

AN INTERNATIONAL DIFFICULTY.

[Original.] Hans Becker and Gretchen Stiefel were German peasants, aged respectively sixteen and fifteen. Their fathers' little farms adjoined, and they went to school together. Hans was a tall, dark eyed young fellow, with a fine frame, though not yet properly filled out. Gretchen looked out of a pair of mild blue eyes, and a heavy coil of hair the hue of flax hung down her back to her knees. The two had played together as children and when they came into their teens were still inseparable.

One day Hans, after a consultation with his father, told Gretchen that he was going to America. An uncle had written from there that if Hans would come out he would give him a place in his brewing business and help him to make a fortune. The offer had been accepted. Hans would soon be seventeen years old, an age when every German man must serve his term of military duty before leaving the fatherland, therefore it had been determined that he should go before his next birthday.

Hans and Gretchen were as ignorant of love as at the day they were born. When Hans told her that he was going to America she turned pale, made a few little breath catches, then tears began to well up in her blue eyes. Hans, too, felt a choking in his throat. He folded her in his arms. For the first time it dawned upon them that they were lovers.

The day before Hans was seventeen he sailed for America. His uncle, who had made money, gave him an opportunity. He told him that if he would remain at the business for ten years without returning to Germany he might have a year's vacation, at the end of which he would receive a block of the stock of the brewing company that would make him rich and he should, if competent, be its manager. At the end of the time Hans had complied with the conditions and proved himself well fitted for a manager's position.

Hans and Gretchen had corresponded and pined for each other, and at the expiration of the ten years Hans went to Germany. He found Gretchen a lovely woman, though still a peasant, and they were married. It was in the summer, and they spent their honeymoon in Switzerland. A couple of months before the expiration of Hans' vacation his wife presented him with a son. But alas the boy was born with a club foot.

When Hans and his family were about to sail for America an officer served a paper on him detaining him from leaving Germany till he had served his term in the army. Then Hans knew what he had not known before or had forgotten—that if he remained more than nine months in Germany he again became a German citizen and liable to military duty.

Here was a misfortune. To remain in Germany for the purpose of hanging around a barrack for several years would be equivalent to giving up a fortune in America. Hans knew that the law on this subject was inexorable and was about to write his uncle relinquishing his interests in the brewing company when he discovered that the period spent in Switzerland had made him alien to Germany. He could stay in the fatherland for nine months more before again becoming a German citizen. This gave him a leeway of nearly two months. His wife was in poor health, and he deferred his departure for the United States till a few days before the expiration of the second nine months' period, which would again make him a German citizen.

On reaching New York he found that if the fatherland is jealous of her sons leaving her shores without having done military service the United States is equally jealous of any one coming within her borders who is not in all respects a desirable citizen. Little Heinrich Becker's club foot was an insurmountable obstacle to his being admitted to the national domain. In vain his father pleaded that he would not permit his boy to become a burden on the American people. The law refusing cripples is as inexorable as the law respecting army service in

Germany, though the reason for it is more humane.

It seemed that the only plan for the Becker family would be to go back to Germany. But if this plan were adopted the husband and father would reach German shores shortly after the expiration of the nine months' period, which would make him liable to military duty. Hans began to wish that the nations of the world would unite under one government, so that he might be a citizen of all. He was wanted in Germany, where he could not make a respectable living, that the emperor might be prepared to fight the powers; he was kept out of the United States, where a fortune awaited him, because his son happened to be born with a club foot.

However, Hans Becker had become an American and did not complain of the exceptional injustice of just laws. It was suggested to him that he go to Mexico with his family, from whose border he could easily enter the United States. But he disdained to break the law. He determined to send his wife and boy back to Germany, to have his boy's foot operated on by a surgeon and then bring mother and child back again. It happened that on the day they were to sail the head of the emigration bureau at Washington visited Ellis Island, where emigrants are received. The case was referred to him, and he decided that little Heinrich Becker might become one of the 90,000,000 people of the United States.

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