

PICKVICK ACIDTS



Finally he summoned all his strength and bellowed. "Fools! Vat is de meanings?"

At a casual glance, there is nothing remarkable about the right hand of August Scheffel—nothing at all. It is just such a reckless, fat, unsentimental hand as all the Scheffels have carried from the cradle to the grave—and if you doubt this, the glance can be had at the living subject of these remarks on view daily in "August's Exchange," where he stolidly barter "light" or "dahkk Weissner" for coin of the realm, in the pachydermatous manner of a veteran. Of course such an investigation will cost the price of "Weissner," but who cares for money?

You will notice that the right hand of August Scheffel is somewhat pudgy, and warty, and covered with a sparse reddish hair—quite a duplicate of his left hand in fact, with which he takes your money; but a very keen observer may discern a slight discoloration between the fingers of the right hand—and thereby hangs a tale.

August is a commonplace "Exchange keeper," of an obstinate Teutonic nature, with a small pull in the ward, and celebrated locally for his boasted ability to beat the man who made pinochle. Six months ago one could have added—"and his friendship for Shultz, the baker"; which is now of the past. Mention Shultz to him, and you may have to outstrip the bungstarter to the door.

August and Shultz were inseparable. The only vocations from baking that Shultz ever allowed himself were those spent in August's place, and when the Maennechor held a picnic August would go if the committee could assure him that Shultz would be there, and not otherwise.

Every Wednesday night at nine o'clock August would turn business over to the blonde attention of his eldest son, Otto—not that he believed in Otto's ability, but because there was no one else he trusted), and would depart for the bakery, where, in a little back room, he would "meld" marriages, and "hundreds of aces," and sometimes "double penockle," with Shultz on the other side of the table. And this had been their custom for seventeen years.

Those who happened to pass the bakery on Wednesday nights would often be startled by the noise of smashing blows on a wooden surface. This was notice that August had commenced leading after his last meld, and that he had Shultz on the run. His fist would descend to the table with the apparent crush of a pile driver, and for each trick he would grunt, signifying a thick satisfaction.

But this has nothing to do with his mightiness of hand; it only leads up to it. Such crushing play annoyed Shultz, and one night he said:

"Vonce I seen a man forgedt what table he was blaying on—yes? So he comes down on a solidt mahogny blaces that dont' gife like a stone wall. He is in bedt for nine veeks. You look outt, Aowgoost, or somedimes you vill break your handt."

August Scheffel leaned back in his chair and picked up his dead cigar stub. Fumbling into his pocket for a match, he drew out a gross handful, and lighting one clumsily, began his reply:

"Dond't I tell you many dimes aboutt my father? He could smash invards a door—yes, chust so, undt by his fist. Vell! who's—Achhh, Gott!—"

This was a cry of sincere German anguish. The flame from the first match had ignited all the others, and with true Scheffel presence of mind, August had dropped his cigar and held onto the spluttering matches desperately. He writhed as the wicked little tongues of fire licked through his fingers. Shultz, for the first ten seconds paralyzed, then leaped forward and knocked the blaze to the floor.

Big tears coursed down the undulating features of August Scheffel. He gasped out:

"Shultz, oldt freindt! I am dying—"

"Nodt much," said Shultz grimly, although he was not sure. "Come quick! We gedt a doctor, undt he vill fix it."

Groaning, August staggered after him to the street. Nineteen blocks away they found the tenth doctor's office occupied by a very young doctor, who greet-

By LEO CRANE

Author of "The Black Evil," etc.

ed them as if business had been on the decline. He gave a glance at the burn, a shake of his head for sympathy, and then in a most business like manner hustled out a bottle of

innocent looking liquid and a wad of absorbent cotton.

"Hold out your hand," he ordered, preparing these things.

"Vill idt hurdt?" whimpered August.

"No! Hold it out."

He spread the liquid slowly over the blistered fingers.

Then Shultz became aware of a wonderful change softening the face of his injured friend. August's eyes brightened and grew wide, his teeth ceased to grind, his features were transformed into a cartoon of foolish joy. August began to laugh. By this time the doctor had wrapped cotton about the burned hand and was busy binding it.

"Du Lieber, Shultz! idt aind't no more!" cried August joyfully. "The pains is nodt." Then came a look of anguish again. "Ach! budt if idt shouldt come back!"

August stole a furtive glance toward the doctor, and one at the bottle. With a quick thievish motion he caught up the phial and poured its entire contents over the cotton bandage.

"What did you do that for?" demanded the doctor wrathfully.

"You pudt on such a leettle bidt," begged August. "You know you didt, doctor. I—I vill pay for idt. Idt dont' make no difference to me aboutt moneys. I vant to be sure the pains dont' come back some more."

The doctor grinned slyly; and pay August did, with some twinges of regret that he dared not exhibit.

"What you think idt was, Shultz?" he asked as they went homeward. "Dunder! idt cost like it was goldt. But no matter—idt makes no differences. Oh! ven I think of the pains!—chust like hell's fire!"

THOUGH Shultz was not of an unfeeling nature, yet there was enough of the callous about him to admit of his forgetting August's accident. Next day the duties of the bakery kept him rushing from dawn to noon, and but for one thing perhaps he would not have thought of his unfortunate friend until the next pinochle meet, when assuredly he would have gone into sentimental recollections of his week's perturbation.

But this one thing stabbed him with both remembrance and remorse as he went down the street that noon. It was the young doctor.

The doctor seemed anxious about something, and he greeted Shultz as if he had been seeking just such a man. An expression of vague suspicion crossed the baker's face as he realized that he was the end of the search. He wants more money, thought Shultz, recalling the ruinous fee of the night before. Shultz walked fast and pretended not to hear; but there was no eluding the other, and when forced to stop, Shultz adopted his stock air of bewilderment, which had served him many a good turn, and determined not to understand from the beginning.

"You brought a man to me last night for treatment," said the doctor. "A big fellow with a burned hand—remember that, eh? He poured a bottle of medicine over the cotton bandage. Say! I am speaking to you!"

Shultz allowed these statements to sink deeply into his phlegmatic consciousness, and then replied cautiously:

"Yass—I belief I didt—vell?"

The doctor assumed an expectant attitude, and said solemnly:

"Man! it was picric acid."

Shultz remained unimpressed. His face was emotionless.

"I say—it was picric acid," repeated the doctor sharply.

"Sure?" questioned Shultz. "Pickvick acidts? Vell? He paidt for the acidts, aind't it? You want the acidts back?"