

Arms and the Woman.

By HAROLD MacGRATH.

(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER X.
On the next afternoon I was sitting on the porch with a glass of wine, when Gretchen came out of the inn. Just then, raising my eyes, I saw a group of horsemen approaching. I discerned them to be cavalrymen, petty officers. They were mounted on spirited horses.

"Gretchen," said I, "they are cavalrymen. They do not wear the Hohenzollern uniform. So perhaps it would be just as well for you to go to your room and remain there till they are gone. Ah," said I, elevating the glasses again, "they wear his majesty's colors. You had best retire."

"I refuse. They may be thirsty." "I'll see to that," I laughed. "But"—she began.

"Oh, Gretchen wishes to see new faces," said I, with chagrin. "If it pleases you, sir," mischievously. "What if they are looking for—?" "That is the very reason why I wish to see them."

"You are determined?" "I am." "Very well," said I. "You had best eat an onion." "And for what purpose?" "As a preventive of offensive tactics," looking slyly at her. Her laugh rang out mockingly.

"Do you not know that aside from duelling the German lives only for his barmaid, his beer and his knoblauch? Nevertheless, since you wish it, I will eat one—for your sake."

"Heaven forbid!" I cried in dismay. "For my sake?" "Does Herr—?" "Does Herr Jack think," her eyes narrowing till naught but a line of

"Certainly not, but sometimes your joy is irritating. You are sad all day; then some strangers come, and you are all smiles. Your smiles do not come in my direction as often as I should like."

The smile would have dazzled an anchorite, let alone a man who didn't know whether he loved her for certain, but who was willing to give odds that he did.

But, with a low laugh, she disappeared behind the door. Gretchen was a woman. As a man must have his tobacco, so must a woman have her coquetry. It was rather unfair of Gretchen after what I had promised. It was like getting one in a cage and then offering sweetmeats at a safe distance.

So I went to the river and sat down in the grass. A gentle wind was stirring the leaves, and the sunbeams, filtering through the boughs, fell upon the ground in golden snowflakes. What was Gretchen to me that I should grow fonder of her smiles? The night before I could have sworn that I loved her; now I was not so sure. A week ago all the sunshine in the world had come from Phyllis's face; now a shadow had come from Phyllis's face; now a shadow had come from Phyllis's face.

The red squirrel in the branches above me looked wise. He was wondering how long before the green burs would parch and give him their brown chestnuts. I was contemplating a metaphysical bur. I wanted to remain true to Phyllis, though there wasn't any sense in my doing so. Had Gretchen resembled any one but Phyllis I never should have been in such a predicament.

"Well, why don't you answer?" "I was startled to my feet by the laughter which followed my question. A few yards behind me stood Gretchen.

"Can't you find a better confidant?" she asked. "Yes, but she will not be my confidant," said I. I wondered how much she had heard of the one-sided dialogue. "Will you answer the question I just put to that squirrel of yours?"

"Perhaps it was the question?" with innocence not feigned. "Perhaps it was, Why should Gretchen not revoke the promise to which she holds me?"

"That cloud of smoke is my history." "It disappears," said Gretchen. "And so shall I at the appointed time. That cloud of smoke was a fortune. I reached for it, and there was nothing but the air in my hand. It was a woman's love. For five years I watched it curl and waver. In it I saw many castles, and the castles were fair indeed. I strove to grasp this love, smoke, smoke. Smoke is nothing given a color. This it is with our dreams. If only we might not wake!"

Gretchen's eyes were following the course of the languid sifter. "Once there was a woman I thought I loved, but she would have none of me. She said that the love I gave her was not complete because she did not return it. She brought forth the subject of affinities and ventured to say that some day I might meet mine. I scoffed inwardly. I have now found what she said to be true. The love I gave her was the bud. The rose—Gretchen," said I, rising. "I love you, I am not a hypocrite. I cannot parade my regard for you under the flimsy guise of friendship."

"Go and give the rose to her to whom you gave the bud," said Gretchen. The half smile struck me as disdainful. "You are a strange woman. I am an honest one." "I began plucking at the bark of the tree. "No, I shall let the rose wither and die on the stem. I shall leave tomorrow, Gretchen. I shall feel as Adam did when he went forth from Eden. Whatever your place in this world is, it is far above mine. I am, in truth, a penniless adventurer. The gulf between us cannot be bridged."

"No," said Gretchen, the smile leaving her lips, "the gulf cannot be bridged. You are a penniless adventurer, and I am a fugitive from the law, the king or what you will. You are a man. Man forgets. You have just illustrated the fact. His memory and his promises are like the smoke—they fade away but soon. I shall be sorry to have you go, but it is best so."

"Do you love any one else?" "I do not. I love no one in the sense you mean. It was not written that I should love any man."

"Gretchen, who are you, and what have you done?" "What have I done? Nothing! Who am I? Nobody!" "Is that the only answer you can give?" "It is the only answer I will give. There was something in Gretchen's face which, I was power and resolution, two things man seldom sees in a woman's face.

"Supposing, Gretchen, that I should take you in my arms and kiss you? I was growing reckless because I felt awed, which seems rather a remarkable statement. "I know you only as a barmaid. Why not?"

She never moved to go away. There was no alarm in her eyes, though they narrowed. "You would never forgive yourself, would you?"

"I thought for a moment. "No, Gretchen, I should never forgive myself. But I know that if I ask you to let me kiss your hand before I go you will grant so small a favor."

"There was rather a sad expression in Gretchen's eyes. She understood to a fuller extent than I what was likely to follow when it was found that I had misrepresented myself. I cursed the folly which had led me to say that I was English, and I swore at the innkeeper for meddling. As I left the room I smiled at Gretchen, but she did not answer it. Perhaps I was gone five minutes. In that time I made up my mind to show the passports and trust to luck for the rest. When I came back, Gretchen had engrossed their attention. They took no notice of me. I have never understood how it came about, but all at once the lieutenant bent forward and kissed Gretchen on the cheek. She started back with a cry, then looked at me. That swift glance told me what to do. I took the lieutenant by the collar and fung him into the corner. The surprise on his face was not to be equaled. Then as he rose to his feet the veins in his neck swelled with rage.

"I'll pay you for that, you meddling beef eater!" he roared. "Don't mention it," said I, with an assumption of blandness which I did not feel. "That was simply gratuitous. It is a sample of what I shall do to you if you do not immediately ask this lady's pardon for the gross insult you have just offered her."

"Insult! To kiss a common barmaid an insult!" he yelled, now purpling. "Why—why—what is this woman to you—this tavern wench, this?" "Be careful," I warned. Gretchen was calmly wiping her cheek, but her eyes were like polished emeralds.

"You have come here, I believe," said I, "to see if my passports were proper." "Curse you and your passports! Are you a gentleman?" "Would you recognize one if you saw him?" I laughed.

"Certainly," said I, thinking of the weapons nature in her kindness had given to me. "Good! Otto, have the horses brought around. We will cut for the barracks and get the colonel's weapons, the rapier. The word 'rapier' sent an icy chill up my spine. A duel! "The devil!" said I under my breath. I knew less about fencing than I did

about aerial navigation, which was precious little. The fact that Gretchen was now smiling aggravated the situation. I could not help the shudder. Why, the fellow would make a sieve out of me!

"Will you look at my passports now?" I asked. "You may not have the opportunity again."

"Your passports from now on will be void," was the retort. "But I shall be pleased to give you a passport to the devil. I shall kill you," complacently. "Think of my family," said I, a strange humor taking possession of me.

"You should have thought of your family before you struck me that blow," he replied. My laughter was genuine. Even Gretchen smuggled a smile. The lieutenant had taken my remark in all seriousness. "You will not run away?" he asked.

"I shall probably be obliged to run away tomorrow," said I smoothly. "I should not be able to account for your presence here. But I shall await your return from the barracks, never fear." All this was mere bravado. Honestly, I shrank within my clothes and shivered at my shoes. But I had an unfailing nerve. Some call it bluff.

Gretchen had been whispering to the innkeeper. When he moved from her side, she was smiling.

"What the deuce is she smiling about?" I wondered. "Does the woman take me for a modern D'Artagnan?" "Innkeeper," said the lieutenant, "if this man is not here when I return I'll take satisfaction out of your hide." The innkeeper shrugged. "I have never heard of an Englishman running away."

"And I have seen many a German do that," I put in. "How am I to know that your going to the barracks is not a ruse?"

He gasped. The words would not come which would do justice to his feelings. He drew off one of his gloves and threw it into my face. It stung me. I should have knocked him down but for the innkeeper stepping between.

"No, herr," he said; "do not disable him." "You had best go to the barracks at once," said I to the lieutenant. My clothes were too small for me now, and I did not shiver in my shoes. My "Tanke" blood was up. I would have fought him with battle-axes.

"Herr," said the innkeeper when the two had made off for the barracks, "you are a man of courage." "Thanks," said I. "Do you know anything about rapiers?" he asked.

"I know the handle from the blade; that's all. But that does not make any difference. I'd fight him with any weapon. He struck me, and then—then he kissed Gretchen."

"I have wiped it off, herr," said Gretchen dryly. Then she passed from the room. I went up stairs too. I looked out of my window. There was moonlight, possibly the last time I should ever see moonlight in the land of the living. Nothing but a mishap on my opponent's part and that early in the combat would save my epidermis. The absurd side of the affair struck me, and a sudden merriment, none the less I laughed. If it had been pistols, the chances would have been equal. A German does not like pistols



"English," I answered discourteously, their beautiful blue green coat seen, "that one of those would dare take a liberty with me?" "I hope he will not. I should have the unpleasant duty of punching his head." "If I could not kiss Gretchen, nobody else should."

"You are very strong." "Yes. And there are some things which add threefold to a man's strength." "Such as"—she looked at me daringly. "Yes, such as"—Her eyes fell before my glance. A delicate veil of rose covered her face for a moment. I wondered if she knew that it was only because I clinched my fists till the nails cut that I did not do the very thing I feared the stragglers coming down the road might do. "Come," said I preemptorily. "There is no need of your welcoming them here!"

"I took the lieutenant by the collar and fung him into the corner." "There was rather a sad expression in Gretchen's eyes. She understood to a fuller extent than I what was likely to follow when it was found that I had misrepresented myself. I cursed the folly which had led me to say that I was English, and I swore at the innkeeper for meddling. As I left the room I smiled at Gretchen, but she did not answer it. Perhaps I was gone five minutes. In that time I made up my mind to show the passports and trust to luck for the rest. When I came back, Gretchen had engrossed their attention. They took no notice of me. I have never understood how it came about, but all at once the lieutenant bent forward and kissed Gretchen on the cheek. She started back with a cry, then looked at me. That swift glance told me what to do. I took the lieutenant by the collar and fung him into the corner. The surprise on his face was not to be equaled. Then as he rose to his feet the veins in his neck swelled with rage.



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