

A SHATTERED IDOL.

GERMAN AUTHOR'S CAREER

CURIOUS LIBEL CASE.

From Our Own Correspondent.

BERLIN, Tuesday.

Germany, and especially young Germany, has to-day been robbed of one of its most cherished illusions. Who has not heard of Karl May, traveller, author, and man of adventure? He has written a whole library describing his explorations in remote corners of the earth, and many a story-book based on his strange experiences in those far lands. His villa at Dresden is crowded with curies which he has brought back from his wanderings, and it has often happened that a princely personage has dropped in to inspect the private museum of the veteran voyager. It was understood that Karl May spoke all languages that no one else in the immediate neighbourhood knew anything about. Chinese and Choctaw were but the beginning of the linguistic attainments attributed to him.

Such was the Karl May of yesterday. But to-day has changed all that, for he was so indiscreet as to appear as prosecutor in a libel action. Someone, it appears, had referred to him as a "born criminal." Unfortunately for him the person in question undertook to prove that accusation, and his lawyer told a story about Karl May very nearly as strange as those which that prolific writer is in the habit of telling about himself—only of rather a different order.

To begin with, he offered to prove that the far-travelled May, who is now 68 years of age, had never been outside Germany till 1900, when his works of travel had long been getting a little musty. He admitted that May had experienced adventures, and those of a very remarkable kind. In 1869, he said, the plaintiff, who already had sentences of six weeks' imprisonment and four years' penal servitude behind him, relapsed into a career of crime, and was soon being wanted on a warrant. To escape arrest he took refuge in the depths of the Silesian forests, where he found a fellow outlaw in the deserter Louis Kruegel, who had left his regiment with several hundred thalers out of the company's cash-box. The pair swore eternal friendship, and agreed, with other kindred spirits, to found a band of robbers. A cave curtained with moss on the Waldenburg domain was the headquarters of May and his merry men. From this centre they practised innumerable villainies. Their speciality was to attack peasant women returning from market and rob them of the produce

of their sales.

At last their raids established such a state of terror that attendance at the markets began to fall off. The towns of Hohenstein and Ernstthal accordingly entreated the Government to send a force of troops to clear the neighbourhood of the bandits. This was done, and with the assistance of the local fire brigades and gymnastic clubs the soldiers proceeded to beat the woods. The two ringleaders of the robber band saved themselves by an ingenious and daring trick. Among the plunder piled up in their cave they had found the uniform of a Saxon warder. This May put on, and, having tied Kruegel's hands behind his back, he marched him unmolested through the encompassing ring. On another occasion they were sitting in an inn, when a couple of gendarmes who were searching for them rode up. As the gendarmes entered the building May and Kruegel dropped from a window, and, leaping on to the horses, galloped off.

These were the most interesting, though by no means the only incidents of a questionable nature which the defendant proposed to prove out of the life of the famous Karl May. The latter denied the truth of these tales, but was obliged to admit his acquaintance with the inside of prison walls, though under what circumstances he declined to state. To make a long story short, the Court, without calling on the defendant to prove his assertions, dismissed the case, and Germany has lost another of its illusions.