

ON ACCOUNT OF THE HERR MAJOR

BY ESTHER B. TIFFANY

In the middle of her spotless, bare little salon, with its snowy curtains, tall white porcelain stove, and waxed floor, towered, hand on hip, Frau Schulze, letter of lodgings in the old North German conservatory town of Leipsic. Facing her sat deprecatingly, upon the sofa, the possible lessee of the lodgings. This was a slight, erect, well-dressed American woman of thirty or thereabouts, with deeper lines in her forehead, and more gray hairs in her abundant dark coils, than seemed explicable in one otherwise so blooming. On the present occasion, however, there might be sufficient cause for the pucker in her delicately drawn eyebrows, for it appeared that she was being weighed in the balance, and Frau Schulze, voluble, dramatic, broad of girth, was putting her through a series of searching questions.

"So none of the Fräulein's six sisters are studying at the Conservatory?"

Miss Jocelyn, in somewhat labored German, hastened to refute the heinous charge.

"Nor play the piano?"

"There will be no piano playing."

"Nor the violin, nor the 'cello, nor the French horn, nor the flute, nor — nor —" Frau Schulze, checking off the various instruments on her plump fingers, paused a suspicious instant, and brought up with an explosive and suspicious "nor the kettledrum, mein Fräulein?"

"A kettledrum! what an idea!"

But the long-suffering landlady held her ground.

"You never can tell, Fräulein, what a lodger may not smuggle in, and now that these ladies' orchestras are all the rage — But as I say, it is all on account of my lodger, the Herr Major, who forbids my taking in any pupils of the Conservatory."

84

"I wonder you can put up with such a lodger, Frau Schulze."

"Put up! put up with the Herr Major!"

Frau Schulze folded her arms across her ample bosom, and gazed her amazement at the sacrilegious young woman on the sofa. "But then, you are a stranger, and moreover an American, and could hardly be expected to understand. Himmel! it was only yester'day, for instance, while I was weeping bitterly over the death of my father-in-law," — Miss Jocelyn looked sympathetic, — "yes, mein Fräulein, only think, my father-in-law died a rich man, and left me a bare fifty marks! As I say, I was convulsed with grief, when in comes the Herr Major. 'Mein Gott, Hanna!' says the Herr Major, 'you have again been impoverishing yourself on my account; you have undoubtedly been turning away another conservatory pupil,' and down he plumps me a good round sum."

"And when you explained," suggested Miss Jocelyn.

Frau Schulze looked her pitying reproach.

"Explain! Ach Gott! you Americans! So cold, so practical! Plunged in grief as I was, how could I find words to explain? I simply kissed the hand of the Herr Major."

"I see," said Miss Jocelyn. "Well, then, Frau Schulze, will you take us in for a few weeks? We are planning moving into the country later."

But still Frau Schulze demurred, stroking down the rustling expanse of her white apron.

"The Herr Major does not love Americans, *mein Fräulein*; he was once most scandalously cheated by a planter from the banks of the Amazon."

"But the Amazon is in South America, Frau Schulze."

"Surely, Fräulein, you told me you came from South America."

"No, indeed, I said from the Southern states of" —

But Frau Schulze would entertain no such invidious distinctions.

"It is all one, *mein Fräulein*, and I cannot pretend to fathom your extraordinary Indian geography, but seeing that my rooms are temporarily vacant, — it was a Russian pianist last; we put mattresses over the doors of the Herr Major, but it was no use, — and six sisters, you say? Six sisters are a great many."

Miss Frances Jocelyn of Maryland, eldest of seven, rose, drawing a deep breath, as one who had cause.

"Still," she said reflectively, "I cannot well drown them off; your river here is such a muddy little ditch; quite different," she added over her shoulder as she passed out at the door, "from the Amazon."

Frau Schulze received this last sally doubtfully.

"Such singular ways of putting things you Americans have." Then she narrowed her eyes, and nodded knowingly. "There are, however, other means of disposing of young girls; that is, if they have good looks, and — above all," — and here Frau Schulze made a rapid and satisfactory calculation of the probable cost of her new lodger's very tasteful wardrobe, — "above all, money."

"Good-morning, Frau Schulze; then you may expect us to-morrow," said Miss Jocelyn, with her head in the air, and the landlady nodded sagaciously to herself.

"She has come abroad to marry off her six sisters. I must have an eye to the Herr Major!"

For a week after the arrival of the Jocelyns at Pension Schulze all went merrily as a marriage bell. From Alice of twenty-two, eldest of the half-sisters, to Anne, just budding into her teens, they were undeniably pretty girls, and, for Americans, singularly docile and subdued. If at times a certain mutinous gleam in the eyes of Beatrice, the tallest and most striking of the group, hinted at hidden fires, Frau

Schulze failed to take alarm, and softened by their beauty, their orphaned estate, their lavish use of money, she buried all suspicion, and even began to entertain generous notions of assisting the eldest of seven in her matrimonial schemes. Not, however, to the extent of throwing these engaging maidens in the way of so eligible a *parti* as the Herr Major! The Herr Major was, Frau Schulze considered, her particular property. Had she not been born on the family estate, and in fact set up in the lodging business by her young master? He was to be cherished and fleeced, it stood to reason, by no one but herself. What advantage should she reap by a marriage which would carry the Herr Major and his open purse to the banks of the Amazon? Fortunately he took his meals at the club, so there was scant opportunity for more than a chance encounter with the Americans. Still, Miss Jocelyn might be laying her plans, and it would be best to sound her.

"So well behaved, so modest, your sisters," purred Frau Schulze, waylaying Miss Jocelyn in the corridor. "One would never suspect they were Americans. Mees Beatrice, now, — such an air; and Mees Alice with a mouth one could cover with a groschen. But Fräulein Jocelyn is wise; she takes her time; she observes this *parti* and that, and she says" —

"I say nothing at all, Frau Schulze," broke in Frances with blazing eyes, "except that my sisters are not — not" — "Not in the matrimonial market" was what she wished to say, but, her German coming short, she finished with the bald statement, "my sisters never marry."

Frau Schulze, with upraised hands, supplicated the chandelier. "Thou dear Heaven! You design them for old maids! The poor lambs; the little innocents! Have you a heart of stone? And with such hair and eyes, and so rich! Gott! you could marry them to any title. Poor lambkins; little angels of gold; and so sweet, so pious, so obedient, so gentle, so — *Um Gottes Willen*, what, what is that?"

"That" was a gay, brilliant, assured *arpeggio* on the violin, and the next moment a tripping, saucy *gavotte* was breaking the sacred silence of Pension Schulze. The sounds emanated from the salon of — Heaven help them — the Jocelyn sisters!

Frau Schulze, as fast as her generous size would allow, lumbered down the corridor, Miss Jocelyn following in open dismay.

"Now how did Beatrice — of course it is Beatrice — smuggle it in? I thought they had all been packed away." Then she came to a terrified pause, for a door had burst open, and an irate officer, and an undeniable German oath, had launched themselves simultaneously into the passage. The officer had eyes only for his landlady.

"What is this, Hanna, a violin?"

Frau Schulze wrung her hands.

"Never blame me, Herr Major; they swore on the holy Bible they had none of them ever so much as touched an instrument of any kind. Ach, Gott! here they are, all of them; the Herr Major may see for himself."

And well the Herr Major might see for himself. Headed by Beatrice, who, at the uproar without, had stopped her playing, and thrown open the door, the whole frightened, blushing bevy was discovered hovering on the threshold, and in a moment Miss Jocelyn added another to the group.

"Beatrice, how could you!" she expostulated, and then, turning boldly, she faced the Herr Major.

"I am sorrowful," she said, in her most stately and classical German, and with a dignity which might have carried more weight if in her perturbation she had not addressed the Herr Major endearingly as *du*; "and assure thee it shall never happen again."

Not a ripple of amusement disturbed the courteous gravity of the major's face. He was a tall man of perhaps forty, of a fine carriage and decidedly prepossessing appearance. Despite the accident of the

oath, he was a gentleman, and as such rose to the occasion.

"In future," he said, clicking his spurred heels together, and executing an impressive salute that completely awed the younger girls, "in future when the young ladies play I shall open my door to listen."

But Beatrice was not to be so easily mollified.

"It's very strange," she said, with her head thrown well back from her fine, long, scornful throat, "why the Leipsic people go to the trouble of founding conservatories, and then refuse accommodation to the poor, deluded pupils who come to attend them."

"There, there, Beatrice!"

Beatrice, who was the linguist and the orator, shook off her sister's restraining hand.

"No, no, Frances, I insist on telling Frau Schulze, and this — this gentleman, how for weeks we have been driven from pillar to post, without a place to lay our heads, and simply because we wish to pursue the divine art of music."

"But, Mees Beatrice," broke in Frau Schulze, while the major, stroking his mustache, looked uncertain whether to stand his ground or to fly before this battery of lovely, reproachful eyes, "but, dear, sweet Miss, — seven of you, and all practicing at once!"

Beatrice waved the interruption aside.

"And when we give up in despair, and try and hire a place in the country, — such a dear old place, with only cows and peasants to object to our practicing, — the agent keeps putting us off, and pretending he must make sure of our references — our references! — and alluding covertly to a so-called 'fellow countryman' of ours, a scoundrel from Brazil who hired the place once and never paid."

A sudden illumination lit up the expressive features of the Herr Major, and though he had evidently a moment before been meditating flight, he now turned to Miss Jocelyn with a genial if somewhat

embarrassed eagerness that sat well upon him.

"Might I take the liberty of asking the *gnädiges Fräulein* the name of the estate in question?"

"Grünau!" burst in chorus from all the girls, who had been silent such an unconscionable time.

Frau Schulze clasped her hands. "Thou dear Heaven! the estate of the Herr Major!"

Again seven pairs of reproachful eyes were fastened on the luckless officer. It was he, then, with his insane distrust of Americans, who was keeping them out of Paradise.

"There has been some unfortunate mistake," protested the owner of Grünau with great earnestness, "I will write at once to my agent to place the house at your disposal."

In April not even the flat, uninteresting plain about Leipsic can quite escape the witchery of spring, and it is then that Grünau looks its best. It is a low, red-tiled manor, built, German farm fashion, around a courtyard which is littered with stable adjuncts not of the savoriest, but toward the rear the windows open on terrace and garden and park. Here a noble growth of trees offers cool and secluded retreats; here wild violets lurk and great sheets of yellow primroses dance in the breeze. From one end of the park wall stretches the village, its steep, pitched roofs overtopped by the gray old Lutheran church spire; and in the other direction, breaking the monotony of the green plain, rise the towers of the city.

In the centre of the main wing of the manor a lofty hall, stone-flagged and hung about with antlers and hunting horns, and a rusty blade and firelock or two, imparts a certain dignity; and without in the garden the ancient stone well, the rose-embowered sun-dial, the quaint dove-cote, add their part to a homely charm that soon steals into the heart. This, at least, was the effect on Frances, and it was with a light heart that she set

her domestic machinery to running, interviewed the old servants, who had stayed on, engaged a highly respectable widow lady as governess and general duenna, and made arrangements for certain masters to come from town, and other arrangements for the older girls to be conducted to and from the Conservatory. So utter, indeed, was the content of the eldest of seven, so sheltered seemed this retreat, that it was nothing less than a shock to receive, one fine morning, the visiting card of the Herr Major.

The Herr Major! What was he there for? Under ordinary circumstances it might seem natural for a landlord to visit his own estate on occasion, but the final words of Frau Schulze had put Frances on her jealous guard.

Drawing Miss Jocelyn aside, and with the manner of one who could unfold unspeakable things, Frau Schulze had whispered, "Beware of the Herr Major, *mein Fräulein*; he is on the lookout for a rich wife."

So on the first appearance of the fortune hunter, the wary elder sister, glancing in alarm at Alice and Martha and Beatrice seated feeding the doves by the fountain, sent them post haste to their practicing, and the formal interview was lugubriously accompanied by the disconsolate wail of 'cello, viola, and violin, issuing from various remote quarters of the house.

It would seem, however, that Frances had been needlessly prudent. The Herr Major did not so much as allude to the young ladies. He had come down to speak about the rehabilitating of the crumbling fresco in the dining-room, the restoration of which — with her gracious permission — he might be obliged personally to superintend from time to time.

For a well-kept-up old mansion it was singular to observe how many things were out of order; out of order, at least, in the eyes of their scrupulous landlord. Not a week passed but the Herr Major, profuse in apologies, but firm as to the necessity of overseeing the workmen.

would drive out to Grünau; and, little by little, to the suspicious eye of the alarmed mother bird, ruffling her feathers and spreading her wings to protect her brood, these visits began to wear an ominous air. Quite early in the game, too, it became evident that Beatrice evinced a fluttered interest in the comings and goings of the Herr Major, and invariably found occasion to have business with the particular carpenter or plasterer or gardener whom the master of Grünau had come down to interview. The whole bevy of girls, in fact, sang his praises. So whole-souled and simple, when once the outer conventional crust had dropped off; so well-read, such an interesting talker; and as chivalrously gentle toward woman as if he had been an American. That last trait he had probably acquired through taking care of his invalid wife, dead five years before, and it must have been the loss of his only daughter that made him so particularly nice with merry, romping Anne, just in her teens.

It turned out, also, that, instead of having no ear for music, it was the extreme sensibility of that member which had made the incessant banging and thrumming of conservatory pupils a horror to him; and as to his hatred of Americans, — well, if he still cherished any such sentiments he kept them quite in the background. Indeed, so frank and genuine did he seem, that, forgetting her fears, Frances found herself by degrees actually consulting with him about the best masters for the girls, and whether he considered tennis too violent an exercise for Martha, who was delicate, and if he could recommend a nice, quiet little inn in the Harz Mountains for July. In all these matters how sound was his judgment; how rational his point of view! Men often did see things more sanely than women! What a comfort it must be in married life to have a man to consult, and not to be obliged to settle everything alone!

It was an unpleasant surprise, directly after one of these confidential talks, to

run across the Herr Major and Beatrice behind the magnolias in the garden, Beatrice flushed and excited, and her companion plainly embarrassed. What did it mean? Would a man of honor, and a conventional German above all, entrap an artless girl into secret interviews? Would, moreover, a man of honor allow himself to look at herself, Frances, as he had begun to of late, unless he — And how it set her heart to beating when he did look at her in that way!

So, restless and puzzled, her happy content quite at an end, Frances tried to steel her heart against this all too engaging visitor, and above all to keep Beatrice out of his path. Poor child, growing daily more sparkling and lovely, what did she know of fortune hunting! Alas, there was but one course to take; they must leave Grünau, and all on account of the Herr Major.

It was the praiseworthy custom at Grünau to take afternoon coffee, weather permitting, at the stone table in the garden; and here, shortly after the posting of the momentous note to the agent, breaking the news of their intended departure, the Herr Major discovered Frances. Seven cups, flanking a tempting cake, round like a garland and sprinkled with delicately browned almonds, decorated the board, and it was evident that in a few moments the whole hungry tribe would launch themselves upon it.

Seated stiffly, and in full regimentals, opposite his hostess, in whose dark coils one of the girls had fastened a cluster of yellow primrose, the master of Grünau looked deprecatingly across the cake and coffee.

"Of course it's only a poor little place," he admitted, evidently having been informed of the impending catastrophe by his agent, "but if there is any improvement you could suggest — The servants? they are old house servants, and horribly opinionated, I fear."

"The servants are perfect."

"The dining-room is a barrack, I know, but if a few more rugs" —

"I like a bare dining-room."

"The gardener does not cut flowers enough, perhaps; the drawing-room is too sunny; the — the" —

But nothing the Herr Major could mention seemed to be at fault, and quite humbly he followed her eyes, which fluttered from bosky park to sunny terrace; from sunny terrace to glowing garden, as if in search of some defect, till finally they rested on an ivy-grown gable from whose open French window, quaint with thick-leaded panes, there stole the haunting cadence of an old German love song. It was Beatrice playing on her violin in an upper chamber, and the song of all others was *How can I leave thee*.

After the Herr Major had waited an embarrassing number of minutes, and no answer came to his question, he rose, his early formality wrapped about him like a garment.

"I understand, it is my too frequent presence at Grünau that is the disturbing element. My intentions have been too evident; my devotion unwelcome."

Frances in her turn rose stiffly, and gripped the edge of the table with both hands.

"Surely you must understand" — she stammered — "with these motherless girls to look out for — and I promised their mother on her deathbed — she was an unhappy woman — and I thought if I filled their minds with some interest like music — their mother hoped they never would marry."

"Who is speaking of marrying your sisters?" asked the Herr Major.

Frances flushed rose red.

"Pardon me; I thought — I understood" —

The Herr Major strode around the table.

"Surely you knew, Miss Jocelyn, it was you — you" —

"*Wie ist es möglich dass ich dich lassen kann,*" wailed the violin from the gable chamber. When had Beatrice ever played like that? Pricked on to speech by the aching pain in her heart, in part for the innocent little sister thus disclosing her inmost secret, in part, alas, for herself, Frances blurted out, —

"You mistake, Herr Major, it is only my half-sisters have the money."

"Now who, *in Gottes Namen*," said the major, in a singularly gentle voice, "has been tampering with you? Those words were never yours, *gnädiges Fräulein*. I have learned to know you too well; so simple, so clear of soul, so unworldly as only some of you American women can be. In your heart you never believed that, and the question of money, thank God, is not one I have to consider."

But Frances still drew back, lifting imploring eyes toward the gable window, where, if truth be told, the supposedly heart-broken younger sister was taking a gloating and bird's-eye view of the first proposal it had ever been her good fortune to witness.

"How can I, if — if she — if Beatrice" —

"Miss Beatrice?" said the Herr Major, catching at the name but missing the significance of the words; "it is through Miss Beatrice, my particular friend and ally, that I learn the young ladies have lost their hearts to Grünau, and nightly insert a petition into their prayers that their eldest sister may be moved to become *die Frau Major*."

PALMER'S HERBERT

BY A. V. G. ALLEN

GEORGE HERBERT is conventionally ranked among the minor poets. The classification has no great value, and instead of serving a useful purpose may only hinder the recognition of poetic greatness. In this edition of Herbert's poems, Professor Palmer has freed himself from the trammels of relative and conventional estimates. He has done for a minor poet, if such he must be called, what has hitherto only been done for the great masters of song. He has subjected him to a study, encyclopædic in its range, a study minute, thorough, and seemingly exhaustive. He has done a work never attempted before, and it is so final in its results that henceforth every student of Herbert must reckon with it. So long as Herbert is read, or studied, will Mr. Palmer be associated with his name, as the commentator who rescued him from the neglect or ignorance which obscured his meaning and purpose. It is no slight task which Mr. Palmer has accomplished. In the absence of creative work which is the characteristic of our time, he has lifted the veil from the poet of another age, and has revealed to us his beauty and his power. Herbert now lives again, better understood than he was even by his contemporaries, and he speaks to the modern world, bringing to it a message needed and longed for. He can hardly again be classed among minor poets. He is not to be judged by the amount of his poetic work alone but by its quality, by the purpose which inspired him, and by his influence on those who followed him. In the light in which Mr. Palmer has disclosed him he is great and to be ranked among the few to whom the world is most indebted.

Herbert has always had his admirers, — a small number it is true, — who have

seen that he possessed some subtle charm for the religious imagination beyond any other. Such was Mr. Emerson, who in his address on Books (1872) said of him: "He was a person of singular elevation of mind, and I think every young man and every young woman who wishes inspiration from books, should find for their Sunday reading and their Monday reading the little volume of George Herbert's poems. I speak of it, because it is a little the best religious English book that I recall. I don't know any one who has spoken so sweetly to the religious sentiment in us as George Herbert." The late Senator Hoar was a devotee of Herbert, one of those who was looking forward to the appearance of this new study of his life and works. Over the fireplace in his library at his home in Worcester were inscribed these lines from Herbert, —

Man is no starre, but a quick coal
Of mortall fire;
Who blows it not, nor doth controll
A faint desire,
Lets his own ashes choke his soul.

There is deep significance in the ups and downs of Herbert's popularity, or in the names of those who have admired him. In his own age he was recognized for his high merit by his friend Lord Bacon, by Walton and Bunyan; by other poets, — Donne, Vaughan, and Crashaw. King Charles I found solace in reading him; Baxter thought he spoke of God as one who knew Him. But in the eighteenth century he was neglected; with the exception of Addison, Cowper stands alone in praising him, "finding delight in reading him all day long." In the last century there came a renewed interest. "During the last quarter of the century," says Mr. Palmer, "a new edition of Herbert has appeared almost every other