

SCHROEDER'S BILL

BY PIERRE MILLE

[The author of this article states that he has in his possession, the actual voucher which passed in this transaction, and relates the incident as an excellent example of the "naive ingenuity approaching ironical astuteness", with which some German officials pad the expenses of the forces occupying their Country.]

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At the close of a certain day of this year of grace or misery—whichever you prefer to call it—1921, the Landrat of Schleiden, in the Rhine provinces occupied by French troops, unfolded his napkin at dinner with a decided frown upon his brow.

This napkin was inserted in a little bag, on which had been embroidered in red cotton by the Landrat's wife. *Love and Loyalty to Germany*. The reader may either forget or remember this detail, as he pleases. It is not important in our story.

The Landrat's wife regarded her husband with tender solicitude, but waited respectfully until he deigned to mention the cause of his care, or irritation.

"I have just received", he said surly, "a letter from the chairman of the Inter-allied High Commission, notifying me that it is proposed to station a deputy of the Commission at Schleiden, and requesting me to find him quarters. This deputy commissioner, the letter says, is a bachelor, and that inasmuch as the official residence of the Landrat is a large one, we will doubtless be able to allot a couple of our thirty-six apartments to this functionary."

"A Frenchman in my house!" cried the Landrat's lady, who was very patriotic. "I will not tolerate it".

"However, it is a fact", acknowledged her husband gloomily, "that we

have thirty-six rooms, most of which we do not use. We need let him have only two."

"But this Frenchman would also have the right to use the kitchen. He would send his servant there. That servant is undoubtedly a black man. We should have this black pest right in our home. Consider the cook."

The housemaid, who also served as waitress, pricked up her ears, visibly interested. She was clearly disappointed when the Landrat replied, "We have no more negroes in this section. They have all been taken back to France to a place they call, if I remember rightly, Saint Raphael".

"Anyway, he will have a servant or an orderly. I do not want strangers in my kitchen."

The Herr Landrat did not stop to suggest that for four years and a half, the French had plenty of occasion to say: "I do not want a German in my kitchen". He honestly felt that his wife was right. That is why he sent for his neighbor, Schroeder, a highway overseer, as soon as he had finished his substantial meal.

"Schroeder", he said, when the latter appeared, "your house has been selected to lodge a French deputy commissioner, who is to be stationed in the City of Schleiden, under the outrageous terms of the Versailles treaty. You will have to get out. However, about a mile from here, in the

little hamlet, Wiesgen, there is a very comfortable vacant residence, which I am requisitioning for you."

"*Es ist nicht gut*", said the overseer. "It will cost money".

"You will not have to pay, my friend. You will not have to pay. Theoretically, Germany pays, but actually it will be the Entente, and more particularly, France. Do not let that worry you. Charge a good price. . . and see here! Kravenckel Inn is very comfortable. Go down there with your wife for the time being. And tell them there that they need not be skimpy in their charges."

. Schroeder was very comfortable at Kravenckel Inn with his wife and his mother-in-law. He did not hurry, tarrying twenty-five days at that hostelry. His household goods were not numerous. They consisted of three beds, a few chairs and wardrobes, a table, a china closet, a cook stove, and a dozen chickens. The furniture did not have to be moved a great distance. Schroeder could easily walk from his former residence to Kravenckel Inn in a quarter of an hour. The drayman, who was a personal friend, said: "I will treat you well, and not charge you much."

But the overseer, who had quickly seized the hint given him by the Landrat, said: "No, no, do not let that bother you. Do not let that bother you. Suppose we have something to drink. What shall it be, beer?"

"I would prefer", said the drayman, "since you are so kind as to offer it, a little whiskey."

"Let me suggest something better than that—some French cognac. They have some first-class here at the Inn."

Finally, like everything else, this delightful sojourn drew to an end. The Herr Landrat summoned Schroeder,

Mrs. Schroeder, Schroeder's mother-in-law, Kravenckel—the Hotel proprietor—and the drayman, in order to draw up the expense voucher which was to be rendered to the Inter-allied High Commission. "My good friends," he said benevolently, "We understand that every one of you is entitled to his liberal compensation. Let's start out with Kravenckel. What is your bill?"

"At twenty-five marks a day each for three persons", began the hotel proprietor.

"Twenty-five marks!" shouted Schroeder. "Why you are silly. Twenty-five marks a person, at a little inn in a village of one thousand people! It was six marks before the war. Suppose we make it fifteen now, and that will be robbery!"

Kravenckel replied, somewhat confused and apologetic, "Why, you know, the Herr Landrat just said. . ."

"Yes, I suggested," murmured the Landrat gently, "that perhaps thirty—"

"Or even thirty-five", timidly intimated Kravenckel.

"Let us make it thirty-five", agreed the magistrate. "Now, thirty-five is better".

"I have indulged myself during my stay," interrupted Schroeder, happy at the turn things had taken, "with sixty-three glasses of beer, outside of meals, several glasses of wine and some fifty glasses of cognac, schnaps and biters, which you know are good for the digestion."

"Yes, the bill for that was one hundred ninety-eight marks", affirmed Kravenckel, with a glow of admiration in his countenance.

"Excellent!" observed the Herr Landrat.

"Make it one hundred ninety-eight

marks for extras, and two thousand, six hundred, twenty-five marks for board. Is that satisfactory to everyone?"

Apparently it was. Meantime, the drayman was rubbing his eyes. He had not been able yet to take in the situation.

"Come, what is yours?" asked the Landrat.

"Oh, you know it was not much of a load, and only a short distance."

"Short distance! Wisegen is not quite a mile from Schleiden, it is true. But then, it is outside the city limits, so it comes under the long distance tariff."

"Well, Herr Landrat, if you say so."

"And then, you had to use two drays, didn't you—two large drays? In any case, you ought to have done so. Charge for two drays. Then, you had to load them, unload them, go from your stable to the house, and also put up your horses at Wisegen."

"But, Herr Landrat, the horses and drays stayed out in the road at Wiesgen—

"That is not necessary. Let us say?—

"Well then," recited the drayman, as light began to dawn upon him, "two drays, five meters long, charge for hauling, long distance, twelve hundred marks; terminal charges at Schleiden, seven hundred fifty marks; stable charges at Wiesgen, twenty-six hundred marks; terminal charges at Wiesgen, ten hundred twenty-five marks; altogether, five thousand, three hundred seventy-five marks. If that is too much—

"No, no, no, no. Let us make it five thousand, three hundred seventy-five marks. That is a very fair figure.

Meantime, Frau Schroeder, the overseer's wife, had been watching them with shining eyes. "Hold on.

Wait a bit. There are my twelve chickens also".

"Did they die on the trip?"

"No, they are not dead."

"Too bad. We might have charged for them. What about it?"

"We had to bring them likewise—our chickens—to Wiesgen."

Schroeder, his wife, and his mother-in-law had tied the chickens' feet together, and transported them personally, head downward, the usual way of carrying chickens in the country. It made four chickens for each. Not a heavy load. However, this little detail did not interest the Landrat, who promptly agreed, "You are right, Frau overseer, and another thing, you had to feed those chickens for twenty-five days, didn't you?"

"Just as usual".

"That makes no difference. Charge for their food. I will put it down—transportation of chickens, feeding them, putting up and taking down a chicken coop, two hundred fifty-four marks."

That sum seemed perfectly fair to Schroeder's family, which showed proper gratitude to the Landrat. However, a new inspiration occurred just then to the overseer's wife.

"Herr Landrat, there was my sentimental suffering."

"Your sentimental suffering?"

"Yes, at leaving the house where I was born."

"Yes, the house of your life time—perfectly right. Now, we will put down, indemnification for the shock to the emotions of the overseer's wife, sixty marks. Is that all? Don't forget anything."

It appeared to be all. They sadly admitted that. As they were pondering on that fact, the overseer's wife suddenly remembered a litre of beans which a tricky grocer had sold her, and

which were not worth cooking. She exclaimed, "It was moving—they spoiled while we were moving."

"What spoiled?"

"Those beans."

So they added one hundred ten marks for the litre of beans which were spoiled by the family's temporary inability to cook them. Then they added up the column. After allotting a sum for repairing the new house, board at Kravenckel Inn, and the

drayman's bill, the total amounted to thirteen thousand, six hundred eighty-three marks. The Herr Landrat rubbed his hands, and signed his "verified and approved" at the bottom of this remarkable voucher, stamped it with the official seal of the City of Schleiden, and transmitted it to the chief representative of the Inter-allied High Commission, either with or without his compliments—the last point is the only one of which I am not certain.

BARRETT WENDELL: AMERICAN 'DISCOVERER' OF FRANCE

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If Frenchmen would appreciate the debt of recognition which their country owes to the American writer who has just died, let them take his volume of 1907, *France of Today*, and contrast it with the most significant, and most regarded book until that time on the same subject, *French Traits* by W. C. Brownell (1888). Only by putting side by side these two studies will they appreciate the road traversed by enlightened opinion in the United States:

The apparent contrast between modern Frenchmen and the crusaders, between the 'cafe-haunters' and the cathedral-builders, stimulates speculation as to whether the present interest of France is commensurate with her historic importance. The difference is as vast as that between gloom and gaiety, between the grandiose and the familiar, the mystic and the rational.

And Brownell had, indeed, to refer to the 'social instinct' all the antino-

mies which he observed, and to insist upon the fraternity diffused in the eternal France. One feels in his interpretation of our land, that a quality sinking to decadence did not cease to impress the observer, friendly though he professed to be.

Wendell, on the other hand, did not hesitate to proclaim that the force of the true French society was in the solidity of its *foyers*, in the persistence of its family spirit:

The first of human duties, instead of being individual, there becomes social and is based upon self-denial. The French are profoundly faithful to that ideal; if they had not practiced it through all generations, with a persistent loyalty and a zeal quite free of selfishness, French society would not exist in the form which it has inherited from the past and which it transmits to the future.

Whatever reserves the author might make in our other characteristics,