

Between Frankfurt and Würzburg

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Between Frankfurt and Würzburg

It was midnight in Frankfurt when the soldier climbed aboard his train. He was due back on duty at nine o'clock the next morning in Nürnberg after a ten day furlough in Paris. He looked for a darkened compartment, and finding one that was empty save for the dim figure of a stranger sitting in the far corner, entered and prepared to grab some sleep. He was weary after the long haul across Eastern France and through the Pfalz country.

But the figure in the far corner by the window intrigued him, and he could not sleep. As he grew accustomed to the dark, he could see that it was the figure of a man, on closer observation a very young man, or what is sometimes called a grown boy.

Now it happened that the soldier was lonely. Paris hadn't provided him with the much needed 'Entspannung' he had hoped for. Perhaps he hadn't found the right places. Or the stories one heard from time to time were exaggerated. Back on duty, he had «überhaupt aufzupassen». Tomorrow he would be back with boys who liked to talk about their exploits in a houseful of women situated on a narrow alley back of Nürnberg's ancient wall. If he couldn't change the subject when it arose, he would either have to keep silent or excuse himself from the group, because he knew he risked giving himself away if he attempted to discuss a subject which was for him totally unfamiliar territory. The thought of going back to this intensified his emotion. 'Ours is a lonely life . . .', he was thinking. Sometimes he grew desperate in his loneliness. Tonight he was desperate, he knew.

He worked as a translator and spoke fairly good German. He engaged the boy in conversation.

But the boy was desperate in his own way. He had been running away, and he was scared. Grateful at last for a sympathetic listener, he poured out his story to the soldier. In short, he had gotten himself in a fight, losing his job as a result. The home situation wasn't favorable, a poor laborer's household in one of the crowded cities of the Rheinland. His father drank heavily, his mother was no longer living, and the step-mother had little feeling for him. 'Don't come back until you can pay for your own food!' had been her last words. Now, «völlig verzweifelt», he was on his way to Würzburg where he hoped, prayed that he would be able to find his mother's brother. He was traveling without a ticket. The trainmen had been kind about that when he explained that he was on his way to look for work. He hoped his uncle would help him to find a new job and perhaps make a new home for him.

The boy refused to accept the twenty Mark the soldier offered him. It wasn't the usual hard luck story.

In it there were tragic overtones. The boy murmured of death, of a swift end to all his «Kummer». Perhaps not now. Perhaps a year hence, if he couldn't make a go of it. In the earth beside his mother, gone the feelings of trouble and worry, gone the ache in his breast.

'You beautiful creature of God!' thought the soldier sitting now beside the boy. 'How could anyone be indifferent to your being?! Could

I but place my one hand on your knee and put my other arm around you and hold you close to my heart. If I could but be your family and your home, and make the world good, for you!

But he didn't know what the boy's prejudices might be, and there wasn't time to find out. More important were the words of encouragement and good sense he had to tell the boy, words the boy's mother might have spoken were she still alive. The soldier realized the boy would take these words seriously only if he had respect for the person speaking them. Ideas about how far the relationship between one man and another dare progress were strong prejudices, and he didn't want to risk sacrificing the impression of what he had to say, when the life and future of the boy might depend on the effect of those words. So it was that he held back. With all his courage and strength, the soldier held back. He behaved like a parent, like a loving parent, and he talked to the boy like a parent.

It wasn't easy. To have given way to the physical attraction of the boy, or at least to have made a cautious «Versuch», would have been easier. But the feeling of responsibility and his growing conviction in the truth of his words, these waxed strong in him. These were more than the passion of his heart and were with him long after the train had made the stop at Würzburg.

A look of relaxation came onto the boy's face as the soldier talked. A glimmer of hope sparkled in his eyes as the soldier made him aware how glad he could feel himself to be a man, with «alles was dazu gehört», a sound man with both his hands and both his eyes and all the future before him; things his mother might have expressed to him, were she but alive.

The soldier said as much, kissing the boy briefly on the forehead as the train began to slow down and it was time for the boy to go.

'Here's my name and address', said the soldier. 'I'll always be glad to hear how you're making out!'

He accompanied the boy to the end of the car. In the bright light he could see that the boy wasn't as beautiful as he had imagined in the dark. But hell, that didn't matter.

WÜRZBURG!

The boy looked up into the soldier's eyes. It was a look of trust, and it expressed more than spoken thanks. They clasped hands warmly, and then the boy was gone.

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Notes

on a Photograph

by Roberto Rolf

To enable our American and English subscribers to read our appreciation of Roberto Rolf's photographs which was printed in German in our June-issue we give herewith an English translation of the article in question. *Der Kreis.*

Painters and sculptors have at all times tried to capture the essential spirit of their age. Fundamentally it is the task that every artist of every period has put himself to: to reproduce the spirit of his era as seen