

*More About Germany
From Within*

Stephen Leacock

Illustrated by
C. W. Jefferys

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More About GERMANY FROM WITHIN

By STEPHEN LEACOCK

Author of "Sunshine Sketches of a Small Town," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY C. W. JEFFERYS



Two years ago as my readers will remember, but of course they don't, I made a secret visit to Germany during the height of the war. It was obviously quite impossible at that time to disclose the means whereby I made my way across the frontier. I therefore adopted the familiar literary device of professing to have been transported to Germany in a dream. In that state I was supposed to be conducted about the country by my friend Count Boob von Boobenstein, whom I had known years before as a waiter in Toronto, to see GERMANY FROM WITHIN, and to report upon it in the Allied press.

What I wrote attracted some attention. So the German Government feeling, perhaps, that the prestige of their own spy system was at stake, published a white paper, or a green paper, I forget which, in denial of all my adventures and disclosures. In this they proved (1) that all entry into Germany by dreams had been expressly forbidden of the High General

Command; (2) that astral bodies were prohibited and (3) that nobody else but the Kaiser was allowed to have visions. They claimed therefore (1) that my article was a fabrication and (2) that for all they knew it was humorous. There the matter ended until it can be taken up at the General Peace Table.

But as soon as I heard that the People's Revolution had taken place in Berlin I determined to make a second visit.

This time I had no difficulty about the frontier whatever. I simply put on the costume of a British admiral and walked in.

"Three cheers for the British Navy," said the first official whom I met. He threw his hat in the air and the peasants standing about raised a cheer. It was my first view of the marvellous adaptability of this great people.

I noticed that many of them were wearing little buttons with pictures of Jellicoe and Beatty.

At my own request I was conducted at once to the nearest railway station.

"So your Excellency wishes to go to Berlin?" said the stationmaster.

"Yes," I replied, "I want to see something of the People's Revolution."

The stationmaster looked at his watch.

"That Revolution is over," he said.

"Too bad!" I exclaimed.

"Not at all. A much better one is in progress, quite the best Revolution that we have had. It is called—Johann, hand me that proclamation of yesterday—the Workmen and Soldiers' Revolution."

"What's it about?" I asked.

"The basis of it," said the stationmaster, "or what we Germans call the Fundamental Ground Foundation, is universal love. They hanged all the leaders of the Old Revolution yesterday."

"When can I get a train?" I inquired.

"Your Excellence shall have a special train at once. Sir," he continued with a sudden burst of feeling, while a tear swelled in his eye. "The sight of your uniform calls forth all our gratitude. My three sons enlisted in our German Navy. For four years they have been at Kiel, comfortably fed, playing dominoes. They are now at home all safe and happy. Had your brave

navy relaxed its vigilance for a moment these boys might have had to go out on the sea, as they had never done. Please God,” concluded the good, old man, removing his hat a moment, “no German sailor now will ever have to go to sea.”

I pass over my journey to Berlin. Interesting and varied as were the scenes through which I passed they gave me but little light upon the true situation of the country: indeed I may say without exaggeration that they gave me as little, or even more so, as the press reports of our talented newspaper correspondents. The food situation seemed particularly perplexing. A well-to-do merchant from Bremen who travelled for some distance in my train assured me that there was plenty of food in Germany, except of course for the poor. Distress, he said, was confined entirely to these. Similarly a Prussian gentleman who looked very like a soldier but who assured me with some heat that he was a commercial traveller, told me the same thing. There were no cases of starvation, he said, except among the very poor.

The aspect of the people too, at the stations and in the towns we passed, puzzled me. There were no uniforms, no soldiers. But I was amazed at the number of commercial travellers, Lutheran ministers, photographers and so forth, and the odd resemblance they presented, in spite of their innocent costumes, to the arrogant and ubiquitous military officers whom I had observed on my former visit.

But I was too anxious to reach Berlin to pay much attention to the details of my journey.

Even when I at last reached the capital, I arrived, as I had feared, too late.

“Your Excellence,” said a courteous official at the railway station, to whom my naval uniform acted as a sufficient passport. “The Revolution of which you speak is over. Its leaders were arrested yesterday. But you shall not be disappointed. There is a better one. It is called the Comrades’ Revolution of the Bolsheviks. The chief Executive was installed yesterday.”

“Would it be possible for me to see him?” I asked.

“Nothing simpler, Excellency,” he continued as a tear rose in his eye, “my four sons—”

“I know,” I said, “your four sons are in the German Navy. It is enough. Can you take me to the Leader?”

“I can and will,” said the official. “He is sitting now in the Free Palace of all the German People, once usurped by the Hohenzollern Tyrant. The doors are guarded by machine guns. But I can take you direct from here through a back way. Come.”

We passed out from the station, across a street and through a maze of little stairways and passages into the heart of the great building that had been the offices of the Imperial Government.

“Enter this room. Do not knock,” said my guide. “Good bye.”

In another moment I found myself face to face with the chief comrade of the Bolsheviks.

He gave a sudden start as he looked at me, but instantly collected himself.

He was sitting with his big boots up on the mahogany desk, a cigar at an edgeways angle in his mouth. His hair under his sheepskin cap was shaggy and his beard stubbly and unshaven. His dress was slovenly and there was a big knife in his belt. A revolver lay on the desk beside him. I had never seen a Bolshevik before but I knew at sight that he must be one.

“You say you were here in Berlin once before?” he questioned, and he added before I had time to answer: “When you speak don’t call me ‘Excellency’ or ‘Sereneness’ or anything of that sort; just call me ‘brother’ or ‘comrade.’ This is the era of freedom. You’re as good as I am, or nearly.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Don’t be so damn polite,” he snarled. “No good comrade ever says thank you. So you were here in Berlin before?”

“Yes,” I answered, “I was here in the interests of MACLEAN’S MAGAZINE, writing up *Germany from Within* in the middle of the war.”

“The war, the war!” he murmured, in a sort of wail or whine. “Take notice, comrade, that I weep when I speak of it. If you write anything about me be sure to say that I cried when the war was mentioned. We Germans have been so misjudged. When I think of the devastation of France and Belgium I weep.”

He drew a greasy, red handkerchief from his pocket and began to sob. . . . “and the loss of all the English merchant ships!”

“Oh, you needn’t worry,” I said, “It’s all going to be paid for.”

“Oh I hope so, I do hope so,” said the Bolshevik chief. “What a regret it is to us Germans to think that unfortunately we are not able to help pay for it; but you English—you are so generous—how much we have admired your noble hearts—so kind, so generous to the vanquished. . .”

His voice had subsided into a sort of whine.

But at this moment there was a loud knocking at the door. The Bolshevik hastily wiped the tears from his face and put away his handkerchief.

“How do I look?” he asked, anxiously. “Not humane, I hope? Not soft?”

“Oh no,” I said, “quite tough.”

“That’s good,” he answered, “that’s good. But am I tough *enough*?”

He hastily shoved his hands through his hair.

“Quick,” he said, “hand me that piece of chewing tobacco. Now then. Come in!”



“I never see that uniform without it giving me the jumps,” said Von Tirpitz.

The door swung open.

A man in a costume, much like the leader’s, swaggered into the room. He had a bundle of papers in his hands, and seemed to be some sort of military secretary.

“Ha! Comrade!” he said, with easy familiarity. “Here are the death warrants!”

“Death warrants!” said the Bolshevik. “Of the leaders of the late Revolution? Excellent! And a good bundle of them! One moment while I sign them.”

He began rapidly signing the warrants, one after the other.

“Comrade,” said the secretary in a surly tone, “you are not chewing tobacco!”

“Yes, I am, yes, I am,” said the leader. “Or, at least, I was just going to.”

He bit a huge piece out of his plug with what seemed to me an evident distaste and began to chew furiously.

“It is well,” said the other. “Remember, comrade, that you are watched. It was reported last night to the Executive Committee of the Circle of the Brothers that you chewed no tobacco all day yesterday. Be warned, comrade. This is a free and independent republic. We will stand for no aristocratic nonsense. But whom have you here?” he added, breaking off in his speech, as if he noticed me for the first time. “What dog is this?”

“Hush,” said the leader, “he is a representative of the Foreign press, a newspaper reporter.”

“Your pardon,” said the secretary. “I took you by your dress for a prince. A representative of the great and enlightened press of the Allies, I presume. How deeply we admire in Germany the press of England! Let me kiss you.”

“Oh, don’t trouble,” I said. “It’s not worth while.”

“Say, at least, when you write to your paper, that I offered to kiss you, will you not?”

Meantime, the leader had finished signing the papers. The secretary took them and swung on his heels with something between a military bow and a drunken swagger. “Remember, comrade,” he said in a threatening tone as he passed out, “you are watched.”

The Bolshevik leader looked after him with something of a shudder.

“Excuse me a moment,” he said, “while I go and get rid of this tobacco.”

He got up from his chair and walked away towards the door of an inner room. As he did so, there struck me something strangely familiar in his gait and figure. Conceal it as he might, there was still the stiff wooden movement of a Prussian general beneath his assumed swagger. The poise of his head still seemed to suggest the pointed helmet of the Prussian. I could without effort imagine a military cloak about his shoulders instead of his Bolshevik sheepskin.

Then, all in a moment, as he re-entered the room, I recalled exactly who he was.

“My friend,” I said, reaching out my hand, “pardon me for not knowing you at once. I recognize you now. . . .”

“Hush,” said the Bolshevnik. “Don’t speak! I never saw you in my life.”

“Nonsense,” I said. “I knew you years ago in Canada when you were disguised as a waiter. And you it was who conducted me through Germany two years ago when I made my war visit. You are no more a Bolshevnik than I am. You are General Count Boob von Boobenstein.”

The general sank down in his chair, his face pale beneath his plaster of rouge.

“Hush!” he said. “If they learn it, it is death.”

“My dear Boob,” I said, “not a word shall pass my lips.”

The general grasped my hand. “The true spirit,” he said. “The true English comradeship; how deeply we admire it in Germany!”

“I am sure you do,” I answered. “But tell me, what is the meaning of all this? Why are you a Bolshevnik?”

“We all are,” said the Count, dropping his assumed rough voice, and speaking in a tone of quiet melancholy. “It’s the only thing to be. But come,” he added, getting up from his chair, “I took you once through Berlin in war time. Let me take you out again and show you Berlin under the Bolshevniks.”

“I shall be only too happy,” I said.

“I shall leave my pistols and knives here,” said Boobenstein, “and if you will excuse me I shall change my costume a little. To appear as I am would excite too much enthusiasm. I shall walk out with you in the simple costume of a gentleman. It’s a risky thing to do in Berlin but I’ll chance it.”

The Count retired and presently returned, dressed in the quiet bell-shaped purple coat, the simple scarlet tie, the pea-green hat and the white spats that mark the German gentleman all the world over.

“Bless me, Count,” I said. “You look just like Bernstorff.”

“Hush,” said the Count. “Don’t mention him. He’s here in Berlin.”

“What’s he doing?” I asked.

“He’s a Bolshevik; one of our leaders; he’s just been elected president of the Scavengers’ Union. They say he’s the very man for it. But come along and, by the way, when we get into the street talk English and only English. There’s getting to be a prejudice here against German.”

We passed out of the door and through the spacious corridors and down the stairways of the great building. All about were little groups of ferocious looking men, dressed like stage Russians, all chewing tobacco and redolent of alcohol.

“Who are all these people?” I said to the Count in a low voice.

“Bolsheviks,” he whispered. “At least they aren’t really. You see that group in the corner?”

“The ones with the long knives?” I said.

“Yes. They are, or at least they were, the orchestra of the Berlin Opera. They are now the Bolshevik Music Commission. They are here this morning to see about getting their second violinist hanged.”

“Why not the first?” I asked.

“They had him hanged yesterday. Both cases are quite clear. The men undoubtedly favored the war: one, at least, of them openly spoke disparagement of President Wilson. But come along. Let me show you our new city.”

We stepped out upon the street.

How completely it was changed from the Berlin that I had known!

My attention was at once arrested by the new and glaring signboards at the shops and hotels and the streamers with mottoes suspended across the street. I realized as I read them the marvellous adaptability of the German people and their magnanimity towards their enemies. Conspicuous in huge lettering was HOTEL PRESIDENT WILSON, and close beside it CABARET QUEEN MARY: ENGLISH DANCING. The street itself, which I remembered as the Kaiserstrasse, was now renamed on huge sign boards THE AVENUE OF THE BRITISH NAVY. Not far off one noticed the RESTAURANT MARSHAL FOCH side by side with the ROOSEVELT SALOON and the BEER GARDEN GEORGE V.

But the change in the appearance and costume of the men who crowded the streets was even more notable. The uniforms and the pointed helmets of

two years ago had vanished utterly. The men that one saw retained indeed their German stoutness, their flabby faces and their big spectacles. But they were now dressed for the most part in the costume of the Russian moujik, while some of them appeared in American wideawakes and Kentucky frock coats, or in English stovepipe hats and morning coats. A few of the stouter were in Highland costume.

“You are amazed,” said Boobenstein as we stood a moment, looking at the motley crowd.

“What does it mean?” I asked.

“One moment,” said the Count. “I will first summon a taxi. It will be more convenient, to talk as we ride.”

He whistled and there presently came lumbering to our side an ancient and decrepit vehicle which would have excited my laughter but for the seriousness of the Count’s face. The top of the conveyance had evidently long since been torn off leaving only the frame; the copper fastenings had been removed; the tires were gone; the doors were altogether missing.

“Our new 1919 model,” said the Count. “Observe the absence of the old-fashioned rubber tires, still used by the less progressive peoples. Our chemists found that riding on rubber was bad for the eye-sight. Note, too, the time saved by not having any doors.”

“Admirable,” I said.

We seated ourselves in the crazy conveyance, the Count whispered to the chauffeur an address which my ear failed to catch and we started off at a lumbering pace along the street.

“And now tell me, Mr. Boobenstein,” I said, “what does it all mean, the foreign signs and the strange costumes?”

“My dear sir,” he replied, “it is merely a further proof of our German adaptability. Having failed to conquer the world by war we now propose to conquer it by the arts of peace. Those people, for example, that you see in Scotch costumes are members of our Highland Mission about to start for Scotland to carry to the Scotch the good news that the war is a thing of the past, that the German people forgive all wrongs and are prepared to offer a line of manufactured goods as per catalogue sample.”

“Wonderful,” I said.

“Is it not?” said Von Boobenstein. “We call it the *From Germany Out* movement. It is being organized in great detail by our *Step from Under* Committee. They claim that already four million German voters are pledged to forget the war and to forgive the Allies. All that we now ask is to be able to put our hands upon the villains who made this war, no matter how humble their station may be, and execute them after a fair trial, or possibly before.”



It was merely a further proof of German adaptability.

The Count spoke with great sincerity and earnestness. “But come along,” he added, “I want to drive you about the city and show you a few of the leading features of our new national reconstruction. We can talk as we go.”

“But Von Boobenstein,” I said, “you speak of the people who made the war; surely you were all in favor of it?”

“In favor of it! We were all against it.”

“But the Kaiser,” I explained.

“The Kaiser, my poor master! How he worked to prevent the war! Day and night; even before anybody else had heard of it. ‘Boob,’ he said to me

one day with tears in his eyes, 'this war must be stopped.' 'Which war, Your Serenity?' I asked. 'The war that is coming next month,' he answered. 'I look to you, Count Boobenstein,' he continued, 'to bear witness that I am doing my utmost to stop it a month before the English Government has done anything.' ”

While we were thus speaking our taxi had taken us out of the roar and hubbub of the main thoroughfare into the quiet of a side street. It now drew up at the door of an unpretentious dwelling, in the window of which I observed a large printed card with the legend REVEREND MR. TIBBITS: *Private Tuition, English, Navigation and other Branches*. We entered and were shown by a servant into a little front room where a venerable looking gentleman, evidently a Lutheran minister, was seated in a corner at a writing table. He turned on our entering and at the sight of the uniform which I wore, jumped to his feet with a vigorous and unexpected oath.

“It is all right, Admiral,” said Count Von Boobenstein, “my friend is not really a sailor.”

“Ah!” said the other. “You must excuse me. The sight of that uniform always gives me the jumps.”

He came forward to shake hands and, as the light fell upon him, I recognized that grand old seaman, perhaps the greatest sailor that Germany has ever produced or ever will, Admiral Von Tirpitz.

“My dear Admiral!” I said, warmly. “I thought you were out of the country. Our papers said that you had gone to Switzerland for a rest.”

“No,” said the Admiral. “I regret to say that I find it impossible to get away.”

“Your Allied press,” interjected the Count, “has greatly maligned our German patriots by reporting that they have left the country. Where better could they trust themselves than in the bosom of their own people? You noticed the cabman of our taxi? He was the former chancellor, Von Bethman-Hollweg. You saw that stout woman with the apple cart at the street corner? Frau Bertha Krupp Von Bohlen. All are here, helping to make the new Germany. But come, Admiral, our visitor here is much interested in our plans for the reconstruction of the Fatherland. I thought that you might care to show him your designs for the new German navy.”

“A new navy!” I exclaimed, while my voice showed the astonishment and admiration that I felt. Here was this gallant old seaman, having just lost an entire navy, setting vigorously to work to make another. “But how can Germany possibly find the money in her present state for the building of new ships?”

“There are not going to be any ships,” said the great Admiral. “That was our chief mistake in the past, in insisting on having *ships* in the navy. Ships, as the war has shown us, are quite unnecessary to the German plan, they are not part of what I may call the German idea. The new navy will be built inland and elevated on piles and will consist—”

But at this moment a great noise of shouting and sudden tumult could be heard as if from the street.

“Some one is coming,” said the Admiral hastily. “Reach me my Bible.”

“No, no,” said the Count, seizing me by the arm. “The sound comes from the Great Square. There is trouble. We must hasten back at once.” He dragged me from the house.

We perceived at once, as soon as we came into the main street again, from the excited demeanour of the crowd and from the anxious faces of people running to and fro, that something of great moment must be happening.

Everybody was asking of the passerby: “What is loose? What is it?”

Ramshackle taxis, similar to the one in which we had driven, forced their way as best they could through the crowded thoroughfare, moving evidently in the direction of the Government buildings.

“Hurry, hurry!” said Von Boobenstein, clutching me by the arm, “or we shall be too late. It is as I feared.”

“What is it?” I said. “What’s the matter?”

“Fool that I was,” said the Count, “to leave the building. I should have known. And in this costume I am helpless.”

We made our way as best we could through the crowd of people who all seemed moving in the same direction, the Count, evidently a prey to the gravest anxiety, talking as if to himself and imprecating his own carelessness.

We turned the corner of a street and reached the edge of the great square. It was filled with a vast concourse of people. At the very moment in which we reached it a great burst of cheering rose from the crowd. We could see over the heads of the people that a man had appeared on the balcony of the Government Building, holding a paper in his hand. His appearance was evidently a signal for the outburst of cheers, accompanied by the waving of handkerchiefs. The man raised his hand in a gesture of authority. German training is deep: silence fell instantly upon the assembled populace. We had time in the momentary pause to examine, as closely as the distance permitted, the figure upon the balcony. The man was dressed in the blue overall suit of a workingman. He was bareheaded. His features, so far as we could tell, were those of a man well up in years, but his frame was rugged and powerful. Then he began to speak.

“Friends and comrades!” he called out in a great voice that resounded through the square. “I have to announce that a New Revolution has been completed.”

A wild cheer broke from the people.

“The Bolsheviks’ Republic is overthrown. The Bolsheviks are aristocrats. Let them die!”

“Thank Heaven for this costume,” I heard Count Boobenstein murmur at my side. Then he seized his pea-green hat and waved it in the air shouting: “Down with the Bolsheviks!”

All about us the cry was taken up.

One saw everywhere in the crowd men pulling off their sheepskin coats and tramping them under-foot with the shout: “Down with Bolshevism.” To my surprise I observed that most of the men had on blue overalls beneath their Russian costumes. In a few moments the crowd seemed transformed into a vast mass of mechanics.

The speaker raised his hand again. “We have not yet decided what the new Government will be.”

A great cheer from the people.

“Nor do we propose to state who will be the leaders of it.”

Renewed cheers.

“But this much we can say. It is to be a free, universal, Pan-German Government of love.”

Cheers.

“Meantime, be warned! Whoever speaks against it will be shot; anybody who dares to lift a finger will be hanged. A proclamation of Brotherhood will be posted all over the city. If anybody dares to touch it, or to discuss it, or to look at or to be seen reading it, he will be hanged to a lamp post.”

Loud applause greeted this part of the speech while the faces of the people, to my great astonishment, seemed filled with genuine relief and beamed with unmistakable enthusiasm.

“And now,” continued the speaker. “I command you, you dogs, to disperse quietly and go home. Move quickly, swine that you are, or we shall open fire upon you with machine guns.”

With the last outburst of cheering the crowd broke and dispersed, like a vast theatre audience. On all sides were expressions of joy and satisfaction. “Excellent, Wunderschön,” “He calls us dogs! That’s splendid. Swine! Did you hear him say ‘Swine’? This is true German Government again at last.”

Then just for a moment the burly figure reappeared on the balcony.

“A last word!” he called to the departing crowd. “I omitted to say that all but one of the leaders of the late Government are already caught. As soon as we can lay our thumb on the Chief Executive rest assured that he will be hanged.”

“Hurrah!” shouted Boobenstein, waving his hat in the air. Then in a whisper to me: “Let us go,” he said, “while the going is still good.”

We hastened as quickly and unobtrusively as we could through the dispersing multitude, turned into a side street and, on a sign from the Count, entered a small cabaret or drinking shop, newly named as its sign showed, THE GLORY OF THE BRITISH COLONIES CAFE.

The Count with a deep sigh of relief ordered wine.

“You recognized him, of course,” he said.

“Who?” I asked. “You mean the big workingman who spoke. Who is he?”

“So you didn’t recognize him,” said the Count. “Well, well, but of course all the rest did. Workingman! It is Field Marshal Hindenburg. It means of

course that the same old crowd are back again. That was Ludendorff standing below. I saw it all at once. Perhaps it is the only way. But as for me I shall not go back. I am too deeply compromised; it would mean death.”

Boobenstein remained for a time in deep thought, his fingers beating a tattoo on the little table. Then he spoke.

“Do you remember,” he said, “the old time of long ago when you first knew me?”

“Very well, indeed,” I answered. “You were one of the German waiters, or rather, one of the German officers disguised as waiters at McKonkey’s Restaurant in Toronto.”

“I was,” said the Count. “I carried the beer on a little tray and opened oysters behind a screen. It was a wunderschön life. Do you think, my good friend, you could get me that job again?”

“Boobenstein,” I exclaimed, “I can get you reinstated at once. It will be some small return for your kindness to me in Germany.”

“Good,” said the Count. “Let us sail at once for Canada.”

“One thing, however,” I said, restraining him. “You may not know that since you left there are no longer beer waiters in Toronto because there is no beer. All is forbidden.”

“Let me understand myself,” said the Count in astonishment. “No beer!”

“None whatever.”

“Wine then?”

“Absolutely not. All drinking, except of water, is forbidden.”

The Count rose and stood erect. His figure seemed to regain all its old-time Prussian rigidity. He extended his hand.

“My friend,” he said. “I bid you farewell.”

“Where are you going to?” I asked.

“My choice is made,” said Von Boobenstein. “There are worse things than death. I am about to surrender myself to the German authorities.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *More About Germany From Within* by Stephen Leacock]