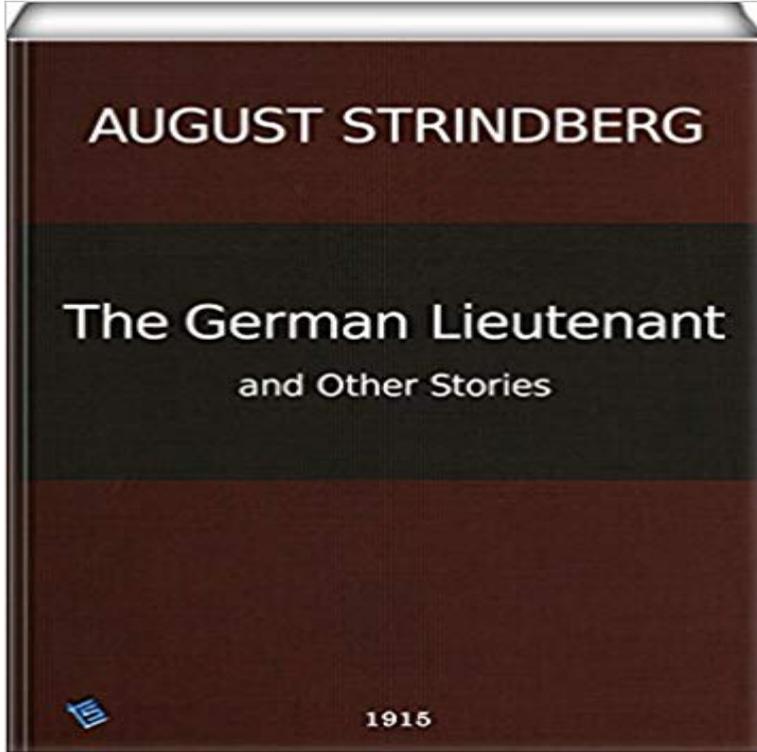


The German Lieutenant and Other Stories



The German Lieutenant and Other Stories - The German Lieutenant; Over-Refinement; Unwelcome; Higher Aims; Paul and Peter; A Funeral; The Last Shot by August Strindberg It was fourteen days after Sedan, in the middle of September, 1870. A former clerk in the Prussian Geological Survey, later a lieutenant in the reserve, named Von Bleichroden, sat in his shirt-sleeves before a writing-table in the Cafe du Cercle, the best inn of the little town Marlotte. He had thrown his military coat with its stiff collar over the back of a chair, and there it hung limp, and collapsed like a corpse, with its empty arms seeming to clutch at the legs of the chair to keep itself from falling headlong. Round the body of the coat one saw the mark of the sword-belt, and the left coat-tail was rubbed quite smooth by the sheath. The back of the coat was as dusty as a high-road, and the lieutenant-geologist might have studied the tertiary deposits of the district on the edges of his much-worn trousers. When the orderlies came into the room with their dirty boots, he could tell by the traces they left on the floor whether they had been walking over Eocene or Pleiocene formations. He was really more a geologist than a soldier, but for the present he was a letter-writer. He had pushed his spectacles up to his forehead, sat with his pen at rest, and looked out of the window. The garden lay in all its autumn glory before him, and the branches of the apple and pear trees bent with a load of the most splendid fruit to the ground. Orange-red pumpkins sunned themselves close beside prickly grey-green artichokes; fiery-red tomatoes clambered up sticks near wool-white cauliflowers; sun-flowers as large as a plate were turning their yellow disks towards the west, where the sun was beginning to sink; whole companies of dahlias, white as fresh-starched linen, purple-red like congealed blood, dirty-red like fresh-slaughtered flesh, salmon-red,

sulphur-yellow, flax-coloured, mottled and speckled, sang one great flower-concert. Then there was the sand-strewn path lined by two rows of giant gilly-flowers; faintly lilac-coloured, dazzlingly ice-blue, and straw-yellow, they continued the perspective to where the vineyards stood in their brownish-green array, a small wood of thyrsus-staves with the reddened grape-clusters half hidden under the leaves. Behind them were the whitening, unharvested stalks of the cornfields, with the over-ripe ears of corn hanging sorrowfully towards the ground, with wide-open husks and bractlets at every gust of wind paying their tribute to the earth and bursting with their juices. And far in the background were the oak-tree tops and the beechen arches of the Forest of Fontainebleau, whose outlines melted away into the finest denticulations, like old Brussels lace, into the extreme meshes of which the horizontal rays of the evening sun wove gold threads. Some bees were still visiting the splendid honey-flowers in the garden; a robin-redbreast twittered in an apple tree; strong gusts of scent came now and then from the gilly-flowers, as when one walks along a pavement and the door of a scent-shop is opened.

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