

At Swords' Points;

OR,

A SOLDIER OF THE RHINE.

By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

Copyright, by STREET & SMITH, New York.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Conclusion.

When the little martinet thus announced his decision it created something of an excitement.

Hildegard's face lost its pallor, and Paul smiled grimly, at the same time he kept an eye on Almee.

Just as he expected, the baffled soulless aimed to carry out a desperate plan.

"It is a lie, a base forgery, a trick to deceive fools; but it cannot hoodwink me. What is this you say—that the man shall go free, he, caught red handed in the act, a spy, a hated German spy, fit only for the halter? And you dare to say that, you who swore on bended knees that my word should be law?"

The poor major, victim of cross purposes, could only shrug his shoulders.

"There is a previous oath, ma'mselle, my vow to my country to obey my superiors. That is above life to me, since my honored name is involved. Even for you I dare not order my men to arrest one who is under the protection of such a sacred document, written by Marshal Bazaine himself."

The countess, apparently cheated out of her prey, and deserted by an ally whom she had believed could be depended upon through thick and thin, looked about her sullenly. Desperation had made her temporarily mad, and she would risk even her own destruction in order to gain revenge. From figure to figure this glance went—and then he saw a fierce joy flash over her face.

It was as though she had discovered that all was not yet quite lost.

Ah! it was Karl!

Remembering as he did that the other had candidly confessed he was in Metz as a secret agent of the German forces, no wonder Paul felt a sudden fall of his spirits when he recollected that the magic document of his British friend would not cover two companions, and that the dreadful fate of death at the hands of the mob, from which he had just escaped by a mere scratch, would probably be the doom of his friend and brother, poor Karl.

Still keeping her eyes glued upon Karl, the countess once more addressed the major, resolved to test the last remainder of her power over that worthy.

"One has escaped you, you say, but do not forget, my friend, there are two. Yonder man, his comrade, is the spy we seek. You prate of your sacred duty as a soldier—let us see some of it now—arrest that man and search him for positive evidence of his guilt."

The major woke up. He was once more the warrior bold, eager to faithfully serve the woman he adored.

Heaven help the poor devil upon whom his concentrated wrath now fell, for, having been held in the leash so long the fighting major was apt to be exceedingly ferocious.

However, if the bellicose soldier anticipated any quailing on the part of Karl Von Stettin, he made the most grievous mistake of his life.

The young Heidelberg philosopher even smiled as brightly as one could wish.

In fact, he even appeared pleased to have all eyes concentrated in his direction.

This was not braggadocio. What could it mean?

Beatrix crept up beside Karl, and caught hold of his arm.

Her action could not be mistaken—it meant as plainly as those words of old which Ruth spoke to Naomi:

"Whither thou goest I shall go, thy country shall be my country, thy God my God."

Karl put an arm around the girl and strained her to his heart.

And into Hildegard's cheeks, hitherto as white as marble, the color surged, as the light of a great revelation began to force its way.

Paul, then, was not lost—he had not been unfaithful—he was all her most fervid fancy had ever painted him—and deep down in her heart she knew he loved her.

No wonder, then, she glowed with sudden hope and the world took on a new brightness—after all, it is our condition of mind that makes or mars the scene. To the happy soul even a dreary day of rain affords seasons of rejoicing.

Thus one good thing had come about through this concentration of attention upon Karl.

Utterly helpless himself, in so far as assisting his comrade was concerned, Paul could only turn to watch the progress of events, praying that Sir Noel could see the way to lend a hand, or that Karl himself might have a card concealed up his sleeve that would sweep the board.

"Your name?" demanded the major, as he frowned upon the smiling young student-soldier, who stood with one arm thrown reassuringly around the girl.

"Karl Von Stettin," came the prompt reply.

"Native of Germany?"

"It is true."

"You belong to the army of the Crown Prince?"

"Yes."

"Have you been a prisoner on parole, the same as this gentleman?"

Karl shook his head in the negative, while the others hung upon his words eagerly, waiting for the light that was so slow in coming—Karl seemed so positive, so utterly reckless of consequences that one could almost believe he expected a corps of the Feldwache with their spiked helmets to appear upon the scene whenever he chose to turn wizard and utter the magical words that insured their coming.

"I have not, Monsieur le Major," he said, firmly.

"Ah! Then you freely admit that you, a German soldier of the line, have entered Metz for some purpose other than sight-seeing?" eagerly.

Karl did not hesitate an instant in replying.

"Even that is true," he said, calmly. Whereat Paul mentally groaned, and the Britisher elevated his eyebrows in surprise, for both of them believed the frank soldier of the Rhine was giving himself bodily into the hands of the enemy.

"Since you have confessed that your mission is that of a spy, there is no other course open for me but to convey you to a dungeon and put your case before a drumhead court. Resistance, you realize, is utterly useless. I shall proceed to have you searched on the spot, so that you may not get rid of any incriminating evidence."

"Ah, do," said Karl, composedly. "since it will save me very much trouble in explaining certain facts which had better been whispered in your private ear—facts that your commander most particularly desired should be kept secret."

His words, of course, aroused the major's curiosity. Since seeing the magic paper carried by the Englishman, he was fearfully afraid of exploding some other hidden mine.

"Come, monsieur," said the accommodating major, "you are concealing something from me—something I should know."

"Something you shall know," declared the other, placidly, nodding and smiling. "It is for your ear alone, Monsieur le Major."

The soldier waddled forward, while the countess hissed and showed her utter disgust by crying:

"Fool! coward! you would lose all!"

Karl spoke a few sentences in a low tone.

Whatever their import, they started the French major, who looked at him in amazement.

"Can you show me the proof?" he demanded, hoarsely.

Apparently it was the fashion to produce papers, for Karl took one from some concealed pocket.

Paul had a glimpse of it, and felt sure the peculiar chirography was exactly the same as that which characterized the Bazaine letter or passport Sir Noel carried.

At any rate, the effect upon the major was quite as startling—his hand trembled as it held the magical document, and his little eyes glowed like sparks of fire.

"Enough," he cried, handing it back to Karl hastily. "I have come upon a fool's errand. There are no spies in Metz—there will be no need of any after to-morrow, the 27th, for Metz will no longer be ours. Sergeant, take your men off. Go and tie crepe upon your left arms, soldiers of France, for we are undone."

Evidently the gallant fighter had read that which chilled his heart.

The order was given.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the tall guards marched out of the room—tramp, tramp, tramp, they went down the stairs until all had disappeared.

Those who were left stood and stared.

"Gentlemen—ladies—I congratulate you on the very happy outcome of this adventure—for you. Pardon my unwarranted intrusion, and, bon soir."

With this the stout, discomfited major betook himself off, accompanied by the countess, whose angry voice could be heard far down the stairs as she berated him for not taking drastic measures to accomplish their desired end in spite of the commandant and his passports.

Already Beatrix was clasped in her lover's arms, and the slight must have inspired Paul, for he immediately strode over to where the blushing nurse stood.

"Hildegard, once I told you that a Rhinelander never loved twice. I failed then to explain my meaning—kept back by a dreadful fear of a family secret. I have found a mother and a sister, and you must hear the sad story connected with the past of this parent it is now my duty to love and cherish. After that, if you do not look down on me because of the shame upon my name, I want to tell you of my love for you, which will live to the end of my life, whether I win your consent to be my wife or not."

And Hildegard put her hand in his, like the noble, true-hearted girl she was, saying:

"My heart has been yours this long time. Herr Paul—take my hand and

all I have with it. I do not wish to hear the story now—at some other time, perhaps. Stop, do not insist. I may have an idea as to the truth, but it is enough for me to know you are innocent. I am only too happy to trust my whole future in your hands."

What could he say?

He sealed the compact as any bold lover would have done, and the bargain made while German shells still exploded in the streets of Metz was founded upon such mutual respect and perfect faith that neither could ever regret it.

The sturdy Briton appeared to be especially tickled over the fact that Karl had seen his lend and zone him one better in the way of leggedomain.

"You came very near ending our friend for good. I declare, the major was so staggered his life hung by a thread," he laughed.

Perhaps there was a tinge of curiosity in his tone.

"You heard enough to give you an inkling of the truth, gentlemen, and now I feel in duty bound to tell all. I am not in Metz as a spy, though I thought it my duty to allow even Paul here to believe it for a time, as my mission was supposed to be a dead secret. On the contrary, I have come here at the written solicitation of Marshal Bazaine, who desires to discover the best terms he could secure for his brave army of the Rhine."

"At first he demanded that there be some allowance made for their emigration to Algiers, which the Crown Prince declined, and matters have become so bad that the French commander has agreed to an unconditional surrender. At midnight I shall go out of Metz bearing his acceptance, and after that time, when this document is in the hands of the Crown Prince, not another bomb will fall within these walls, for Metz will have fallen."

Paul looked delighted, and even the non-partisan Briton seemed pleased to know the era of bloodshed in this particular region was at an end.

"Thank God!" he said, reverently. "then peace will follow when Paris also falls."

"Yes, we have much to be thankful for," said Paul, glancing toward Hildegard.

As for the doctor, spying a bottle of wine with three glasses upon a sideboard, he poured some into the crystal receptacles.

"Gentlemen, join with me in this toast—here's to the gallant major!"

"And may he escape the almost universal fate of those who worship at Almee's shrine," added the Rhinelander, earnestly.

And so they drank it down.

Little did they guess that at the very moment Countess Almee was being carried into the hospital, a victim of an exploding Prussian shell, and that if she lived through the dreadful shock it would be as a helpless wreck of her past beautiful self.

The judgment had come at last, and in this hour her myriad victims were avenged.

What more need be said? Paul and Karl served until Paris fell and peace came upon the stricken fields of France.

There is no necessity to tell how they married, and what joys or sorrows came their way, for this world holds its share of both for all who love and who are chosen.

Paul tenderly cared for his mother the rest of her years, and at her request finally laid her away in the American cemetery, where rested the husband who had been so fearfully wronged, yet who, with his last dying breath, had pardoned all in the greatness of his love, believing that to those who have sinned much, if they truly repent, everything shall be forgiven.

THE END.

Different Signs.

The following story was once told by Dr. John Marshall, dean of the University of Pennsylvania, during a lecture:

"There lived in a small English village a curate whose custom it was to drive his horses tandem. His parishioners evidently thought such a style was unbecoming for a minister and spoke to him on the subject. Their words had no effect, and they complained to the bishop. The bishop sent for the curate and advised him to drive his horses side by side.

"But," said the curate, "what difference does it make whether I drive my horses side by side or tandem? The horses are the same, and there is only a difference of position."

"That's just it, my good man," said the bishop—"the position. Now, when I extend my hands this way," and he stretched them over the curate's head, "it's a sign of a blessing, but when I put them this way," and the bishop placed one hand in front of the other before his nose, "it is a sign of derision."

Should Have Satisfied Him.

President Tucker of Dartmouth College, with his family, has spent a number of summers on a farm in New Hampshire. During the past year, however, the pedagogy was greatly annoyed by two things—the proximity of the pig-pen and the manners of the "hired girl." Therefore when the owner of the farm wrote to him recently, asking whether he would again have the president of Dartmouth as his boarder, the latter sent back a decided negative, stating his reasons for not wishing to return. In a few days he received the following reply:

"Dear Sir: There ain't been no hogs since you left, and Hannah has went."

—New York Times.

DOVES OF APHRODITE.

BY F. H. LANCASTER.

(Copyright, 1902, by Daily Story Pub. Co.)

"And hecatombs of doves were slain upon the altars of Aphrodite, for the Greeks admired this goddess of love greatly and made daily sacrifices to her."

The student leaned back and closed her book unwillingly, her fingers caressing its covers while her eyes wandered to the sunset beginning to glow among the pines. As she gazed an odd smile twisted her lips.

"In these later days we sacrifice not only doves, but eagles," she murmured dreamily. Then with sudden passion: "Oh, love, what monstrous murders are committed daily in your name—murder of mind and moral! Life after life broken and bruised at your breast." Her brows knitted slowly and again that odd smile crept to her lips.

Two years ago Helen Nord had found herself alone in the world. That she was penniless had not troubled her. She knew of a place where she could live on ten dollars a month and save money. Moreover she fancied that she could go to that place and make the ten dollars. It was in the Pine Barrens of south Mississippi. There were a couple of small public schools there, lying a few miles apart, one of which was taught in summer and one in winter, each having a term of four months and paying about a hundred dollars per term. When she applied to the county superintendent for information, he gave her besides a bit of advice three bits—"Teach the schools honestly; keep your mouth shut; don't flirt with the girls' sweethearts." She thanked him, feeling the advice to be sound, and went away to follow it.

As teachers go, she had been successful. She held her schools against all rivals and had a hundred dollars in bank; and her pupils, without the aid of chart, diagram, or blackboard, were steadily acquiring a sound English education.

For two years she had boarded at six dollars per month, dressed plain, worked hard, and studied. She had gratified her heart's desire and was a happy woman. Books banked up steadily in her little room, books that she had earned all her life to possess, and she read them over and over in the long, delicious hours after her day's work was done.

Two years of Eden and, lo, the serpent.

She had paid small attention when he first entered her garden. Only by degrees had it dawned upon her that he was, like young David, strong of body and with a ruddy countenance good to look upon. Later on she noted that he neither drank nor swore; that he kept his nails in order and was always neat. He lived at the house where she boarded, and brought her mail from the far-away post office. He was always polite, was this Cajan-born Donician, yet his presence troubled the fair young teacher. Vaguely he interfered with her studies, and she resented the interference.

But the sunset glow was fading while she dreamed of Aphrodite and her doves. What was Aphrodite to her? Or the doves? Dreadful, melancholy birds that made even the glad pine woods mournful with their plaintive cooing. Helen laughed a little as she put away her much-loved books and went out into the bold fresh air for that delightful half hour between the lights.

She threw back her tired shoulders and drank in deep breaths of vigor. Glorifying in the reckless pride of youth. Standing between the fading sunset glow and the brightening gleam of the rising moon. Appropriating the grandeur and understanding nothing. Seeing in the light-tipped pines only glorified pride. Blind to the serenity that is born of suffering; deaf to the note of sadness that thrilled through their melodious chanting—to her only a burst of deep-throated triumph.

Oddly enough, in the midst of these shaken vibrations of her soul came the practical reflection:

"I can live on ten dollars a month and save money; and I can make the

inch a man was M. Donician, in spite of his predilection for blushing.

Helen stared down at the little packet of mail and saw instead a small cottage furnished cozily with that hundred dollars in bank. It was unfortunate, that hundred dollars, in that it formed a solid foundation for a temptation that must have otherwise have remained chimerical. For an hour she struggled with it, sitting in the dark in her little ten by ten room. Then she laughed, an echo of that sighing laugh with which she had put away her books, and struck a light. She had forgotten her mail!

Presently a crisp bit of paper

"I love you, Miss Helen. 'Tis right you should know."

cracked between her fingers. Her first check, Ambition leaped up wildly. Poor Donician! Alas, for the doves of Aphrodite.

Poor Donician? He sat on a saw-log in the moonlight wrapped in a dream as warm as heaven. His breath came unsteadily, deep-chested, and quivering. His fingers still felt the touch of hers. His ears still throbbled to that unconsciously caressing "thank you." He had forgotten its civil repetition. Poor Donician! He knew nothing of that strong-seated ambition that had ridden unceremoniously over the pleasant things of her life. Nothing of that bit of crisp paper with a few figures in one corner. Had he seen it, he would not have understood; yet it was the death warrant, signed and sealed, for his happiness.

Why should he suspect the existence of such things? To him the fair-faced young teacher was as a dainty wild flower, half open in the early dew. He sat on in his warm dream of heaven-born happiness, joying in the relentless might of his strong-hearted love.

Helen Nord was right. In these later days eagles are frequently sacrificed upon the altars of Aphrodite.

The next evening when she carried her ambition out in the forest that it might soar bold and unrestrained as the breath of the pines, Helen saw him coming toward her over the soundless needles. Strong and happy-hearted he swung along, bearing the beauty of a Greek god upon his brow. A strange, reeling fear seized upon the woman's heart. She sat down weak, inert, upon a fallen trunk and stared miserably at the dead straws.

Donician came on swiftly. He bared his head as he sat down beside her.

"Any mail for me to-day?" she questioned, failing dismally in her effort to appear unconcerned.

"No," he said softly. Had he kissed her the caress could scarcely have been more endearing.

Helen flung up her head desperately. Her choice had come to her in narrow lines, love or ambition. Aphrodite demanded a sacrifice. Should it be dove or eagle? Alas, for the dove. The ambition that had ridden roughshod over all the pleasant things of life was not to be unseated by its poor, plaintive pleading.

Donician spoke with manly simplicity.

"I love you, Miss Helen. 'Tis right you should know."

"Thank you," she muttered incoherently. She was plunging wildly against the strain of stern asceticism in her blood. It seemed such a senseless sacrifice—two spotless doves for one wild eagle. Then the old glamor came again upon her eyes. She saw herself as she would be—a proud, free woman, working her way up into the high white light.

She tried to make it easy for him.

"We should not talk of such things, you and I, M. Donician," she said, looking beyond him lest she should see that in his wonderful eyes that would haunt all her after days. It was an unnecessary caution. He was not the man to bare his wounds.

"I love you," he said, with quiet insistence. "I can make you happy."

"Yes," she returned, suddenly conscious of extreme weariness. "Yes, I know. But it must not be. I—I have other work to do."

Donician hesitated a moment as though unwilling to believe that his glad dream was shattered.

"When two people love one another they belong to each other for all time." Is it not so?" he asked tenderly, and his eyes compelled hers to meet them in one brief, truth-telling glance.

"No, it is not so, not always," she stammered, hurriedly. "It must not be!" she started to her feet, but his hand checked her flight.

"Wait," he said, "I will go."

She watched him move away. Farther and farther his upright, swift-moving figure glancing at rare and rarer intervals between the tree-

trunks. Suddenly she turned and fled, goaded by intolerable pain.

And the pines were left alone in their eternal serenity, chanting the requiem over the fair white doves of Aphrodite.

WONDERFUL GROWTH OF OKLAHOMA

In That Territory the Rich Soil Is Attracting Thousands of Settlers.

That portion of the west comprised in Oklahoma and Indian Territory is the center of interest for the ever-present emigration movement that marks American civilization. The states to the north and south have been drained of their surplus population for a decade to build up these virgin lands, but the process is not complete. The land offices of Oklahoma, outside of the newly opened reservations, have done during the last summer, the largest business in years.

Western Oklahoma lands that were considered fit only for the herder are being taken for small ranches, and the cattlemen are nervously watching the destruction of their barbed-wire fences by the advent of the man with the plow. Indeed, this is the only portion of western land outside the irrigated areas that can be secured for new settlement. While vast tracts are yet open to homesteading in other parts of the west, they are the refuse, the arid, rough or worthless claims undesired by the settlers of the last three decades.

Little wonder, then, that the virgin lands of the Indian Territory, capable of producing a bale and a half of cotton, seventy bushels of corn or forty-five bushels of wheat per acre, should be in demand; or that Oklahoma farms, with almost equal fertility, and which are to be subdivided and rearranged to suit the development of the country and the increasing population, should attract both settlers and investors.

Peopled to a larger extent than almost any other part of the union by native American stock, says a writer in the Review of Reviews, with the advantages of example in the organization and development of other communities, guided by the knowledge of to-day and following modern business methods, there should be a marvelous future for this region.

NATURE PROVIDES ICE HOUSE.

Food for Birds That is Preserved in the Arctic Regions.

The number of birds that go to the arctic regions of breed is vast beyond conception. They go not by thousands, but by tens and hundreds of thousands, and because nowhere else in the world does nature provide at the same time and in the same place such a lavish prodigality of food.

The vegetation consists of cranberry, cloudberry and crowberry bushes, and these, forced by the perpetual sunshine of the arctic summer, bear enormous crops of fruit. But the crop is not ripe until the middle and end of the arctic summer, and if the fruit-eating birds had to wait until it was ripe they would starve in the meantime, as they arrive on the very day of the melting of the snow.

But each year the snow descends on an immense crop of ripe fruit before the birds have time to gather it. It is thus preserved perfectly fresh and pure, and the melting of the snow discloses the bushes, with the unconsumed last year's crop hanging on them or lying, ready to be eaten, on the ground.

The frozen meal stretches across the breadth of northern Asia. It never decays and is accessible the moment the snow melts. The same heat which thaws the fruit brings into being the most prolific insect life in the world—the mosquito swarms on the tundra. No European can live there without a veil after the snow melts. The gun barrels are black with them and clouds of them often obscure the sight.

Thus the insect eating birds have only to open their mouths to fill them with mosquitoes, and thus the presence of swarms of cliff chaffs, pips and the wagsails in this arctic region is accounted for.

No Salvation Army Divorces.

In these latter days, when the divorce courts are crowded with mismatched pairs, the claim of the Salvation Army that in its ranks divorce is unknown where the weddings were performed by the hallelujah ceremony prescribed in their ritual, comes as a bright spot in the view of the domestic life of America, which has been painted in most pessimistic colors by social students.

The Salvation Army is the first religious society to lay claim to the honor of being unstained in its record by an example of broken vows which were taken with its sanction. For thirty-five years the army has been marrying its people with its characteristic ceremony which binds the persons not only to each other, but to work in the army as long as both shall live.

Remarkable Cork Output.

The production of cork in the world, estimated at 1,000 metric tons (a metric ton equals 2,204 pounds avoirdupois), is confined to Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and North Africa (Tunis, Algeria and Morocco). The area of French forests, including those in North Africa, really producing cork is more than one-half of the total extent of cork forests. These forests are composed mainly of cork trees, intermixed with pines and evergreen oaks. The demand for cork increases from day to day, and it is added that France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia and the United States absorb 85 per cent of the total production of cork.



"I love you, Miss Helen. 'Tis right you should know."

cracked between her fingers. Her first check, Ambition leaped up wildly. Poor Donician! Alas, for the doves of Aphrodite.

Poor Donician? He sat on a saw-log in the moonlight wrapped in a dream as warm as heaven. His breath came unsteadily, deep-chested, and quivering. His fingers still felt the touch of hers. His ears still throbbled to that unconsciously caressing "thank you." He had forgotten its civil repetition. Poor Donician! He knew nothing of that strong-seated ambition that had ridden unceremoniously over the pleasant things of her life. Nothing of that bit of crisp paper with a few figures in one corner. Had he seen it, he would not have understood; yet it was the death warrant, signed and sealed, for his happiness.

Why should he suspect the existence of such things? To him the fair-faced young teacher was as a dainty wild flower, half open in the early dew. He sat on in his warm dream of heaven-born happiness, joying in the relentless might of his strong-hearted love.

Helen Nord was right. In these later days eagles are frequently sacrificed upon the altars of Aphrodite.

The next evening when she carried her ambition out in the forest that it might soar bold and unrestrained as the breath of the pines, Helen saw him coming toward her over the soundless needles. Strong and happy-hearted he swung along, bearing the beauty of a Greek god upon his brow. A strange, reeling fear seized upon the woman's heart. She sat down weak, inert, upon a fallen trunk and stared miserably at the dead straws.

Donician came on swiftly. He bared his head as he sat down beside her.

"Any mail for me to-day?" she questioned, failing dismally in her effort to appear unconcerned.

"No," he said softly. Had he kissed her the caress could scarcely have been more endearing.

Helen flung up her head desperately. Her choice had come to her in narrow lines, love or ambition. Aphrodite demanded a sacrifice. Should it be dove or eagle? Alas, for the dove. The ambition that had ridden roughshod over all the pleasant things of life was not to be unseated by its poor, plaintive pleading.

Donician spoke with manly simplicity.

"I love you, Miss Helen. 'Tis right you should know."

"Thank you," she muttered incoherently. She was plunging wildly against the strain of stern asceticism in her blood. It seemed such a senseless sacrifice—two spotless doves for one wild eagle. Then the old glamor came again upon her eyes. She saw herself as she would be—a proud, free woman, working her way up into the high white light.

She tried to make it easy for him.

"We should not talk of such things, you and I, M. Donician," she said, looking beyond him lest she should see that in his wonderful eyes that would haunt all her after days. It was an unnecessary caution. He was not the man to bare his wounds.

"I love you," he said, with quiet insistence. "I can make you happy."

"Yes,"