want to know what was my real object in sending him to the bureau, step forward and press your heel upon that little knot in the floor."

I obeyed, and was not a little startled when a good square yard of the flooring immediately in front of the bureau gave way with a loud, whirling noise, disclosing a black chasm of unknown depth from which arose the hoarse gurgle of running water.

"Why, you don't mean to say—" faltered I, glancing from the ghastly abyss below to the benevolent face of the savant, which looked milder and more benevolent than ever.

"Precisely so," answered the professor, with a gained smile, and rubbing his little fat hands gleefully. "That's the Neckar which you hear grumbling down yonder; but there was a good yard of dry pavement for it to fall upon and it sufficed. Unhappily, the fall occasioned certain injuries to his anatomical structure, which however my humble knowledge of surgery has, as you see, enabled me to repair." (And he pointed to the pistol-bearing skeleton with a complacent air.) "Why do you look so shocked, my friend? it was a fair trial of skill against strength. He, the man of brute force, attempted to entrap me, the man of science—and he was caught in his own trap. Fill your glass, and let us drink to the great scientific movement which has made Europe the first quarter of the world, and Germany the first country in Europe."

I filled my glass, though I did not drink, but made some excuse, and gladly left the house.

FREE AND EQUAL.—This is something like Wendell Phillips on religious and political consistency—

"Our fathers started with the principle that all men were free and equal, but for one hundred and fifty years Massachusetts allowed only church members to vote, and when she adopted the principles of the Declaration of Independence she wrote them out with her hand, but she did not get them into her heart. For years a Baptist clergyman was an object of contempt. As late as 1801 the few points of Massachusetts decency were to trace the family back to the Mayflower, graduate at Harvard College, be a doctor, a lawyer, or member of the Orthodox church, pay your debts and frighten your children to sleep by crying Thomas Jefferson!"

If Wendell were to visit Utah and learn a little of political and judicial "consistency" hereabout, he would be able to render his next lecture upon such a topic still more incisive and brilliant if possible.

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