

CHERISHED GERMAN WAS ONCE A BANDIT

Karl May, Boys' Hero, Posed for
Years as a Great Traveler
and Man of Adventure.

EXPOSED IN LIBEL CASE

Man He Sued Offers to Prove His
Travels Imaginary, and May Ad-
mit He Is an ex-Convict.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
LONDON, April 16.—Germany, ac-
cording to Berlin dispatches to London
papers, lost one of its most cherished
illusions this week.

Every youth in Germany knew the
name of Karl May, traveler, author, and
man of adventure. He had written
a whole library describing his explora-
tions in remote corners of the earth
and many story books based on his
strange experiences in those far lands.
His villa at Dresden is crowded with
curios which he brought back from his
wanderings, and it often happened that
a Princely personage dropped in to in-
spect the private museum of the vet-
eran voyager.

It was understood that Karl May
spoke all the languages about which no
one else in the immediate neighborhood
knew anything. Chinese and Choctaw
were but the beginning of the linguistic
attainments attributed to him.

Such was the Karl May of yesterday.
To-day has changed all that, for he was
so indiscreet as to appear as the pros-
ecutor in a libel action. Some one, 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 a rather different or-
der.

To begin with, he offered to prove
that the far-traveled May, who is now
33 years of age, had never been out-
side of Germany till in 1900, when his
works of travel had long since been
getting a little musty. He admitted,
however, that May had experienced ad-
ventures, and those of a very remark-
able kind.

In 1869, he said, the plaintiff, who
already had sentences of six years' im-
prisonment and four years' penal serv-
itude behind him, relapsed into a career
of crime and was soon being sought
on a warrant. To escape arrest he
took refuge in the depths of the Si-
lesian forests, where he found a fel-
low-outlaw, in a deserter, Louis Krü-
gel, who had left his regiment with
several hundred thalers out of the regi-
mental cash box.

The pair swore eternal friendship, and
agreed with other kindred spirits to
found a band of robbers.

A cave, curtained with moss, in the
Waldenburg domain, was the head-
quarters of May and his merry men.
From this centre they practiced in-
numerable villainies. Their specialty
was to attack peasant women returning
from market and rob them of the prod-
uct of their sales. At last their raids
established such a state of terror that
attendance at the market began to fall
off. The towns of Hohenstein and
Ernstthal accordingly entreated the
Government to send a force of troops
to clear the neighborhood of bandits.

This was done, and, with the assist-
ance of the local fire brigades and
gymnastic clubs, 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 Krügel's
hands behind his back, he marched
him unmolested through the encom-
passing 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 Krügel dropped from a win-
dow, and, leaping on to their horses,
galloped off.

These were the most interesting al-
though not the only incidents of a ques-
tionable nature which the defendant
purposed 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 ac-
quaintance with the inside of prison
walls, although under what circum-
stances 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 thus lost another of
its illusions.