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CASTLE HOHENWALD

A ROMANCE

AFTER THE GERMAN

OF

ADOLPH STRECKFUSS

AUTHOR OF "TOO RICH," ETC.

BY MRS. A. L. WISTER

TRANSLATOR OF "THE OLD MAM'SELLE'S SECRET," "THE SECOND WIFE," "TOO RICH," "MARGARETHE," "ONLY A GIRL," ETC.

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CASTLE HOHENWALD.

CHAPTER I.

The music ceased. The gentlemen led their partners to their various chaperones, and then crowded out upon the balcony to enjoy the cool spring breeze, giving no attention to the remonstrances of their host, the President, who, when he found how little heed was paid to his warning against imprudence, turned away, declaring to his friend the colonel that there really was nothing to be done with the heedless young people of the present day. "They trifle with their health as if their nerves were of iron and illness impossible," he added, a little out of humour, perhaps, at the neglect of his advice.

"Why then, old friend, do you give a ball in April?" the colonel asked, laughing.

"Could I help being born on the 20th of April? My son and daughter insist upon my keeping up the old custom and celebrating the occasion by a ball. This year it is perfect folly, but then no one could foretell this early warm spring."

"Come, never trouble yourself about those young people; my officers have often braved more sudden changes of temperature in the field without being any the worse."

"But the Assessor? His constitution is none of the strongest."

"And suppose he does take cold; 'twill do him no harm. Come, come, let the young people alone. We were once not a whit more prudent ourselves."

And as he spoke the colonel took his old friend's arm and led him back into the ball-room, while the young officers upon the balcony, who had overheard all that had been said, laughingly grouped themselves about the Assessor, rallying him upon the anxiety with regard to his health manifested by the President.

"The President is right," said a black-bearded cuirassier, inclining his tall figure towards the slightly-built Assessor. "You ought to take care of yourself, my dear Assessor; the sensitive nature of which you so often tell us can never endure what our coarser constitutions brave with impunity. Put an end to the anxiety of your future father-in-law and leave the balcony, I beseech you."

"Herr von Saldern, I beg----"

"Do not make the fair Adèle a widow before she is a wife," chimed in another officer.

"Herr von Arnim, such remarks are very much out of place. It is true that I am peacefully disposed. I make no boast of it, for the gifts of nature----"

"Are variously distributed," Herr von Arnim interrupted the Assessor by completing his sentence. "Do we not frequently hear from your own lips how lavishly mother nature has endowed you, denying you the gift of a robust constitution alone? Spare your precious health,--preserve yourself for the fair Adèle, and for us, your tenderly attached friends; follow the kind President's advice."

The Assessor gazed helplessly at the laughing faces about him; he was the only civilian among these reckless young fellows, and he knew that any serious remonstrance would but provoke anew Arnim's love of chaff. The more prudent part was to laugh too and yield the field. This he did, leaving the balcony and re-entering the ball-room.

To his astonishment he here recognized an acquaintance whom he had not met for a long time, and he hastened across the room to greet him, doubly pleased, since, if Arnim should chance to rally him upon his flight, he could now declare that he had left the balcony to welcome the arrival of Count Styrum.

The Count, a man of about the age of thirty years, was standing in the background of the ball-room, in the doorway of one of the antechambers, thoughtfully contemplating the brilliant scene. The élite of the large provincial town was assembled in the President's rooms to-night, men high in office, with their wives and daughters, the officers of the garrison, and the most aristocratic of the county gentry.

The President enjoyed giving splendid entertainments, and his wealth and position entirely justified him in gratifying his taste in this direction. The hospitalities of his house were quite famous,--his balls had been mentioned with favour by royalty itself,--had not the Prince, upon a visit to the town, accepted an invitation to one of these birthday fêtes, and declared afterwards that he had never attended a more brilliant entertainment or seen a more charming collection of lovely women?

Count Styrum, too, thought that he had rarely seen so many lovely faces assembled in one room, and he gazed with delight at the charming groups laughing and jesting on all sides, wondering while he gazed whom he should pronounce fairest among so many that were fair. His doubt on this head vanished, however, as his eye fell upon a young girl seated upon a low divan near him.

He was quite lost for a moment in admiration of her beauty; the features might, it is true, have been more regular, but the face was indescribably lovely and attractive. The slightly pouting lips could surely smile charmingly, although now there were pensive lines about the mouth which accorded well with the melancholy expression of the large and eloquent brown eyes.

The Count felt an immediate and lively interest in this lovely girl; he had never seen her before, and yet he longed to know why she, the fairest among this gay throng, should look so sad and take apparently so little interest in what was going on around her.

She could hardly number twenty years; could she be preyed upon by any secret grief? What was she thinking of at this moment? Scarcely of the whispered words of the man on the low seat beside her, for she never looked at him, and even turned away from him with a gesture betokening that his conversation was anything but agreeable to her.

"I see I am right! It is really yourself, my dear Count. I thought you were in Rome or Naples, and am most heartily delighted to welcome you here!"

It was thus that the Assessor addressed the Count, who, in contemplation of the beautiful girl on the divan, had not noticed his approach. Now, however, he held out his hand, saying, not unkindly, and with a smile, "You here in the provinces, my dear Hahn? I had not expected to meet the lion of the metropolis here; how does it happen?"

The Assessor, greatly flattered by the question, conceitedly twirled his light moustache and tried to look as much as possible like a flaxen-haired lion of the metropolis; not very successfully, however. His face would look boyish in spite of the moustache, and his head barely reached to his distinguished friend's shoulder, as he replied, "I have been here two years. Just after your departure, when I had passed my third examination, I was appointed to the post of assessor here. It is true that we forego much in the provinces, where however the heart finds truer contentment than amid the whirl of the capital, and therefore I am abundantly satisfied with my present life, which, unfortunately, I must shortly resign, for I am ordered to Altstadt. It is difficult to tear one's self away from loved surroundings and companionship. I am endowed with more than my share of sensibility, I know; not that I would make a boast of it, for it is mine from the hand of nature, and her gifts are variously bestowed."

A smile hovered upon the Count's lips as he replied, "I am glad to find you unchanged, my dear Hahn. Of course you are entirely at home in this society, where I am a total stranger. Not a soul in the room do I know except my uncle Guntram and my cousins Adèle and Heinrich. You will tell me who all these delightful people are."

"With pleasure. I know all your uncle's guests. You know the poetry of my nature. I make no boast; nature's gifts are various, but as a poet nothing interests me more than the study of human feeling and aspiration. You have applied to the right quarter for information with regard to the character and circumstances of all these people."

"I am sure of it. I have always admired your obliging amiability no less than your profound study of character."

"You do me honour. I am obliging by nature, but I make no boast of it. Question me; I am quite at your service."

"To put you instantly to the test, tell me who is the charming girl dressed simply but elegantly in white, there, on the divan to my left, with brown hair and the wreath of snow-drops; the beautiful creature who evidently cares not one whit for all that the fellow with the black beard, leaning over her, is pouring so eagerly into her ear."

The Assessor listened with a smile to this enthusiastic description. "Evidently hit, my dear Count," he said.

"Not at all; but the melancholy on that charming face interests me excessively."

"Poor Frau von Sorr! She may well be melancholy."

"Frau? Impossible! You do not know whom I mean."

"Ah! yes I do. No one could fail to know from your description, and it is not to be wondered at that you take Frau von Sorr for a young girl: it is the same with every one who first sees her. She is just twenty-two and looks much younger."

"And the man talking to her is, I suppose, her husband."

"Not at all. That is Count Repuin, an enormously wealthy Russian, a bosom-friend of Herr von Sorr, and a gambler and spendthrift, who throws away his money by thousands. They say Herr von Sorr knows how to pick it up, and that is the secret of the friendship between them, and also why Sorr allows Repuin to pay such court to his wife."

"And does she encourage it?" Count Styrum asked. "How deceived one may be by a face! I thought hers so innocent and refined in expression."

"And the expression does not belie her," the Assessor rejoined. "Herr von Sorr is a despicable fellow enough, and bears the worst possible reputation; but scandal itself could not touch his charming wife. It is only on her account that he is endured in society in spite of his notorious past and his more than doubtful present. Your uncle would never have invited him here to-night except for the sake of his wife, who is the dearest friend of Fräulein Adèle."

"But the Russian----"

"Is desperately in love with her. He throws away incredible sums upon her worthless husband, while she sternly refuses to accept any of his attentions. My observation is naturally very keen. I make no boast of it, but it is; and I am convinced that at this moment that poor woman is suffering agonies because, without exciting observation, and for the sake of her good-for-nothing husband, she cannot repulse that fellow indignantly."

The Assessor's words increased the interest with which the beautiful Frau von Sorr had inspired the Count, and it was still further heightened by a little scene that passed unobserved by

any eyes in the ball-room except his own and the Assessor's.

Frau von Sorr, who had hitherto endured, rather than heard, in perfect silence what her neighbour was saying to her, never even varying by a look the cold indifference of her bearing, suddenly turned upon him eyes flashing with indignation. The delicate colour in her cheek deepened to crimson, the beautiful lips unclosed as if to speak, when suddenly second thoughts seemed to assert their sway, and rising, with a look of inexpressible contempt at Repuin, she turned from him and walked slowly across the ball-room to join a group of young girls gathered about the daughter of the house, Adèle von Guntram.

"What does that mean, do you think?" Count Styrum asked the Assessor.

"It means that the fellow went too far, and she turned her back upon him."

"Poor young creature! she interests me, and I must hear more of her; pray tell me, my dear Hahn, what you know of her husband."

"Certainly. What I know everybody knows, and there can be no indiscretion in relating it; for the world I would not be indiscreet. In fact, I am discretion itself. I make no boast of it, but I am. Of course I may tell you what all the world knows. Well, then, Herr von Sorr is utterly worthless. In the last few years he has squandered his own considerable property and his wife's fortune upon all sorts of follies, and worse, in the capital. What he now lives upon no one knows. All sorts of strange stories are told about that. They may not all be true, of course, but there must be some foundation for them, since Lieutenant von Arnim lately declared that he would not play when Herr von Sorr kept the bank, and that he did not like to have him for next neighbour when he kept it himself, for it was so disagreeable to have to keep a sharp eye upon the pile of money before him."

"Rather strong, I should say."

"It was indeed; but no one expressed any surprise at Arnim's declaration; indeed, I heard it whispered that one night when he sat next Sorr at play a hundred-thaler note had unaccountably disappeared; as I said, the man's character, or want of it, is such that were it not for his lovely wife every respectable house in the town would be closed against him."

"But how did the fellow come to have so lovely a wife?"

"Six years ago, when he married Fräulein Lucie Ahlborn, his reputation was good; he was held to be a wealthy man of rank, and such he was, although even then he had squandered a large part of his property. Herr Ahlborn, his wife's father, was a rich manufacturer; he never thought of saying 'no' when Sorr applied for his daughter's hand,--he was probably flattered by the proposal,--and if he thought the young man rather wild, supposed that marriage would cure all that. Fräulein Ahlborn brought her husband a fine estate, which she had inherited from her mother."

"Was she forced into the marriage by her father?"

"Not at all. I do not know that she was very devoted to her bridegroom, but possibly she was, for he was a handsome enough young fellow,--his wild life has told upon him now,--but then he might easily have captivated the fancy of a girl of sixteen. This I grant, although I was a student then, visiting very frequently at Herr Ahlborn's, and a little in love with the fair Lucie myself, which did not prepossess me in favour of my fortunate rival. Neither I nor any one else dreamed that Sorr would ever sink so low as he has done. Everybody thought the match an excellent one, and regretted that the charming couple withdrew to the retirement of Frau von Sorr's estate to enjoy their conjugal felicity. Their seclusion, however, did not last longer than a few months. They then returned to town, where Sorr played like a madman, kept a costly racing stud, and spent huge sums upon a notorious ballet-girl, scandalously neglecting his poor wife, who, however, bore her sad fate with divine patience. Fortune dealt her its heaviest blows, for she lost her father, with whom she might have sought a refuge from her husband. Herr Ahlborn was ruined by the bankruptcy of a large business firm, and failed. There might have been some composition with his creditors, but being a man of an even exaggerated sense of honour, he gave up everything. Not one of his creditors lost a penny, but he forfeited his entire fortune. His business friends offered him money and credit wherewith to re-open his manufactory, but he could not endure the thought of beginning life again in a place where he had occupied so high a position. He became gloomy and misanthropic, even refusing to accept assistance from his daughter, who would gladly have given it to him. Taking with him but a small sum of money, the remnant of his large fortune, he left the scene of his former activity, ostensibly to sail for America. They say he never took leave of one of his old friends, but went, without even bidding good-bye to his daughter. This was more than four years ago, and nothing has since been heard of him; he has never written to his daughter, and she does not even know the name of the vessel in which he sailed from Germany. Shortly before his departure he declared that he would either return as a wealthy man or not at all. If he really went to America, which is doubtful, he may not have been successful; perhaps he is dead,--no one knows anything about him. His daughter mourned him deeply; but she soon needed to mourn still more deeply for herself for her miserable husband, after spending all his own fortune, did the same by hers, mortgaging her estate until it had to be sold. Since that took place, how he lives is a mystery. I have told you

some of the current explanations of it, and I am sure you must now find it very natural that there should be an expression of melancholy upon Frau von Sorr's lovely face."

The doors of the adjoining supper-room were here opened, and the Assessor broke off his long narrative, saying, "Excuse me, my dear Count, for leaving you, but duty calls. Your charming cousin, Fräulein Adèle, has promised to allow me to take her to supper."

And bowing, he hurried towards the group of ladies, of which Adèle was the centre. He need not have been in any haste, however, for she herself, accompanied by Frau von Sorr, advanced to meet him, saying, with an enchanting smile that transported the little man to the seventh heaven, "I have a request to make of you, Herr von Hahn, and I am sure you will grant it."

"Ask what you will, Fräulein Adèle. You cannot ask what I shall not be proud to grant."

"I will not put your amiability to any severe test," she rejoined; "the fulfilment of my request brings with it its own reward. Pray take my dear Lucie, instead of myself, in to supper."

The Assessor was not altogether charmed, since he had engaged his fair partner for supper a week previously; but he was too courteous to allow a shade of disappointment to appear in his countenance, and his momentary annoyance vanished when Adèle continued, "We must be neighbours at supper, however; keep two places for me at your table, and I will follow you with my cousin, Count Styrum, who, not knowing the customs of our house, has, I fear, engaged no one to go with him to supper."

The Assessor was made supremely happy by her words and manner. Never had this charming creature, to whom for the time he was devoted heart and soul, treated him with such a degree of amiable confidence. He knew better than any one else how far he was from the attainment of his hopes, and therefore the badinage of his military friends had for him a peculiar sting; but now on a sudden his fair one's manner was such as seemed to him to justify his aspirations.

It was the custom at the President's to have the supper-room arranged with many small tables, accommodating each from four to eight persons, at which the guests seated themselves in groups selected among themselves beforehand. This obviated the necessity for caution lest the rules of precedence should be infringed,--a very important consideration in a provincial town,--and greatly promoted the ease and comfort of the guests.

With his head proudly erect, the Assessor conducted Frau von Sorr into the adjoining room, into which other couples were thronging. He soon found an unoccupied table, and was looking round for Count Styrum and Adèle, when Count Repuin approached, and, without according him any salute or attention, addressed Frau von Sorr. "Surely, madame, you cannot have forgotten that you promised me the honour of your society at supper?"

The Count uttered these words in a tone almost of menace, scarcely consistent with the rules of polite society. He was, as was evident from his flashing eyes and his dark frown, controlling himself with difficulty, and the Assessor was very much embarrassed. He was perfectly conscious of the obligation laid upon him to assert his right to escort to supper Frau von Sorr, whose hand still rested upon his arm, but such assertion was by no means easy,--the Russian's gleaming black eyes were so wrathful, and just at the moment the Assessor could not but remember the man's reputation as an unerring pistol-shot, and his great readiness to send a challenge.

Poor Herr von Hahn! He had a most uncomfortable sensation about the throat, somewhat as if his cravat had been suddenly tightened. He cleared it, but could scarcely utter a word; nevertheless something must be ventured, else what would Fräulein Adèle, what would all his acquaintances say? "Count Repuin, excuse me, but I have the honour of being this lady's escort----"

Count Repuin looked down upon him with undisguised contempt as he rather stammered than uttered these words, and then haughtily replied, with a coldness that was almost insulting, "I did not address you, sir. It was not of your mistake that I spoke, but of Frau von Sorr's. Of course you will yield me the right I desire as soon as madame accords it to me."

"Which I shall not do," Frau von Sorr interposed.

She had relinquished the support of the Assessor's arm, and stood tall and stately before the Count, meeting his eye with calm resolve, evidently ready to brave his anger.

Repuin's face flushed crimson,--he bit his lip, and said, with forced calmness, "Have you forgotten, madame, that by your husband's permission I this morning requested to be allowed to conduct you to supper to-night, and that you consented to my request?"

"I have forgotten nothing. Count Repuin, not even the words you addressed to me a few moments ago; let me beg you to leave me."

"I refuse to yield my right," the Count angrily retorted. "If you deny me thus, I must appeal to Herr von Sorr to support my claim."

"I think not, Count Repuin. My friend Frau von Sorr is, I trust, secure from all insult beneath

my father's roof."

The words were Adèle von Guntram's. She had arrived, leaning upon Count Styrum's arm, just in time to hear Repuin's angry threat, and now, stepping to her friend's side, she turned to Count Repuin with a degree of dignity and resolution that added much to the Assessor's already great astonishment at such a manifestation on the part of so gentle and amiable a girl, and said, "You have permitted yourself to be carried away by your annoyance, Count, to the extent of addressing a lady in terms inconsistent with our German ideas of courtesy. I must beg you to apologise to my friend."

Count Repuin angrily compressed his lips, but he perfectly understood that he had gone too far, and that upon this antagonist he had not reckoned. If he would not entirely lose the game he was playing he must control himself, and, difficult although it might be, comply with Adèle's demand. He therefore smothered his rage, and, taking Adèle's hand and kissing it with respectful humility, he said, "You shame me, Fräulein von Guntram, yet I cannot but be grateful to you for recalling me to a sense of the duty which, according not only to German ideas, but also to those entertained in Russia and throughout the world, every gentleman owes to a lady whom he has been so unfortunate as to offend. I beg Frau von Sorr's pardon from my soul, and venture to hope for her forgiveness, the more confidently as my irritation was the consequence of my great disappointment at losing a pleasure which she will admit I had some right to anticipate."

Frau von Sorr heeded his apology no more than his threat, but turned to Adèle, who replied to his words and farewell bow by a cool and dignified curtsey.

As soon as he was out of hearing the young girl gave a sigh of relief "Thank Heaven, he is gone! He actually terrifies me, and I had to muster up all my courage to become my poor Lucie's defender. The man is indescribably odious,--Russian from head to foot,--rough, coarse, and brutally passionate one moment, courteous, smooth, and smiling the next, but always false and untrustworthy. However, he has gone, and we will not spoil our pleasure by thinking of him an instant longer. Cousin Karl, let me present you to my dearest friend, Frau von Sorr. My cousin, Count Karl Styrum, Lucie dear; and now let us enjoy our supper together."

CHAPTER II.

Count Karl Styrum had never been very fond of large entertainment, and had accepted his uncle the President's invitation on this evening only because he did not wish to be rude to a relative whom he had not seen for years. The ball had hitherto been rather a bore; he did not dance, and, stranger as he was in this society, he took little interest in watching others dance. The only figure that his eyes followed with any pleasure in the waltz was his cousin Adèle's, and he had intended to slip from the room unobserved, when her gracious and cousinly invitation to him to conduct her to supper frustrated his unsocial plan.

He could not refuse so amiable a proposal, but he promised himself but little entertainment in her society, since, although cousins, they were now almost entire strangers to each other. He had last visited his uncle, his mother's brother, ten years before, when Adèle was a pretty little girl with fair curls, whom he had made a pet of and called his little sweetheart. In the busy years that ensued he had almost forgotten her; indeed, he had hardly remembered her name. Now he had come to M---- to arrange a personal adjustment with his uncle of a lawsuit between them concerning an inherited estate. It had been the cause of a not quite friendly correspondence, and the Count had not looked forward to a renewal of intercourse with his relatives without some misgivings. He was all the more pleased, therefore, by the cordiality with which his uncle received him, and begged him to forget the odious lawsuit entirely, except when it absolutely demanded attention as a matter of business.

"I think, my dear Karl," the President said, when the Count first presented himself at his house a few days before the birthday ball, "we can manage to leave all quarrelling over mine and thine to our lawyers; let us do all we can to aid in the settlement of the question, but if this settlement be delayed, do not, for Heaven's sake, let it disturb the friendliness of our relations with each other any more than should our difference in politics, which latter, most unfortunately, embittered your father towards me during the last years of his life; to the day of his death he could not forgive me because we Prussians were victorious in 1866. I trust that you, Saxon soldier though you be, are more placable, and will reflect, as I do, that your dear mother was my favourite sister, and that we loved each other faithfully as long as she lived. It was not our fault, as we both thought, that our grand-uncle involved us in a lawsuit by an ambiguous will."

Count Styrum could not possibly fail to reciprocate so kind an expression of good will on his

uncle's part. He did not, it is true, accept the pressing invitation extended to him to leave the hotel and make the President's house his home while in M----, but he promised to spend every spare hour beneath his roof. He did this the more readily since his cousins welcomed him as cordially as their father had done. On Adèle's part this amiability was certainly sincere, while Heinrich, who was an assessor in his father's office, probably acted in mere compliance with his father's wish in the matter. Adèle was thoroughly pleased with her cousin,--she knew nothing of the lawsuit, and cared nothing for politics,--Karl was to her simply the son of an aunt whom she had dearly loved, and with whom she could remember passing happy weeks, in Dresden, in her childhood, when "Cousin Karl" had always been so kind to her. During all the long years of absence she had never forgotten him, and she treated him now with a degree of sisterly familiarity which greatly pleased him. He would gladly have availed himself of his uncle's kindness to pay frequent visits to his relatives, but his stay in M---- was very short, and most of his time was occupied in interviews with his lawyers, who would not listen to a friendly adjustment of the matter in hand, so that until this evening he had scarcely done more than exchange a few cursory remarks with Adèle. He had been favourably impressed by her frank and easy gayety of manner, but she had not aroused in him any deeper interest, and he had accepted with some reluctance her invitation to be her escort to supper, since this would of necessity detain him longer than he had proposed to stay at the ball. Suddenly, however, his feeling with regard to her changed entirely, upon witnessing her spirited opposition to Count Repuin. How beautiful she was as she confronted the Count with indignation flashing from her eyes! and how lovely was the change in her expression when she turned to her friend with such tender affection! Involuntarily he compared the two young creatures before him.

A few minutes previously he would have pronounced Frau von Sorr the more beautiful of the two,--the most beautiful woman, indeed, whom he had ever seen; but now there was no doubt that the golden-haired Adèle, with her earnest eyes sparkling with anger and then melting with tenderness, was, if not the more beautiful, by far the more attractive. It was strange that never until this instant had he been impressed by this exquisite development of the pretty child into the lovely woman.

And now, when, after Count Repuin's departure, she gayly entreated her friends to forget the unpleasant scene they had witnessed, and when, seated at the supper-table, she did all that she could to dissipate Frau von Sort's melancholy and win a smile from her, she seemed to her cousin more enchanting than ever. She so managed the conversation that neither Frau von Sorr, who could not soon forget what had just occurred, nor the Assessor, who was rather ashamed of the part he had played, was obliged to talk much, while Count Styrum was drawn on to speak of his travels, and this all the more willingly as he felt he was seconding Adèle's efforts in so doing.

The Count had resigned from the army at the close of the war, and, that he might be prepared for the management of the large estates to which he was heir, had spent a year in attending the lectures at Tharandt. Then, in company with a former comrade in the army, who had been his fellow-student also, Baron Arno von Hohenwald, he had travelled for a year in Belgium, Holland, England, and Italy, being finally called home by the death of his father.

The Count was an admirable narrator as well as observer: no one could throw more interest than he into the details of his travels, and on this occasion he surpassed himself. Not only did Adèle listen with sparkling eyes, now and then asking an eager question, but Frau von Sorr was gradually aroused to attention and interest. The Assessor alone was very silent and not at all comfortable. In addition to the mortifying consciousness that he had failed entirely to undertake the defence of Frau von Sorr against Count Repuin, he could not help experiencing a decided envy of Count Styrum, who was thus monopolizing the conversation, and evidently making a favourable impression upon Adèle.

Although he enjoyed the proud consciousness that among the gifts with which kind nature had endowed him, and of which he would not boast, a talent for conversation which had frequently stood him in stead was most conspicuous, here he was undeniably thrown into the background, and this, too, in the presence of his adored Adèle. He several times attempted to divert the talk from these overrated adventures of travel, but without success, until at last, upon the frequent mention by the Count of the name of his companion, Arno von Hohenwald, he broke into the conversation with, "Do I understand you, Count? Are you really speaking of Baron Arno von Hohenwald? I can scarcely credit that you travelled for a year with that gloomy misanthrope, that inveterate woman-hater. And yet it must be so, for to my knowledge there is but one family of Hohenwalds in Saxony, and I ought to know, for I am distantly connected with them myself. I never judge others with severity,--it is not my nature,--but I cannot help pronouncing the Hohenwalds, that is, the old Baron and his son Arno, haughty, disagreeable, inaccessible people, who have very little intercourse with any one, not even their nearest relatives. The best of them all is Arno's brother Werner, the Finanzrath;[1] it is possible to get along with him; but my cousin Arno?---- Really, I cannot understand how you managed to travel with him for a whole year."

"Your judgment of my friend is very harsh and unjust," Count Styrum replied, gravely. "And yet I cannot blame you for it, for there are few who know how to value Arno von Hohenwald, or who, indeed, have any knowledge at all of him."

"Of course; he is absolutely inaccessible. Can you deny that he is a perfect misanthrope, refusing to mingle in any society, and repulsing discourteously every advance made to him?"

"Arno is no misanthrope, but the warmest-hearted fellow and the truest and most loyal of friends. I grant that it is not easy to win his confidence, and that to the superficial observer he may seem to shun intercourse with others; he has no small change of conversation for that society where you, my dear Assessor, are in your element. In the army he had but few intimates, And took no part in our card-parties and the like entertainments. Nevertheless he was a good comrade whom every one liked, for all knew that when there was need of a friend's assistance it was sure to be found at the hands of Arno von Hohenwald, and we forgave his burying himself among his books while we pursued our pleasures. I alone of all his comrades could boast of any real intimacy with him, and I am proud to think that he considered me worthy of his friendship--his confidence."

"Oh, then he has certainly told you the story of his notorious love-affair with the rope-maker's pretty daughter, which ended in his being the furious woman-hater that he is! You must ask the Count to tell you that story, madame. I assure you it made quite a noise at the time at the Court of Saxony, where the Hohenwalds stood very high."

"I am not curious," Frau von Sorr observed.

"But I am!" Adèle interposed. "I confess, Karl, that I take great interest in your friend. I have heard much of him. Madame von Kleist is a cousin of the late Frau von Hohenwald, and the other day, at an afternoon party, she had such wonderful things to tell of the eccentricities of the old Baron and his son Arno, that the entire conversation finally turned upon the Hohenwalds, their lives and their peculiarities. Several of the ladies present were distantly connected with them, and they not only confirmed all that Madame von Kleist said, but contributed various anecdotes to show that the old Baron was no better than an ogre, and that the son Arno was following worthily in his father's footsteps. The old Baron, they said, lives in perfect solitude in Castle Hohenwald, never seeing a visitor, nor indeed any one beside his two sons and his daughter, except, perhaps, the village priest, who is the young girl's tutor. All sorts of tales are told of the way in which the old man has repelled his relatives' advances, as well as of his quarrel with his son Arno, whom he threatened to disinherit because he had betrothed himself to a pretty girl of the bourgeoisie. When the engagement was broken off Arno was reconciled to his father, having become a more terrible misanthrope and woman-hater than the old man himself. So you may readily imagine, Cousin Karl, how I should like, after all these stories, to hear as much of your friend as you can tell us without indiscretion."

Count Styrum looked annoyed. The gossiping Assessor had given a turn to the conversation that necessitated explanations which he would gladly have avoided. Since this turn had been given, however, he felt it due to his friend to disprove the false reports current with regard to the Hohenwalds. "There can be no indiscretion," he said, "in relating facts known to many, although I certainly would rather avoid doing so since I know my friend Arno's dislike of any discussion of his private affairs. However, the truth had better be told about them, that it may counteract these silly rumours with regard to the family, rumours which some of their connections, indeed, are not ashamed to circulate."

The Assessor turned red, feeling that the Count's words might well apply to himself, but he judged it wisest to take no notice of the reproof conveyed in them.

"The Hohenwalds," Karl began, "have furnished food for gossip to the Saxon aristocracy for many years. They are a singular race; their peculiarities have been inherited for generations, but the haughty Barons troubled themselves little as to what the world might say of them, and lived out their convictions with unshaken fidelity. It was a Hohenwald who, in Augustus the Strong's time, stood forth at the Saxon Court as the champion of good old German morality in social life, scourging with bitter words the wanton frivolity of the lovely court dames, and denouncing the extravagant luxury that ruined poor Saxony. All that saved him from persecution and perhaps imprisonment in Königstein was Augustus the Strong's own declaration that the Hohenwalds had always been fools--it was best to let them wag their tongues and pay them no heed. So Werner von Hohenwald was not sent to Königstein, but to his own castle, which he never left for many years, leading much the same hermit-life there as is led by his great-grandson to-day. Another Hohenwald, the father of the present Baron, distinguished himself in the early part of this century as a warm friend of Prussia and a bitter opponent of the Franco-Saxon alliance and of the first Napoleon, who would have had him shot but for the interposition of the king, who declared, as Augustus the Strong had done, that the Hohenwalds were fools, not to be too severely dealt with. He, too, was sent to live in undisturbed retirement in his own castle. The present lord, Baron Werner, resembles his forbears; like them he is unyielding, keen in word and in action, a steadfast, severe man, living according to his own convictions, and holding himself aloof from a world that does not share them. I do not know him personally, but I have heard so much of him from my friend Arno and from my own father, who was intimate with him many years ago, that I have a very vivid idea of him, I can see him in my mind's eye,--a tall, stout old man, his stern face framed in beard and hair of silver, from which the black eyes can flash terribly when he is angry, although they beam mildly enough when their gaze rests upon his darling, his daughter. It is said that in his youth, departing from the traditions of his family, he was a gay and genial man of fashion. As a wealthy landed proprietor, he passed his summers at Hohenwald, his winters in Dresden. At that time my father knew him well, and their friendship lasted for a number of years after the Baron married a Countess Harrangow. He seemed to live very happily with his beautiful wife, keeping open house, as well in Dresden in the winter as in summer upon his estate of Hohenwald, which is not far from the Prussian boundary. His wife's relatives visited him

frequently, and often spent weeks beneath his roof, where they were upon the best of terms with the lord of the castle, although they were Prussians, and he a bitter enemy of Prussia and a great friend of Austria, never hesitating to declare his anti-Prussian sentiments in the presence of his Prussian guests.

"A few months after the birth of his youngest child--a daughter--there was a sudden and complete transformation in the Baron's manner of life, the cause of which was entirely unknown. He separated from his wife, who returned to her paternal home, where she received from the Baron a large yearly income, but whither she was not permitted to take her children, two sons and the baby daughter, who remained in Hohenwald. No one knows the reason for this separation; the Baron has never by so much as a word alluded to it, and all the reports concerning it circulated in Dresden society, where the affair of course made a great deal of noise, are utterly without foundation. Even the Baroness, who died within a year after the separation, without seeing either husband or children again, never assigned to her parents any reason for her expulsion--for that is the only term to be applied to it--from Hohenwald. The relatives of the Baroness, who had hitherto always found a welcome at the castle, did all they could to effect a reconciliation between husband and wife, but they were repulsed by the Baron with such harshness and severity that they never renewed their efforts. My father, too, fared no better. Relying upon the claims of long friendship, he complied with the wishes of the king, who regretted that the Baron should have so treated his wife's relatives, and expressed a wish that my father would use his influence with his friend, so that if no thorough reconciliation could be brought about, at least the public scandal of a separation without a divorce might be avoided. With some reluctance my father undertook the task thus assigned him. He could hardly refuse to do so, although he had but small hope of any good result. He went to Castle Hohenwald, where the manner of his reception showed him the hopelessness of his mission.

"The Baron met him with a dark frown. 'What is your business with me, Count?' he asked, without offering his hand. My father, embarrassed by a reception in such marked contrast to the terms of friendship upon which he had felt himself with the Baron, could not, of course, immediately explain the real cause of his appearance at Hohenwald, and spoke courteously of his desire to see a friend from whom he had been separated for some time; but the Baron interrupted him with, 'Pray take no unnecessary pains, Count. I am not fond of idle phrases, and declare to you once for all that I will suffer no one to meddle in my affairs. If you have been sent hither, repeat this to whoever sent you; if you are here of your own free will, take my words to heart. If in consideration of our former friendship you are inclined to do me a kindness, pray shield me from any further attempt to influence me. Say in Dresden that the gates of Castle Hohenwald are in future closed to all visitors; that I have irrevocably and forever broken with all my former acquaintances and friends!'

"It may easily be imagined that my father after this made no attempt to speak with the Baron, but left Castle Hohenwald immediately, never to return to it. From that day the gates of the castle have been closed to every one. One or two attempts were made by near relatives to see the Baron, but they were entirely unsuccessful,--the servants denied him to every one. So completely did he isolate himself from his former world that he answered no letters addressed to him except those relating solely to business. From that time he has led the life of a hermit in his castle, never leaving his estate, seeing no one except the pastor and the doctor. In spite of all this, his servants and the labourers employed upon the estate, as well as the poor of the neighbouring villages, will stoutly deny that he is a misanthrope; they represent him as the kindest of masters, the best of landlords. Therefore I would advise you, Herr von Hahn, to lay stress upon this fact in your future narratives with regard to the life of the Baron von Hohenwald."

"I shall most assuredly do so, my dear Count," said the Assessor; adding, "Justice demands it, and I could not do otherwise, for a love of justice is one of my characteristics. I make no boast of it, for the gifts of nature are various; but so it is, and I am indebted to you for your information with regard to the old Baron von Hohenwald, while I await with eagerness what you have to tell of the son, Baron Arno."

"You will have occasion to modify your judgment of him also, for, in spite of some eccentricities, Arno is one of the best and noblest of men. You have already laid perhaps more than sufficient stress upon the faults which prevent mere acquaintances from rightly estimating his excellence. There is nothing, therefore, for me to do but to explain how he came to share his father's eccentricity and to withdraw himself from society."

"He is a woman-hater, then?" Adèle asked, curiously.

"I cannot exactly contradict you. He shuns the sex for the fault of an individual, but I am sure you will judge him gently when you hear his story. I told you just now that he was a silent and reserved officer. One of our regiment who had been with him at school described him to me as the merriest of lads, always ready for any school-boy prank. But the separation of his parents seems to have made a profound impression upon him, destroying in him all the joyousness and geniality of youth. After his mother's return to her father, Baron von Hohenwald recalled Arno to Hohenwald from school in Dresden, and engaged as tutor for him the pastor of the village, a very earnest and learned man. Thus the boy grew up sharing his father's solitude; perhaps his father confided to him the cause of his lonely life; certain it is that never during our years of intimacy has Arno mentioned to me his mother's name. His relations with his father were most intimate and affectionate. Whatever cause the old Baron had for repudiating his wife, his anger was never

visited upon her children. To them he has always been the most kind and indulgent of parents,--even to Arno's elder brother, who was much more of a stranger to him than the others, since he, Werner, was already a student in the university when Arno was recalled from school. The visits to Castle Hohenwald of the elder son, who embraced a diplomatic career, have been of necessity infrequent, so that naturally his father's heart does not cling to him as to the constant inmates of his household.

"His solitary life at Hohenwald fostered in Arno a love of retirement, which was manifest during his military life in Dresden, whither he went to join the army, by his father's desire, at the conclusion of his studies. He would have preferred to embrace one of the learned professions, but his father's wish was his law in this respect; and he made a capital officer, gaining both the respect and the esteem of his comrades and his superiors. He took lodgings in the house of a rope-maker, and, as he spent all his evenings at home, only leaving it to fulfil his military duties, he saw more of his hostess and her pretty daughter than would otherwise have been the case. The daughter, Rosalie, a young girl of sixteen, had been educated for a teacher, and her associates at school had taught her the air and bearing of a higher social rank than her own. How could a young man, who knew nothing of society and the world, fail to be attracted by a girl of extraordinary beauty and a fair degree of culture, and with manners far above those of her class? How could he suspect the utter want of moral training beneath so fair an exterior, or dream of the arts that were practised to attract him? You spoke, Herr von Hahn, of a 'love-affair with the pretty daughter of a rope-maker;' a very grave 'love-affair' it was for Arno, for he asked the girl in marriage of her parents, and of course received from them a glad consent to his wishes. Not only this, but, to the extreme surprise of Rosalie's parents, the old Baron von Hohenwald did not refuse to sanction the marriage. When Arno went to Hohenwald to tell his father of his betrothal, the old man was naturally enough dismayed at the prospect of such a misalliance. He represented to his son all the consequences of so fatal a step, the disapproval it would meet with in all quarters, the annihilation of all prospect of advancement in his profession, the scandal it would cause in aristocratic circles. But when Arno declared that his word was pledged, and that nothing would induce him to recall it, his father withdrew all opposition. He consented to the union, though he refused point-blank to repair to Dresden to see his son's betrothed, declaring that he should have time enough to make her acquaintance after the marriage.

"In Dresden the betrothal made a most disagreeable talk; Arno's comrades were beside themselves; they adjured him to resign all thoughts of the girl, hinting that she was quite unworthy of the sacrifice he was making for her. All that they said was to no purpose, however; and in several cases Arno was with difficulty prevented from calling to a bloody account those who dared to remonstrate with him. The colonel of our regiment, by advice from very high quarters, called upon Lieutenant von Hohenwald, but his representations availed nothing against my friend's obstinacy. Arno professed himself ready to request his dismissal from the army, but not to break his plighted faith. This offer on his part would doubtless have been accepted but that war with Prussia was imminent, and the services of so brave an officer as Arno von Hohenwald could not be spared. It was therefore intimated that the royal consent to his marriage would be accorded him provided he would accede to the king's wish that it should be postponed for a year. To this condition he consented, although the pretty Rosalie pouted and sighed, and her father and mother were quite indignant at the delay.

"During the short campaign that now took him from Dresden, Arno wrote frequently to his betrothed, without, however, receiving a word in reply, a circumstance for which his trusting nature found abundant explanation in the irregularity of the Bohemian postal arrangements. At Königgratz he was severely wounded; indeed, the newspapers reported him killed, and as such they mourned him for weeks at Castle Hohenwald. Meanwhile, he was lying unconscious in the hospital. I was in the same ward with him, only slightly wounded, however; I was soon sufficiently recovered to go to Dresden, on leave, to regain my strength there. When I left Arno his condition was still very critical; in one of his intervals of consciousness he sent a message by me to his betrothed, which I of course made it my duty to deliver as soon as possible. I found only the mother at home when I paid my visit to the rope-maker's, and she shocked and disgusted me by the want of feeling she displayed upon hearing that Arno was not dead, as had been supposed, but only dangerously wounded. She even appeared glad to learn that, in the event of his recovery, it must be months at least before he could come to Dresden. On the same day, however, all that was strange in her behaviour was fully explained to me by the physician whom I consulted with regard to my wound, and who had been a fellow-lodger of Arno's and his warm friend. As such he felt it his duty to acquaint me, the poor fellow's most intimate friend, with the wretched story that so closely concerned him, and that filled me with consternation and disgust. Arno had been infamously deceived both by his betrothed and by her parents, whose sole thought had been how to enrich themselves at whatever expense of honour and honesty. Some time before her betrothal to Arno, Rosalie had been secretly under the protection of a wealthy manufacturer in Dresden, her connection with whom, when the report of Arno's death seemed to her to free her from the necessity for concealment, became a day's theme for public gossip. She flaunted her disgrace abroad, meeting with no opposition from her parents in her downward career. There is no need to dwell upon the details of this miserable business; the investigations I felt it my duty to my friend to prosecute fully confirmed the physician's story. This being the case, what was I to do? Of course, I ought to acquaint Arno with the facts I had learned, and yet the knowledge of them might kill him in his present precarious state. I needed advice in the matter, and I turned for it to my friend's father. I wrote to him telling him all, begging him to come to Dresden to receive personal confirmation of the truth of what I wrote, and offering, if he desired

it, to go immediately to Arno and inform him of his betrothed's worthlessness. I supposed that the Baron would reply to my letter in person, but he did not come to Dresden; by return of post I received a letter from him, expressing heart-felt gratitude to me. 'I need,' he wrote, 'no further confirmation: it is for my son to investigate this matter. Of course he will not condemn his betrothed without hearing her in her own defence. I suffer greatly from the gout, and cannot come to Dresden; besides, I do not think myself justified in forestalling my son in this matter.' He then begged me to fulfil my promise to go to Arno as soon as possible and tell him all. 'Do not be afraid,' he said, in conclusion, 'that you will retard my son's recovery in thus performing your duty as his friend. We Hohenwalds come of a tough stock, and know how to bear pain; it may perhaps bend, but it will not break us. Believe me when I tell you this.'

"He was right, as I found when a few days later, sitting at Arno's bedside, and finding him quite himself again, I tried to prepare him gently for what I had to say. He perceived instantly that I was the messenger of evil tidings, and briefly and firmly bade me speak out and tell him all that was to be told. I did so, and he listened in gloomy silence, with downcast eyes, asking no question, giving no sign, except the convulsive clinching of the hand that lay on the coverlet, of the storm of emotion raging within him. When I had finished, he looked up with eyes that seemed to read my very soul. 'I do not thank you,' he said. 'I cannot tell, before I have seen and learned for myself, whether you have rendered me the greatest service that one friend can render to another, or whether I must call you to account as my mortal foe. Until then we must part. Leave me now. I shall soon seek you out in Dresden, either to thank or----'

"I tried to soothe him, but he repulsed me sternly, and I returned to Dresden without seeing him again. His surgeon informed me that he considered his condition very alarming, that he feared the worst, and that at all events it must be months before he could leave the hospital. So I left him, filled with remorse for having followed the old Baron's advice; but scarcely four weeks had passed when one day Arno entered my room in Dresden. He looked terribly,--his dark eyes gleamed with unnatural brilliancy in his wasted countenance, his right arm was in a sling, while, although he supported himself upon a stout cane, he could scarcely stand. When I hurried towards him he sank, half fainting, into my arms, and I carried rather than led him to a lounge. He pressed my hand, and, as soon as he could speak, said, 'I thank you; you told me nothing but the truth, and yet not all the truth. You have saved me from a horrible fate, and I never will forget it. Add still further to my obligations to you by granting me one request: I entreat you never, never again to make the faintest allusion to that wretched girl.' I promised, and since that day not one word with regard to her has passed Arno's lips. How he parted from her I never knew. He had spent two days in ascertaining the truth of the story I had told him, and then came to my room, which it was long before he left again. His strength of will had sustained him until his purpose was fulfilled, and then he was utterly prostrated. For many a night I watched by his bed, hopeless as to his recovery, but in the end his vigorous constitution conquered. The old Baron was right.

"During his convalescence we often discussed our plans for the future. We both resolved to send in our resignations. I spare you our reasons for this course of action, for I know that you, my dear Assessor, are one of Prince Bismarck's most enthusiastic supporters, and that my lovely cousin Adèle, as the daughter of a Prussian official high in rank, could hardly appreciate the feeling that made it impossible for us to continue in the army after peace was concluded. Arno's political opinions so closely coincided with my own that our plans for the future were the same. For him, as for me, it was simply impossible to accept office under government, and so we determined to withdraw altogether from public life, to study the management of estates and to find our calling in the future in administering our own.

"I wrote to my father, and received his speedy approval of my resolution. Arno, as soon as he was strong enough, set out for Hohenwald. I proposed to accompany him, but to this he objected, telling me frankly that he could not invite even his dearest friend to Hohenwald; that his father's seclusion must be invaded by no stranger. He attained his wish, however; his father had no objection to make to his plans; and so we both went to Tharandt to study, and later travelled through Europe together, until my father's death called me home. Since then Arno has been living in Hohenwald, where, as he writes me, he has undertaken the management of his estates. I have not seen him, for Hohenwald is closed to every one; but we correspond constantly, and he has promised to pay me a visit shortly."

CHAPTER III.

The ladies had listened eagerly to Count Styrum's narrative. Frau von Sorr, indeed, was so impressed and interested by all that she heard of the Freiherr that she forgot for the moment the

late disagreeable encounter with Count Repuin.

Adèle was no less interested. So absorbed was she in her cousin's account that she did not notice a certain restlessness that had begun to pervade the guests seated at the numerous small supper-tables. It was the invariable custom at the President's balls for the daughter of the house to give the signal for the renewal of dancing, by leaving the supper-room escorted by her cavalier. This duty the young girl, usually so attentive a hostess, had wellnigh forgotten, and she would have continued to question her cousin upon the subject that so interested her, had not her brother Heinrich reminded her that their guests were awaiting with some impatience the return to the ball-room. He left the table where he had been playing the part of host, and, standing behind his sister's chair, whispered in her ear, "You seem to have forgotten, Adèle, that it is high time the dancing began again."

"Why are you in such a hurry? You are not used to be so eager to dance," Adèle replied, in a tone of some annoyance.

"I speak for our guests, who have been looking impatiently for your leaving the supper-room, as you would have seen yourself had not interest in your conversation with our cousin made you blind and deaf to everything else. Let me beg you now to bestow a little attention upon others."

Although her brother's reproof might have been more amiably administered, Adèle felt the justice of what he said, and, rising instantly, begged Count Styrum to conduct her to the ball-room. The other couples followed her immediately, and the supper-room was soon emptied of all the guests with the exception of the elderly gentlemen, for whom the President now produced his choicest Havanas, and whose enjoyment of the evening only rightly began when, supper finished, they could linger over their wine with closed doors.

For those younger men who were not enthusiastic dancers, but who were fond of high play, Heinrich von Guntram had his own sanctum prepared. The gaming-table was set out, the champagne duly iced, and he only waited until the dancing should have begun to assemble there the chosen few. His father discountenanced gaming, and therefore there had been no mention of play before supper, but now that the President was occupied with his special friends, Heinrich dutifully danced once with his partner at supper, and then led the way to his room, followed by all those for whom gaming always formed part of an evening's entertainment.

"Are you tired of dancing, Count Repuin?" he asked the Russian, who stood in a doorway, gloomily watching Frau von Sorr as she was waltzing with the Assessor. "Come to my room and you will find a cigar."

"And cards?"

"Of course."

"Have you asked Sorr?"

"No; you know----"

"Yes, I know; but you will do me a great favour if you will ask him to join us."

This request embarrassed Heinrich; he did not like to spare the Russian from the card-table, for he always lost, when he did lose, with great equanimity, but he was naturally disinclined to extend his invitation to Sorr. "I have already asked Arnim," he said, hesitating, "and I am afraid----"

"Of his making a scene with Sorr," the Russian completed his sentence. "You need not be afraid. Whatever Arnim might say at the club with regard to Sorr, be sure that beneath your roof he will respect him as your guest. Indeed, you will greatly oblige me, Herr von Guntram, by asking Sorr."

"If you really wish it, of course I will do so," Heinrich replied; "but I would far rather that the invitation should come from you than from me. I could then excuse myself to Arnim, upon the plea that not I, but you, introduced him."

"Be it so," said the Count. "I will bring him with me, with your permission. All that Herr von Arnim said was that he would not play when Sorr kept the bank, and we can easily arrange that. I will not follow you with Sorr until half an hour has elapsed, and your game will have been begun when we arrive."

Heinrich assented; he left the Russian, and, as he passed through the ball-room, observed that Count Styrum was standing alone, looking on at the dancers. "You are no dancer, Count," he said, addressing him. "I think you did not dance before supper either."

"No, I never dance much; and just now, as you know, I am in mourning."

"It must bore you to look on at all this spinning and whirling. If you have not forsworn cards, cousin, you will find in my room a good cigar, excellent champagne, and a few very clever fellows."

"Do you play high?"

"Not at all, not at all. Count Repuin stakes rather large sums sometimes, but no one else among us does so, except perhaps Herr von Sorr, when he has any money, which is not often. The rest of us stake but little; we play merely to kill time."

Count Styrum cared very little for play. He had now and then won and lost small sums at a public gaming-table, but it had been more out of compliance with the wish of some friend who desired his companionship than from any interest in the game. He would have refused his cousin's invitation but that he was curious to know more of Herr von Sorr, and thought that no better opportunity could offer for meeting the man who was husband to the beautiful woman who had so interested him. He therefore followed Heinrich, who led the way to the room which he called his study, and presented him to the young men, mostly officers, there assembled. Count Repuin and Herr von Sorr were not yet present.

"Who is to keep the bank?" asked Herr von Saldern, who, impatient to begin, was already shuffling the cards.

"Let us take turns; each put in twenty-five thalers."

"Twenty-five thalers is too little. There are but ten of us, and that would only make two hundred and fifty thalers,' Herr von Saldern objected.

"Come, come, Saldern, you shall not insist upon high play," said Herr von Arnim. "Let us have a comfortable evening, and not dip too deep in one another's pockets. I agree to Guntram's proposal, but upon condition that the bank is kept only by one of those now present."

"But why?"

"Because I suspect that Sorr will find his way here before long; he has a wonderful scent for cards. I have declared that I will not play when he keeps the bank, and I will run no risks."

"You ought to be more careful in speaking of Herr von Sorr, my dear Arnim," Heinrich von Guntram remonstrated.

"Bah! I don't care that whether or not he hears what I say," said Arnim, snapping his fingers. "Besides, he ought to feel flattered by my fear of him. At all events, I am superstitious, and feel sure I shall lose my money if Sorr keeps the bank; so I repeat my condition, and will not take part in the game unless it be accepted."

"Well, well, it is accepted. Let us begin, and let Guntram be banker first!" the rest cried, impatiently, as they seated themselves at the table; and Guntram, after receiving twenty-five thalers from each of the players, began the game as banker. He had hardly drawn the first card when Count Repuin and Herr von Sorr made their appearance.

"I knew it!" Herr von Arnim whispered to Count Styrum. "Sorr scents cards ten miles off; no vulture could be keener. Pray, Herr von Sorr," he added, aloud, as the latter seemed inclined to take a seat between Arnim and Count Styrum, "be good enough to find a place the other side of the Count. I do not like to lose so agreeable a neighbour, and there really is no room on this side."

All eyes were turned upon Sorr, and every one looked for some hasty reply to Arnim's words, which were almost insulting from their tone and the manner in which they were uttered; but Sorr either did not or would not perceive intentional offence in them, and, merely saying, "You are right; there is more room here," placed a chair on the right of Count Styrum and took his seat in it.

This propinquity was not undesirable to the Count, who now had the best possible opportunity for observing the man of whom he had heard so much from the Assessor. As he did so he could not help saying to himself, "How could this man ever have won the affection of that charming woman?" Never had he been more disagreeably impressed by any one, and yet he could hardly tell why this was so. Herr von Sorr's features were regular; his fair full beard and curling light hair became him well; his blue eyes were fine in form and colour; but the expression of both features and eyes was to the Count most repulsive. An artificial smile constantly played about his finely-chiselled lips. His eyes never looked fairly into those of the man whom he addressed; there was an air of utter weakness and want of character about him; defects which, beyond all others, Count Styrum despised.

The game began, and was very moderately conducted. Count Repuin, who was seated opposite Sorr, beside Heinrich von Guntram, now and then staked a large sum, which he usually lost. Sorr staked but little; between him and Count Styrum on the table there was a little heap of silver and paper money, from which he took his stakes and to which he added his winnings; beside it lay the pocket-book of the Count, who, for want of small notes, had one of larger amount changed by the banker. The game interested him but slightly, and he had abundant opportunity to watch the players, who, in spite of the small stakes, gradually displayed an eagerness which was by no means allayed by the champagne with which the servant in attendance plied them.

The company began to grow noisy. Heinrich von Guntram, who had handed over the bank to Herr von Arnim, and who began to stake larger sums, cursed his luck loudly, and was laughed at by Arnim, who had a ready word of ridicule for all, and bidden to imitate the composure of Herr von Sorr, who won or lost with equal grace.

Herr von Sorr did not seem to hear Arnim's persiflage; his attention all appeared to be given to the game, and he showed a moderation in drinking which contrasted strikingly with the conduct of his friend Count Repuin, who emptied glass after glass of the champagne, which Sorr refused, confining himself to a few glasses of seltzer water. The wine, however, appeared to produce no effect upon the Russian; he seemed not at all excited and observant only of the game. But Styrum, who watched him narrowly, perceived that this was only seeming; that in reality Repuin's whole attention was given to Styrum's neighbour, Sorr.

Thus the game lasted for about an hour, when Repuin rose from the table. "I have had enough for to-night," he said, gathering up his money; "and you too, Count Styrum, seem but little interested. Shall we not, without disturbing the others, take a quiet cigar together in the next room and discuss--our Italian experiences, for example? I think we were at Naples at the same time."

Count Styrum was greatly surprised at being thus addressed. He did not know the Russian, to whom he had been but formally introduced. What could be his reason for desiring to converse privately with an entire stranger in the next room? He must have some special aim in view, although what this was Styrum could not divine. He hesitated to accept the invitation of the man whose behaviour towards Frau von Sorr had so disgusted him, but curiosity to know what the Russian contemplated conquered his reluctance, and, taking his offered arm, he accompanied him into the adjoining room, the door of which Repuin closed behind them.

"I thank you for accepting my invitation, Count," said the Russian, from whose face the courteous smile vanished as soon as they were alone. "You guess, of course, that I have sought this interview with you for a graver object than any discussion of Italian experiences. I shall therefore, without circumlocution, come to the point at once with a question which will doubtless strike you as very strange. Do you know how much money there was in the pocket-book which lay before you on the table, and which you have just put into your pocket?"

"Your question is indeed a strange one!"

"I will explain it immediately, if you will be so kind as to give me an answer."

"I cannot see what possible interest the amount of money that I carry in my pocket-book can have for you, Count Repuin, but, since you wish it, I can tell you about how much there was. When I sat down to play I had five one-hundred-thaler notes in my pocket-book; one of these I exchanged for two fifties; one of these again I put into my pocket-book, using the other for the game, so that, besides some small notes, the amount of which I cannot tell you, since I do not know how much I won or lost, my pocket-book must contain four hundred-thaler notes and one fifty."

"Thank you. I pray your patience for a moment, and you shall understand my apparently indiscreet question. Be so obliging as to take out your pocket-book and see whether it contains the sum you have mentioned."

"Count Repuin, this is a most extraordinary request!"

"It is; and if you insist, I will instantly explain it to you, but you would greatly oblige me by first glancing at the contents of your pocket-book; my demand can easily be complied with."

Styrum could not avoid granting a request couched in terms so courteous; he opened his pocket-book and counted his notes, finding, to his great astonishment, that they numbered only three hundred-thaler notes in addition to the fifty and the smaller sums.

"Well, is your money all right?" asked Repuin, who was watching him with eager interest.

"No; a hundred-thaler note is missing. It must have dropped on the floor when I changed the other. I will go look for it."

"Do not trouble yourself, Count; you will find nothing," the Russian calmly rejoined. "I will find it for you, and, in doing so, will entirely explain my apparently unjustifiable curiosity."

He awaited no reply from Styrum. Opening the door leading into the next room, he called, in an imperious tone, "Herr von Sorr, one word with you. Count Styrum wishes to speak to you."

A livid pallor overspread Sorr's countenance. Did he suspect what was coming? He started, and one hand sought his breast-pocket, but before it could reach it it was seized by Count Repuin and held as if in a vice. "Leave the contents of your pocket untouched," the Russian whispered in his ear. "Follow me instantly,--I command you!"

Sorr obeyed, following the Russian like a trembling slave.

"What is the matter?" was the question that hovered upon the lips of all, and that was uttered aloud by one of the young men at the table. Although Repuin's last words had been spoken in a tone so low as to reach Sorr's ears alone, all had heard his first authoritative summons and had seen Sorr's confusion as the Count had seized his hand, and all wondered what was the matter, although only one uttered the question.

"Something very disagreeable, most certainly," Heinrich von Guntram made reply. "In my opinion, gentlemen, we had better finish the game and go back to the ball-room as soon as possible. Let those three end their business as seems to them best; the less we know of it the better."

"But our bank!" Herr von Saldern exclaimed.

"Arnim, who is banker, will attend to all that, and see that each one receives his due proportion; will you not, Herr von Arnim?"

"'Tis already done, my dear fellow. You will take charge of Count Styrum's share," replied Arnim. "Be quick, gentlemen; here is your money. I agree with Guntram that the less we hear of what is going on in the next room the better. Let us go back to the ball-room. This scandalous scene will at all events convince our friend Guntram how unfit Sorr is to be admitted to the society of gentlemen, and we shall, I hope, be spared any association with him in future."

Count Repuin closed the door of the next room after Sorr, and then, turning to Count Styrum, said, "I will now give you the solution of the riddle I have just read you, Count." As he spoke he leaned against the closed door, and looked with disdainful contempt at the miserable wretch before him, who would evidently have fled from the room had not the Russian's tall form barred his egress.

Styrum had already taken a thorough dislike to Count Repuin, from witnessing his behaviour towards Fran von Sorr. Now, as he marked the triumphant malice that mingled with the contempt expressed in his face, this dislike deepened to what was almost a horror. He divined what would be the solution of the riddle of the lost money; he remembered all that the Assessor had said of Sorr, and, recalling the keen scrutiny that Repuin had bestowed upon Sorr's movements at the gaming-table, he could not doubt why the Russian had summoned the pale, trembling wretch before him. Still, he could not understand the triumph with which Repuin was regarding the detected thief. Was he not, according to the Assessor's report, the man's intimate friend? What reason could he have for sacrificing him merely to restore some lost money to a stranger? This riddle Styrum could not solve, for it was incredible that Repuin should act thus, simply from indignation at Sorr's dishonesty.

After a moment's pause the Russian turned to Styrum: "Do you now guess, Count, where your hundred-thaler note will be found? You do not reply? Well, I will tell you; it is at present in Herr von Sorr's breast-pocket, whither it was conveyed from your pocket-book, with immense dexterity it is true, but not dexterously enough to elude my vigilance. He is the thief,--does he dare to deny it?"

He did not dare. Repuin's words seemed to annihilate him, all the more that they were uttered by a man whom he had thought his friend. Pale and trembling, unable to articulate a word in self-defence, he bowed before the terrible fate that had thus overtaken him. All power of resistance seemed crushed out of him. In silence he awaited his sentence.

"Give back the stolen note to Count Styrum," the Russian ordered.

Again he obeyed; he was incapable of thought,--Repuin's iron will ruled him irresistibly. Automatically be put his hand into his breast-pocket, took out the note, and handed it to Count Styrum.

"I have kept my word," Repuin continued. "You are again in possession of the missing note. We must now consider what is to be done with this scoundrel. It is your part, as the sufferer by his theft, to decide this. Shall we deliver him over to justice and a jail? He is ripe for it; this is not his first crime of the kind, as his skill in committing it testifies. Let us take the gentlemen in the next room into council, and send for the police. What say you, Count?"

"For God's sake, have mercy upon me!" With this cry Sorr threw himself at the Russian's feet. But Repuin thrust him from him. "Hands off, scoundrel! To me you appeal in vain. There stands your judge!"

He pointed as he spoke to Count Styrum, and to him the wretched Sorr turned with clasped hands. "Spare me, Count!" he implored. "I have given you back the note. Have pity!"

Pity for the worthless creature who crawled thus in the dust after his detection Count Styrum could not feel. Why should he have any compassion upon the miserable worldling who had squandered his means in every kind of low dissipation and was now nothing more nor less than a common thief? He deserved mercy less than did the criminal whom want and misery had driven to steal. It was his duty to banish him from the society of honest men and deliver him over to a just punishment.

And yet, just at this moment, there presented itself to Count Styrum's mind a vision of the lovely young creature who, without a suspicion of the horrible fate impending over her, had but a short time before listened to his words with such interest. Would not a just sentence pronounced upon her husband crush her also? And Adèle,--Frau von Sorr was her dearest friend. What a blow her misery would inflict upon Adèle!

Thus Styrum was still undecided between the consideration he felt for Frau von Sorr and for his cousin's peace of mind and the evident duty of delivering over a thief to justice, when suddenly an idea occurred to him that caused him to waver no longer. What reason had Count Repuin for convicting his friend of a theft? Was he weary of a friendship which, as the Assessor reported, cost him so much money? Had the disdainful repulse he had but now received from Frau von Sorr incited him to revenge? Or did he hope by ruining the husband to plunge the wife into such misery that she would in the end be accessible to his degrading advances? He looked quite capable of so devilish a scheme.

"Decide, Count!" Repuin said, hastily. "What is done must be done quickly!"

"I have decided," Count Styrum replied. "We owe it to the hospitality extended to us beneath this roof to avoid a scandal which would be most painful to my uncle and to my cousin Adèle."

"And you will let the fellow go scot-free?" Repuin asked, gloomily.

"If we allow him to escape the legal penalty of his villainy, his sole punishment must be the memory of this hour, which, I trust, may serve him as a warning."

"Oh, Count Styrum, how shall I thank you!" exclaimed Sorr, to whose cheeks the colour began to return, as he attempted, but vainly, to take Styrum's hand.

"Spare me your acknowledgments," said Styrum, turning from him with disgust. "It is owing to no sympathy for you, but to consideration for the society in which I find you, that you are spared the punishment you deserve. Go,--take my advice, and leave my uncle's house on the instant. I trust I shall never meet you again beneath his roof."

Sorr would immediately have followed this counsel, but it was impossible, for Repuin, who was still leaning with folded arms against the closed door, did not stir. The Russian's eyes were gloomily fixed on the ground; evidently he was dissatisfied with Styrum's decision, and was considering whether or how he should combat it. As Sorr approached him he looked up. "You are in too great a hurry," he said, disdainfully. "You and I are not yet quits; we have a few points to discuss that would hardly interest Count Styrum. I left the decision in this matter to you, Count, since you were the injured party, and I bow to it, but I cannot suffer this man longer to frequent a society in which he is regarded as my friend, and where I must continually encounter him. The means that I shall use to prevent this will depend upon the result of a private conversation, which I must insist upon having with Herr von Sorr."

There was in these words so direct a request to be left alone with Sorr that Count Styrum could not but comply; he had no right to remain, although an imploring look from Sorr seemed to entreat him to do so. With a slight inclination to Repuin, who instantly made way, and even opened the door, he left the room.

Scarcely was he gone when Sorr raised his head. The degradation of the moment when his villainy had been unmasked in the presence of a stranger had robbed him of all power of self-defence; now that he found himself alone with the Russian he was once more able to speak; his wrath he might hope to appease. Although Repuin's savagely passionate nature had always impressed him with a kind of terror, he thought he could devise a means to pacify him, difficult as it might be. Extreme caution was necessary,--in Count Styrum's presence this means could not be mentioned, but now, let him but soothe his antagonist with hopes of the fulfilment of his wild desires and all might yet be well.

"How could you--you of all men--act as you have just done, Count?" Sorr began. "How have I deserved such treatment at your hands? You know how devoted I am to your interests, how grateful for all you have done for me,--that I should think no sacrifice too great to testify this gratitude to you, and yet you--you it is who would ruin me!"

Repuin looked down with haughty contempt upon the cringing figure before him. He had spent months in studying this man, and his servile, degraded soul was as an open book before him; he knew the precise value of all these asseverations.

"Spare me your protestations, Herr von Sorr," he replied, "they will avail you nothing. I did not detain you here to listen to your assurances of friendship and gratitude, but to put a stop to any such. I have lost my interest in the game which you and your beautiful wife have been playing with me. I must be done with it. Understand me,--I refuse to be any longer either your dupe or your wife's."

"I do not understand you. I----"

"You shall learn to do so. I know you. I have scrutinized your every action for months past; your very thoughts are laid bare to me; I knew, when I brought you to Guntram's room to-night,

that you would deliver yourself into my hands, either by cheating or, as has been the case, by theft. I knew when Count Styrum left his pocket-book open before you how it would all end."

There was an expression of absolute horror on Sorr's face as he listened to these words. That Repuin's treatment of him was due to no sudden impulse, no outbreak of passion, but was the result of a cool, well-considered scheme, robbed him of all hope, and he stood before his savage persecutor and judge an image of despairing guilt.

A cruel smile hovered upon Repuin's lips; he was satisfied with the effect his words had produced; without awaiting a reply, he continued: "You thought to play with me, Herr von Sorr; you were but a tool in my hands,--a tool to be thrown away whenever it pleased me. I should have done so long since, but for certain considerations. I might have unmasked the thief in the little affair with that other lost note of Herr von Saldern's, which I see you remember, but the fruit was not quite ripe, and I disdained to shake the tree. I am not fond of violent measures. I prepare them for my use, but I use them only in cases of absolute necessity. So long as I hoped to win your wife to listen to my suit, and to purchase her husband's easy compliance with money and a show of friendship, I allowed you to go your way. I thought you wise enough to use your influence with your wife in my favour. I paid you well for such service; but to-day she has shown me that it is vain to attempt to proceed upon a friendly footing. She has offended, insulted me; the consequences be upon her head. For what has happened to-night you may thank your beautiful wife."

"What--what has happened?" Sorr exclaimed, marking with terror the savage gleam in the Russian's eyes.

"Your wife repulsed me with scorn and left me, when, after the dance to-night, I whispered a few passionate words in her ear; and although by agreement with you she was engaged to me for supper, she refused my escort, and took the arm of that fool, Von Hahn!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Sorr. "When she promised me so faithfully! She shall atone for it; she shall make you ample reparation!"

"If your influence with your wife is so powerful, you should have exerted it earlier," Repuin said, with cruel scorn.

"How was I to know that Lucie would break her word? But you shall have satisfaction; I swear you shall. I do not deserve that you should punish me thus for Lucie's actions. I am your most devoted friend; ask of me what you will, and you shall be obeyed."

"I look for no less from you," Repuin replied, "though I certainly do not reckon upon your friendship or gratitude, but upon your fear. That you may know clearly what you have to expect, I will tell you plainly what I meant, and still mean to do. Entire frankness is the best policy between us. I love your wife passionately, madly; I have sworn that she shall be mine at all hazards. Though I should commit murder in pursuit of her, she shall be mine. You must separate from your wife. She must be left to me."

Sorr fairly staggered. He had, indeed, long known that Count Repuin loved his beautiful wife; he had built upon this love his hopes of mollifying the Count; but for this infamous demand he was not prepared. He had often made shameful capital of his wife's exquisite beauty when young men of fortune were to be decoyed to his house and to the gaming-table; his dissipated life had long since destroyed in him all ennobling affection for her; he felt no jealousy upon seeing her surrounded by admirers; he had even exulted when the wealthy Russian had been evidently conquered by her charms. And yet he was horrified by Repuin's demand; to comply with it would banish him from the world in which he had hitherto lived; who would take the slightest notice of him if Lucie were no longer his wife?

"What you ask is impossible!" he gasped, at last.

"Do not dare to talk of 'impossible' to me!" the Russian angrily exclaimed. "I require obedience of you, and if you refuse I will hand you over to justice. Count Styrum, if summoned to court as a witness, must tell what he knows, however unwilling he may be to do so. Your fate in such a case is certain. Your only alternative would be to send a bullet through your brains before you were arrested. If, however, you consent to my will, I will not only be silent, and engage that Count Styrum shall be silent, but I will also pay you ten thousand thalers down. You shall receive the money on the day when your wife becomes mine and we start for the Italian tour. You see I am magnanimous. I buy your wife of you when I might force you to give her up to me. Choose,--your fate is in your own hands!"

As Sorr looked up at the Count's face filled with savage resolve, he felt that all hope was lost. "My wife will never consent to it," he said, with hesitation.

"That would be unfortunate for you; but I am sure she will yield if you tell her the true state of the case. Describe to her her future as the wife of a convict. How will she live when her present support is closely confined behind bolts and bars? Upon the other hand paint to her the delights of a life by my side. There is no wish that she can frame that it will not be my joy to gratify. If the fair Lucie is not insane, I think that a just representation of the state of affairs--and this must be your task--will soon convince her of what choice she had best make."

"You do not know my wife," Sorr said, still hesitatingly,--he was afraid of arousing the Count's anger, and yet he dared not keep back the truth: "her pride transcends belief; she would prefer the most fearful fate, even death itself, to a life with you."

"Exert all your eloquence, Herr von Sorr, and I am convinced you will succeed. Remember the sword that is suspended above your head, and that you alone can avert its fall. But enough for the present; you will now return to the ball-room, only to leave it immediately with your wife upon whatever pretext you may devise,--a sudden indisposition or something of the kind. I owe it to Count Styrum that you spend not an instant longer than is absolutely necessary beneath this roof. You will inform your wife this very night of what has been agreed upon between us. I will wait no longer than to-morrow morning for the result. Come to me early and let me know what it is, and I will decide what is next to be done."

"Count----"

"Not another word! Your part is to obey; woe upon you if you fail! I shall expect you to-morrow morning by eight o'clock at the latest!"

With a haughty, scarcely perceptible nod, the Russian withdrew, and finding Heinrich's room--whence the gamblers had long since departed--empty, returned to the ball-room.

CHAPTER IV.

After supper there had not been the amount of gayety that was wont to distinguish the President's balls. The young people had begun to dance, and the elderly folk to enjoy the delights of card-room and smoking-room, when there was whispered through the assemblage a rumour that interfered greatly with the merriment of the evening. It was first heard in the ball-room; whence it originated no one could exactly tell, but there it was, flying from lip to lip. The younger men were seen to crowd around Guntram and the officers from Heinrich's room, whom they plied with questions, and although it had been agreed that no mention was to be made of the disagreeable circumstance that had occurred there, the dark rumour was not long in taking shape.

How it came about that first the elder ladies and then the younger portion of the assemblage learned it no one could tell, but it circulated everywhere in the ball-room, and finally penetrated to the smoking-room, where the older men left their cigars and cards and returned to the ball-room to ascertain what had happened.

They found the greatest excitement prevailing there; the band was still playing, it is true, but there were only a few couples on the floor, and these danced without enthusiasm, and apparently merely for form's sake.

And what was it all about? No one could precisely say. Had Count Repuin actually boxed Herr von Sorr's ears in Heinrich's room and called him a cheat and thief? Oh, no! it was not Count Repuin. He had interfered when Count Styrum, who had been robbed by Sorr, would have chastised the thief, and high words had passed between the two Counts. It would certainly end in a duel. This was the tale told to Adèle by the wife of Major Gansauge; but Frau von Rose, who stood by, declared that she had it from the best authority--her informant had begged that his name might not be mentioned--that there was not a word of truth in the whole story. It all came from Herr von Arnim's recklessly accusing Herr von Sorr of playing unfairly. Poor Herr von Sorr was very likely not so much to blame; he played high, to be sure, but, good heavens! plenty of people did that nowadays, and Arnim was probably irritated because Sorr's luck was better than his own. He had lost his temper, accused Sorr of cheating; Sorr had naturally resented it; a duel was impending; Count Styrum was to be Arnim's second, while Count Repuin was to act as poor Herr von Sorr's friend. It was outrageous that such an affair should disturb the gayety of one of the dear President's charming balls. Poor dear Lucie von Sorr was most to be pitied, for every one knew that Arnim was the best shot in the world and always killed his man. But there was Count Styrum just come back to the ball-room; he could tell all about it, if he only would.

Adèle listened with impatience to the contradictory statements of the two ladies. They were both noted gossips, and equally untrustworthy, but there must be something wrong, else how could the report of some kind of scene in Heinrich's room have circulated everywhere, even reaching the ears of Frau von Sorr, who, in some agitation, had begged her friend to discover the truth of the matter for her?

Heinrich, to whom his sister had first turned for information, had refused, somewhat roughly,

to give her any satisfaction. "Old women's gossip," was his only reply, as he turned his back upon her. His manner only served to convince Adèle that there was some truth in the rumours she had heard, and anxiety for her friend Lucie induced her to pay some heed to the talk of the two old ladies in hopes of learning some fact of consequence. Her only satisfaction had been in hearing that her cousin, Count Styrum, could give her the information she desired. It was not easy, however, to enter into conversation with him, for immediately upon his return to the ball-room he was surrounded by eager questioners, each curious to know all that he could tell. In her friend's interest, however, Adèle was brave. She walked towards the group of gentlemen, who instantly made way for the lovely daughter of their host, and, accosting Styrum, said, "Cousin Karl, let me beg you to conduct me to a seat."

The Count instantly offered her his arm, and, while conducting her through the room, quietly remarked, "I suspect why you have sought me. You want to know the truth with regard to the occurrence in Heinrich's room, concerning which such wild rumours have got abroad with inconceivable rapidity. Am I not right?"

"Yes, cousin; I implore you to tell me the whole truth. My poor Lucie is quite beside herself with anxiety. Only see how pale she is! Never was there a woman so self-controlled as she. Look, she is smiling now, as she must so often when her heart is almost breaking; but she cannot quite conceal her torturing fear that something terrible has occurred. Take me to a seat beside her, that you may tell us both what has happened."

"That I cannot do," the Count replied, gravely. "I will willingly tell you all that I know, but I cannot describe to that most unfortunate woman the disgraceful scene which I was forced to witness. You are her most intimate friend, and yet I doubt if even you will be able to tell her the whole truth. With this I can acquaint only yourself, your father, and your brother."

Adèle looked around; she noted the curious eyes fixed upon the Count and herself; she knew that it would create gossip if she indulged in a longer *tête-à-tête* with her cousin, if she withdrew with him from the throng; but she would brave it all for the sake of her poor Lucie. "Let us go out upon the balcony," she said; "there is no one there at present; the gentlemen are all gathered about Heinrich and his friends."

It excited no little observation in the ball-room when Styrum led his cousin out upon the balcony.

"Look, look!" the major's wife whispered to her crony, Frau von Rose. "That is a little too strong. I know they are relatives and all that, but it is possible to presume too much upon such relationships. Out alone on the balcony with him! Who would ever have thought it of the little prude!"

"What are you thinking of, my dear?" Frau von Rose whispered in her turn. "Adèle is as good as betrothed to the Assessor von Hahn. I have it from a trustworthy source."

"Indeed! So much the more reason why she should not be out on the balcony alone with her handsome cousin. It is scandalous! Who would have thought of such things happening here at the President's! First this terrible Sorr story, and then such conduct on Adèle's part."

"But, my dear, we advised her to ask information of the Count."

"We?---- I beg pardon; I never should have advised any such thing; and if I remember rightly, you only mentioned that the Count could tell all about the matter if he would; you never hinted a word of advice. But of course Fräulein Adèle will blame you if her father scolds her for such behaviour, and very unseemly behaviour it is for a young girl to talk to a gentleman alone in a dark night upon a balcony."

"I myself do not think it exactly the thing, but there's no great harm in it. The balcony is as light as day from the lights in this room. You can see them both quite plainly. Look, Adèle is leaning against the iron balustrade, and the Count is standing at a respectful distance talking to her. He is telling her all about Herr von Sorr, it is plain to be seen; and at any rate, my dear, what affair is it of ours if Fräulein Adèle finds it convenient to talk more confidentially to her cousin on the balcony than she could here in the ballroom? She will know the particulars of the affair when she comes back, and we will make her tell us all about it."

While the elderly ladies in the ball-room were thus unfavourably discussing the interview on the balcony, Adèle was listening with painful interest to her cousin's story. She had long known of the evil reports circulated with regard to Sorr; they had been matter of discussion in the President's family circle, and her father had often declared that he could not ask to his house a man whose reputation was so bad. It was only in compliance with Adèle's entreaty that Sorr had been invited to this birthday ball, and this only when Heinrich, upon being consulted, had insisted that the silly stories concerning Sorr were false, that they were all inventions of Lieutenant von Arnim, who hated Sorr.

Adèle, too, had hitherto given little credit to what was said of Sorr; she knew that her friend led a very unhappy life with her husband, that his habits were extremely dissipated, and that he neglected his wife shamefully, but that he had ever been engaged in any dishonourable transaction she did not believe. Nevertheless, at times, when Lucie seemed oppressed with a

sadness which no words of hers could relieve or lighten, doubts had occurred to her; doubts which, however, since Lucie never accused her husband, nor even alluded to him, the young girl had resolutely banished, defending Sorr against her father's suspicions, and treating all evil rumour concerning him as idle gossip.

Now she knew the truth; and her heart seemed to stand still as she learned that all that had been hitherto whispered of evil against Sorr was exceeded by the facts,--her Lucie's husband was a detected thief!

"My poor, poor Lucie!" she said, with infinite sadness, when Styrum had finished his narrative. "What will be done now? What does that dreadful Repuin mean to do?"

"I am not sufficiently familiar with the relations which have existed hitherto between Sorr and Count Repuin to answer that question," Styrum replied, "but I must confess that my first thought was that Repuin had brought about this catastrophe intentionally. I may do the Count injustice, for he acted as any man of honour would have done in his place. He could not suppress his knowledge of Sorr's theft, but he acquainted me with it with great tact, leaving it to me to spare the thief or to bring him to justice, and he acquiesced in my decision, that out of consideration for your father the fellow must be let alone. And no one can blame him for wishing to adjust without my assistance his own relations with Sorr, who has hitherto passed in society for his friend. He has only done his duty, and that in the most honourable manner. All this I admit, and yet I cannot help suspecting that he acted in accordance with a deep-laid scheme and in furtherance of his own evil designs. I can never forget the look the man cast upon Frau von Sorr when you took your friend's part so bravely, and the memory of it fills me with distrust of him. Therefore I had intended to tell you as soon as possible all that happened, and am especially grateful to you for this opportunity to do so, since you are in a position to judge whether any danger threatens your friend. She certainly must have told you much that will enable you to know this."

"Oh, if she only had!" said Adèle. "Unfortunately, it is not so. I love Lucie like a sister. When we were at school together she confided everything, even her very thoughts, to me: we had no secrets from each other; but I no longer possess her confidence. I know she loves me as well as ever, and if she could confide in any one, she would confide in me and let me share and soothe her sorrow. Therefore I cannot but hope for a return of the old intimacy. After her marriage I had not seen her for a long time, and our correspondence had flagged, when something more than a year ago she suddenly came here with her husband to live. Her first visit was to me, and I was indescribably happy to see her once more. She showed me all her old affection, but not her old confidence. I soon perceived that she was very unhappy,--she could not prevent my seeing that,--but to all my questions she returned evasive answers, and I only judged from common report that her marriage was an unhappy one, she has never spoken of it to me. And of her relations with Count Repuin I know only what my own observation has taught me. He has been for months Sorr's most intimate friend; they seemed inseparable. Sorr lives very quietly, he never gives large parties, but he frequently entertains a few friends, among whom, Heinrich has told me, Repuin is always to be found. He has paid assiduous court to my poor Lucie, never heeding the almost offensive coldness of her manner to him. I know how abhorrent his attentions are to her, although she has never mentioned him to me: I can read it in her eyes. This is all I know; you were a witness of the odious scene at supper to-night, it aroused in you the suspicion that troubles me also. My poor, dear Lucie! I am in despair at not knowing how to advise or assist her. I entreat you, dear Karl, to help me; my Lucie deserves to find faithful friends in her terrible misery. Tell me, what will happen,--what can we do?"

As she spoke, Adèle looked up at her cousin, her large, dark eyes glowing with entreaty and filled with tears. How beautiful her eyes were!--almost more beautiful now when their brilliancy was dimmed by those "kindly drops" than when sparkling with youthful gayety.

Count Styrum was wonderfully impressed,--Adèle's cordial confidence enchanted him. Frau von Sorr had already interested him; he was now resolved to do everything in his power to aid her in her misery. Adèle's friend could not be the accomplice of her unworthy husband.

But what could he do? He pondered this question in vain. "What will happen?" To this he could make no reply; he could not imagine what Repuin contemplated doing.

"You do not reply, Karl?" Adèle asked. "Will you not help me to protect my poor Lucie from that horrible Count Repuin, to stand by her in her misery?"

"With all my heart I will, my dear Adèle," he replied, taking her hand and kissing it so fervently that the girl withdrew it with a blush.

"I accept your promise," she said; "we are now allies, and I am convinced that you will be a help indeed. How we can aid my friend I do not yet know, but I am sure that in her great need she will accord me her full confidence, and appeal to me for help; then, Karl, I will summon you and remind you of your promise."

"And I will come. Ask of me what you will, you shall not ask in vain."

"I thank you from my soul; you inspire me with courage and hope. But look, cousin, there comes Repuin, followed by Sorr. Take me to Lucie quickly,--I cannot leave her alone!"

Repuin, as he entered the ball-room, looked around for Heinrich von Guntram. To reach him he was obliged to traverse the entire length of the room, and he waited several minutes to do this, since he did not wish to disturb the dancers. He paused in the doorway and let Sorr pass him, saying as he did so, "Good-night, my dear fellow," in a tone evidently intended to be heard by all about him. "I hope," he added, "that your terrible headache will be gone by tomorrow. Indeed, you ought to consult a physician. Pray give my regards to your wife."

He held out his hand to Sorr with a friendly nod, and then, turning to Assessor von Hahn, he forestalled the question which that worthy was about to address to him, by saying, "I am sorry for poor Sorr; he seems to me in a very bad way. See, Herr von Hahn, how pale he is! He only drank a couple of glasses of champagne, and they have given him a racking headache."

"Is his present ghastly appearance entirely the effect of champagne?" the Assessor asked, with a slight laugh.

"What else could it be? Do you think he can be seriously ill? I trust not."

"It seems, Count, that your great kindness of heart prompts you to endeavour to hush up this ugly story. I admire your amiability. I am naturally kind-hearted myself. I make no boast of it,--the gifts of nature are variously distributed; but it enables me to understand you, Count, and it makes it all the more painful for me to tell you that you never will succeed in crushing this scandal,--nothing else if talked of throughout the room. See how every one looks at Sorr, how his most intimate acquaintances avoid him, turning away as he passes them. Your kindness can avail that man nothing, Count; he is lost, branded, and he knows it; a guilty conscience speaks in every feature of his face."

Repuin had observed the same thing, and exulted to see the contempt with which Sorr was treated by those of his acquaintance whom he was obliged to pass in gaining his wife's side. What had taken place in Heinrich's room was already known here, then. The young officers had blabbed; they could not have told all, for they did not know all, but enough had been said to affect greatly Sorr's reputation.

This was just what he had intended, that Heinrich and his companions should suspect Sorr's guilt without being sure of it. He had hoped to find the ball-room filled with dark rumours, and his wishes were gratified. Sorr would now be convinced that it needed but a word from Repuin to annihilate him, and that his only hope for the future lay in implicit obedience to the Russian's commands.

He, however, feigned to be greatly amazed. "I do not understand you, Herr von Hahn," he said. "What ugly story is it that my discretion is to crush? Why should poor Sorr have a guilty conscience in addition to a bad headache? What has he done?"

"That you know best, Count."

"I am but a poor hand at guessing riddles, and must beg you not to propound them to me, but to tell me plainly what has happened. I must request an explanation in the interest of my friend Sorr."

The Assessor looked at the Count with a very puzzled air. He really did not know what to think. Arnim had given him a succinct account of what had taken place in Heinrich's study, and had added his opinion that "Sorr was now done for," since Repuin had doubtless detected him in cheating at the game. Arnim's trustworthiness was not to be questioned, but how did his story tally with the Count's behaviour? Surely Repuin would not call a detected cheat his friend?

The Assessor did not know what to believe; he was in a very disagreeable position. The only way out of it for him was to tell the Count what reports were current in the ballroom, and thus justify his over-hasty expressions.

"A most annoying misunderstanding," was the Russian's comment upon his communication. "I cannot, Herr von Hahn, explain the occurrence to you, since it concerns a private matter of Count Styrum's, to whom I have promised silence, but this rumour must be contradicted. Pray come with me, we will make use of this pause in the dance to seek out Herr Heinrich von Guntram, and I will explain matters as far as I may in his presence."

Repuin then walked directly across the room to Heinrich, the Assessor following him, joined by several of the gentlemen, who guessed Repuin's intention and were curious to know more of the scene in Heinrich's study. Thus the Russian was surrounded by quite an audience when he reached Heinrich, who was standing near the door of the balcony talking earnestly with Arnim and Herr von Saldern.

Heinrich replied but coldly to the Count's friendly address. He was very indignant that Repuin should have been the cause of so unpleasant a scandal beneath his father's roof upon this special evening; a scandal that had called forth a decided rebuke from the President with regard to the gaming in his son's apartment. He was also annoyed at the indiscretion that had given rise to such disagreeable rumours, and he visited this annoyance upon the Count, although he had but just entered the room and could not possibly have originated any of them.

Repuin took no notice of his cool reception. "I am sorry to disturb you, Herr von Guntram," he said, in a loud voice, "but I am forced to do so by a very unfortunate misunderstanding, which appears to be wide-spread. It concerns a conversation which took place between your cousin, Count Styrum, Herr von Sorr, and myself. May I beg you to ask Count Styrum to step here for one moment, that I may have his ratification of a declaration which I wish to make in your presence?"

Heinrich was surprised at the conciliatory tone adopted by the Russian, and he could not refuse to accede to his request. He beckoned to Count Styrum, who had returned from conducting Adèle to Frau von Sorr, and was standing near the balcony quietly surveying the assemblage.

"I have to my regret learned from Herr von Hahn." Repuin began when Count Styrum had drawn near, "that the aforesaid conversation between the Count, Herr von Sorr, and myself has given rise to various groundless reports, which I feel it my duty to contradict, in order that the serenity of this charming entertainment may not be disturbed by any silly gossip. I therefore declare, and beg all the gentlemen who hear me to take notice of what I say, that the conversation between Count Styrum, Herr von Sorr, and myself, which has given rise to all this talk, related solely to private personal matters, and ended, I trust, entirely to Count Styrum's satisfaction, so that we agreed to forget the whole affair, and not to speak of it again. I beg Count Styrum kindly to confirm this statement."

Styrum did not immediately reply. Could he confirm Repuin's words? They contained no falsehood, and yet they were calculated to deceive the hearers, who would infer from them that the question was of a personal disagreement, which, after a friendly adjustment, was to be forgotten. Did they not imply a justification of Sorr which Styrum neither could nor would ratify? What was Repuin's motive in thus gently treating the thief whom so short a time before he had seemed unwilling to allow to escape?

"May I ask for the confirmation of my words, Count?" Repuin asked again, on noticing Styrum's hesitation. "Have I not spoken truly?"

"What you have said is true," said Styrum, who could hesitate no longer, "but it might give rise to a further misunderstanding, which is under all circumstances to be avoided. I therefore add that there was no question of any quarrel."

"I did not mean to imply that there was, and state expressly that there was no talk of a quarrel between Count Styrum and Herr von Sorr. I believe this affair may now be considered as dismissed."

"Not quite, Count," Lieutenant von Arnim here interposed. "The affair has unfortunately acquired such publicity that it must be pursued a little farther. If you desire to re-establish as a man of honour Herr von Sorr, whom in the presence of many witnesses you treated as no gentleman should be treated by another, you must do it rather more formally. Your conduct towards Herr von Sorr exposed him to suspicions which nothing that either Count Styrum or you have said suffices to allay. I have no desire, Count, to meddle in your private affairs; I do not care to know what was the nature of the conversation to which you summoned Herr von Sorr after so unceremonious a fashion. I shall be quite content--so shall we all--if you and Count Styrum will simply declare 'We consider Herr von Sorr a man of honour.' Let me beg you to make this declaration, Count Styrum."

"I do not feel justified in making such a declaration," Styrum replied.

"Nor do I," Repuin added, "since I do not admit that any one has a right to demand of me a statement as to the honour of a gentleman."

"Your opinion is made sufficiently plain by your refusal," Arnim said, very gravely. Then, turning to Heinrich von Guntram, he added, "I think, Guntram, that you now owe it to yourself, to your family, and to all of us to require this Herr von Sorr to leave a society where there is no place for him."

"I protest against such a construction of my words!" exclaimed Repuin, with a dark glance at the lieutenant.

"No quarrelling, gentlemen, let me entreat," Heinrich von Guntram interposed. "We have had enough, and more than enough, annoyance for to-night. Have some regard for my father and my sister, Arnim, and recall your demand, compliance with which would only provoke a fresh scandal."

"There is no occasion for farther discussion," said Repuin. "Herr and Frau von Sorr are just leaving the room. I advised Sorr to go, he complained of a headache."

"A very prudent proceeding on Herr von Sorr's part," sneered Arnim. "He relieves our friend Guntram of a disagreeable duty. For the present the matter is settled. You must decide for yourself, Guntram, how to act in future with regard to this precious Herr von Sorr. Do not, gentlemen, allow this miserable affair to disturb our enjoyment any longer. The music is just beginning; let us at least have one more dance."

To this all were agreed, even Count Repuin, who was not sorry to be relieved from duty as Sorr's champion. Everything was taking the course he desired; his victim could no longer frequent this society; he was delivered over into the hands of his enemy.

Herr and Frau von Sorr had indeed left the ball-room before Arnim's last words. Their suburban dwelling was not far from the President's, it took scarcely a quarter of an hour to drive thither, but to Lucie the time appeared an eternity.

She leaned back among the cushions, whilst her husband looked out of the carriage window. Not a word did he address to his wife during the drive, nor did she once break the silence. She did not wish to question him to provoke an explanation, she would fain have avoided any such altogether. She knew nothing decided with regard to what had occurred at the President's. A few remarks, not intended for her ear, had hinted at a most disagreeable scene, in which her husband had been implicated, and in her anxiety she had applied to Adèle for information. Her friend, however, had no time to impart this, for scarcely had Count Styrum conducted her to Lucie when Sorr made his appearance, stating that he was not well, and that he wished to leave immediately, without any formal adieux.

A few words only Adèle had contrived to whisper into her friend's ear, few but significant. "Courage, dearest Lucie; remember, I am your devoted friend; trust me; whatever happens, I will stand by you."

What did these words mean? Lucie ran over in her mind the events of the evening, but found no explanation of them. Adèle could not know how insulting had been Count Repuin's presumption, or how sharply he had been reproved. But if she did not know, she perhaps suspected it, and therefore had her championship of her friend been so eager.

Had the Count perhaps had a quarrel with her husband? They had returned to the ball-room together, the Count with his head carried haughtily, Sorr, on the contrary, with an air that seemed to Lucie to express profound despair. Just so pale and downcast had he looked on the day when he told her that the last remnant of his property had been lost at the gaming-table, and that not his money only, but also his honour would be sacrificed if he could not quickly find means to pay his gambling debts. He threatened to put a bullet through his head if Lucie did not sign a power of attorney that placed her maternal inheritance, her whole fortune, at his disposal. He had promised then never to play again, and to alter his whole manner of life.

Lucie had long known that he had broken his word, that he had played away her property also, and she only called this scene to mind now because he had the same air of utter despair that had characterized him on this evening when he had followed Repuin into the ball-room.

What had happened? Should she ask him? No! Whither could such questions lead? He had long ceased to tell her the truth; and even were he to do so, she might well wish it untold. Even to guess at the dark ways by which he maintained his position in society was misery enough. Why should she wish to know the terrible truth? He must have been playing again; Repuin had probably lost, and some quarrel had ensued, which---- No, she would pursue such thoughts no further. She trembled to think that her husband might have revelations to make to her that would rob her of the last remnant of her peace of mind.

The carriage stopped; Sorr got out, and, without troubling himself about his wife, unlocked the door and entered the house. She followed him, and they ascended the stairs in silence. In the anteroom he lighted the two candles left in readiness for them. When they returned from an evening entertainment it was his custom, after lighting the candles, to retire to his room with a curt "good-night," but this he did not do. "I have something to say to you," he said, handing Lucie one of the candles. "I will go with you into the drawing-room."

She made no reply; her hand trembled as she took the light. She had a foreboding that a crisis in her destiny was at hand; that the communication which Sorr was about to make to her would be momentous both for her and for him.

He went first. In the drawing-room he placed the light upon the table, and then sank upon the sofa as if exhausted. He sat for a long time in silence, his head resting on his hand, his looks bent on the ground.

Lucie did not disturb him, but remained standing by the table in front of the sofa, silently watching him, marking the convulsive twitching of his lips, the terrible change in his countenance. She saw the struggle going on within him.

At last he seemed to have come to a determination. He looked up, but when he saw Lucie's dark eyes fixed searchingly upon him he instantly averted his own. He sprang up from the sofa and paced the room with hurried, irregular strides, pausing at last before his wife. He tried to look at her, but he could not meet her eye. It was inexpressibly difficult to speak the first word. He longed to have her question him, that he might reply, but Lucie was silent. He felt her keen glance watching his every movement, and at last he could endure it no longer.

This must end,--this terrible silence was not to be borne; he must break it by some word, no matter what. "I am ruined!" he said.

"I know it; we have been so for a long while," was Lucie's reply, given with forced calmness.

"You deceive yourself. I am far worse off than you think. I have lost all,--everything! More than we ever possessed! I am overwhelmed with debt; we are on the brink of an abyss from which there is but one means of escape."

"We should have adopted it long since."

Sorr looked up in astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"That we must at last resign the life we have led hitherto. I have often, but always in vain, begged you to do so. Now necessity will force you to it, and if you really see this at last I shall bless this hour. By honest labour we can regain what we have lost. We have influential friends, by whose aid we can easily begin life anew in another city. You can procure some official position, and I will give lessons in music and drawing, or in French and English. With courage and determination we can easily achieve a secure independence."

"You are mad!"

This was all the reply that Sorr had for Lucie's words. Then he laughed aloud. "It is incredible," he said, more to himself than to her, "the wild ideas that will fill a woman's brain! An official post with a few hundred thalers of salary--too much to starve upon, too little to procure enough to eat! Tiresome work, from morning until night, and hectored by a superior officer, to whom one must cringe. Regarded askance by gentlemen. A pretty position! No, rather a bullet through my brains and the whole mummery at an end. No need to waste a word upon such nonsense. If I cannot live as I have been accustomed to live, I had rather not live at all. This is not the means of escape which I have to propose to you." He paused a moment; it was difficult to say what he had to, but he could delay no longer, and he continued, "We must separate, Lucie!"

"You forget that this is impossible," Lucie replied, forcing herself to speak calmly; "a Catholic marriage cannot be dissolved, or ours would have been so long ago."

"Nonsense! I am not talking of a divorce, which is of course impossible, but of a separation. I have a proposal to make to you; I know that at first it will seem odious to you; I do not like it myself, but upon calm reflection you will see that in it lies our only means of salvation. You must first know how matters stand with me, and this I will tell you in as few words as possible. Our need is such that in my despair I was induced to--to--it must out, there is no help for it--Count Styrum's pocket-book lay open before me, and I took from it a hundred-thaler note."

Lucie recoiled; incapable of uttering a word, she stared at her husband. A thief! No; for this she had not been prepared; this exceeded her worst forebodings,--a thief! And he could confess his shameful deed thus with cynical frankness; he did not even repent it; he was not crushed and despairing. Had he not just expressed his contempt for honest labour? A thief! And to this man she was bound by an indissoluble tie!

Sorr expected no answer; he had now gained the courage to speak; after the confession of the theft nothing was difficult, and he continued, "Well, yes, I could not resist the temptation; the pocket-book lay open before me; the opportunity was too tempting. I thought no one saw me, but I was wrong; Repuin saw it all. Our fate lies in his hand; if he speaks I shall be condemned as a thief, and you will share my dishonour. The wife of the thief who has escaped punishment only by voluntary death is an outcast from society. Your plan of honest labour would prove futile, for none would intrust their children's instruction to a woman at whom the world points the finger of scorn. You will sink into utter misery; that will be your fate, as mine will be to die by my own hand, if you refuse to accede to the proposal in which alone lies safety for us. It is in your power," the wretch continued, speaking rapidly and in a firmer tone, "to secure yourself a gay and joyous existence, free from care, and provided with every luxury that wealth can give, while you keep your conscience clear of the guilt of my death, for it will be your act that drives me to suicide if you refuse to accede to my proposal."

"And what do you ask of me?" Lucie inquired, in a low monotone.

"Count Repuin," Sorr began again, "is madly in love with you. You have hitherto treated him very badly, although you owed it to me to smile upon him, as I have often begged you to do. His love, however, has been only increased by your reserve. He is ready to make any sacrifice for you now. But if he is again repulsed he is resolved upon revenge; he will then be our deadly foe; he will ruin both you and me. You see what is before us. If, however, you consent to our separation. Count Repuin will take you to Italy, or whithersoever you wish to go. He will load you with the costliest gifts, every wish that you can frame will be fulfilled. You will insure yourself a most brilliant position and save my life. It would be worse than madness to say 'no.'"

Lucie's gaze was bent upon the ground. When her husband first began to speak such shameful words, she thought she could not endure life until he should have ended, but she summoned up all her strength of mind and succeeded in conquering the terrible pain that tortured her; she preserved an outward calm, while her heart seemed breaking with horror and indignation.

Sorr patiently awaited her answer. He thought she was considering his proposal, and that was a good sign. He had feared that she would indignantly reject it, give utterance to her detestation

of the Russian, and overwhelm him with reproaches for having dared to suggest such a scheme, but nothing of all this had occurred; she had listened quietly. He had prepared himself to overpower her resistance with threats and entreaties, but there seemed to be no need for these. Since she was so calmly considering the matter she would certainly be reasonable in the end. He exulted in so easy and unlooked-for a victory.

At last she spoke: "You then desire that we should part? You yourself would now declare me released for life from every obligation that a wife owes to her husband? You distinctly consent to our separation, and declare that you have no longer any claim upon either my life or my fidelity. Answer me with a simple 'yes,' and I will consider whether to accept your proposal, but before I decide I must be free."

"If you accept my plan, it follows as a matter of course that you are entirely free by my desire," Sorr replied, who could not help thinking her demand rather ambiguous.

"I asked for a simple 'yes' or 'no,' without any 'if.' I must be free before I decide. Unless you say 'yes' unconditionally, I swear to you I will die before I yield to your wishes and part from you."

"Well, then, 'yes,'--you are free. But now be reasonable, Lucie; tell me what to say to Repuin; he expects me tomorrow morning by eight o'clock. I dare not go one minute later."

"I will consider; you shall have my reply before eight to-morrow."

"But, Lucie----"

"You must wait. I will not decide to-night."

"Well, then, as you will. To-morrow morning early. Good-night, Lucie."

He held out his hand, but she turned from him with loathing, and, without even looking at him, took up a candle and left the room. Sorr heard the door of her own room bolted behind her.

CHAPTER V.

The Hohenwalds by no means belong to the old German imperial nobility. It is said that in the forest-depths of the domain of a Saxon Prince his trusty huntsman saved the life of his lord from the furious onslaught of a wild boar, and that in gratitude the Prince bestowed upon him the hunting castle where he had previously been overseer, and in memory of his bravery gave him the name of Hohenwald,[2] which gradually came to belong to the castle and the neighbouring village on the estate. The title of Freiherr, or Baron, was bestowed much later by the Emperor. Baron Werner von Hohenwald, who distinguished himself as a colonel during the Thirty Years' War, was probably the first thus honoured, and the founder of the family of *von* Hohenwalds.

This old colonel, who added much to the estate, not a large one originally, was passionately devoted to the chase; he took up his abode in the old castle, surrounded on all sides by the forest, and his example was followed by all his successors, although such a residence by no means lightened the cares of the management of the extended estates of Hohenwald. The solitude of the forest had an irresistible attraction for the Hohenwalds, and although they had erected a comfortable grange near the village, they always occupied the castle. Around the comparatively new grange were gathered the farm buildings and the dwellings for inspectors and other officials. The Hohenwalds thought nothing of the inconvenience of riding a couple of miles to reach the grange; they thought themselves amply compensated by the wonderful beauty of the site of the castle, buried in the depths of a magnificent forest. The love of solitude seemed inherrent in the Hohenwalds. If some among them had in their youth frequented the Court, of Dresden, they were sure to return finally to Castle Hohenwald, and none of them ever left it in summer. They had lavished so much money and taste in fitting it up for a home, that it would indeed have been difficult to find one more charming and desirable. The imperial colonel had first begun to improve and add to the old hunting-nest, and each of his successors had done his part in giving fresh beauty and grace to castle, to gardens, and even to the forest, a portion of which had been converted into a magnificent park. If they loved solitude, they were all the more determined to surround themselves in their solitude with every luxury that wealth could procure. Some of the rooms of the castle were furnished with princely splendour, especially those on the lower story, in which the present Freiherr Werner had been wont to assemble frequent guests before his separation from his wife. The walls were hung with paintings by illustrious masters;--the collection of pictures at Hohenwald, although for years it had been seen by none save the

inmates of the castle, was accounted one of the best and largest in the country,--and the castle library exceeded many a public one in its treasures of literature.

The ground-floor of the castle was less gorgeously fitted up than was the first story. The present possessor, Freiherr Werner, had arranged it for himself, and he thought more of solid comfort than of superficial splendour. Nothing had been spared to make the rooms pleasant and comfortable, but the hangings and furniture-covers were not of silken damask, but of substantial woollen fabric, subdued in colour, suiting well with the dark oak wainscoting and furniture.

The Freiherr's favourite retreat was a large apartment, at one end of which lofty folding-doors of glass opened upon a terrace, whence a flight of steps led into the garden. As the castle crowned an eminence, from this terrace almost all the garden could be overlooked, as well as part of the road leading to the castle from the village of Hohenwald.

The garden-room, as it was called, was the dwelling-room of Freiherr Werner; he spent most of his time here, even in winter, and in summer, when the tall doors were thrown wide open, the view from them partly indemnified him for the loss of open-air exercise, from which he had now been debarred for some years.

Every morning he was pushed into this room in his rolling-chair from his bedroom, for his right foot was so lame from the gout that he could not walk. Here he assembled his family about him, here the daily meals were eaten, and only late in the evening was he rolled back again to his bedroom by his servant or by his son Arno. Every day he sat at the open doors, gazing out into the garden. In former years he had devoted much time to his garden; he was enthusiastically fond of flowers, but since the gout had confined him to his rolling-chair he had been forced to content himself with merely superintending the gardeners, to whom from time to time he would shout down his orders. It was but seldom that he could be taken out into the garden among his flowers, for the slightest motion occasioned him great pain.

On the afternoon of a lovely day in May the Freiherr was seated in his favourite spot, looking abroad into the garden, where his beloved flowers were budding gloriously, and delighting in their beauty and the mild air of spring. He was in the most contented of moods; his book was laid aside; he could read at any time; storms did not interfere with that. His keen gaze wandered with intense enjoyment from shrub to shrub; most of them he had planted himself, and his interest was unflagging in watching their daily development from bud to blossom.

If the Assessor von Hahn could have seen the Freiherr at this moment he would hardly have recognized the gloomy misanthrope in this kindly old man with genial smile and gentle eyes; but the next moment the expression of the mobile features changed, the genial smile vanished, the brow was contracted in a frown, the dark eyes sparkled with irritation.

It was the sound of a distant post-horn that caused this sudden change in the Baron's expression. The old man listened. An extra post! He had not heard the signal for a long time, but in former years his ears had been familiar enough with it; he could not be deceived. A visit was impending, for the road led only to Castle Hohenwald and ended there; any traveller upon it must have the castle for his goal. Again the signal sounded, rather nearer; the postilion was evidently determined that the castle should be thoroughly apprised of the visitor at hand.

The Freiherr picked up a bell from the table beside him and rang it loudly. A servant instantly appeared at the door leading into the hall. "Did you hear that, Franz?" his master angrily exclaimed. "Did you hear that? An extra post!"

"It cannot be, sir," old Franz calmly replied. "Who is there to come to us?"

"That's just it. Who can have the insolence? But there; hear it for yourself. The cursed postilion is blowing with all the force of his lungs just to vex me."

"Can it be possible?" old Franz exclaimed, in the greatest astonishment, as he hearkened to the postilion's horn now sounding much nearer.

"No doubt of it! A visit! Such insolence is insufferable! Do they think me old and childish? Whoever it may be will find himself mistaken. Hurry, Franz, to the castle gate; you know what to say. I receive no one; I'm sick,--I cannot see anybody. The carriage must turn round and go back; whoever it may be, don't let them get out. Call the gardener and old John to help you, if you need them. Go; be quick. In a few minutes that carriage will be here."

The old man looked very angry as he shouted out these orders; his dark eyes flashed from beneath the bushy snow-white eyebrows. With one hand he stroked, as was his habit when vexed, his full silver beard, with the other he rapped upon the small table beside him. "Well, what are you waiting for?" he growled to the man, who still stood hesitating at the door.

"What if it should be the Herr Finanzrath?"

"Werner? I positively never thought of him," replied the Freiherr, mollified on the instant. "Of course he is an exception; but now to your post. Go!"

Old Franz vanished, and the Freiherr leaned forward in his chair, disregarding the pain the

movement caused him, that he might better overlook the road leading up the hill, for in a few moments the extra post would emerge from the forest and be visible upon the road.

On came the horses and the vehicle, a light chaise, in which sat an elegantly-dressed man leaning back among the cushions, and talking to a horseman who was riding beside the carriage.

"Of course it is Werner!" muttered the Freiherr, relieved, sinking back into his chair. And yet he did not seem particularly rejoiced at the unexpected arrival of his eldest son, for the frown did not quite leave his brow. He looked annoyed. "What does he want, coming thus without letting us know? But perhaps he did announce his visit to Arno; he is riding beside him. Well, well, we shall see."

The old man had not long to wait,--the post-chaise soon rattled over the stones of the court-yard, and a few minutes later the Finanzrath von Hohenwald, accompanied by his brother Arno, entered the garden-room.

The Finanzrath was a tall, handsome man, something over thirty years old; he, as well as his brother Arno, bore a decided resemblance to the old Baron,--they had the same dark, fiery eyes, and the same finely-chiselled mouth, which, when tightly closed, lent an almost hard expression to the face. And yet, despite their likeness to their father, the brothers were so unlike that it was only after long familiarity with them, and a careful comparison of their features, that any resemblance between them could be detected. Both were handsome men, tall and shapely, but their air and bearing were entirely dissimilar, Arno having preserved the erect military carriage of the soldier, while the Finanzrath was distinguished by an easy, negligent grace of movement. Although he was the elder of the two, he looked much younger than Arno; his fresh-coloured, smooth-shaven face had a very youthful expression, while Arno's grave, earnest eyes made him appear older than he really was.

The old Baron's face cleared somewhat as the Finanzrath drew a chair up beside his father's and greeted him most cordially. "I am delighted to see you looking so well, father," he said, kindly. "I trust that terrible gout will soon be so much better that you can get out among your flowers. But where is Celia?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, where is she? Who can tell the whereabouts of that will-o'-the-wisp? In the forest, in the park, in her boat on the lake, in the village,--everywhere at once!" the old man answered, with a smile.

A slight shade flitted across the Finanzrath's countenance. "Just the same as ever," he said. "I thought so; and perhaps it is as well that Celia is not here at the moment, as it gives me an opportunity to speak to you and Arno, father, of a matter that lies very near my heart, and that I should like to have settled before I see her. I hope, sir, you will not be angry with me if I speak frankly with you in regard to your darling, whom you have just designated so justly a will-o'-the-wisp?"

"What do you want with the child? Have you any fault to find again with Celia?" the Freiherr asked, crossly.

"Yes, father; I feel it my fraternal duty towards Celia to speak very seriously to you and to Arno in regard to her. You both spoil the girl so completely that a stop must be put to it. Celia is now fifteen years old, she is almost grown up."

"She is grown up," Arno interposed.

"So much the worse. Then it is certainly high time that something were done about her education, if she is not to run quite wild. She is a charming, sweet-tempered creature, and I can hardly blame you, living with her here in this lonely forest, for being content with her as she is, nor can I wonder that you, my dear father, can scarcely grasp the idea of allowing her to leave you."

"What do you mean?" the Freiherr exclaimed, angrily. "What are you thinking of? I let Celia leave me? Never!"

"I knew what you would say, father," the Finanzrath replied; "but I hope, nevertheless, that after calm consideration you will agree to a plan that I have to propose to you. Celia has grown up here in the castle without feminine companionship, for you will hardly call our old Kaselitz, who has always spoiled the child to her heart's content, a fit associate for a Fräulein von Hohenwald. The only person of education with whom Celia comes in contact, with the exception of yourself and Arno, is her tutor our good old pastor, Quandt, who, as Arno wrote me, has taught her well in various branches of science and literature, but can of course teach her nothing of what a young girl of rank should know when she goes out into the world."

"She never shall go out into the world!" the Freiherr indignantly exclaimed.

"Do you wish Celia to pass her entire life here in the solitude of Castle Hohenwald? Will you run the risk of hearing her one day say to you, 'You have robbed me of the joys of life, father! I might have been a happy wife and mother, but since you chose to keep me by your side, I am become a weary, unhappy old maid!' You cannot be so selfish as to wish that your darling should

sacrifice to you her entire youth?"

"Nonsense! What would you have?" growled the Freiherr. "But go on. I should like to know what you really want."

"You shall soon learn. I spoke of Celia's education; she is well grounded in science and literature; she rides like an Amazon,--not badly perhaps; she handles a fowling-piece with the skill of a gamekeeper. So far so good; but does she understand how to conduct herself in society? does she possess the talent for social intercourse,--a knowledge of those forms which, worthless in themselves, are nevertheless indispensable accomplishments for a young lady of rank?"

"I have not brought her up to be a fine lady!" the Freiherr said, peevishly.

"I think, sir, if you will pardon me, that you have not brought her up at all. I detest a fine lady and modern artificial culture, but a Baroness von Hohenwald should not be utterly ignorant of the forms of society. Celia must learn to conform to the rules that govern the society of to-day, and it is high time that she began to do so. Arno will admit that I am right."

"I cannot deny it," said Arno, who had been an attentive listener as he paced the room to and fro, and who now paused before his brother and nodded assent. "I, too, have pondered upon what was to be done for Celia. Something must be arranged for her further culture, but I have vainly tried to devise what it shall be."

"And yet the matter is simple enough. Two methods are open to you. Let my father choose which he prefers. The first, which I myself think the best and would therefore most strongly recommend, is perhaps the one that will prove least pleasing to my father. Frau von Adelung's school in Dresden has the best of reputations, and Frau von Adelung herself is a woman of refinement and culture, who moves in the first society. I made an excursion to Dresden before I came hither, saw Frau von Adelung myself, and spoke with her regarding Celia, whom she is quite willing to receive among her pupils."

"Deuce take you for your pains!" cried the Freiherr, with a burst of anger. "I know without being told that if I choose to pay for it the best boarding-school in the country will be thankful to have my Celia, but I tell you, once for all, I will not hear of it. I cannot part with the child. Celia is my sunshine in this gloomy house. My heart rejoices at the sight of her. The pain that tortures me is forgotten when I look into her laughing eyes. I am a sick old man. You ought not to be so cruel, Werner; leave me my jewel for the few years that I have to live."

The Freiherr's tone from one of angry reproach had become that of almost humble entreaty.

The Finanzrath nodded and smiled. "I hope you will rejoice for many years in your jewel, and one day see her a happy wife and mother," he said; and then continued: "If you will not part with Celia, she must have the training here in Hohenwald which she could indeed procure more easily at school; all that remains to be done is to engage a good governess for her."

Arno suddenly paused in his pacing to and fro in the room. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "What are you thinking of, Werner? A governess here in the house! Live with the pedantic, insufferable creature day after day, week after week, and always have her interfering between our Celia and ourselves! Our entire life would have to be changed. If so pretentious a person were to come here she would require to be amused; we should have visitors, and would be forced to pay visits in return. The peaceful repose that has hitherto reigned in Hohenwald would be gone if a strange inmate were introduced among us."

"Would you rather send Celia to school? I confess I should prefer it myself."

"But I should not!" the old Freiherr exclaimed, with decision. "I do not like womenfolk, but sooner than part with Celia I will endure a governess in the house. After all, she will be only a superior sort of servant. We get along with Frau Kaselitz, and we can get along with her too!"

"Frau Kaselitz does not pretend to sit at table with us, nor to join our family circle," said Arno.

"That would be insufferable," the Freiherr said, reflectively.

"Then let us have recourse to the school."

"Don't say another word about that cursed school," growled the Freiherr; "let us have the governess and be done with it!"

Arno would have made some further objection, but his father cut it short by declaring that not a word more should be said upon the subject until Celia was by; the girl was old enough to have an opinion concerning her own affairs.

To this decision the Finanzrath assented, rather unwillingly, to be sure, since he would have preferred to have the matter settled on the instant. He saw, however, that his father was coming round, and he feared to injure his cause by any insistance. And Celia herself prevented the possibility of continuing the conversation in her absence.

A shower of syringa blossoms suddenly rained down upon the Finanzrath, who was seated

near the open door leading to the garden, and a charming young girl appeared upon the threshold. It was Celia,--the will-o'-the-wisp, as her father loved to call her,--who always appeared when least expected.

With a merry laugh she flew to the Finanzrath, sealing her flower-greeting with a light kiss upon his cheek, and then turning to the old Baron, she threw her arms around his neck. "You are a dear, darling old papa!" she cried, gayly. "You will not let your Celia be sent to school like a little child; you will not let me be disposed of without consulting me! Thank you, my own dear papa; but as for you, Werner, I shall not forget that you would have banished me from Hohenwald."

The Finanzrath shook off the syringa blossoms, and, leaning back in his chair, contemplated his sister with increasing satisfaction. He had not seen her for nearly a year; he had not been at Hohenwald since the Freiherr's last birthday, and during this time Celia had changed wonderfully. He had left a child, he found a maiden; the tall, lithe figure had gained a certain roundness and grace.

Celia was developed physically far beyond her years; mentally, she was still the gay, careless child; the happy spirit of childhood laughed in her large brown eyes, was mirrored in the bright smile that lit up her lovely features, and in the gay defiance with which, after having fairly smothered her father with kisses, she confronted the Finanzrath with folded arms. "Well, my sage brother," she said, laughing, "here I am, in my own proper person, prepared to listen to your highly valuable advice with regard to my future training."

"Have you been listening, Celia?" the Finanzrath asked.

"Of course I have. I saw you arrive, and by way of welcome plucked a whole apronful of syringa flowers to surprise you after a sisterly fashion, and then crept up to the door on tiptoe. There, to my horror, I heard how the redoubtable Finanzrath had the impudence to tell my darling old papa that he had not brought me up. Was it not my duty to listen? You are a detestable monster, Werner! Look at me and tell me what fault you have to find with me."

At this moment the Finanzrath certainly had no fault whatever to find with his charming sister; he thought her lovely, and owned to himself that if no one had brought Celia up, mother Nature had done the best that was possible for her. Her every movement was graceful, her bearing that of a lady, and even in the stormy embrace she had bestowed upon her father there had been nothing rude or unfeminine, but only an impulsive warmth that became her admirably.

"Why do you not speak?" Celia went on, as the Finanzrath continued to look at her with a smile but without replying. "You were ready enough just now to prate about my want of social elegance, and Herr Arno, in the character of a dignified echo, added his 'I cannot deny it.' Only wait, Arno; you shall atone to me for that!"

"That's right!" the Freiherr cried in high glee. "The little witch has you both on the hip."

"And, papa, I am a little angry with you, too. You were nearly talked over by that odious Werner. Now let me tell you, if you ever send me to boarding-school I will run away immediately. Even if I have to beg my way back to Hohenwald I never will stay in Dresden with that horrid Frau von Adelung, to whom Werner would sell me like a slave."

"You would not talk so, child, if you had ever seen Frau von Adelung," the Finanzrath observed.

"I am not a child, and I will not let you treat me as such. Remember that, Werner. I will never consent to be sent to school."

"Assure yourself on that point, little one. You heard me say that I never will permit such an arrangement: that I cannot and will not be parted from you," said the old man.

"Yes, I heard that, you dear old papa, and I could have shouted for joy when you refused to listen to Werner's odious plan. You cannot live without me, nor can I without you. So let Arno talk as he pleases. You and I know that I am very well brought up. Neither you nor Arno has ever found any fault with my manners, and as for what Werner has to say about marriage, it is all nonsense. I shall never marry, but live here with you two at Hohenwald. Upon that I am resolved."

"Ah, indeed?" the Finanzrath asked, smiling. "So elevated a resolve adopted by a girl of fifteen of course alters the case."

"You are detestable! In two months I shall be sixteen."

"A most venerable age, I admit; fortunately, however, not so advanced but that you may still have something to learn. How, for example, does your music come on?"

Celia blushed, and replied, rather dejectedly, "I have not practised much lately. Our good old pastor is so deaf that he never hears my mistakes."

"And therefore you prefer not to practise at all, but to forget the little you have learned, although you have considerable talent, and might give my father a great deal of pleasure if you had a good teacher. Think, father, how you would enjoy having Celia give you an hour or so of delicious music every evening."

The old man looked fondly at his darling: "Yes, yes, I should like it very well, but if it tires the child to practise, I can do very well without it."

"Oh, no, papa; I will turn over a new leaf, and practise well, if it really will please you."

"Practice is not enough," said the Finanzrath; "you never will improve without a teacher. I consulted Frau von Adelung upon the subject, for I foresaw that my plan of sending you to school would meet with invincible opposition from you and my father. Therefore I asked Frau von Adelung if she knew of any one whom she could recommend as a governess for Celia."

"Ah, now we are coming to the governess!" cried Celia, laughing. "You are a born diplomatist, Werner. This is why you praised my 'talent' and talked about my music. But no, my cunning brother, I am not to be caught in your net. Am I, grown up as I am, to be ordered about by an ugly old governess in green spectacles? I can hear her now: 'Fräulein Celia, sit up; you are stooping again! Fräulein Celia, no young lady should climb a chestnut-tree. Fräulein Celia here, Fräulein Celia there! You must not do this, and you must not do that.' Oh, a governess is always a horror! and I tell you, Werner, that if you send one here, I will contrive that she is tired of her post in a week."

"We will see about that," the Finanzrath rejoined, coolly. "Frau von Adelung has recommended to me very highly an accomplished young person, who, so far as I know, neither wears green spectacles nor is a horror. She is very musical, plays the piano charmingly, and speaks French as well as English."

"She must be a prodigy, indeed!" Arno said. "Is it possible that such a combination of the arts and sciences can condescend to come to Castle Hohenwald? Celia is right; the lady could not stay here a week. Our lonely castle is no place for such a wonder, nor is Celia any pupil for her. Neither my father nor I could alter our mode of life for a governess. Women, in fact, are so little to my mind, that it is only by an effort that I can bring myself to speak to them."

"Pray let me thank you in the name of the sex," Celia said, with a low courtesy to her brother.

"Nonsense! you are an exception, you little will-o'-the-wisp. No need to talk artificial nonsense to you; you are not greedy for admiration, and do not expect to be flattered."

"And how do you know that Fräulein Müller, the lady recommended by Frau von Adelung, expects it?" asked the Finanzrath.

"All these modern governesses expect it. Most of them are pedantic, and all of them are greedy for admiration."

"You are certainly mistaken in this case. I described exactly to Frau von Adelung the life that is led at Castle Hohenwald; I expressly told her that no guest is admitted within its walls, that the governess would have no companionship save Celia's, that my father was ill, and therefore unfit for social intercourse, that Arno was a woman-hater, who would never, probably, exchange three words with her, and that therefore the position of governess here would not suit any one with any social pretensions."

"And what was Frau von Adelung's reply?" Arno asked.

"That it was just the kind of situation that Fräulein Müller wanted."

"That seems to me a rather suspicious circumstance. Why should such a woman as you describe, talented and accomplished, desire to bury herself in the solitude of Castle Hohenwald?" Arno objected, and his father, too, shook his head doubtfully.

But the Finanzrath was prepared for this objection; he said, "Frau von Adelung, in whose sincerity and truth I place perfect reliance, explained what seemed to me, too, an anomaly. Fräulein Müller has had much to endure in her life; her father was a wealthy merchant, and she was brought up in the greatest luxury. But all the young girl's hopes in life were disappointed: her father lost his entire fortune. Frau von Adelung hinted that he had committed suicide, probably in despair at his losses, and gave me to suppose, although for the young lady's sake she did not say so directly, that the poor girl was betrothed, and that the loss of her money broke her engagement. Alone, and dependent entirely upon her own exertions, the unfortunate girl is anxious to earn an honourable livelihood. The solitude of Castle Hohenwald, Frau von Adelung maintains, would make the situation here peculiarly desirable to Fräulein Müller. I expressly stated, also, that my father would be quite ready to indemnify her by an unusually high salary for the disadvantages of her position here; and I have so arranged matters that it only needs a note from me to Frau von Adelung to secure Fräulein Müller for Celia. She might be here in a few days. It is for you to decide, father, whether we shall embrace the opportunity thus offered us of procuring a suitable companion and teacher for Celia, or whether we shall let it slip."

The Freiherr was convinced by his son's representations. There was still a conflict going on within him between his distaste for having his quiet life disturbed by the intrusion of a stranger and his desire that Celia's education might be complete. But he was so far won over to the Finanzrath's views that he would not say 'no' to his plan. Celia must decide. "Well, little one," he said, "what do you think now of Werner's scheme? Shall he write to Frau von Adelung to send us this Fräulein Müller, or do you still declare that you will not have her?"

Celia looked thoughtful. She must decide, then. She thought of the delicious liberty she had hitherto enjoyed, of the restraint that would be laid upon her in the future. But she thought also of her father's pleasure in her progress in music, and more than all, it quite broke her heart to think that her "no" would destroy the hopes of an unfortunate girl who was seeking a position as governess.

Her brother's account had excited her profound sympathy. She could not say "no." "You are an odious fellow, Werner!" she said, after a short pause for reflection. "You do just what you please with us; but you shall have a kiss, and you may write to Fräulein Müller to come, and I will try not to tease her."

So the Finanzrath had his kiss, but he could not keep her by his side. She had been serious long enough, and she ran laughing into the garden, leaving her father and brothers to farther consultation.

CHAPTER VI.

The Prussian-Saxon boundary defines also the bounds between the Hohenwald estates, that lie entirely on Saxon territory, and the Prussian domain of Grünhagen. The boundary-line here makes a great curve into Saxony, so that the Grünhagen lands are almost shut in by the Hohenwald forests and fields. The Grünhagen forest indeed forms a continuation of the magnificent woods of beech and oak that surround Castle Hohenwald, the boundary-line between them being only marked out by a narrow path, so overgrown with moss and underbrush that only careful observation can detect its course.

The vicinity of the two estates has always been, since the memory of man, a fruitful cause of quarrel between the respective proprietors of Hohenwald and Grünhagen, each being strictly jealous lest his neighbour should infringe upon his rights. At times some of the Hohenwald cattle, when the herd-boy was not sufficiently on the alert, would stray into the Grünhagen fields and be taken into custody by Herr von Poseneck's people, and on one occasion the Hohenwald forester had actually sequestrated the fowling-piece of Herr von Poseneck, when that gentleman, who was devoted to the chase, had in his hunting attempted to make a short cut through the Hohenwald forest. There had also been various trespasses upon the rights of the chase which were hardly to be distinguished from poaching committed on both sides of the boundary by enthusiastic Posenecks and Hohenwalds.

These innumerable quarrels had begotten a hostility between the Barons of Hohenwald and Poseneck, which had been handed down from generation to generation, and which was by no means lessened by the fact that, since the annexation of Saxony with Prussia, the Posenecks had become Prussian noblemen. No Hohenwald ever visited Grünhagen, and even in the days when Hohenwald had been renowned for its brilliant entertainments, at which were assembled all the country gentry and many families from beyond the border, no Poseneck was ever invited within its gates.

The hatred of the Hohenwalds for the Posenecks was so great that Freiherr Werner, although he was not wanting in a certain amiability, could not suppress a sentiment of exultation when, in 1849, Kurt von Poseneck, who had allied himself with great enthusiasm to the revolutionists, was forced to sell Grünhagen to his brother-in-law, the Amtsrath Friese, and emigrate to America with his family to escape the trial for high treason that threatened him as a member of the extreme left of the Frankfort National Assembly.

Since then, however, the animosity between Grünhagen and Poseneck had slumbered, for the new possessor of Grünhagen was a man who detested litigation, and who did all that he could to avoid giving cause for offence to the Hohenwalds, while he overlooked any slight trespass on their part. Thus open strife was avoided, but the old dislike only smouldered. Freiherr Werner had transferred it to the Poseneck's near relative, the Amtsrath, whom he detested for his Prussian extraction.

Like master like man! All the inmates of the castle and the inhabitants of the village of

Hohenwald hated everything relating to Grünhagen. The Hohenwald servants, from the steward and inspector to the commonest stable-boy, held the "Grünhagen Prussians" for an odious race of men, and, as they had received strict orders from the Freiherr not to be led into any disputes, avoided all association with the Grünhagen people.

Thus the road from Grünhagen to the village of Hohenwald wellnigh disappeared beneath weeds and grass, for there was not the slightest intercourse between the two places. Was it to be wondered at, then, that a Hohenwald plough boy, driving his team in the meadow bordering upon the Grünhagen lands, stopped his horses and stared in surprise at a young, well-dressed man sauntering slowly along the disused road, crossing the boundary, and then, when near the village of Hohenwald, striking into a by-path leading directly to the Hohenwald oak-forest? The fellow looked after the stranger until he was lost to sight in the forest, and then whipped up his horses, resolving to acquaint the inspector that very evening with the remarkable occurrence.

The stranger noticed the ploughboy's wonder, but it merely provoked a smile as he slowly loitered along the meadow-path. Now and then he paused and looked around, surveying with evident pleasure the lovely landscape spread before him, the fertile fields and meadows, girdled by the glorious oaken forest, now clothed in the delicious green of early spring. As he reached its borders he paused again to look back at the charming village of Hohenwald, nestled on the edge of the forest, and at the stately mansion of Grünhagen, overtopping the farm-buildings, granaries, stables, and cottages about it.

How near the two estates were to each other and yet how wide apart! A smile hovered upon the young man's handsome face as he called to mind the strange hatred of the two proprietors for each other. He had laughed aloud when the Amtsrath Friese had told him of it at Grünhagen, and he could not now suppress a smile, for such an inherited aversion was entirely inconceivable to him; it was a folly for which there was no possible explanation.

Entering the wood, he pursued the narrow path through the thick underbrush, and gazed about him with intense admiration. Nowhere else in Europe had he seen such magnificent old oaks; they belonged exclusively to the Hohenwald domain, whose proprietor cared for them most tenderly, and never allowed any of the giant trunks to be felled except those which nature had decreed should yield to time. The Baron could well afford to cultivate his love for his oaks; and whatever might be done in distant parts of the forest, no axe was ever allowed to work havoc near the castle among his old oaks and beeches in his dear "forest depths." The narrow foot-path crossed a broad road through the wood; here the stranger paused irresolute and looked about him searchingly. To the right the road wound through the forest, in whose depths it vanished; to the left it led through rows of trees up a gentle incline to Castle Hohenwald, one of the wings of which the stranger could discern in the distance. He had not thought himself so near the castle; the foot-path must have led him astray. According to the directions of the Grünhagen inspector, he should be upon the path which, cutting off a corner, was a more direct road to the Grünhagen woods than the one leading from the mansion; but if this were so, it ought not to have brought him so near to Castle Hohenwald. He hesitated, pondering whether to follow the path on the other side of the road or to turn round, when his attention was arrested by a charming sight. Galloping upon a magnificent and spirited horse, there suddenly appeared upon the road from the castle a girl scarcely more than a child. She managed her steed with wondrous case and security; the mad gallop gave her no fear; she sat as firmly and even carelessly in the saddle as though the horse were going at an ordinary pace; indeed, she even incited him to greater speed with a light touch of her riding-whip.

How lovely she was! A young girl, judging by her slender, well-rounded figure, and yet only a child. There was a bright smile upon her charming face, her eyes beamed with happiness, and her dark curls, blown backwards by the breeze, escaped from beneath her light straw hat.

She was very near the stranger when the horse suddenly started and shied, probably frightened by the young man's light summer coat among the trees.

A practised horseman might well have lost his stirrup through such an interruption of the swift gallop, but the young Amazon kept her seat perfectly, punished her horse by a smart cut with her whip, as she exclaimed, "What are you about, Pluto?" and then, as with a strong steady hand she reined him in, looked to see what had caused his terror.

A stranger in the Hohenwald forest! Celia had reason enough for astonishment, for she could scarcely remember ever having seen any save the people of Hohenwald upon her father's estate. And this was an elegantly-dressed stranger, no forester or peasant, but a young man evidently from the higher walks of society. Now a well-educated young lady would certainly have found it becoming in such an unexpected encounter with a stranger in the lonely forest to display a certain amount of embarrassment, perhaps of timidity. Not so Celia. She scanned the intruder upon her father's domain with a long, searching look,--the sensation of fear she knew only by name, and there was no cause for embarrassment. She was at home here, upon her native soil. She had a perfect right to ask the stranger bluntly, "How came you here? Who are you?"

The stranger bowed very respectfully. "I think," he replied, "that I have the honour of addressing Fräulein von Hohenwald."

He was evidently a very polite and agreeable young man,--"the honour of addressing Fräulein

von Hohenwald." Celia suddenly felt very much grown up. Hitherto she had been only Celia. Even the servants, who had known her from infancy, called her nothing but Fräulein Celia. Fräulein von Hohenwald sounded delightful. She quite forgot to pursue her inquiries, and answered, "Yes, I am Cecilia von Hohenwald."

Again the stranger bowed low, and taking a little card-case from his breast-pocket, produced a visiting-card, which he handed to her, saying, "I must pray your forgiveness for presenting myself in this informal manner as your nearest neighbour."

Celia read the card. "Kurt von Poseneck!" she exclaimed, and the tone of her voice as well as the expression of her eyes manifested such surprise and even terror, that for Kurt all the inherited hatred of the Hohenwalds for the Posenecks found utterance in this brief mention of his name.

When the Amtsrath Friese, his uncle, had told him of the fierce hatred between the Hohenwalds and the Posenecks that had been handed down through generations, Kurt had laughed heartily, but now when he thought he saw that this insensate hate had taken root in the heart of this lovely child, he was filled with a sense of painful regret. "What have I done to you, Fräulein von Hohenwald," he said, sadly, "that my name should so startle you?"

"It does not startle, it only surprises me," Celia replied, quickly, as she looked with increased interest and a greater degree of attention at this young man, who did not in the least resemble the picture she had formed from the tales of Frau Kaselitz of a member of the evil-minded, cross-grained quarrelsome Poseneck family.

Certainly Kurt von Poseneck looked neither cross-grained nor quarrelsome as his frank eyes met her own kindly and yet sadly.

Her first inspection had inclined her in the stranger's favour, and Celia now decided that he was a very fine-looking man, almost as tall as her brother Arno and far handsomer, for Arno looked stern and gloomy, while Kurt smiled kindly. His full brown beard and moustache became him admirably. Celia thought his expression exceedingly pleasing; she had never supposed that a Poseneck could have so frank and honest a smile.

The girl was quite incapable of dissimulation,--her thoughts and sentiments were mirrored in her eyes,--and Kurt perceived to his great satisfaction the first startled expression vanish from her face as she looked at him with a very friendly air.

"I thank you, Fräulein von Hohenwald," he said, "for those simple words. I was afraid you shared the melancholy prejudice that has been the cause of so many terrible disputes between our families in former times, and this would have specially pained me in you."

"Why specially in me?"

The question was simple and natural, but yet not easy to answer. "Because--because--well, then, honestly and frankly, Fräulein von Hohenwald, because as soon as I saw you I said to myself, 'Let the Hohenwalds and the Posenecks quarrel and hate one another as they choose, Fräulein Cecilia von Hohenwald and Kurt von Poseneck never shall be enemies!' Forget the mutual dislike that has divided our families. Will you not promise me this? I know it is a strange request to make of you, but you must forgive my bluntness. I returned to Europe only a few months ago, and cannot forget the fashion learned upon our Western farm in America. I hope you will not blame me for it."

"Oh, no; on the contrary, I like frankness. Werner always scolds me for having my heart upon my lips; he is odious, but papa and Arno take my part."

"Who is Werner?"

"My brother, the Finanzrath. I thought you knew; but indeed you cannot know much about us if you are only lately come from America."

"More than you think. My father used often to tell me of Grünhagen and Hohenwald, and my uncle Friese has talked of you to me also. I knew and admired you, Fräulein von Hohenwald, from his description, and I am doubly rejoiced that chance has brought us together. But you have not yet answered me. Will you grant my request and promise me that for us the old family feud shall not exist?"

"With all my heart!" said Celia; and in ratification of her promise she held out her hand to Kurt, although her horse seemed to take the stranger's approach very ill, and grew restless.

Kurt took the little proffered hand. "Peace is formally concluded, then," he said, gayly. "We are to be good friends, and I trust, Fräulein von Hohenwald, that if you should meet me again in the Hohenwald forest, bound for the Grünhagen wood by the shortest way, you will permit me to exchange a few friendly words with you."

This Celia promised readily; but at the same time she pointed out to Kurt that he never would reach the Grünhagen wood by pursuing a path leading directly to the lake in the Hohenwald

park, and offering to show him the path he was seeking, she walked her horse beside him.

She never dreamed that there could be anything unbecoming in her readiness to show him the right way through the lonely wood; she thought it very natural that she who was at home here should direct a stranger aright, and quite at her ease, she chatted on to Kurt as to an old acquaintance.

He told her of his life in America, and spoke with such affection of his parents, who had been dead now for some years, and with such loving tenderness of his sisters, who were married in America, that Celia could not but be interested and attracted by him. He told her how he had served in the Northern army in the war with the South, attaining the rank of major before it was over. He had then resigned, and, after his father's death, had disposed of the American property, and had now returned to Germany to assist in the management of the Grünhagen estates, which, as his uncle's declared heir, would one day be his. He had spent a few months in travelling in England, France, and Italy, and had arrived only three days before in Grünhagen, where his uncle had given him the warmest of welcomes.

All this Kurt detailed to his guide on their way through the forest, and he also expressed to her his sincere regret that, as his uncle had told him, there was no possibility of establishing friendly relations between Hohenwald and Grünhagen, and that he himself could not even venture to pay a visit to Hohenwald to show that he had inherited nothing of the old family hatred.

"Oh, no, it would never do," Celia said, sadly. "Papa would be terribly angry; his orders are positive that no visitor shall ever be admitted to the castle. Arno would have liked so much to ask his dearest friend, a Count Styrum, to stay with us; but, although papa thinks very highly of the Count, and says himself that he must be an excellent man and a worthy son of his father, who was once papa's dear friend, he could not be induced to let Arno send him an invitation."

"Of course, then, I cannot venture to come, but I hope at least to make your brother Arno's acquaintance; this will surely be facilitated by his being an intimate friend of my cousin, Karl Styrum."

Celia shook her head dubiously. Arno was just as dear and good as papa, but just as disinclined to come in contact with strangers. He never left Castle Hohenwald except when some inspection of the estate was necessary; he spent all his time in studying learned books.

"Are you, then, quite alone in the lonely castle?" Kurt asked, compassionately, but Celia laughed aloud at his question. "I alone and lonely!" she cried. "What can you be thinking of? I have my own darling papa, and Arno, who is so kind; you cannot conceive how kind he is. Then I have my tutor, dear old Pastor Quandt, to whom I go every morning from nine to eleven; that is, I always have gone to him until now,--how I shall do in the future I cannot tell, for only think, now in my old age I am to have a governess."

Kurt laughed, and Celia laughed too, but the laugh did not come from her heart. "You must not laugh at me," she said, with some irritation. "I am afraid I have said something that I ought not. Tell me frankly and honestly, are my manners so odd that I really need a governess?"

"What a very strange question, Fräulein von Hohenwald!"

"Answer it by a simple 'yes' or 'no.' Ought I to have a governess or not?"

Kurt looked at her, with a smile. "Do you really want a frank answer?" he replied.

"Of course I do; it would provoke me very much not to have it!"

"I am afraid you will be provoked with me for giving it, but I will do as you ask. In truth, I think you might learn much of a really good governess, and that she would do you no harm in spite of your 'old age.'"

"How odious of you!"

"Did I not say that I should provoke you by my frankness?"

"No; I am not provoked with you, quite the contrary. I see now that Werner was right. If you, who have only known me a quarter of an hour, see that I need a governess, it must be so. But here we are on the borders of Grünhagen, and there is the path that will lead you back to the house."

She stopped her horse, and pointed out to Kurt with her riding-whip a narrow path, so grass-grown that it could have been detected only by some one very familiar with the locality.

"And you really are not angry?" Kurt asked, unpleasantly surprised by his abrupt dismissal.

Celia looked thoughtful, and after an instant's pause held out her hand to Kurt. "No, I am certainly not angry with you," she said, cordially. "I was provoked, I do not deny it, that you should have thought Werner right; but you meant no unkindness, I am sure, or you would not have been so frank."

"I assuredly meant nothing but kindness!"

"I am sure of it, and it makes me all the more sorry that you cannot come to Hohenwald. It would be so pleasant to have you tell me more about America and your adventures there. But that cannot be, and it will be long before we see each other again, unless we should meet by chance in the forest."

"I trust in my good fortune."

"Well, we may possibly chance to meet again soon, since I take my ride almost every afternoon about this hour, and am very fond of the broad road leading towards the Grünhagen woods. Adieu, Herr Kurt von Poseneck."

"Au revoir, Fräulein von Hohenwald."

She gave him a friendly little nod, touched her horse with the whip, and vanished in a minute along the road leading to Castle Hohenwald.

Kurt looked after her vanishing figure, and then resigned himself to delightful reflections. Was it not something more than chance that had decreed that he, who had found his way so often in American forests, should lose it here, and thus make the acquaintance of this charming girl?

The next day about four o'clock Kurt was seized with an irresistible desire to inspect the forests; he could not stay in the house; it drove him forth, much to his uncle's surprise, who, however, ascribed it to the love of nature engendered by his life in the open air in America. Kurt did not this time, however, pursue the path he had taken on the previous day; he remembered the ploughboy's gaping wonder, and did not choose to become a theme for gossip to the Hohenwald servants; he followed, instead, the more direct course across the Grünhagen fields to the woods, but scarcely had he reached it, when chance guided him to the very spot upon the broad road leading from Castle Hohenwald where he had been so unfortunate as to frighten Celia's horse. The same chance that led Kurt to this place arranged that Celia also, who had hitherto been very careless about the time at which she took her afternoon ride, suddenly required her horse to be saddled on the stroke of four. Old John, the groom, could not imagine why Fräulein Celia should all at once be "so very particular." She never had seemed to care whether the horse were brought to the door a quarter of an hour sooner or later, and now she insisted sharply upon punctuality, although it was the Baron's birthday, and the old servant had had a great deal to do, as Fräulein Celia knew. She could scarcely restrain her impatience to be gone, and as she galloped off down the road, the old man looked after her with a thoughtful shake of the head.

"We may possibly chance to meet again soon," Celia had said to Kurt as she took leave of him, and chance conducted her to the very spot where she had met him yesterday, and where she now met him again. From afar she espied his light coat among the trees, and her lovely face was lit up with a happy smile.

Had she expected him? Impossible! She had made no appointment with him. She knew enough of social rules to understand that a young lady could not appoint a rendezvous with a young man whom she had seen but once, and then only for a short time. Of course it was chance that had brought them both to this spot at the same time, but she was very glad of it, and greeted Kurt with a charming smile.

It was quite natural that she should now walk her horse that Kurt might walk beside her, although it cost her a struggle with Pluto to induce him to agree to this new order of things. Kurt walked beside her, looking up at her with admiration. How graceful was her every movement as she reined in and controlled her impatient horse! She held the curb in a firm grasp, but there was nothing unfeminine in the strength thus put forth. For a while her whole attention was given to her horse, but when she had reduced him to a state of obedient quiescence she replied kindly to Kurt's greeting, and when he expressed his pleasure that a fortunate chance had again brought them together, she answered, with perfect freedom from embarrassment, that she also was much pleased. As she spoke, her smile was so arch that he could not but laugh. And then they laughed together like two children. They knew well what made them laugh, although they said no more about it.

It sounded almost like an excuse when Celia said that she had come from home nearly a quarter of an hour later than usual this afternoon, old John had been so long saddling Pluto, but that she could not scold him, for he was very old now, almost seventy, and he had been up half the night helping her to hang oaken garlands all about her father's beloved garden-room, that he might be surprised by their beauty when Franz rolled him in from his bedroom at five o'clock on his birthday morning. And her father had been very much delighted,--he so loved his oaks,--and he had been specially pleased with a tobacco-bag that she had embroidered for him as a birthday gift. He was not very fond of embroidery, but he knew how hard it was for her to sit still at any kind of work, and he had been touched by the trouble she had taken for him.

Thus Celia talked on, and Kurt listened with rapt attention, as if she were imparting to him the most important secrets. Her delight in the garlands of oak-leaves and in the completion of her gift for her father charmed him. He thought her almost more lovely now than when, a few

moments before, her eyes had sparkled and flashed in her struggle with her horse. He did not know which to admire more, the blooming girl or the lovely child; he only knew that both were adorable.

On the day previous, Kurt had told of his adventures in the war and his life in America; to-day he begged Celia to describe to him her life in Castle Hohenwald, and she did so willingly. She was glad that Kurt should have in his mind a true picture of her dear old father, whom strangers could never portray truly, for no one knew how dear and good he was. Arno too, Frau Kaselitz and Pastor Quandt had often told her, was just as little known or appreciated as his father. She had seen yesterday, from the compassionate way in which Kurt had spoken of her solitude at Castle Hohenwald, how false was his conception of the life there; now, strangers might think what they pleased of it, but Kurt von Poseneck must know what happy days she led there with her kind papa and her dear Arno.

And so she described it to him, beginning with her father, so truly kind, although a little hasty perhaps now and then, bearing pain so patiently, never requiring any sacrifice of his people, but always ready to befriend them. All who knew him loved him. The old servants declared that there never was a better master; even the Herr Pastor had a great respect for him, and only regretted that he had withdrawn from the world, and was in consequence so misjudged. Arno, too, was as kind as he could be. He might look stern and gloomy, but he was not so,--only very sad,--and for this he had good cause. He had been betrothed, and had lost his love, of whom he was inexpressibly fond. Celia did not know how it had happened. Frau Kaselitz would not tell her anything about it, and she could not ask Arno, for when the engagement had been broken some years before, her father had forbidden her ever mentioning the subject to her brother. He had travelled for a long time, but travel could not make him forget his grief; that was why he seemed so stern and gloomy, although he was always gentle and kind to his father, to her, and to the servants and villagers. If any of them were in trouble they always came to Arno for help; and even when it was impossible to help them he always had a kind word for them.

Celia's praise of her eldest brother was by no means so enthusiastic. He was a very good fellow, but then he was not Arno; still, he was very wise, and could always persuade his father to do as he chose. She had been told that in his boyhood Werner was very irritable and passionate, but he had quite conquered this fault. Now he rarely allowed himself to be carried away by anger; his self-control was so great that even when he was deeply irritated he could preserve a perfect calmness of manner, and this was why he had such influence with his father, that whatever he wished to have done at Hohenwald was done. If he did not succeed in one way he tried another. Thus he had contrived that in spite of his father's dislike of having a stranger in the house he had consented to the engagement of a governess.

As she said this Celia could not suppress a little sigh, although she instantly laughed, and added, "Well, it may be best,--you think so, and I will do what I can, and receive Fräulein Müller as kindly as possible."

Werner, she went on to say, came but seldom to Hohenwald, usually only once a year, to be present on his father's birthday, when he stayed only two, or at most three weeks. He was always very good and kind, but she could not love him as she did papa and Arno; she could not tell why, but so it was, and she could not deny that she was always a little glad when he went away again. She was quite sure that papa and Arno felt just as she did, although neither of them had ever said one word to that effect, but she had observed that papa breathed more freely after the carriage had rolled away with Werner.

Then Celia described the few people, not her relatives, with whom she had daily intercourse--Pastor Quandt, her tutor, an old bachelor nearly eighty years of age, but still hale and hearty, and dear and good, and Dr. Bruhn, the village physician, also an amiable old bachelor, and Frau Kaselitz, the housekeeper, who could not do enough to show her love for her darling Fräulein Celia. She, Frau Kaselitz, was the childless widow of one of the former stewards of Hohenwald, and had passed her entire life either in the village or at the castle. She was as good as gold; far too kind; she, Celia, knew that Frau Kaselitz spoiled her and made a governess so desirable--as he had thought it, the girl added, with an arch glance at her companion. She could not deny herself the pleasure of this little thrust.

Celia's lively description soon made it possible for Kurt to have in his mind a vivid picture of the simple life at Castle Hohenwald, and his admiration for the lovely speaker was increased tenfold. What a treasure of simple content she must possess, to preserve such a cheerful gayety of mind with so little in her surroundings to induce it!

A long conversation followed upon Celia's narrative; she required, in her turn, to be told of Grünhagen and its inmates. She asked about his uncle Friese, and was amazed to learn that he was an amiable, kindly old man, who only desired to live at peace with all men. According to Frau Kaselitz and the Hohenwald servants, he was a cross, quarrelsome, purse-proud old person.

In such mutual explanations the time sped rapidly, and Celia, as well as Kurt, was surprised to find that they had reached the Grünhagen woods and the end of the broad road that led through the Hohenwald estate.

"It is time for me to turn back," said Celia, with a slight sigh.

Kurt did not venture to remonstrate, although he felt as if he should have liked to talk on with her forever, and although in Celia's manner there was an indirect appeal to him to ask for a prolongation of the conversation.

"Indeed I must turn round," Celia added, with an interrogatory glance.

"I am afraid you must," Kurt replied, suppressing his desire, and yielding to more prudent suggestions. Then, holding out his hand to Celia, he continued: "Chance has been so kind to-day that I trust it will prove no less so in the future, and so I do not say 'farewell' to you, Fräulein von Hohenwald, but 'till we meet,' and may that be speedily!"

Celia smiled as she nodded her farewell to him, and rode back along the forest road; and on the following day chance was again so amiable as to bring about a meeting between the young people at the same spot in the woods. Yes, chance here proved steadfast and true, and day after day the pair passed slowly along the forest road to the Grünhagen woods, deep in innocent but profoundly interesting conversation. Kurt was on the spot with unfailing punctuality at four o'clock, and a few minutes later Celia would appear on Pluto, who now greeted Kurt with a neigh, and was no longer impatient at the slow walk along the road to the Grünhagen woods. For ten days the skies smiled upon Kurt's forest walks, but then May, which had hitherto shown him such favour, justified the reputation for variability which she shares with April.

At Grünhagen a cold rain pelted against the window-panes, through which Kurt disconsolately watched the skies, covered with dull gray clouds that gave no hope that the weather would clear that day, nor perhaps for several days to come.

The Amtsrath had just finished his after-dinner nap and lighted his long pipe. Sitting in his arm-chair and comfortably sipping his coffee, he was not in the least incommoded by the rain that so interfered with Kurt's good humour; on the contrary, he thought it good growing weather, for

> "Whenever May is wet and cool,
> The farmer's store-house will be full."

He had often lately looked up to the sky in hopes of rain, and he was glad that it had come at last to scatter abroad its blessings over field and fell.

"A fine soaking rain," the old man said, with a smile, to Kurt, who, he felt sure, must agree with him.

"Soaking indeed," Kurt replied, not by any means so pleased as his uncle had expected; but then the old man was thinking of his meadows and Kurt of Celia, whom the soaking rain would surely prevent from taking her daily ride.

The clock in the Grünhagen church-tower struck four; Kurt took his hat.

"Where are you going?" asked his uncle.

"To take a walk in the woods."

"In such weather?"

"A few drops of rain will do me no harm."

The Amtsrath shook his head, for the few drops of rain were, as Kurt himself had admitted, a steady, soaking downpour. Still there is no accounting for tastes, and if forest walks in a pelting rain were among Kurt's American habits, his uncle had no objection to make.

As Kurt stepped out into the open air, and the huge drops were driven into his face by the wind, he hesitated a moment. There was no possibility of meeting Celia in the forest in such a storm. Still, suppose she should persist in taking her ride? It was possible; no, it was impossible; nevertheless, Kurt would not fail to be upon the appointed--no, it had never been appointed--spot in the forest; he could then tell her the next day that he had been there in spite of the storm and rain, that he had not, indeed, expected her, but that he had thought of her. He knew that she would laugh at him and tease him about his walk in the rain, but he so liked to hear her laugh, she was so wonderfully charming in her gayety.

In spite of the increasing rain that soon penetrated his light summer dress, the way did not seem long; he thought of her, and perhaps because he had no hope of seeing her that day her image was all the more present to his mind. During the past ten days a very peculiar relation had been developed between Kurt and Celia. While Kurt sauntered along the forest road beside Pluto they talked together like brother and sister. Celia was never tired of hearing all that Kurt could tell her of America and the life he had led there, and his conversation had opened to her an entire new world of thought and emotion. Brought up in a narrow home-circle, whence all strangers were excluded, the girl had had no idea that people of culture could entertain any views and opinions save those shared by her father, by Arno, and by the old pastor her tutor. It was, for example, one of her articles of faith that across the boundary, just beyond that strip of meadow in

Prussia, evil reigned triumphant. Prussian! The word stood for all that was contemptible,--rapacity, low ambition, greed of gain, and arrogant conceit. Like a good Saxon, Celia hated the Prussians from her very soul, and worst and most to be hated among them all was Bismarck, whose name her father never uttered without coupling it with some opprobrious epithet. Kurt was the first to present to her mind other views with regard to the state of affairs in Germany, and she listened to him with profound interest. It was exquisite enjoyment to Kurt to talk with Celia, and to note her rapt attention to all that he said, her quick espousal of any cause advocated by him. He loved her, and he knew that he loved her, but not for the world would he have addressed to her one word of love; it would have been a sin against her childlike innocence. His experience of life, spite of his youth, had been so wide and varied that he could not but be aware what risk there was for Celia in these daily interviews with a young man in the solitude of the forest; and could he have seen her anywhere else, could he but have sought her at Hohenwald, he would have abstained from his daily walks for Celia's sake. But they offered him his only opportunity for meeting the girl, and he had not the strength to refuse to embrace it. He could not but yield to the spell that lured him daily to the forest road, but he pledged his honour to himself that he would be nothing to Celia save a friend and brother, that he never would betray the childlike trust she reposed in him.

Now first he felt what an absolute necessity for him the daily meeting with Celia had become,--now, as he walked on in the wind and rain, constantly repeating to himself that she certainly could not leave the house to-day. In spite of this repetition, a yearning desire for a sight of her spurred him on along the accustomed path. He never heeded that in pushing through the trees and bushes he had become fairly drenched with rain. He reached the broad castle road: the distant wing of the castle, a glimpse of which could be had from here in fine weather, was veiled in mist. Sadly he leaned against the trunk of a giant oak, conscious that until this moment he had cherished a hope that perhaps in spite of the rain Celia might take her afternoon ride; she was no city-bred fine lady, but a strong, healthy child of nature, who was not afraid of the rain. Now, however, as he looked forth into the comfortless, white, impenetrable fog, his last hope vanished.

But what sound was that? Surely something like the distant neighing of a horse. And now--yes, there was no mistaking Pluto's loud neigh, close at hand, as a tall figure emerged from the fog, and the next moment Celia reined in her horse beside Kurt.

"I thought so!" she cried, triumphantly. "I knew you would not mind the rain!" Then, as she looked at him, she burst into a merry laugh. "Good heavens! how you look, poor fellow! You could not be wetter if you had fallen into the lake!"

Kurt laughed with her. How odd it was that the huge waterproof that she wore detracted not a whit from her beauty and grace! A gray waterproof can scarcely be called an elegant garment, but Celia looked lovely in this one. Her fresh rosy face smiled enchantingly from out of the hood that she had drawn over her head, and from beneath which tiny curls were rebelliously fluttering out into the wind and rain.

"It certainly is a 'fine, soaking rain,' as my uncle says," Kurt rejoined, laughing. "It has drenched me, but I have many a time tramped through a wood in worse weather than this, and even slept soundly on a hill-side in just such a pour, with only a soldier's blanket over me. The rain can do me no harm, but you, Fräulein von Hohenwald, are very wrong to come abroad in such weather."

"And yet you expected me to do it."

"No; I was sure you would prudently stay at home. It is no weather for you to ride in."

"No? Still, here I am, you see. Neither Pluto nor I ever mind the rain; but then we are neither of us at all prudent. And besides, you do not tell the truth. Why are you here if you thought I should not come? I had more confidence in you. I knew I should find you here, and I should have been terribly angry if you had stayed away for the rain. For indeed I had to see you to-day. I have so much to tell you. Only think, the new governess is really coming this evening!"

"Indeed? Then the Finanzrath has carried his point."

"Of course; just as he always does. He wrote to Fräulein Müller, and sent the letter to Frau von Adelung in Dresden. I could not help hoping that the Fräulein would decline to come, for papa consented to Werner's plan only upon condition that he should truthfully describe the life she would have to lead at Castle Hohenwald. Werner did so. He read his letter aloud to papa, Arno, and me, and I must confess he did not flatter any one of us. If I had been Fräulein Müller I never would have said 'yes' to such a letter."

"Did he give so terrible a description of the castle and its inmates?"

"The castle and all of us. He made Arno out a gloomy woman-hater, and called me a spoiled child. Was it not odious of him?"

"He meant no wrong."

"Oh, I know you agree with him! Now, confess honestly that you think me a spoiled child, or rather do not confess it, or we shall be sure to quarrel. Let me tell you more. Werner told

Fräulein Müller that at Castle Hohenwald she would be cut off from all social intercourse, that she could neither receive nor pay visits, and that the family circle there could not indemnify her for such seclusion, since neither papa nor Arno was an agreeable companion. In short, he painted existence here in such gloomy colours that papa said Fräulein Müller must be a very extraordinary person if she accepted such a situation. But she has accepted it. Her answer came to-day,--a very odd reply. Papa and Arno, as well as Werner, shook their heads over it. They could not make it out. So it is no wonder that I cannot comprehend it either. I have brought it to you to read, that you may tell me what you think of it."

"You have brought me the letter?" Kurt asked, in surprise.

"Why, yes; I know you always tell me the truth when I ask you for it, and when Werner gave me the letter I thought to myself, 'Herr Kurt von Poseneck shall read it;' so I kept it and brought it with me. There, read it; but be careful not to let it get wet. Wait a moment; I will hold my waterproof out so as to shield it from the rain."

Celia handed Kurt the letter and protected it with her cloak while he read it.

"An excellent hand," he said, as he opened it: "firm and clear. They say that the handwriting shows the character of the writer; if that be true, this letter should impress one greatly in Fräulein Müller's favour."

"That is just what Arno said; only he added, 'Only to be the more bitterly undeceived afterwards.' But read, read, I beg you,--I am so anxious to know what you think of the letter."

Kurt read the short note, which ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,--Your description of the life at Castle Hohenwald so perfectly accords with my wishes and inclinations that I accept with pleasure the honourable position offered me of companion and teacher to Fräulein Cecilia von Hohenwald. I shall arrive at the station at A---- by the afternoon train, at a quarter-past eight on the seventeenth, hoping to meet the carriage which you tell me will be sent for me from Hohenwald.

"With much respect,

"ANNA MÜLLER."

"Well, what do you think of it?" Cecilia asked, eagerly. "It does not seem odd to me at all. I think it simple, clear, and decided."

"But what does she mean by saying that Werner's ugly description of the life here accords with her views and inclinations? Arno says that must be a falsehood; that no girl could like such a place, and that Fräulein Müller must be a false, exaggerated person to say that she accepts such a position with pleasure. Papa thought the same; and even Werner said that the brevity of the note impressed him disagreeably, while Arno insisted that its short, decided tone, its want of all conventional courtesy, was the only thing in it to recommend it. What do you think?"

"I think we should be overhasty in adopting a prejudice against the lady upon reading her short note, which to my mind contains nothing to inspire it. Why should we distrust her declaration that the life in Castle Hohenwald is to her taste? If it were not so, could she not decline the position offered her? It certainly speaks well for her that she makes use of no stupid conventional phrases, and she shows a correct appreciation of her duties towards you, Fräulein von Hohenwald, in calling herself not your governess, but your companion and teacher. I really cannot see any reason why you should form an unfavourable opinion of Fräulein Müller. Take my advice and receive her after your own frank, cordial fashion. Do not be swayed by your brother Arno's (pardon me) unjustifiable prejudice, but see and judge for yourself, and you will be sure to judge rightly."

"Yes, I will," Celia said, cheerfully. "I knew you would give me good counsel, and I shall follow it. But now," she continued, with a sudden gravity, "we must discuss one point which I have never ceased to think of since the letter arrived to-day. What will become of my beloved liberty? Is it not lost from the moment that Fräulein Müller arrives at Castle Hohenwald?"

"It may be somewhat restricted, and is it not perhaps best that it should be so, Fräulein von Hohenwald?"

"Ah, you are thinking again that I need a governess. You will make me seriously angry. I am not a child, and I will not have my liberty restricted! I am willing to learn. I will sit still for hours and play the piano every day, but I will not be put into leading-strings. It is not kind of you to wish it for me, Herr von Poseneck. What will become of my afternoon rides if Fräulein Müller thinks it unbecoming for a young lady to roam about the forest alone?"

Celia's words told a joint in Kurt's armour; had he not often reflected that the propriety of

these rides was questionable? It was hard for him to carry out his resolve of always being frank and true towards Celia, but he did it. With a sigh, he replied, "Fräulein Müller would not be far wrong if she did think so."

Celia suddenly reined in her horse, and looking down at Kurt with eyes large with wonder, she said, in a tone expressing painful regret, "And you tell me this?"

"Yes, Fräulein Celia," and for the first time he avoided the formal Von Hohenwald; "yes, I tell you so, because I always will be honest and true to you."

Celia made no reply; she urged Pluto into a walk again, and rode beside Kurt in silence. She had never reflected whether these meetings in the forest were becoming. She had made no appointments with Kurt, but chance--no, it had not been chance entirely after the first meeting; she knew that she should meet him, but she could not reproach herself with having made any appointments. She was quite blameless. Quite? Why, then, had she never mentioned these daily meetings at home in Castle Hohenwald? Why had she never uttered the name of Kurt von Poseneck to her father or Arno, and never even said a word when Arno had casually mentioned the fact that a son of the Poseneck who had emigrated to America had returned, and was living at Grünhagen with the Amtsrath, whose heir report said he was to be? Her father, Arno, and Werner had discussed the Posenecks at some length; why had she never said a word, although she could easily have set them right upon several points? Hitherto she had simply followed her impulse to see Kurt, whom she liked so much, daily; but now, suddenly, she became aware that something about these meetings was not just as it should be.

After a long pause, she said, dejectedly, "I think you are right, Herr Kurt; I have acted very unbecomingly; but then we never made any appointments, and it was so pleasant to meet by chance. You have told me so much to interest me, I could always listen to you for hours; but if you think it improper, I will not ride on the forest road again. It will be hard, for lately I have looked forward all the forenoon to this hour of talk with you."

The girl's childlike, innocent frankness enchanted Kurt; he yielded to an irresistible impulse to seize and kiss the hand that hung down near him. Then, startled at what he had done, he instantly dropped it, while Celia, not in the least startled, looked at him with a happy smile.

"Is it really so wrong for us to spend one short hour here every day talking together?" she asked, looking down kindly into his face.

He could not withstand the magic of her look; all the wise rules that he had laid down for himself melted in the light of her eyes like snow before the sun. "No, dearest Celia! A thousand times no!" he cried, rapturously. "I swear to you by my honour that you never shall have any cause to regret your confidence in me. I will not ask you to continue your rides,--you shall not promise me to do so,--but I will be here awaiting you every day; nothing shall prevent me. Although you should stay away for weeks, you will find me here whenever you come at this hour."

"And you shall not await me in vain," Celia replied; and as she leaned down towards him their lips met for one instant in a fleeting kiss. Then she suddenly wheeled her horse about and was gone.

Kurt stood for a while motionless. Long after the lovely rider had vanished in the gloom he still saw her in spirit, and felt her kiss upon his lips. He hardly noticed that the rain, which had ceased for a few minutes, was pouring down with renewed violence; that a sharp wind was blowing, colder than before. He stood like one entranced in the lonely forest, and, when unconsciously he turned towards home, he never heard the howling of the tempest. Not until the bough of an oak-tree, torn off by the wind, fell directly across his path did he waken from his revery.

CHAPTER VII.

"Station A----. One minute's stop!"

The conductor hastily opened the door of a second-class carriage and helped out a young lady, civilly handed her her travelling-bag and railway wrap, clambered into his place again, and in a few moments the train was out of sight.

The young lady was the only passenger who had left the train; therefore the gentleman who had been walking to and fro on the platform for a quarter of an hour easily recognized her as the

person for whom he had been waiting. He approached her, and, raising his hat, said, courteously, "Have I the honour of addressing Fräulein Anna Müller? I am the Finanzrath von Hohenwald."

"Have you come yourself, Herr Finanzrath, in spite of this terrible weather? It is really too kind."

There was surprise as well as great satisfaction in the smile with which Werner looked at the young lady; he was in truth deeply impressed by her striking beauty.

Fräulein Müller was by no means equally pleased. She had supposed the Finanzrath to be a much older man; his fresh, smooth-shaven face looked to her very youthful, and she was not agreeably impressed by the satisfied smile with which he contemplated her.

It was but a moment that Werner devoted to his scrutiny of the lady; he now bowed even lower and more respectfully than at first, and said, with extreme politeness, "I was too much rejoiced, Fräulein Müller, that I had been able to induce you to come to Hohenwald to allow another than myself to be the first to welcome you here. Moreover, I felt it my duty to meet you, since I was the cause of your accepting a position for the difficulties of which you are perhaps not fully prepared. Before you enter Castle Hohenwald you ought to have a more vivid idea of those with whom your life there will be passed than it was possible to give you in my short letter. I described as impartially as I could the difficulties of your position, but there is much that you should know, which I shall be able to tell you during our drive to the castle, which in this weather, and from the consequent state of the roads, must needs be a slow one. And now let me conduct you to the carriage as quickly as possible; it will, I fear, be quite late and very dark by the time we reach Hohenwald."

Then taking her travelling-bag, and offering her his arm, which after a moment's hesitation she accepted, he led her through the station-house to where a close travelling carriage was awaiting them.

The wind howled, and the rain poured in torrents. The Finanzrath was assiduous in his attentions, holding his umbrella over his companion as she got into the carriage, then hurrying to see that the porter fastened her luggage securely in its place behind the carriage. Not until all was arranged to his satisfaction did he take his seat beside her in the well-cushioned vehicle. The rattling of the carriage over the stones while the road led through the town of A---- prevented all conversation, and enabled the Finanzrath to observe his companion attentively without attempting any of his promised communications.

He was impressed anew by the girl's extraordinary beauty; an expression of melancholy that vanished when she spoke, but which characterized her features in repose, made her still more attractive, while it afforded the Finanzrath--who remembered all that Frau von Adelung had hinted to him of Fräulein Müller's misfortunes--an explanation of her readiness to accept the offer of a position at Castle Hohenwald. At length the carriage left the paved streets and entered upon the country road leading to the castle. Although the wind howled about the vehicle and the rain pelted against its windows, conversation had become possible.

The Finanzrath was a clever man; it was but natural that his lively portrayal of the inmates of the castle should interest Fräulein Müller extremely. She listened eagerly, only interrupting him now and then by brief questions, which he answered readily. With an impartiality which was surely worthy of all praise, Werner entered upon a detailed account of the characteristics of his nearest relatives,--his father, his brother, and his sister; he warmly extolled their good qualities--his father's kindness of heart and simple truth, Arno's stern sense of justice, his earnestness, his industry, his varied acquirements, Celia's gay good humour and childlike simplicity; but at the same time he concealed none of their faults. As he discoursed, the daylight had vanished and darkness had succeeded the short twilight. The sky was black with clouds, and within the carriage it was so dark that Anna could scarcely see the outline of her companion's figure, although he leaned towards her as he repeatedly assured her that in him she would find a friend ready to aid her in any way during her life at the castle, and begged her to confide frankly to him any wish with which he could comply.

He said not one word that circumstances did not fully warrant, and yet Anna was excessively uncomfortable. The *tête-à-tête* with him in the dark carriage seemed to her almost insufferable. She shrank away from him at the very time when he was speaking so gently and kindly to her that there could not be the slightest reasonable cause for her distaste of his society.

Suddenly the carriage stopped. Anna drew a long breath of relief when the Finanzrath broke off his discourse and, opening the window, asked, anxiously, "What is the matter, John? Why do you not drive on?"

"I do not know, Herr Finanzrath," a voice from the box replied, "but I think something is wrong."

"What can be wrong?" It seemed to Anna that the Finanzrath's voice trembled as he asked the question. Was he, strong man as he was, so fearful of an accident that his fear betrayed itself in his voice? The sign of weakness instantly put an end to all Anna's dread of the Finanzrath. She felt strong, indeed, in view of his timidity. No possible danger of the road in the dark night had

power to alarm her. All she had dreaded had been the *tête-à-tête* with her companion.

The coachman did not immediately answer; he slowly descended from the box, and not until the Finanzrath asked in a tone of still greater anxiety, "What has happened, John?" did he reply, sullenly, "Nothing has happened, Herr Finanzrath, but the devil himself could not find the way in this storm; you can't see your hand before your face. I thought we had got off the road and were going towards the Grünhagen quarry, but it is all right, and we can drive on."

"No, no, don't try, for Heaven's sake, John!" the Finanzrath exclaimed, in evident terror.

"Oh, it's all right," the coachman said, with great composure. "We must drive on; we can't spend the night here in this weather."

He mounted the box again and whipped up his horses, but the next instant there was a jolt, a crash! The wheels on one side of the carriage rolled over a stone, while those on the other sank deeper and deeper into the mud, the carriage leaned more and more to one side and finally upset.

Anna felt herself tossed to one side; her head struck against some hard object. She experienced a burning pain in her temple, and was near fainting, but the next moment recalled her to herself; she did not choose to faint, and her will was victorious.

The carriage had fallen upon the side where sat the Finanzrath. Anna heard him groan as he struggled to rise.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, anxiously.

"My foot pains me terribly; I fear it is broken," he replied, in a loud, distinct voice which soothed Anna's apprehensions that his injuries might be mortal.

"I will try to open the door that is uppermost," she said; and this, after several attempts, she succeeded in doing. The rain poured down upon her, but she braved it, and exerting all her strength, she climbed out upon the side of the carriage and thence got down to the ground. At first she sank ankle-deep in the mud, but in a minute she found firm footing. "Can you possibly get out, Herr Finanzrath?" she asked.

"I will try," a voice from the carriage replied, and immediately afterward the Finanzrath looked out of the open door. He gazed about him, but in the gloom could see nothing. Anna's figure was hardly distinguishable, although she was but a few paces off. "John! John! Where are you?" Werner called loudly, but, although he repeated the call several times, there was no reply.

"I am afraid the poor fellow has had a bad fall," said Anna.

"So it seems, since he does not answer," rejoined the Finanzrath. There was not much sympathy in the tone of his voice, and still less was there in the remark that followed. "The clumsy scoundrel cannot even hold the horses after upsetting us. This is horrible! Suppose the horses should run off just as I am climbing out?"

This fear was groundless. The horses had stopped the instant the vehicle overturned. They did not stir, and the Finanzrath climbed out upon the carriage, but did not attempt to descend from it.

"Is your foot so painful that you cannot step upon it?" Anna asked, compassionately. "Can I help you? Take my hand, I pray you!"

"Thank you," he replied; "but my foot will not permit me to climb farther. What are we to do? We cannot sit here all night in the rain."

"I will seek help," Anna replied, resolutely. "The road must lead to some house or village. Wait for me here. I shall soon return with men, who can right the carriage."

"For Heaven's sake, do not go one step!" Werner cried, in great agitation. "We are close upon the quarry; there must be a deep chasm just at hand!"

"I will be very careful. At all events help must be procured. Something must be done for the poor coachman, who has given no sign of life yet; and you too, Herr Finanzrath, need assistance."

"Yes, yes; but you must not leave me. Let us both shout for help. We shall perhaps be heard. There must be labourers' cottages near the quarry. Help! help!" he thereupon shouted with all the force of his powerful lungs. And in fact scarcely had the sound died away when a distant "Halloo!" was heard.

"Thank Heaven, they have heard us!" Werner said, and then shouted again, "Help! help!"

The answering shout came nearer, and in a few moments a dark figure approached. "What is the matter here?" a rough voice asked. "A carriage upset, as I live! What the devil were you doing in the quarry at this hour?"

"We lost the road, and are greatly in need of assistance," replied Werner.

"Lost the road? Were you going to Grünhagen?"

"No; to Castle Hohenwald."

"To the castle? Then you belong to Hohenwald?"

"I am the Finanzrath von Hohenwald; but this is not the time for talking. I beg you, my friend, to help me to reach some place of security."

A burst of discordant laughter was the only reply vouchsafed to this request. After indulging in his ill-timed merriment, the new-comer inquired, "Have you ever heard of Carter Jock?"

"No; but, my friend----"

"No friend of yours! I would rather eat my head than help a Hohenwald. Any of the castle people can tell you about Carter Jock. Finely they treated him indeed; and, by way of thanks, he wishes you a pleasant night!" With another scornful laugh the man turned on his heel and would have gone, when Anna approached him, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, said, "You will not be so cruel as to desert us in our need?"

"The deuce! There's a woman in the scrape, and not the madcap Celia either!" the man exclaimed, in amazement, after having lighted a couple of matches, which the rain, to be sure, instantly extinguished, but not before he had perceived that it was not Celia who addressed him.

"A lady! a stranger!" he muttered to himself. "She must not be left all night in the quarry. The devil take the Hohenwalds; but I must let the folks at Grünhagen know what has happened."

For one moment he stood reflecting, and then, without heeding the Finanzrath's entreaties, he turned away and vanished in the darkness.

For a while Werner von Hohenwald sat silent as if in utter despair. At last a red spark of light appeared in the distance; again he shouted as loud as he could for help, and to his joy the voice that answered him was Arno's.

In a few minutes Arno, followed by several men with lighted torches, reached the overturned carriage. "I was afraid," he said, "that John would miss the road, and so came out to meet you with torches; not soon enough, unfortunately, to prevent an accident. But why do you sit up there on the carriage, Werner? Why don't you jump down?"

"The chasm must be close by, Arno."

"Nonsense! there is no chasm here. Give me your hand and spring down."

Werner grasped the hand extended to him and sprang out upon the road. His foot could not have been severely injured, since he accomplished this with apparent ease.

"Where is Fräulein Müller? I hope nothing has happened to her."

"Nothing has happened to me, Herr von Hohenwald," said Anna, who was standing in the shadow, "but I am afraid the coachman has received some injury."

Arno turned hastily, and stepped aside so that the torchlight fell full upon Anna's face. Its great beauty astonished him also, but he was shocked at the sight of a dark-red streak that extended from beneath the chestnut curls on her temple to the white kerchief about her throat, which was stained crimson. "You are bleeding?" he exclaimed, "you are hurt?"

"It is nothing. Never mind me; but let us search for the unfortunate coachman. I fear he is terribly hurt."

"Where is he? John, where are you?"

There was no reply, and Arno became alarmed. He took one of the torches from the men, and was not long in finding poor old John, who was lying unconscious by the roadside, with a terrible wound on his forehead. Arno kneeled beside him, and laid his hand upon his heart. "He is alive," he instantly declared, "but I am afraid he is very badly hurt."

"Oh, is he?" said Werner, who was seated on a stone, calmly watching his brother's proceeding. "I thought it must be so when he did not answer. But what are we to do, Arno? My foot is terribly painful."

"Indeed? It cannot be very bad, since you easily jumped from the carriage."

"Nevertheless it pains me terribly. I never can walk to the castle. Can the carriage not be righted?"

"We will see." Arno examined the carriage, but found the axle broken. "This is bad," he said. "We cannot, then, drive poor old John to Hohenwald, but we can make a litter comfortable with

the carriage cushions, and you, my men, can carry him to the village."

The men assented eagerly, but the Finanzrath was not satisfied. "I should suppose," he said, peevishly, "that I might be attended to before John. I cannot possibly walk. When the men have carried me to Hohenwald they can return and fetch John."

His brother greeted this speech with a glance of contempt. "If you cannot walk," he said, coolly, "you can sit here! The old man's life, perhaps, depends upon his having surgical aid speedily."

"I cannot stay here in the pouring rain; I shall catch my death of cold!"

"Death is not easily caught of cold!" Arno rejoined, unsympathetically. "Make haste," he said to the men, who were busy constructing the litter. "Poor old John must be moved as quickly as possible."

"How far are we from Hohenwald?" the Finanzrath asked, when the litter was nearly completed.

"Three-quarters of a league from the castle and half a league from the village."

"Then the manor-house of Grünhagen must be close at hand."

"Grünhagen is not ten minutes' walk."

"Indeed? Then, Arno, I think it would be much wiser to carry John there, and I could manage to hobble there myself."

"You would go to Grünhagen?" Arno asked, and there was surprise as well as disapproval in his tone. "What business has a Hohenwald in Grünhagen? Am I to ask shelter for old John and for you of the Amtsrath Friese or young Kurt von Poseneck, only to meet with a rude refusal, or, what would be worse, with a condescending compliance, which would burden me with an obligation to them?"

"What folly!" Werner declared. "You ought to be above such prejudice, Arno. It speaks ill for your humanity that you insist upon dragging poor old John to Hohenwald."

Here one of the men whom Arno had brought with him advanced, and, taking off his hat, respectfully said, "No offence to the Herr Finanzrath, but we cannot take old John to Grünhagen."

"What do you mean?" the Finanzrath angrily inquired. "Would you disobey orders?"

"Certainly not," the man replied, exchanging a glance with his fellows. "We are old soldiers, and know how to obey always, but indeed we could not answer it to the master or to old John himself if we took him to Grünhagen. If he had his senses he would be sure to say that he would rather die than be carried to Grünhagen. And, besides, if we do take him farther, we get the doctor sooner, for our Dr. Brühn in Hohenwald would not go to Grünhagen for the world; when they want a doctor there they have to send to A----, and that is too far."

Arno nodded approvingly to the man. "You are right, Kunz; we will take John to the Hohenwald village. Lift him carefully and lay him on the cushions, and let us be off instantly."

"But, Arno, what is to become of me and of Fräulein Müller?" Werner asked, plaintively.

Anna had been no idle spectator during this time; she had helped the men to arrange the cushions on the litter, and was holding a torch to light them as they lifted the unconscious John upon it, listening the while with surprise to the conversation between the brothers. She had been disgusted with the Finanzrath's selfishness in desiring to be carried when his foot was evidently not severely hurt; and Arno's stern refusal to carry the wounded man to Grünhagen had also impressed her disagreeably. She had no desire to take any part in the discussion, but now, when the Finanzrath asked of Arno what was to become of her, she hastily interposed with, "I shall carry one of the torches, since I cannot, unfortunately, render any more important assistance; there is no occasion to waste any thought upon me."

Arno looked at her with a surprised but kindly air. "Brava!" he said. "You are brave, and I trust can walk the half-league to the village; if you are very tired I will assist you. You, Werner, must help yourself. If you cannot walk with us, creep back into the carriage and shelter yourself from the rain until I can send you assistance. And now on to Hohenwald!"

"No, Herr von Hohenwald; to Grünhagen," a strong, manly voice was now heard to say.

The voice was Kurt von Poseneck's; he emerged from the darkness into the torchlight, and, advancing towards Arno and the Finanzrath, courteously informed them that he had just heard the news of the accident in the quarry, and had instantly given orders to have a carriage prepared, while he had hurried hither to entreat the gentlemen to turn towards Grünhagen, where they would be cordially welcome, and where apartments were already prepared for them. The injured coachman, too, should have every care bestowed upon him, and a carriage should be instantly sent to fetch Dr. Brühn to Grünhagen.

Kurt spoke so kindly, so cordially, that even Arno could not help for a moment forgetting his prejudice against the Posenecks as he thanked the young man for his proffered hospitality, which, however, he declined. In vain did Werner add his entreaties to Kurt's. Arno refused to yield, and cut short all further discussion by ordering the men to proceed with the litter.

Werner was very indignant at his brother's obstinacy. "Such unreasonableness is inconceivable!" he exclaimed; "but you shall not force me, Arno, to share your folly. I accept your invitation gratefully, Herr von Poseneck, for Fräulein Müller and myself; we will return with you to Grünhagen and accept your hospitality."

"You must not speak for me, Herr Finanzrath," Anna protested. "I promised to be at Hohenwald this evening, and I shall keep my word."

"But, Fräulein Müller, you cannot surely persist in walking to Hohenwald in this weather? I will engage to excuse your delay to my father."

"I need no excuse, Herr Finanzrath," Anna replied.

In vain did Werner expend his eloquence in entreaties and representations. She carried one of the torches and walked beside the litter towards Hohenwald. She stoutly braved the storm; the wind blowing in her face cooled her burning temples, and she experienced a sense of strange satisfaction when, upon looking back, she found that the quarry was already so far in the distance that the light of the torch left with the Finanzrath gleamed like a faint spark in the black darkness of the night.

The castle clock had struck eleven, and the Freiherr von Hohenwald, who was usually rolled into his bedroom at ten precisely, was still sitting in the spacious garden-room. He was not in a good humour, as was manifested by the frown upon his forehead, which even Celia's cajoleries could not smooth. The girl was seated on a low chair beside him, endeavouring in vain to win him to cheerfulness. Sure as she usually was of an affectionate reply to her questions, to-night he would not be amiable. She had been reading aloud to him; but even that did not please him. He took the book from her, grumblingly declaring that she was inattentive, that her emphasis was all wrong; she was thinking, of course, of the new governess, on whose account the whole house was turned upside down.

As he spoke, the Freiherr glanced angrily at the table in the centre of the room spread for four people. "It capped the climax," he added, peevishly, "for Werner to tell me it was not the thing to smoke in ladies' society, I am not to be hectored after that fashion, however. Bring me my meerschaum!"

Celia sprang up and brought him his large meerschaum, with a lighted match. He usually rewarded her for this service with a loving smile, but to-night he sat puffing out clouds of smoke without a word, until he drew out his huge gold watch and said, "Ten minutes after eleven! This household is topsy-turvy. It was not enough that Werner should insanely go to meet the woman at the station himself, but that fool Arno must needs run after him. There stands the table waiting,--nine o'clock is the supper-hour, and it is now nearly midnight."

"But you had your supper at the right time, papa," said Celia.

"How would it have helped matters to have me kept waiting? It is enough that all the rest of the household suffers because of you and this governess. It was the stupidest thing I ever did to listen to Werner. What's the use of your having a governess? Your manners are quite fine enough for Castle Hohenwald, for Arno, and for me."

"Still it was very wise in you, papa, to follow Werner's advice. I can learn a great deal from a good governess, and some time, I suppose, I shall meet those who demand more than Arno or you."

"Oho! the wind has changed, then? So Werner has converted you too!"

Celia blushed. Werner had not even attempted the conversion of which his father accused him; but she did not say one word in his defence,--she could not tell her father that it was Kurt von Poseneck who had caused her change of opinion.

"Where can they be?" the Freiherr exclaimed, impatiently; "they ought to have been here by ten o'clock at the latest."

"I hope there has been no accident."

"Nonsense! The road is perfectly good, and since Arno chose to go and meet them with torches an accident is impossible. There is just as much pother about this governess as if she were a lady of distinction."

"Do not be unjust, papa! If old John, who has not driven over that road for so long, should have missed the way and got into the Grünhagen quarry, and any accident had happened to Werner or the lady, you never would forgive yourself for scolding Arno for going to meet them, Only hear

how the wind howls and the rain beats against the windows. For my part, I am almost dead with anxiety lest an accident has happened. But, thank Heaven, no--there they are; I hear the carriage rattling over the stones of the court-yard."

Celia started up, and would have hurried out to meet the arrivals, but a peremptory word from her father detained her. "Stay here!" he exclaimed. "There is such a thing as being too kind. It is more than enough that Werner brings her from the station, that Arno goes to meet her, and that the table and you all are kept waiting for her. As she herself wrote, she is to be your paid companion and teacher. Remember that, child. Any undue familiarity is very undesirable."

Celia tossed her head and a reply was upon her tongue, but as she looked at her father she thought it wiser not to provoke him further, so she bit her lips and obeyed in silence. At the same time she privately determined that neither her father's command nor her brother's advice should influence her conduct towards the governess.

Her patience was put to the proof, for several minutes elapsed before the hall-doors were thrown open and Arno appeared, ushering in a lady, whom he presented. "Fräulein Anna Müller. My father, my sister Celia." This introduction he evidently considered quite sufficient, for he instantly turned from her, and, taking his father's hand, said, "We have kept you waiting a long while, father--you shall hear why when you have welcomed Fräulein Müller. I have much to tell."

The Freiherr made no reply; during the presentation he had not removed his pipe from his mouth, but when Anna approached with a slight courtesy, and, in a soft, rich voice, said, "Forgive me, Herr Baron, for having been the involuntary cause of so much disturbance," he instantly laid it aside and made an attempt to rise from his chair in answer to her words. It was many years since he had exchanged a word with a lady, but the memory of the time when he lived in society stirred within him as he looked at Anna. He had supposed that a negligent word of greeting would suffice for a governess, after all only a kind of upper servant, but he saw before him a lady to whom he involuntarily paid a mach greater degree of respect. It was not Anna's extraordinary beauty that thus impressed him, although he found it admirable, but a certain indescribable something which characterized her, and which her unsuitable dress could not conceal. She had left her drenched clothing at Inspector Hauk's, in the village of Hohenwald, and had borrowed a dark woollen dress of his wife's, which, although much too large for her slender figure, could not disguise its beautiful proportions.

A few minutes previously the Freiherr had not been by any means inclined to receive kindly the disturber of his domestic peace, but as he looked into Anna's pale face, and thought he saw an entreaty for kindness in her fine eyes, the expression of irritation vanished from his features, and he said, very kindly and simply, "You are heartily welcome, Fräulein!"

These were the first words that Anna heard from the dreaded woman-hater, the stern Freiherr. Her future pupil's reception of her was far more effusive; she had taken Celia's heart by storm. While Anna was speaking to the old Baron, the girl stood rapt in admiration of the stranger's exquisite smile and melodious voice, and when she turned from the father to the daughter, the latter threw her arms around her in a sudden burst of girlish enthusiasm, which conveyed a far more cordial welcome than could have been given in words. Anna gently kissed her brow and felt inexpressibly pleased by the manner of Celia's greeting, founding upon it the brightest hopes for the future.

And what did the Freiherr say to this infringement of the rule he had laid down but a few short minutes before? He was not in the least angry; he smiled benignantly, and watched with great satisfaction the two charming girls, the governess, apparently but a few years the elder of the two, and his darling, his will-o'-the-wisp. Paternal pride whispered to him that, beautiful as the stranger was, she was no lovelier than Celia.

Arno by no means shared his father's satisfaction. His face grew dark as he looked at Anna. What magical charm did this stranger, whom Werner had introduced among them, possess, to enable her thus, by a single word, to transform his father, prompting him to utter that "heartily welcome," and now so completely winning over Celia, who had naturally rebelled against the idea of a governess? Had she not even made a far deeper impression upon himself than he was willing to admit? She must be an adept in the art of pleasing.

"Now you shall have supper," said the Freiherr; and Arno rang the bell to have it served immediately, and then pushed his father's chair up to the table. It was only when old Franz had placed the dishes on the table that Celia observed that Werner's place was empty. Her father noticed this at the same time, and they asked, simultaneously, "Where is Werner?"

"Where you would least suspect him to be, father," replied Arno. "The Finanzrath is so far exalted above the traditional prejudices of his family that he has accepted Herr Kurt von Poseneck's invitation, and is at this moment either calmly supping with the Amtsrath Friese and Herr von Poseneck, or comfortably tucked in bed at Grünhagen."

This announcement produced very different effects upon Celia and her father. Celia blushed crimson; but so far from seeming shocked at Werner's transgression, she laughed merrily, and asked, "How did it happen?"

The Freiherr, on the contrary, would have risen hastily from his chair had not his gout prevented; he muttered an oath, and exclaimed, "What a devil of a story is this? Werner at Grünhagen with those scoundrels of Posenecks!"

"Why should you speak so harshly of Herr von Poseneck, papa?" Celia asked, indignantly.

The Baron gazed at his child in amazement. "What is the child thinking of?" he asked. "Actually taking me to task! Since when have you become the champion of the Posenecks, little one?"

"It seems to me unjust to abuse the absent, who do not deserve it, and cannot defend themselves!"

"How do you know what the Posenecks deserve? Would you send your old father to school? Truly, it seems high time that your education were looked after, child."

Celia's cheek grew more crimson still, but she made no reply to her father's reproof. Arno had listened to the brief war of words with a smile. "Positively," he said, "I shall henceforth believe in signs and wonders. A Hohenwald partakes of the hospitality of Grünhagen; Celia appears as the champion of the Posenecks; my father scolds his darling, and she makes no reply! Who can discredit miracles after all this?"

"Nonsense!" the Freiherr rejoined, peevishly. "Rather tell me how Werner came to meet that Poseneck fellow."

In answer Arno gave a narrative of the evening's adventures. He had determined to state the simple facts to his father, alluding as little as possible to Fräulein Anna Müller, but as he proceeded, his remembrance of the scene at the quarry was so vivid that he went farther than he had intended. He could not forbear, for mere justice' sake, to enlarge somewhat upon the courage and unselfishness of Anna's conduct, in contrast with Werner's weakness and egotism, when he told how, although wounded herself, she had declined his aid and had begged him instantly to bestow it upon old John. He did not utter one word of praise, but in his description of what had occurred there was much commendation implied, while he did not spare his sarcasm in speaking of Werner's very slight injury.

Anna was not a little embarrassed by his account; she would have liked to disclaim Arno's praise, but what could she say while he confined himself to a narrative of facts? When Celia, however, turned to her with a warm caress, saying, "Good heavens, you are wounded, and have said nothing to us about it!" she smilingly lifted the dark-brown curls upon her forehead, and said, "You see it is a mere scratch; the village doctor attended to it, and told me that it would be perfectly healed in a few days. It really is nothing."

Arno confirmed her words, and went on to reassure his father as to old John's condition, which Dr. Brühn pronounced to be not at all dangerous, although his injury had at first seemed grave. He then gave a detailed account of Werner's desire from the first to go to Grünhagen, and of how he was not to be dissuaded from accepting Kurt von Poseneck's invitation, which, Arno admitted, was most amiably and courteously tendered.

The Freiherr nodded, well pleased, when he heard how the Hohenwald people had refused to carry old John to Grünhagen, but he was all the more irritated by the Finanzrath's acceptance of Kurt's invitation. "It is disgraceful!" he exclaimed. "How could a Hohenwald forget himself so far as to accept hospitality at the hands of a beggarly Poseneck!"

"It is not at all nice of you, papa!" Celia instantly declared, with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes. "How can you, who are usually just and good, speak so unkindly of Herr von Poseneck, who has never done anything to you? It is poor thanks to him for hurrying out to the quarry in the storm to help Werner. And Werner was perfectly right to accept the invitation; what had he to do with an old worn-out feud? Herr Kurt von Poseneck certainly had no share in it; he has only lately arrived from America."

"Why, what an eloquent advocate the Posenecks have in our little one!" Arno rejoined, before his father, who was quite speechless with astonishment, could frame a reply. "And in truth she is partly right, for the young Herr von Poseneck certainly conducted himself excessively well on this occasion; nevertheless, I did not wish to accept his invitation, nor did Fräulein Müller; Werner, however, is superior to all Hohenwald prejudice. The Finanzrath knows far better how to conduct himself than we, who rust here in Castle Hohenwald, possibly can. His father and brother ought to be banished to the lumber-garret,--eh, Celia?"

"Come, come; have done with sneering, Arno. Go on with your story," the girl replied.

"You are right. Disputing cannot change matters; that neither my father, nor Werner, nor I can do. You and I belong to the old order of affairs, father; we must be content to find others leaving us; and it is but natural that Celia should vow allegiance to modern ideas; so I will not waste another word upon the Posenecks, although I confess I practise self-denial in not doing so." And he finished his narrative, describing Anna's courageous braving of the storm and rain on their way to the Inspector's at the village of Hohenwald, where they found warmth and shelter, and whence a messenger was despatched for Dr. Brühn, who soon pronounced upon old John's case

and dressed the cut upon Fräulein Müller's forehead. Then, after Arno had exchanged his wet clothes for a suit of the Inspector's, and Fräulein Müller had been provided with garments from his wife's wardrobe, a village wagon had brought them both to the castle.

The old Baron was greatly interested in Arno's account; even Werner's visit to Grünhagen was almost forgotten as he eagerly listened to his son's narrative. The new governess was evidently no spoiled city lady. He briefly expressed to her his admiration and gratitude, and it pleased him still more that Anna quietly declined to accept any thanks for what was merely a matter of course and of no consequence.

Meanwhile, it had grown late, and still, contrary to his custom, the Freiherr leaned comfortably back in his rolling-chair and said not one word of retiring, so interested was he in discussing the events of the evening. Suddenly, however, he happened to glance at the clock, and discovering that it was just about to strike one, he remembered how fatigued Fräulein Müller must be. Directing Celia to show her to her apartment, he had himself rolled into his bedroom by Arno, after wishing the new governess a courteous good-night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"My dear Arno,--You have a right to scold. I can see you frown when you learn that this letter would have reached you two weeks ago, if I had fulfilled my promise of writing to you about my visit to my uncle Guntram soon after my arrival in M----.

"But man proposes, and a charming, smiling little blonde disposes. Indeed she is charming enough to make a man forget even the sacred claims of friendship, and so I confess my fault, and pray your forgiveness. But I can see the frown deepen on your brow, you incorrigible woman-hater, and you are less inclined than ever to forgive upon such a plea. What will you say, then, when you know the worst? Listen, and wonder, Arno. I am betrothed,--the happy lover of the aforesaid lovely little blonde. I beg leave to present to you the betrothed pair, Adèle von Guntram--Karl, Count Styrum. There! Do not throw the letter angrily aside, or you will not learn how it has all come about so quickly, and, besides, you must accustom yourself to the idea of receiving, upon your promised visit to Altenheim, a welcome from a charming little Countess Styrum. That your welcome from her will be of the warmest I can assure you, for my betrothed takes the keenest interest in Arno von Hohenwald, about whom she is never weary of hearing. I might almost be jealous of him did I not know his views with regard to women.

"And now let me tell you what is stranger than all, that it is owing to this interest of Adèle's in you that I am now her accepted lover, or rather that I am so much sooner than I could otherwise have been; and I will tell you as briefly as I can, without breaking a promise I have made, how this came about.

"You know I visited M---- on account of the vexatious lawsuit with my uncle Guntram which I inherited from my father, and concerning which I hoped to effect some sort of compromise. My uncle received me with the greatest cordiality, and we should speedily have arranged matters had it not been for my cousin Heinrich, who, being a newly-fledged lawyer, would not hear of any adjustment of the affair. I believe I could not have offended him more deeply than by voluntarily relinquishing my claims. Now he must put up with this offence, although it is given in a manner different from any that he could have foreseen. His zeal for litigation was of the greatest service to me, for it kept me in M---- when I thought my presence necessary at Altenheim. Thus weeks and even months passed, and I was no nearer the goal than at first, that is, so far as the lawsuit was concerned, otherwise my stay in M---- was entirely delightful to me. My uncle Guntram was all that he could be in the way of affectionate kindness, Heinrich extremely amiable in a cousinly way, and Adèle--no, I will not write about Adèle, for you would only laugh at me and call me a love-sick fool. Wait until you come to M----, as friendship demands you should do, to be present at my marriage, and you will understand how welcome any pretext was to me for a protracted stay here, and how willingly I spent day after day beneath my uncle's roof, passing the most of my time talking with Adèle. She treated me in the kindest manner, but her innocent familiarity, which was almost like that she might show to a brother, made me anxious. A distant connection of yours, a certain Assessor von Hahn, frequents my uncle's house, and was evidently suing for my cousin's favour. I heard reports from all sides of a private betrothal between them, which was not to be announced until the Assessor had obtained the position of circuit judge, since my uncle greatly disapproved of long engagements.

"I really could not perceive that Adèle favoured the pretensions of the Assessor, who is a very well-disposed but rather ridiculous little man; but as all the world declared that it was a settled affair, and as even the Assessor himself let fall several hints to the same effect, I thought I should

be forced to accept my fate. I should never have dared to tell my charming cousin how dear she was to me had not you, Arno, without knowing it, lent me your aid.

"I had often talked of you to Adèle, telling her of our delightful travels, and even describing to her your father, your sister Cecilia, and your surroundings at Castle Hohenwald, as I had learned to know them from yourself.

"When I went to my uncle's this morning at the usual time, I found Adèle alone; she received me more kindly than usual; she even owned frankly that she had for an hour been longing for my coming. Flattering as this reception was, I founded no hopes upon it, for I saw that my cousin was desirous to acquaint me with some plan, in the execution of which she looked to me for assistance. She was in a state of feverish agitation; at times she would look at me with an expression of intense entreaty, and then, just when I hoped she was about to speak frankly of what was nearest her heart, she would introduce some indifferent topic of conversation. At last she evidently summoned up courage sufficient to enable her to bestow her confidence upon me. 'Cousin Karl,' she said, in her sweet, gentle voice, 'I have a very, very great favour to ask of you.' I need not tell you how fervently I assured her that she could not ask what it would not be my delight to grant. She then proceeded to tell me that her dearest friend, a Fraulein Anna Müller, who had been her schoolmate at Frau Adelung's, in Dresden, was forced by dire misfortune to seek a position as governess. Frau von Adelung had recommended the young lady to your brother Werner for your sister Celia, and Fraulein Müller was to start for Hohenwald this very day. The mighty favour that Adèle asked of me was to write to you and exert my influence with you to insure the young lady a favourable reception at Castle Hohenwald. I never can tell so evil-minded a woman-hater as yourself how exquisitely lovely Adèle was as she thus pleaded with me for her friend, nor how it happened that I retained the hand I took in mine and forgot all the silly stories about the Assessor von Hahn. Indeed, I do not know where I found the courage to tell her how inexpressibly dear she was to me, and how life had no greater joy for me than the hope of keeping for my very own forever the hand I then held. I was afraid she would instantly withdraw it, but she did not, and--no, I will only tell you that I am the happiest fellow in the world. Uncle Guntram, when he came from his study shortly afterwards, found us betrothed, and gave us his blessing, assuring me that his dearest wish was fulfilled in our betrothal, and adding that Adèle should have the lawsuit for her dowry, so that if I wished to continue it I could do so with my wife. Heinrich made a wry face at this, but there was no help for it, and he offered us his brotherly congratulations.

"Thus, you see, I owe my being the happy lover that I am to you, Arno, for had it not been for Adèle's request I never should have had the courage to confess to her that I loved her. The bugbear of her betrothal to Herr von Hahn would have prevented my speaking frankly to her. Adèle laughed at me when I told her this, and rallied me upon lending an ear to such silly gossip.

"And now, Arno, that my confession is made, my next duty is to fulfil my love's request, and cordially to recommend her friend to your kindness. I do this with a good conscience; she is a cultivated, highly-gifted person. I congratulate your sister that your brother succeeded in inducing her to come to Castle Hohenwald. I as well as Adèle am convinced that Fraulein Müller's talents and acquirements will achieve for her an honoured position in your father's household, and Adèle hopes for more yet; she trusts that her friend in the solitude of Hohenwald, in a refined family circle, may in time forget the misfortunes that have befallen her, and that your kindness may assist her to do so. I know your magnanimity and delicacy of sentiment, and that you only need be told that Fraulein Müller, owing to no fault of her own, is very unhappy, and that any allusion to her past, any question with regard to it, would be extremely painful to her. To alleviate her sorrow she only needs cordial kindness, confidence which she deserves in fullest measure, and considerate regard. All these I know she will find at Castle Hohenwald, and among you she will not be subjected to a curiosity to which she would be specially sensitive. You will forgive me for communicating no further particulars to you with regard to the lady's past when I tell you that I am bound by a promise. I know that you will be content with my declaration that I vouch for Fraulein Müller's blameless integrity and purity of character. When you receive this she will already be beneath your roof; let me pray you not to let her know that I have written to you, and my Adèle will thank you for not doing so when you come to M---- to our marriage.

"One thing more before this long letter is concluded: with regard to your nearest neighbor, my cousin, Kurt von Poseneck. I have heard something of an hereditary feud between the Hohenwalds and the Posenecks, but I know you too well to suspect you of giving heed to any such folly, and therefore I cordially commend my cousin to your kindness. Kurt's life in America has been the best of training for him; he is a fine fellow. I learned to know him well when he paid me a visit at Altenheim not long ago, and I assure you that I have rarely seen a young man so greatly to my mind, as I know he will be to yours. Although we are antagonistic in politics (he is a democrat, as was his father before him), I enjoyed every moment of his stay with me at Altenheim, for even in a political discussion Kurt never forgets that he is a gentleman. He defends his views with spirit, but with such calmness and moderation that he is never offensive. I am sure you will soon be friends, if you will only consent to break the spell of your solitude so far as to become acquainted with him.

"And now adieu! God bless you! Woman-hater though you be, your congratulations are confidently expected by

"Yours always,

"Karl Styrum."

Arno laid the letter aside, after he had read it, with a sigh. He had found it with his other letters by the day's post upon his table after he had left the garden-room, as we have seen, long after midnight. "He, too!" he muttered to himself, with another sigh, and then he read the letter for the second and third time, his face darkening as he read. After the third perusal he sat for a long time lost in thought, and finally took up a pen and wrote:

"My Dear Karl,--You expect congratulations from your friend; it is indeed an ancient custom to offer kind wishes to the newly betrothed, and I follow it all the more readily as in my case I employ no empty, idle phrase when I wish you happiness with all my heart. We have always agreed to be frank and true in our dealings with each other, and never to shun entire openness through fear of giving offence. I now fulfil my share of our compact. Indeed, after reading your letter three times I cannot but reply to you, my only intimate friend, as my heart dictates upon the impulse of the moment, not as I might after long and cool consideration. Therefore this is no formal letter of congratulation, but the true and faithful reply of a friend. Yes, I wish you all happiness, but I do so with a heavy heart, for I know how much I lose by your betrothal,--I, who have hitherto held the foremost place in your regard, must content myself with the second, and I shall shortly, as mournful experience teaches, lose this also, for love is the mortal foe of friendship. Both cannot exist together in the same heart. Thus I know that I have already half lost you, and shall soon lose you entirely, for I shall never be content with the cold modicum of regard which is all that the bridegroom and husband has for an every-day acquaintance. This pains me profoundly. You were the only man in whom I could thoroughly confide,--the only one to whom I could look for entire comprehension and sympathy. Nevertheless, I wish you happiness, and my wish is all the more fervent since I dread its non-fulfilment. Yes, my pain in losing you is augmented by my fears for your future. I know you, and I know that you never can content yourself as can so many unless your marriage brings you full sympathy of heart and mind. You are in love, and I know from sad experience that love drugs the intellect and bewilders the judgment. You will, therefore, doubtless regard my doubts as to your future as a positive crime against your betrothed, but I must be frank with you, my regard for you demands it. I repeat, I wish you joy; you need all good wishes, and if I could I would close this letter with mine, for my head and heart are so full of your betrothal that there is hardly room in them for another thought, but you have made a request of me to which I must reply.

"Fraulein Müller, your betrothed's friend, has been for several hours in Castle Hohenwald, to which I myself introduced her after a most extraordinary fashion. Of this I will write you shortly. I will only tell you now that I have already had abundant opportunity to admire the lady's rare courage. She has by her beauty and her frank attractive bearing already taken Celia's heart by storm and conquered my father's prejudice against her. I received your letter *after* her arrival here, and therefore could not comply with your request as to her reception, but rest assured that the lady herself insured its cordiality far better than I could have done. I could not have believed it possible that my father should treat a stranger with such urbanity, although a few hours before Fraulein Müller's arrival he had scouted the idea of any friendly familiar intercourse with the new governess, and had declared that while Celia's companion and teacher was entitled to a courteous and respectful reception in Castle Hohenwald, she could lay no claim to admission within our family circle. Fraulein Müller can have no cause to complain of any want of the cordiality you desire in my father's or Celia's welcome, but the requirement of such from me is, unfortunately, a demand with which I cannot comply. You know how I value your opinion, how highly I rate your recommendation; it is a warrant to me that the lady is deserving of all regard. I promise you that she shall be annoyed by no curiosity as to her past, and that I will do all that I can to conceal from her the discomfort that her stay among us causes me. More I cannot promise. You would not ask me to be false to my nature, and I tell you frankly that I have an invincible repugnance to all intercourse with this young person, which is rather increased by the fact that she is beautiful, cultured, and amiable, and that I cannot refuse to accord her a certain degree of esteem in view of the admirable courage she displayed this evening under exceedingly trying circumstances.

"To treat her with cordiality is impossible for me; I will keep out of her way as far as I can. I will always observe every rule of conventional courtesy in my unavoidable intercourse with her, and, in deference to your request, will endeavour to make her position in the household as pleasant as it can be under the circumstances; you will not ask more of me. Enough for to-night. In a few days I will write you a detailed account of my adventures in bringing Fraulein Müller to Castle Hohenwald, and of my encounter with your cousin Kurt von Poseneck, whom I saw for a moment upon the same occasion. Farewell, and do not be angry with me for perhaps mingling one bitter drop in your cup of happiness,--I could not help it. I must always be utterly frank and true with you.

"Always and all ways your faithful friend,

"Arno von Hohenwald."

The letter was finished; but when Arno read it over he was not satisfied with its contents. He had meant to tell his friend in heartsome words how he feared for his future; but now that they were there on the paper in black and white they seemed cold and insulting. It was but a poor reply to Karl's warm-hearted letter. And he was no better pleased either with what he had written about Fräulein Müller. He had meant to be perfectly candid and true to his friend. Had he not promised always to be so? and this surely justified all he had said. But was what he had written quite true? Did he feel an invincible repugnance to any familiar intercourse with Fräulein Müller? Had she not, on the contrary, inspired him with an inexplicable interest which he vainly tried to suppress? While he was writing she was perpetually in his mind. He had been obliged once to lay down his pen because her image so flitted before him; he saw her walking beside him through the night and the tempest, braving the storm so boldly, and yet without doing violence to a true feminine nature. Even on the road to the village of Hohenwald he had tried to resist the impression that the first sight of this charming girl had made upon him, but in vain, although he conjured to his aid the ghosts of a vanished past. He would gladly have detested this stranger thus thrust into his life; he heaped her with all kinds of accusations, and yet confessed to himself that they were all unjust. What reason had he for crediting her with a desire for admiration? had she sought by look or by gesture to attract him? Would Styrum have commended her so warmly if she had not been worthy of all praise? Still, why should she alone of all women be careless of admiration? No; Styrum was in love; he saw with his betrothed's eyes. He was credulous, and had not purchased with his heart's blood the sad experience that the most innocent of smiles upon lovely lips is but a prearranged means to some desired end. Poor Karl! he had not seen through the game they were playing with him, or he would not have fallen into their toils so easily. The rich Count, belonging as he did to the foremost of the Saxon nobility, would at any time have been considered by the President Guntram as an excellent parti for his daughter; but the prospect of a happy conclusion to the lawsuit had doubtless made the match doubly desirable. Therefore it was that the engagement between the fair Adèle and the Assessor had been dissolved, and no means had been neglected to bring the Count to a declaration. Interest for her friend had afforded Adèle an excellent opportunity to treat her cousin with flattering confidence, and she had won the game. Poor Karl! in his noble trust in innocence and purity he had fallen a victim to an excellently-laid plan, and was now made use of by Adèle to insure her friend a firm footing in Castle Hohenwald. Arno could not but laugh at himself. Had he really been in danger of proving false to his principles? He had seen through the game at the right moment, however,--the suspicion that had been aroused on the road to Hohenwald now became a certainty, and what he had written to his friend was the truth. Yes, he now felt an invincible repugnance to any closer intercourse with this intriguing stranger, who had selected Castle Hohenwald as the theatre for her schemes. The letter should be despatched just as it was. He folded and sealed it, and then betook himself to rest. The day's exertions had wearied him, and he soon slept, but the image of the lovely stranger mingled in his dreams.

The stranger herself stood at the window of the room to which Celia had shown her, and gazed out into the gloomy night; she heard the howling of the wind and the beating of the rain against the panes, but she did not heed them, for before her mind's eye rose a form that made her oblivious of the present. She shuddered as she looked back to that last terrible night spent beneath the same roof with the wretch who would have bartered his wife's honour for a release from poverty and detection. She had clung to him faithfully, had always conscientiously fulfilled her duty to him, hoping that she might perhaps in the end influence him for good. She had forgiven him for squandering her property, for plunging her into poverty, although she no longer loved him, and was bound to him only by a sense of duty; but that he could so dishonour her as actually to wish to sell her to the Russian was a sin never to be forgiven,--it separated her from him forever.

He had spoken the decisive word himself, he had restored to her her freedom, lured by false hopes perhaps, but he had done so unconditionally, and she was now her own mistress; she no longer felt the chains that had bound her to her wretched husband; they might exist for the world, but no longer for herself, for her own conscience. When on that dreadful night she had bolted herself into her bedroom, her resolution was already taken. Without hesitation she proceeded to carry it out. She exchanged her ball-dress for a simple stuff gown; she packed a few necessary articles of clothing in a travelling-bag, and hastily wrote these lines: "You have given back to me my freedom; I accept it. It is your desire that we should part; it shall be fulfilled: you will never see me again. Should you dare to persecute me, you will force me to denounce you publicly and to give to the world the reasons that justify my conduct. The detected thief, who would barter his wife's honour, has forfeited the right to control her destiny.--LUCIE."

Her hand did not tremble as she wrote these words. She folded the sheet, sealed it and placed it where its address could be plainly seen by any one entering the room.

It was done! She was parted from him forever. A shudder ran through her as she thought of his threat of suicide if she refused to accede to his wishes, but the thought did not for an instant deter her. Only the coward, whose courage is never equal to the commission of the deed, can threaten suicide; if he could have preferred death to disgrace he never would have been a detected thief.

She cautiously unbolted her door and crept through the drawing-room to the hall, upon which the door of Sorr's sleeping-room opened. Here she paused and listened,--he was wont to breathe heavily in his sleep,--but she could hear nothing: a proof that he was still awake. What if he

should hear her and come from his room to prevent her departure? What then? The wonted gentleness of her look gave place to stern determination; involuntarily she clinched her hand; the struggle had begun, and should under all circumstances be carried on.

Fortunately, however, she encountered no obstacle to her progress down the stairs to the house-door, which she softly opened and as softly closed behind her. The streets were deserted; she passed a watchman asleep on a doorstep, and walked as quickly as possible towards the President's mansion without being seen by a human being. The windows of the house were still gleaming with light, and there was a long line of carriages in the street before it. Lucie paused and hesitated for a moment. The ball was not yet over. She had hoped this would be the case; else it would have been difficult for her to obtain an entrance to the house. But how was she to pass the line of carriages? So late a wanderer would be sure to be noticed by the coachmen and lackeys, and she might be the object of coarse jests. Perhaps the little gate leading from the garden into a side street was open: it was seldom locked; and even should it be so, she could easily climb the low garden-fence. She was not to be stopped by such an obstacle; from the garden, the wing in which was Adèle's room was easily entered by a back-door, which was, of course, still open, and once in the house she could soon make her way to Adèle's room.

She hurried into the side street. The garden-gate was not locked, nor was the back-door even closed. Fortune favoured her; not a servant did she encounter as she hurried up a narrow staircase and along the passage leading to her friend's room, which she reached without being observed. Arrived here, she sank down upon the little lounge where she had so often sat conversing gayly with Adèle, upon whose aid she now relied in her plan of flight.

An hour passed slowly; the music floated in from the ball-room; but at last it ceased; there was a bustle of departing guests, servants ran to and fro in the house, and the rattle of carriages told Lucie that the ball was at an end. Another half-hour went by; the house grew quieter, the bustle entirely subsided; there were steps in the passage, and Heinrich von Guntram's voice said, "Good-night, Adèle. Shall I light your candle for you?"

"Oh, no; there are matches on the table Good-night, Heinrich."

"Good-night."

The door opened. Adèle entered, bolted it behind her, and then, going to the table in front of the sofa, lighted a match, by the flickering light of which she distinguished a dark figure sitting on the sofa. She gasped with terror and ran towards the door, but was instantly arrested in her flight by the gentle tones of a familiar voice, whispering, "Don't be frightened, dearest Adèle; it is I,--Lucie!"

"You--you here at this hour?"

"I need your help, Adèle. In my extremest misery I seek refuge with you, my dearest friend."

In an instant Adèle's arms were about her, and the tenderest assurances of sympathy and aid were poured into her friend's ear. Then she drew the curtains close and lighted the candles, before seating herself beside Lucie and entreating her to tell her all.

Lucie complied; she told her of her wretched past with her worthless husband, and of the incidents of the last few hours, remaining perfectly calm amid the storm of indignation with which her friend greeted her narrative. Anger was dead within her, slain by the thorough contempt she now felt for Sorr.

"And now, dear Adèle," she concluded, "I come to claim your aid. Your last words to me this evening when I left the ball-room were, 'Trust in me; whatever happens, I will stand by you.' This has given me courage to take this decided step to break the fetters that bound me to one so unworthy. I knew I should not be quite alone, that you would not desert me, and therefore I come to you."

"Never, Lucie dear, never; and not only I,--there is another whose aid will be of more use to you than that of a poor weak girl. My cousin Karl told me every detail of the miserable scene in Heinrich's room; he suspected you would soon need protection and assistance, and is ready to give it to you. You may trust him; he is a noble, true-hearted man, and has promised me to befriend you at your need. Be sure he will keep his promise. He will advise us what is best to be done."

"I do not need any advice," Lucie gravely rejoined; "my resolution is taken, my plans for the future are arranged. I need the help of faithful friends only in their execution. I shall be grateful for Count Styrum's help; but later, when I am no longer here."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Herr von Sorr has given me my freedom. I will employ it in beginning a new life. For years I have foreseen that I should one day be obliged to turn to account for my support the accomplishments acquired during my girlhood, and I have continued to study with this end in view. I am perfectly qualified to fill a position as governess. Such a position I shall endeavour to find in some retired country-seat, but in order to obtain it I need testimonials, with which so

young a man as Count Styrum cannot furnish me. I have therefore thought of writing to our dear old teacher, Frau von Adelung, in Dresden. I remember that she was constantly applied to for governesses. But I am afraid to confide wholly in her. With the best intentions she is something of a gossip, and would find it difficult to keep my secret, and yet her recommendation I must obtain. When Herr von Sorr finds my letter to-morrow and discovers that I am fled, he will, I know, together with Count Repuin, leave no stone unturned to discover my retreat. He will not be deterred even by the threat in my letter, and he must learn nothing, and therefore I cannot confide in good Frau von Adelung. You must write to her and bespeak her good offices for a friend of yours; you were always one of her favourites, and she will not hesitate to comply with your request. I am sure, dearest Adèle, you will do this for me."

Lucie's scheme seemed to her friend admirable, and she declared herself ready to do all that she could to further it: but when Lucie went on to state that she intended to leave M---- the next morning by the five o'clock train, to await in some retired village the result of her friend's action, Adèle reused to entertain any such idea. Nowhere, she said, could Lucie be so safe from Sorr's persecution as in M----, where he certainly would never expect to find her. The arrival of a lady alone and unattended in any little village would surely excite remark, while Lucie might stay for weeks in Adèle's room and her presence beneath the President's roof never be suspected. Adèle never received her friends in her bedroom or dressing-room, and neither her father nor her brother ever came to her there. All that was to be done was to take Lina, Adèle's special maid, into their confidence,--she had lived in the house for years, and a more faithful, trustworthy creature there could not be. Adèle's representations overcame her friend's scruples, and it was agreed to admit the maid to a full knowledge of the state of the case. And when the dawn was at hand the two friends retired to bed, Adèle happier with regard to Lucie than she had been for a long while.

The next morning when Lina came to call her young mistress her surprise was great at finding a new inmate in the room, of whose coming no one had been aware. Adèle told her the true reason for Frau von Sorr's flight from her husband's roof, and Lina, flattered by the confidence shown her, promised to keep such guard over the fugitive that no one should dream of her whereabouts, while she should daily fare like an honoured guest, without arousing the suspicions of the other servants.

She kept her word, which she would have done out of her faithful devotion to Adèle alone, even if Frau von Sorr's gentleness and misfortunes had not excited her sympathy and spurred her on to redoubled watchfulness. The scheme was eminently successful. Neither the President nor Heinrich nor any of the other inmates of the house ever suspected that Lucie von Sorr, whose sudden disappearance was the town-talk of M----, was concealed in Adèle's room.

The President, at the dinner-table, expressed his surprise that so beautiful a woman could have contrived to vanish utterly without a trace. He told how Herr von Sorr had applied to the police for assistance in his search for his wife; that inquiry had been made of all the hack-drivers of the town and the porters at the railway stations. No one could remember having seen the fugitive; an extraordinary fact in view of the lady's remarkable beauty. Herr von Sorr was beside himself, and feared that his wife might have been driven to suicide by the strange reports circulating in the town.

Adèle listened to all this in silence, and reported it to her friend afterwards.

In a few days many visitors made their appearance at the President's, in hopes of learning something satisfactory from Adèle, who was well known to be Frau von Sorr's nearest friend. Among them were Madame Gansauge and Frau von Rose, the Messrs. von Saldern and von Arnim, Assessor von Hahn, and others, all craving information.

Adèle listened to all that they had to say, but had nothing to tell them. She could not imagine why her friend had left M---- so suddenly; she could not look upon her disappearance as a flight, and she feigned a fresh interest in every repetition of the reports circulating in M----.

It was positively certain, the wife of Major Gansauge asserted, that Frau von Sorr had destroyed herself,--a peasant had seen her at five o'clock in the morning near the Marble Gate, close by the large pond. The body had not yet been found, but doubtless would be shortly. Count Repuin was quite inconsolable, far more so than Herr von Sorr, who bore his trial with more equanimity.

Frau von Rose knew from the very best authority--she was not at liberty to mention names--that Count Repuin and Herr von Sorr had a violent quarrel. The Count would not believe that Sorr was ignorant of his wife's whereabouts. The affair was certainly very odd, for the Count behaved precisely as though his wife, and not Herr von Sorr's, had run away, and had threatened the husband with some dire revenge if the fugitive were not shortly discovered.

The Assessor von Hahn was more cautious in his expressions; he hinted that Frau von Sorr had made a profound impression upon Count Styrum, and that the Count had perhaps been willing to shield her from Count Repuin's persecutions. The Assessor remarked that he was too discreet to say more; he did not boast of it, for discretion was a gift of nature, and her bounties were variously distributed; discretion was one of his natural endowments, therefore he would be silent.

All these contradictory reports which Adèle heard from the gossiping friends of the family she faithfully recounted to Lucie, and the friends congratulated themselves that no attempt had been made by Frau von Sorr to leave M----.

Adèle had written immediately to Frau von Adelung, telling her that one of her dearest friends, a Fräulein Anna Müller, was very desirous to procure a situation in the country as governess. She expatiated upon the talents, acquirements, and culture of the young lady, who regretted that, never having dreamed of being obliged to support herself, she possessed no testimonials to her ability. Now, however, she was in great distress; her father had died brokenhearted at the loss of his large fortune, and Fräulein Müller had been very unfortunate also in other ways, so that she craved retirement from the world, and would prefer a situation in the solitude of the country.

An answer to this letter arrived by return of mail. Frau von Adelung expressed her pleasure at being able to do anything for her dear Adèle, whose friendship for Fräulein Müller was a sufficient recommendation in her eyes. At present she knew of no situation for her, although there was no doubt that one could shortly be found, and she promised to write again as soon as this was the case.

More than a week elapsed before Frau von Adelung was again heard from. Lucie continued to live in her concealment in her friend's room, hearing from her all that was going on in M----. Count Repuin and Sorr had both suddenly left town, the latter deeply in debt. Whither they had gone no one knew. Count Repuin had left orders that his letters should be sent to Berlin *poste restante*.

At last, when Lucie was beginning to chafe under her enforced idleness, a second letter arrived from Frau von Adelung, asking whether Fräulein Müller would be willing to accept the position of governess to the Baroness Cecilia von Hohenwald, or rather, as the young lady was sixteen years old, that of companion and teacher. Lucie and Adèle were greatly surprised by this letter; they well remembered the description given by Count Styrum on the evening of the ball of the secluded life at Castle Hohenwald, and this remembrance decided Lucie at once to accept the offered position. In the solitude of Castle Hohenwald, where no guest ever found admission, surely she might look for the seclusion she so earnestly desired.

In a short time a third letter was received from Frau von Adelung, enclosing the one addressed to Fräulein Müller by the Finanzrath, of which we have already heard. His dreary picture of the castle and its inmates, far from deterring Lucie from accepting the post offered her there, only made her the more desirous to accept it, and she acceded instantly to the Finanzrath's request that she would, if she could, return a favourable reply and inform him of the day of her arrival at the station A----.

Thus the die was cast. Two days more were all that she could spend with the dear friend who had so aided and sheltered her. Adèle now wished to intrust Lucie's secret to her cousin, that he might write and insure her a friendly reception at Castle Hohenwald, but this Lucie permitted her to do only upon condition that she should wait until she had actually departed from M---- before she spoke to Count Styrum upon the subject.

The day of departure arrived,--an agitating day for Lucie. Hitherto Lina's fidelity and caution had made concealment possible; not one of the household even dreamed that the vanished Frau von Sorr was quietly living in Adèle's apartments; but how could she steal away unobserved?

The gossiping Assessor had reported that Count Repuin had bribed all the railroad officials, who were to give him immediate notice of the appearance at any one of the M---- stations of the well-known Frau von Sorr. The police also were in his pay, and it seemed to Lucie almost impossible to leave the President's house without discovery.

Here, too, the faithful Lina rendered most efficient aid. She had come to seek service in M---- years before from an Altenburg village, and the ugly national dress of the Altenburg peasantry, although long since discarded by her, was still reposing neatly folded in her trunk. She was about Lucie's height, and, with a few alterations, the peasant's dress was made to fit the lady perfectly, so that when, one morning towards four o'clock, a neatly-dressed Altenburg peasant-girl walked out from the President's garden into the side street, the most experienced detective would hardly have suspected her of being the admired Frau von Sorr.

At the Marble Gate Lina was awaiting her in a covered wagon, driven by one of her cousins, an Altenburg peasant lad, whom she had sent for to take her to her native village, where she had received permission from her master to spend a week's holiday. The peasant lad was rather surprised that his cousin Lina should have stopped him, when they had driven no farther than the Marble Grate, to wait for a young girl, who shortly arrived and got into the vehicle. Still greater was his surprise when, at a little wayside inn some miles from M----, Lina made him wait much longer, while she went into the house with the young girl, who must have remained there, for when Lina got into the wagon again it was in company with a very fine lady, who paid him for driving her to the nearest railroad station, where she took a kind leave of his cousin.

Once in the railway carriage bound for A---- Lucie had no farther fear of discovery, and we have already heard of her safe arrival there, and of her adventurous drive with the Finanzrath.

How different her reception at the castle had been from any she had anticipated! She had looked forward with a heavy heart to meeting the old Baron; but he had welcomed her so kindly, so cordially, that she felt sure that in him she should find a friend.

But Arno? Even if Count Styrum had written to him beseeching his kind offices for the new governess, this morning, after his visit at the President's, he could not have received the letter; his conduct had been characterized only by the coldest courtesy. Still, she was prepared for this; she knew his sentiments with regard to women. He had behaved precisely as she had expected him to do, and his manner was certainly far preferable to the Finanzrath's. As she called him to mind a burning blush overspread her cheek, and she leaned her forehead against the cool glass window-pane. She could not tell what it was in his behaviour to her that so aroused her repugnance. He had been all that he should be, and no more, and yet his courtesy inspired her with dread; this man was antipathetic to her. But why trouble herself about him in any way? He was but a guest at the castle, where everything seemed so much more encouraging than she had hoped to find it; he would be gone in a few days, and Celia, this charming, lovely Celia, who had evidently conceived a sudden affection for her new companion, would still be with her. How entirely unnecessary had been Lucie's fear of the "wayward, spoiled child"! Celia could not feign; in her clear, honest eyes the genuine welcome she had given to her new governess was plainly to be read. How happy she had seemed upon noting the pleasant impression produced by the pretty and luxurious bedroom and dressing-room to which she had shown Lucie! How cordially she as well as Frau Kaselitz had begged to know if anything were wanting for the comfort of the new inmate! and how caressing had been the kiss with which she had said good-night!

Yes, everything was far, far more pleasant than Lucie had expected; surely she could find repose and forgetfulness amid these surroundings, and in the fulfilment of a duty so interesting as the instruction of this sweet young girl; and yet she could not look forward into the future with any degree of buoyancy; the driving rain, the dark night, the moaning wind, seemed to her to symbolize her destiny.

CHAPTER IX.

The tempest had spent its fury in the night, and the sun shone warm and bright into Lucie's bedroom when she awaked at a rather late hour the next morning. She was habitually an early riser, but the fatigue of the previous day and evening had prevented her from sleeping until towards morning, and she did not awake until eight o'clock from her dreamless and refreshing slumber. She gazed around her in some bewilderment, and could not at first remember where she was; but in an instant all the past, her parting from her dear Adèle, her journey hither, and last night's adventures, flashed upon her mind, and brought with them the consciousness that she was actually in Castle Hohenwald. If her room had looked pretty and comfortable by candle-light on the previous evening, it was positively charming now, with a bunch of fresh spring flowers, which she had not seen the night before, upon a little table between the windows, and the sunlight glorifying the landscape without. Lucie hastily left her bed, and was proceeding to dress, when there came a low knock at her door. "Who is there?" she asked.

"I,--Celia. I waited until I heard you stirring, to tell you that your trunk has been brought over from Grünhagen, and is here in the next room--our morning room--with your dry dress from the Inspector's. I will come to take you to breakfast in half an hour."

When Lucie opened the door into the next room Celia had vanished, but her trunk stood near, and her travelling-dress, brushed and dry, hung across a chair. She made haste to perform her simple toilet, and then went again into the apartment which Celia had called "our morning room." This room, then, she was to share with her pupil. It was a delightful and luxurious retreat; its windows opening upon an enchanting prospect of the garden, the mighty oaks in the park, and the distant mountains; near one window was a table, upon which lay a half-finished piece of embroidery, while another table, evidently new, and prettily furnished with writing materials, was plainly destined for the new governess. Upon it was a small vase filled with flowers evidently plucked but an hour ago, the dew not yet dry upon the petals of the roses. Flowers! So little, and yet so much! They made a welcome where they stood. Lucie bent over them to inhale their cool fragrance, and when she raised her head looked into Celia's laughing eyes. "How can I thank you for placing these here, Fräulein von Hohenwald?" she said, with emotion.

"By never again calling me Fräulein, but Celia. Every one who cares for me calls me Celia, and I want you to care for me very much."

Such a request, accompanied as it was by a kiss and a caress, could not be refused. The girl's frank tenderness was inexpressibly soothing to Lucie.

"And now come with me to the garden-room," Celia went on, putting Lucie's hand within her arm. "Papa is waiting for us; he drank his morning cup of coffee long ago, but he wants us to take our breakfast in the garden-room all the same."

The Freiherr had indeed been awaiting the appearance of the ladies to breakfast in the garden-room for more than an hour. Seated in his rolling-chair in his favourite spot, he was rejoicing in the beauty of the lovely morning and inhaling the mild air of spring, while, as he sipped his coffee, he received his morning visit from his son.

Arno seated himself beside his father's chair and began, as was his wont in the early hour of talk, to discuss matters connected with the estate, agricultural schemes, etc., which did not, however, appear to have the power to interest him today as deeply as usual. It almost seemed as if he were thinking of other things as he expatiated upon the new ploughs and the building of fresh stables. He now and then paused in his talk, and seemed to lose the thread of his discourse. The case seemed the same with the Freiherr. He could think of nothing but what had already occupied his mind since he arose,--the pleasant talk of the previous evening. For years he had not conversed with a lady. Celia, Frau Kaselitz, and the servant-maids were the only women with whom he ever exchanged a word. His conversation with the governess had therefore the added charm of novelty, and he had greatly enjoyed it.

Celia's appearance to wish her father good-morning interrupted, to the Baron's satisfaction, the agricultural discussion, and gave him an opportunity to ask after Fräulein Müller. Celia announced that she had listened several times at the door of her bedroom, but that she was not yet stirring.

"Evidently accustomed to late hours," Arno observed.

His words sounded like sarcasm, and instantly aroused Celia's combativeness. "Do you suppose," she said, indignantly, "that a delicately-framed woman, not used like you to hunting all night long, can endure without fatigue such a walk through the storm as Fräulein Müller took last evening? It was almost three o'clock when we went to bed, and it is now just seven. Four hours' sleep is not much after such fatigue, although you may think it sufficient for yourself. Besides, you are used to such early rising that you should not judge for others."

"Don't quarrel, children," the old Freiherr interposed; "although you are quite right, child, to take up the cudgels for your governess; she certainly has well earned a few hours of sleep. Even you, Arno, expressed your wonder last evening at her quiet endurance of so much fatigue."

"Yes, papa; is it not odious of Arno to be so unjust to Fräulein Müller, when she is so charming, so divinely beautiful, and so amiable?"

"The child is all fire and flame!" Arno remarked. "Well, well, it is nothing to me; believe that your governess is an angel of light and a miracle of amiability if you choose, only do not require me to agree with you. Your enthusiasm lightens the duty with which my friend Styrum has charged me. I found a letter from him among my papers last night announcing his betrothal to his cousin, Adèle von Guntram, and telling me that Fräulein Müller is his betrothed's most intimate friend. Here is his letter; read aloud to my father what he says of Fräulein Müller, Celia, if you like."

This Celia did most willingly. As she returned it to Arno she said reproachfully to her brother, "You do not deserve the confidence, Arno, that Count Styrum reposes in your friendship. I cannot conceive how you can judge Fräulein Müller so harshly and unjustly after such a recommendation from your dearest friend."

"Bah! his recommendation is utterly worthless; he sees with the fair Adèle's eyes, and would recommend the devil's grandmother to us if his betrothed desired it. What I did promise him was that the lady shall be annoyed by no inquiries or allusions to her past. In this respect Karl's word is all-sufficient, for not even the entreaties of his betrothed could induce him to vouch for Fräulein Müller's purity of character if the slightest blame attached to her. I know my promise will be kept by all."

"Most certainly it shall," the old Freiherr rejoined. "Styrum's word is quite enough for me; he is a man of honour, as was his father, once my intimate friend. I respect the young fellow, although I do not know him personally. You remember, Arno, how well he conducted himself upon a former occasion, with what tact and delicacy----"

"Let the past be forgotten, father!" Arno interrupted him; and, turning to his sister, he added, "I hope you will be discreet, Celia, and not ask any idle questions of Fräulein Müller."

"I am not curious, and I certainly will be careful," Celia replied, as she left the room.

The Freiherr called after her, "Beg Fräulein Müller, if she is up, to take her breakfast here in the garden-room. I am expecting her."

It was not long before his darling reappeared with the governess, whose cheerful good-morning the old man returned after his most genial fashion. Then, ringing the bell, he desired Franz to have Fräulein Müller's breakfast served immediately, and to roll his chair nearer to the

table that he might take part in the conversation.

This he found exceedingly entertaining. Whatever was the subject under discussion Fräulein Müller bore her part charmingly. The Baron found her possessed of a far higher degree of culture than he had thought possible in a woman, and he was specially pleased to find her at home in his beloved classical literature.

When the meal was ended she seated herself, at his request, at the fine grand piano, which had been his last gift to Celia, and, after a lovely prelude, sang a little national melody, in a rich, deep contralto, with such pathos that Celia embraced her enthusiastically with eyes swimming in tears, and the old Freiherr was inexpressibly delighted. It certainly was a fact that Werner had found a treasure; his advice, after all, had been worthy of all gratitude. The old man was in an admirable humour, as was plainly shown when his sons unexpectedly entered the room together. He had intended on the previous evening to greet the elder upon his return from Grünhagen with a thunder-blast; but he was now half inclined to condone his transgression of the family traditions. "Why, here we have the Herr Finanzrath," he said, as Werner approached him. "Have you had a comfortable night at Grünhagen with the Posenecks? I am pleased to see that your broken leg is mended again. I certainly should not imagine from your walk that anything had ailed it."

Werner had expected a much harsher reception, therefore he quietly accepted the raillery. "It was not so very bad," he replied, with a smile, "although it certainly pained me so much last evening that I could not have undertaken the long walk to the village."

"Which Fräulein Müller courageously accomplished, in spite of her evident fatigue," Arno interposed.

"I admire Fräulein Müller's courage," the Finanzrath continued, with a courteous bow to Lucie; "but she would hardly have been able to walk so far had her injury been of the foot instead of the temple. I positively could not, and, as Herr von Poseneck was polite enough to invite me to Grünhagen, I saw no reason for declining his kindness; it might have offended him."

"So you preferred to offend your father by accepting it," the old Baron said, angrily, his good humour already disturbed by Werner's words.

"I knew of no reasonable grounds why you should be offended by my doing so. Young Herr von Poseneck, who has only lately come to reside at Grünhagen, has certainly never insulted you, nor had any desire to insult you. He assured me that he had the highest respect for you, and that only your express refusal to receive visits at Hohenwald had prevented him from paying his respects to you."

"Let him try it! let him try it!" the old Baron said crossly.

"I hope, father, that calm reflection will induce you to change your mind," the Finanzrath quietly rejoined. "I can assure you that young Kurt von Poseneck in no wise deserves the dislike which you have transferred to him from his late father, and that he really desires to testify his respect for you. I cannot sufficiently extol the cordial hospitality extended to me at Grünhagen, and which can be ascribed only to the fact of my being your son."

"Nonsense!" growled the Freiherr.

"The Amtsrath Friese, as well as Herr Kurt von Poseneck, repeatedly expressed his pleasure in being able to render any little service to a Hohenwald. Both lamented your seclusion, and wished they might convince you of their friendly regard. Both treated me with distinguished hospitality, for which I am greatly obliged to them. Herr von Poseneck, after he had conducted me to Grünhagen, went back with horses and men to the quarry to extricate the carriage and horses and get them under shelter; he sent over Fräulein Müller's trunk at daybreak this morning, and when I expressed a wish to return home, the Amtsrath placed his own carriage at my disposal. Common courtesy requires that I should drive to Grünhagen to-morrow to call, and to tell Herr Kurt von Poseneck that he will gratify me by visiting me in return at Hohenwald."

Celia's eyes sparkled as she heard the Finanzrath thus announce his intentions, but her joy quickly fled as she looked at her father, upon whose forehead the frown had deepened as Werner spoke, and whose rage now burst forth with, "I'll have the dogs set on him if he dares to enter the court-yard! No Poseneck shall show his face in Hohenwald so long as I am master here!"

"Papa, that is very disagreeable of you," Celia ventured to say; "you do yourself great injustice!"

"Is the girl out of her senses?" the Freiherr asked, angrily. "What are the Posenecks to you, that you should defend them against your own father?"

Celia flushed crimson; she could not answer this question.

Fortunately, Werner came to her assistance, saying, "Celia's words, although they are perhaps to be reprehended, are prompted by her innate sense of justice. She could not help exclaiming against your threat of requiting the courtesy of a visit by setting the dogs on the visitor. I think,

upon calmer consideration, you will find her conduct but natural. I am very sorry, sir, that I should so have provoked you, and will try to avoid doing so again. Of course I am not to be deterred by the unfortunate prejudice entertained by you against the Posenecks from fulfilling the duty enjoined upon me by common politeness. I must call at Grünhagen, but I will not invite Herr von Poseneck to Hohenwald. I will convey to him your thanks, and tell him you regret your inability to receive him at Hohenwald, since your health does not admit of your receiving visitors."

"Then you will tell him a lie; my health admits of my receiving any visitors whom I care to see."

"I think my conscience can endure the weight of a lie of that kind," the Finanzrath rejoined, with a smile.

"Do as you please, but let me hear no more of the Posenecks!" growled the old Baron. His relations with his eldest son were peculiar; he constantly disputed with him, but in spite of his father's angry vehemence Werner usually gained his end, because he never lost his temper. The old Baron felt now that he had been wrong, and, although he did not frankly admit this, he yielded.

Werner seemed not to notice this; he was too wise to insist upon his father's acknowledging himself in error. To change the conversation he turned to Lucie, who, still seated at the piano, had been an involuntary listener to the dispute between father and son. Approaching her, the Finanzrath took her hand, and saying, with the air of protection which had so annoyed her on the previous evening, "Permit me, dear Fräulein Müller, to bid you cordially welcome to Castle Hohenwald," would have carried it to his lips had she not hastily withdrawn it.

Why she did so she could not herself have told. She had frequently allowed her hand to be kissed by way of greeting; it was a received custom in the society to which she had belonged, and yet she could not endure that this man should avail himself of it; it seemed to her an unbecoming familiarity on his part. She acted upon an impulse, and she did not observe the fleeting smile that passed over Arno's face as he noticed the intentional withdrawal of her hand. She replied to the Finanzrath's courtesy by a simple inclination of her head.

Celia, too, had seen that Werner's salutation was not received with favour, and with ready tact came to her new friend's aid. "You must reserve all your fine speeches for another time, Werner," she said, stepping to Lucie's side; "Fräulein Müller belongs entirely to me to-day. I am burning with desire to take my first lessons of her, to show her what a good scholar I can be."

Lucie's grateful glance as she arose and followed Celia from the room showed the young girl that she had done right.

From this time Celia devoted herself to her studies with ardour. Lucie's hardest task was to induce her to moderate her zeal. The "will-o'-the-wisp" quite forgot its errant nature; for hours the girl would sit at the piano practising wearisome exercises, and at other times she would bury herself in a book,--an entirely new experience for Celia. It needed but a few weeks of intercourse with her new friend to arouse within her a genuine literary taste. The old Baron and Arno were astounded at the change; the former feared that his darling, whom he saw thus tamed, might perhaps become too tame; he shook his head as he reminded Celia that she must not study too hard, lest her health should suffer; she ought to continue to take her daily exercise in the open air.

To such admonitions the girl was not at all deaf. True, she no longer roamed about the garden as she had done: it took too much time; she confined herself to a morning's walk there with Fräulein Müller to visit the green-houses and the shrubberies; but her afternoon ride was never omitted. When the hour for this arrived she could no longer fix her attention upon her book: her thoughts flew forth to the forest. Fräulein Müller smiled at her enthusiasm for her daily ride, ascribing it in great part to the force of habit, since no weather was too stormy to keep her at home.

Celia always rode alone. Formerly, old John had sometimes accompanied her, but, although he soon recovered from the effects of his fall, his young mistress never now desired his attendance. She could not so easily have declined Lucie's companionship, but Fräulein Müller had never been a horsewoman, and did not care to learn to ride.

Thus, then, Celia rode alone. A happy smile illumined her features and her dark eyes sparkled as she daily caught the first glimpse of the light straw hat among the trees, and found Kurt at the appointed place in the forest waiting to walk along the woodland road by her side. Then the girl would drop the bridle on her horse's neck, and Pluto, who was now on the best of terms with Kurt, knew perfectly well that before he was urged to greater speed than a leisurely walk an hour would elapse. An hour! How quickly it flew by! how much had both Celia and Kurt to say in that brief space of time! Celia told of her studies, of the delightful hours she now owed to her friend Anna, whose beauty and loveliness, clearness of head and goodness of heart, she described in such glowing terms that Kurt could not at times suppress a smile, for which Celia would instantly reprove him as implying a doubt of the accuracy of her descriptions.

Kurt, on the other hand, would tell of his life at Grünhagen: how he was becoming more at

home in Germany, how his uncle's hospitality and social qualities made his house delightful, a resort for the country gentry and for the principal people in the neighbouring town of A----. He often spoke also of the Finanzrath, who was now frequently at Grünhagen. Kurt, who was always candid and unreserved towards Celia, admitted to her that, although for her sake he should always treat her brother with the utmost politeness, he had very little liking for the exaggerated polish of his manners and bearing.

Thus they talked in the most innocent manner. At parting Celia always offered her hand to Kurt, and smilingly permitted him to imprint upon it an ardent kiss, but not again did she bend over him as when she once had yielded to an irresistible impulse. If he had uttered one tender word she would hardly have refused him a second kiss, but this word was not spoken; he withstood with manly determination the temptation to utter it. He had registered a vow that never should this innocent girl have cause to regret the frank confidence she had shown him.

Lucie had no suspicion of the attraction that took Celia to the forest, nor that the simple-hearted girl could have a secret from her. She took delight in her charming pupil's tender affection for her, which indeed she reciprocated with all her heart.

The old Freiherr had greatly changed since Lucie's coming to Castle Hohenwald: he had grown social. True, his sociability was confined to a desire for the society of his immediate family circle, among whom he reckoned, of course, Fräulein Anna Müller; but with them he developed a genial courtesy that astonished his sons.

Arno, on the other hand, preserved the same attitude towards his sister's governess that he had adopted upon her first arrival at the castle; he was conscious of an involuntary thrill of delight when, in the course of conversation, or upon an accidental encounter in their walks, Fräulein Müller bestowed upon him one of her rare sweet smiles; but the next moment he would rouse himself to renewed hatred of the entire sex, bethinking himself that this very enchanting smile was bit a trap set by overweening love of admiration, and could avail nothing with him. And yet he could not avoid her. When Lucie, occupied with some bit of feminine work, seated herself at the table beside the Baron's rolling-chair and talked pleasantly with the old man and Celia, Arno would join the circle, placing his chair where, unobserved, he could watch every change of expression on the lovely face. He spoke but little, but not a word of hers escaped him,--especially did he watch and listen when, as was but rarely the case, she appealed to Werner.

Why was he so pleased at the coldness and reserve of her usual manner towards his brother? Why should he be so much annoyed when one day Werner announced that he had just received a favourable reply from his chief in office to his request for a prolongation of his leave of absence? Wherefore should Werner have seemed to him absolutely insufferable since he had taken to paying such marked court to Fräulein Müller?

Arno had never been upon terms of close intimacy with his brother,--theirs were antagonistic natures; but now he felt an absolute repugnance to him for which there was no accounting; surely it was nothing to him if Werner chose to pay court to Celia's beautiful governess.

No; it was not "nothing to him." He excused himself for this by reflecting that Werner's superficial, frivolous manner was unworthy a Hohenwald. What views could he entertain with regard to Fräulein Müller? Had he not often declared that in the choice of a wife he should consult his head, and not his heart? Wealth was of no consequence; but the future Freifrau von Hohenwald must belong to a family through whose influence the Hohenwalds might recover the importance they had lost with the government. Arno thought he knew well that Werner, keenly devoted as he was to his own interests, never carried away by sentiment, would not be false to these expressed principles of his. It was inconceivable that he should sacrifice his ambition to love for a poor bourgeoise girl, his sister's governess! He could scarcely cherish honest intentions with regard to her, and Castle Hohenwald should never be profaned by the reverse! And this was why, as Arno tried to convince himself, he watched Werner and Fräulein Müller so narrowly.

Often when riding alone in field or forest it would suddenly occur to him to wonder whether Werner were at the moment talking with Fräulein Anna in the library, or walking with her in the garden. Then resistance was useless; he was forced to succumb to the impulse that drove him to plunge the spurs into his horse and gallop furiously to the castle, where his calm was restored only when convinced of the groundlessness of his alarm.

Lucie found nothing to offend or displease her in his manner towards her. When she had resolved, in defence of her honour, to undertake the battle of life under a maiden name, she had not been unmindful of the dangers that might beset her path, and she had gladly accepted the position offered her at Castle Hohenwald, since she knew from Count Styrum and Adèle that there she should have nothing to fear from obtrusive admirers. She had reckoned upon Arno's hatred of her sex, and she had not been deceived. From her first meeting with him his manner had been not only indifferent, but even repellent. It was what she had hoped for, and she was glad of it; but her gladness was not heartfelt. Count Styrum's recital of his misfortunes had awakened Lucie's interest in the misanthrope, and this interest had grown since she had known him personally. His coldness and reserve did not irritate her; they were but natural after the terrible experience that life had brought him. He had--how could it be otherwise?--lost all faith in mankind; but still he might have shown a trifle less animosity towards her. Sometimes a severe remark of his would bring a warm flush to her cheek, and she was tempted to as severe a retort;

but if she yielded to the temptation she always reproached herself afterward. He was so unhappy! What a blessed task it would be to heal the wounds from which he was still bleeding! But such ministry was forbidden in her sad case.

Here was a dark spot in Lucie's otherwise contented life at Castle Hohenwald, and there was one still darker in the anxiety she felt at the Finanzrath's demeanour towards her. There was surely no sufficient cause for this anxiety, for the cultured man of the world never transcended conventional bounds. He was attentive and polite, but never officious; his courtesy and kindness never degenerated into any familiarity which Lucie could be justified in resenting. When he extolled her beauty and amiability, her delightful singing, her admirable instruction of Celia, and spoke of the excellent influence she exerted over her pupil, it was all done after so refined a fashion that she could not take exception to what was said. The old Freiherr said precisely the same things, though far more bluntly. And yet Lucie could not away with a feeling of uneasiness with which the Finanzrath's manner always inspired her. The news of the prolongation of his leave of absence was very unwelcome to her; it made her really unhappy.

CHAPTER X.

"There comes Werner again!" Arno said to his father, when an extra post was again seen approaching Castle Hohenwald; and the announcement did not seem particularly to delight the old Freiherr.

The Finanzrath had spent a few days in Dresden about the end of May in arranging for another prolongation of his leave of absence. He had been successful, and upon his return had remained at the castle only a few days when a letter arrived for him from Paris. He immediately declared that he must go to Berlin, where a friend whom he had not seen for a long while was awaiting him. He departed, remaining away but a few days, when he returned, only to leave again after two days, this time to see an old college friend in Hanover, and to take a trip to Cassel, where another of his friends resided. Even after this journey he was not content to stay quietly at home. He had scarcely been at the castle for a week when he left it again for a somewhat longer tour; he wished to visit the South German capitals, Stuttgart and Munich, passing several days in Vienna, and returning by way of Dresden.

The Freiherr received Werner's announcement that this time he should be absent two weeks, and could not return to the castle before the beginning of July, with a smile of satisfaction; he was not at all displeased that his eldest son should break in upon his prolonged stay at Castle Hohenwald with these frequent journeys. He as well as the other inmates of the castle felt relieved when the carriage with the Finanzrath inside rolled out of the court-yard.

"Werner makes the atmosphere dense; he kicks up a dust wherever he goes," the old man was wont to say in excuse of his evident relief at his son's departure; and was it therefore to be wondered at that he greeted with a sigh Arno's exclamation, "There comes Werner again!"

Arno, too, frowned when old Franz announced the Herr Finanzrath's arrival a few moments before Werner himself entered the garden-room.

He paid his respects to his father and greeted his brother with his usual quiet courtesy, in which, however, there was never any genuine cordiality, and then he dropped into a comfortable seat beside the old Baron's rolling-chair. "Home again at last!" he said. "I travelled all night to reach Hohenwald as quickly as possible, and I bring news of vivid interest, especially for you, Arno. Not only for Arno, however, but for every one who carries a good Saxon heart in his bosom. To arms, Arno! It is time that you girded on your sabre again. I hope you will write to the king this very day to ask for your appointment to your former military rank, for I tell you beforehand in confidence that France is about to humble the arrogance of Prussia, and I need not say what side we Saxons should take in the fray; the time has come to revenge ourselves for Königgratz and Sadowa!"

"Are you mad, Werner?" burst out the old Freiherr, who really thought that his son had taken a little too much wine.

"I mad? Do you think madness or the love of change has driven me away upon these various journeys lately?" the Finanzrath exclaimed in his turn. "I must tear the veil from your eyes and rouse you from your fancied security; the time for action has come,--a time that calls upon you, Arno, in especial. You must re-enter the army immediately, for it is eminently advisable that the number of right-minded Saxon officers should be as large as possible, that Saxony may not fail to do her duty at the right moment. There is a wide-spread secret alliance in process of formation

against Prussia. War will immediately ensue upon its completion. The question is not of months, perhaps not of weeks, but only of days, for every preparation is concluded, and our action must be prompt and sure."

"From what source have you gathered this wondrous information?" Arno asked, incredulously. "Since when have you linked yourself with those who decide the destiny of nations?"

"Spare your sarcasm, Arno!" the Freiherr said, crossly; "and you, Werner, come to the point. I should like to know something of this wonderful mess you seem to have been helping to cook."

"You shall be informed, father, in a very few words of the present condition of political affairs." Werner began by ascribing the quarrel between Prussia and France to the choice of a Hohenzollern prince for king of Spain, and then continued, "Napoleon will compel William to choose between a humiliating compliance, that will deprive him of all prestige, and war. Now, relying upon the power of the North German alliance, upon the military treaty with the South German states just concluded, upon the friendship of the Emperor of Russia, and upon that of England, Bismarck, who has no suspicion of the secret alliance against Prussia, to which, in addition to the dispossessed princes, Austria, Bavaria, Würtemberg, and the hereditary princes of Russia belong,--Bismarck, I say, will undoubtedly choose war. This you will see by next week, perhaps sooner. We can rely upon Russia absolutely; this I have learned in conference lately with my friend Count Repuin. The heir to the throne of Russia hates Bismarck, and the Emperor's voice is powerless in the matter; the anti-Prussian party at the Russian court is too large and too powerful. The French preparations are all complete. Immediately after war is declared a French army will invade the very heart of Germany, and will be received by the acclamations of the liberated Hanoverians."

"And what part have you assigned to me in the struggle which you describe as so near at hand?" asked Arno, who during the preceding glib explanations had been pacing the apartment with eyes fixed upon the ground, but who now paused and confronted his brother.

"The one marked out for you by your duty as an enemy of Bismarck, as an officer of the Saxon army which was so shamefully defeated in 1866, and, above all, as a true Saxon patriot," the Finanzrath replied. "If Saxony is to hold its own as the equal of Bavaria and Würtemberg after the downfall of Prussia, if it is to have its full share in the distribution of the Prussian provinces, this unnatural Prussian alliance must be dissolved, and that speedily. Now our king will hardly be in a condition to do this; at the beginning of the war he will be deterred by considerations that have no weight, however, with Saxon patriots. As in 1813, York, by his independent action, decided the destiny of Prussia and earned the gratitude of his king--as Saxon troops then, following the ignorant leading of the common people, went over to the German army with flying colours, so must they now, in the coming conflict, act independently for their fatherland. It will produce a tremendous impression upon the entire German people, and conduce essentially to the speedy overthrow of Prussia, if the Saxon regiments sunder the Prussian alliance and turn their bayonets against Prussians. The animus of our troops is good, but it will avail nothing unless their officers take the initiative, and, unfortunately, many of these are not to be relied on. Our corps of officers is tainted with a Prussian mania; they must be recalled to their duty. Let this be your task, Arno. You can easily influence your old comrades; you can arouse their Saxon patriotism, inflame their slumbering hatred of Prussia. You must instantly apply for reinstatement in your old rank. I have provided that your application should receive immediate attention."

"Treason, then! You would incite me to degrading perjury and treason?" Arno exclaimed, looking at his brother with flashing eyes. "Matters have gone far indeed when a Hohenwald can make such proposals to his brother!"

The Finanzrath was quite unprepared for such a reply. He had never imagined that Arno could refuse to undertake the task assigned to him, and therefore had he explained his schemes and hopes with such reckless frankness. He suddenly found himself exposed to a danger of which he had not dreamed. What if Arno should misuse the knowledge thus gained! He grew pale, but speedily recovered his composure. He must show no sign of fear; the game might yet perhaps be won.

"Who talks of treason?" he rejoined, with forced calmness. "Is it treason for a Saxon officer to obey his king's command? Is it treason to break an alliance that was framed by mere brute force? Was York guilty of treason in 1813? Has not posterity honoured him as the saviour of his country? Do not judge too hastily, my dear Arno, do not yield to a momentary emotion, but ask yourself, after calm reflection, whether you are justified in refusing your services to your country at her sorest need. Can you ever forget that you are a Saxon? Our king and country are to be delivered from the Prussian yoke; remember that, Arno, before you decide."

Arno looked at his brother with profound contempt. "I will hear no more!" he said, sternly. "What your share may be in the disgraceful intrigue of which you speak I do not know, nor do I wish to know. Go your own dark way, but do not think to mislead me by your sophistry. I know my duty. You reckon upon my hatred of Prussia, upon my love for our own little Saxon land; your reckoning is false from beginning to end. Yes, I do hate the arrogant, ambitious Prussian, but I have a fiercer hatred for the arch-enemy of all Germany, and it fills me with shame and indignation that a Hohenwald should dream of inciting his brother to a disgraceful league with France in a war with Germany. This is the error in your prudent calculations: you reckon upon

the hatred of Prussia in South Germany, in Hanover and Saxony, but that hatred will vanish like chaff before the wind when it comes to be a question of defending Germany against French lust of conquest. Neither you nor your noble Russian friend Count Repuin can use the German love of country as a factor in your calculations, for you do not appreciate its existence, nor that there are happily but few scoundrels in Germany so ready as yourself to satisfy their own selfish ambition by giving over their fatherland to French greed of territory."

The Finanzrath sprang up in a rage, but his brother, without waiting for a reply, left the room. "Insulting!" Werner exclaimed, quite beside himself.

"Not one word against Arno!" the old Freiherr said, sternly. "Every word that he uttered found its echo in my soul, and I thank God that there is at least one Hohenwald who retains within him a sense of right and honour and a genuine love of his country. Not a word, Werner! I will hear no more of your disgraceful schemes; not now, at all events. I must be more myself than I am now when I speak with you again. Now leave me; I wish to be alone."

Werner hesitated for a moment, but judged it wisest to make no attempt at present to recover the ground he had lost. "I obey your commands, sir," he said; "I hope calm reflection will induce you to change your mind, and that it will also have its effect upon Arno."

After the angry dispute with his brother, Arno walked out into the garden, and, feeling the need of quiet to collect himself, took his seat upon a rustic bench nearly hidden in a clump of shrubbery. It was a favourite retreat of his, and from its seclusion he could overlook almost the entire garden. Here, then, he sat down, and resigned himself to thought. So buried was he in reflection that, although he was aware that Fräulein Müller and Celia came from the castle to take their morning walk, and passed quite near him, he did not heed them: his mind was filled with Werner's dark schemes.

Thus he remained for he could not tell how long, when he was suddenly roused from his reverie by the sound of the voice that never reached his ear without thrilling him to the heart. He looked up. Walking along a leafy side-path came Werner and Fräulein Müller; she was speaking, and looking, not at Werner, but upon the ground. Arno thought he perceived that her voice trembled, although he could not distinguish what she was saying.

Werner's reply was made in so low a tone that not a sound reached Arno's ear; he could only perceive its effect upon Fräulein Müller, and it aroused within him a feeling of indignation. There was pain that was almost agony expressed in Anna's face as she listened eagerly to her companion's whispered words. Werner spoke long and persistently, bending above Fräulein Müller the while, and devouring with passionate admiration the lovely downcast face. As the pair passed his retreat Arno caught two words from his brother's lips, "Count Repuin," and marked how colourless was Anna's cheek, down which a tear was trickling from beneath the drooping eyelid.

They passed, and at the end of the woodland path turned into a walk leading to the castle. Celia here joined them. Near the castle gate they paused. Fräulein Müller, with a slight inclination to Werner, left him and entered the castle with Celia. The Finanzrath turned into a side-path leading to the forest and disappeared from Arno's sight.

What had passed between Werner and this girl? Was there a secret understanding between them? Arno felt his blood boil at the thought. Had Werner really induced Anna, who had hitherto treated him with cool reserve, to grant him a private confidential interview? She had begun her morning walk, accompanied by Celia, and had sent away her pupil that she might speak alone with Werner. Arno sprang from his seat in uncontrollable agitation; but he grew calm again as he remembered the pained expression of Anna's features, the tear that had rolled down her pale cheek. If there were some private relation between them, it certainly was not a friendly one. Still the mere thought that Werner by some fine-spun scheme had induced the girl to accord him this *tête-à-tête*, and to listen with eager attention to his words, was torture to Arno. If he had succeeded thus far, what might not be the result? She must be warned, warned against the vile arts of the betrayer! Thus much was certain. But who should warn her? To whom could he confide his fears? To his father? Impossible! The Freiherr was not overfond of Werner, but he would indignantly have rejected the idea that his son, that a Hohenwald could be guilty of such infamy. Celia, then? An innocent child of sixteen? No! Celia never must dream that her eldest brother could harbour a thought that could wrong her dear companion. And there was no one else in the castle who could speak one word to Anna upon such a subject; he had held himself so aloof that he never could advise her in so delicate a matter.

To Styrum he would turn in this need; but first he would narrowly observe Anna and Werner, that he might be able to give his friend a clearer idea of the relations between them than he had yet been able to gain for himself.

The result of his observation during the next few days could scarcely be called favourable,--it strengthened his suspicions as to Werner's dishonourable intentions, but he arrived at no decided conclusion.

There was evidently a change in the relations between Werner and Anna. She no longer avoided casually meeting the Finanzrath; she did not cut short her morning walks with Celia

when he joined them, but Arno never again saw them alone together.

The political horizon darkened daily,--the newspapers were read with avidity. None of the Hohenwald household could resist the conviction that a political convulsion was at hand; there were constant discussions at table and in the evenings in the domestic circle as to public affairs. On these occasions Celia's governess, who took an eager interest in the conversation, proved herself as enthusiastic an admirer of Bismarck as was the Finanzrath his bitter opponent.

One morning, in the library, Arno was eagerly discussing the news of the day with Fräulein Müller. Celia's teacher was unusually interested; she declared that her hopes for her country were centred on Bismarck. "His enemies," she said, with ardour, "conspire in secret; in their foolish conceit they believe him blind to their manœuvres, deaf to their machinations, but I am convinced that he clearly sees through their dark dealings. A Bismarck is not to be hoodwinked by such men as the Herr Finanzrath."

Scarcely were the words uttered when she seemed to regret them,--they had evidently escaped her unawares.

Arno listened surprised. "You know of my brother's schemes, then?" he asked.

There was nothing for it but to reply. "They are not difficult to divine; he has made no secret of his desires and hopes; but he and all his associates will find themselves deceived. Your brother in his miserable plans reckons upon the pitiable jealousies of all petty governments; but he is out in his reckoning,--the German people is not yet so degraded as to lend itself to so frivolous a game. If war should really be declared, Germans will, with a few disgraceful exceptions, rally promptly around the banner that will wave in the front of the battle to vindicate German honour and faith against all rude assaults. The very attempt now made to retard Germany in its march towards internal unity will but bear it more swiftly to its goal of unity and freedom!"

As she spoke her dark eyes sparkled, her cheeks glowed, and Arno thought he had never seen her so enchantingly beautiful.

"I trust from my soul that you are a true prophet!" he rejoined.

She rewarded him for these words by a brilliant glance of appreciation. "I knew that you must think thus," she said, with emotion; "you will be among the first to forget an ancient grudge when the time comes to stand forth for German honour and German right. The Freiherr Arno von Hohenwald will be at hand when the German people is summoned to the defence of the fatherland; of that I am convinced from my very soul." She held out her hand to him: he seized it and pressed it to his lips: for the moment he scarcely knew what he was doing; his past, his prejudices, were all forgotten; it was as if a dark cloud which had enveloped him were suddenly rent asunder, revealing to his mental vision a bright, sunlit future. "Your trust shall not be deceived," he said, with enthusiasm. "Be sure that when the battle begins I shall be ready. And when I return from the field, will you not give me a kindly welcome?"

He had not released Anna's hand; he bent over it to kiss it once again, when it was suddenly withdrawn. He looked up, and was shocked by her altered looks. Her cheeks were deadly pale, the light of enthusiasm in her dark eyes was gone: they were veiled in tears. "This must not be, Herr Baron," she said, in a low monotone.

"Have I offended you?" Arno asked, startled.

"No--but--I must leave you, Herr Baron; I must not and will not listen any longer!"

She would have turned and left the room, but Arno took her hand again and held it fast. "But you must listen," he said, gravely; "there must be truth between us. You will not yield to an over-sensitive delicacy of feeling that is unworthy of you, you will not leave me without letting me tell you that the light of your candid eyes has banished the mists that hung about me; your words have broken the spell that parted me from you. My heart is filled with sunshine; I know now that I love you with my whole soul, that I have loved you from the first moment that I saw you in the quarry. I have struggled with this love, I have even tried to hate you; have in my blind folly often shocked and offended you, because I would have it that the deception which so blasted my first youthful passion had killed all power to love in my heart. I know now how grossly I deceived myself. I am in your eyes a gloomy, irritable misanthrope; you can accord no liking to one who has so often wounded you by his severity; but it is my dearest hope that one day your love may be mine, and in this hope I shall leave you when duty calls me to the field. It will henceforth be the star of my life."

Anna had listened in silence to this torrent of words; her hand still rested in his: she did not withdraw it until he had ended; then first she raised her eyes and looked him full in the face with an expression of profound sadness. She did not reply at once; she could not for a few moments sufficiently master her emotion to attain an external calm. When she spoke at last, it was with an evident tremor in her voice. "There must be truth between us," she said; "you require it, Herr Baron, and I owe perfect truth both to you and to myself. Your sudden and unlooked-for declaration has destroyed the hope in which I had found peace. I hoped to regard Castle Hohenwald as my home; I hoped to pass years here, sheltered from the sorrows which have poisoned my life; but your words drive me forth into the world again!"

"Anna! I conjure you----"

"No more, Herr Baron! I must not listen to you; must not permit hopes that can never be fulfilled. You say that the hope of one day winning my love will be the guiding star of your life; banish the idle thought, for never,--I swear it by Almighty God,--never may I return your love."

"You love another, then?" Arno exclaimed.

"No, Herr Baron."

"Then I will not resign the hope you call idle. I implore you not to turn from me; I ask for so little, for no promise, only for permission to love you."

"And this little I must not grant. I pray you leave me, Herr Baron; we must part forever. I must not again expose myself to a danger from which I thought myself safe with you; my duty as well as my honour forbids me to listen to you. Once more I entreat you to leave me!"

"You rob me of all hope?" Arno asked, gently.

"All!"

She spoke so calmly, and with such absolute firmness, that Arno despaired of moving her; he did not venture to add a single word of entreaty; after so decided a rejection he could no longer refuse to accede to her request. He took her hand once more, kissed it passionately, and hurried from the room.

He never looked back, and therefore could not see how, even before the library door had closed upon him, Lucie's hardly-won composure utterly forsook her. She sank into a seat, buried her face in her hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

Half an hour afterward she was seated at her desk in her room, writing to her dearest, her only friend, Adèle.

"I must leave here immediately,--every hour of my stay at Castle Hohenwald is a period of unspeakable torment for me. I had feared and hoped so much from this place; both fears and hopes are unfulfilled, and I must leave Hohenwald, where I was so content. I love the old Freiherr like a father, and I know he is fond of me; scarcely a day passes that he does not tell me that the sun has shone more brightly in Hohenwald since I came here. And I love my darling Celia, dear, innocent child; with my whole heart do I return the tender affection she lavishes upon me,--her progress delights me, but I must go.

"Do not, dear Adèle, think me variable and fickle,--my heart bleeds at the thought of leaving these dear people, but it must be; you will say so yourself when you hear all. You know I have faithfully described my life here to you. I have told you of the distaste with which the Finanzrath's attentions inspired me. I did all that I could by the cold reserve of my manner to impress him with this fact. I did not think he would ever succeed in forcing me to grant him a private and confidential interview, and yet this he has done. About a week ago he came into the garden where Celia and I were taking our usual morning walk. He had just returned from one of his frequent journeys, and I could not avoid replying to his courteous greeting. He joined us and entered into conversation with us. He talks extremely well, and even I could not help being amused by his lively descriptions of his travelling adventures, while Celia, who is not very fond of her eldest brother, was much entertained. Suddenly he paused, and, turning directly to me, said, 'But I have not told you the most interesting experience of my trip, Fräulein Müller.' Then, with a searching glance, he added, 'I have seen several friends of yours, and have talked of you a great deal.'

"I felt the blood mount into my face at these words. I could not conceal the terror with which they inspired me; whereupon the Finanzrath, with a satisfied smile, went on, 'I need only mention the name of one of my friends, of Count Repuin, to convince you how interesting was our conversation about you.' The detested name of that terrible man produced upon me all the effect that the Finanzrath had doubtless expected. It was only by a strong effort that I could keep myself from fainting. Celia noticed my pallor; she had not heard her brother's words,--he had chosen a moment for them in which she was lagging behind to pluck a flower. 'What is the matter, dear Anna?' she exclaimed, in terror; 'you are deadly pale.' In fact, had she not put her arm about me I think I should have fallen, although I soon recovered myself. The Finanzrath offered me his arm, and despatched his sister to the castle for a vinaigrette. I did not dare to refuse his proffered aid, lest I should offend him, and thus I found myself alone with him, forced to continue my walk leaning upon his arm. 'I thank you, Fräulein Müller,' he said, as soon as Celia had left us, 'for your readiness to grant me this *tête-à-tête*. It gives me a precious proof of your confidence in me,--a confidence which, I promise you, you never shall regret. Chance has revealed to me your secret; but I give you my word of honour it shall remain buried in my breast.' He then told me how he had learned who I was. Repuin is his friend,--he had seen him in Munich, and one day, while Repuin was engaged in writing letters, had whiled away the time by looking over some photographs in a book upon the Russian's table. Many of these he was familiar with; but his astonishment was great when in one of them he recognized his sister's governess. He waited until Repuin was at leisure, and then his first thought, so he told me, was to ask the Count whether he was acquainted with Fräulein Anna Müller, the original of the photograph; but,

reflecting that Count Styrum had made it a request that no curiosity should be shown regarding my past, he suspected that I should prefer the Count's remaining in ignorance as to my whereabouts, and therefore he took up the book of photographs again, as if casually, and suddenly exclaimed, 'A pretty face, Count; who is this girl?' showing my likeness as he spoke.

"'Not a girl, but a married woman,' Repuin replied. 'Sorr's runaway wife!'

"'I could not so command my features,' the Finanzrath continued his narrative, 'as not to show the surprise I felt at this information. Fräulein Anna Müller the wife of that Herr von Sorr whom Repuin had presented to me! It seemed impossible!

"'And then the shameful words which Repuin had uttered, "Runaway wife." I could not rest without some explanation. Can you wonder at it, Fräulein Müller? "The picture reminds me of a lady whom I saw not long ago," I said.

"'Scarcely had I uttered these words when Repuin sprang up in great agitation. "You have seen her?" he cried. "There is no other face that resembles hers; tell me where you saw her. I have been searching for her for months, but she has vanished utterly."

"'What was I to tell him? I saw instantly that he must be put upon a false track, and on the spur of the moment replied that I had shortly before travelled in a railway carriage with a young lady who closely resembled the picture.

"'My answer was so prompt that Repuin was fortunately deceived. He never suspected that I was misleading him, and questioned me further with the greatest eagerness. I told him that the young lady had been my travelling companion from Berlin to Cassel, but that of course I had not exchanged a word with her.

"'"I will go to Cassel this very night!" Repuin exclaimed, in the greatest excitement. "I must find her! I have sworn to do it though it should cost me half my fortune. Now that I have traced her she shall not escape me."

"'He was completely deceived by my invention, and I could no longer doubt that it was to destroy all trace of your existence that you had taken refuge in Castle Hohenwald under a feigned name. I remembered your enigmatical letter to me, and was convinced that I had found its explanation. Let me assure you that it was entirely owing to my profound sympathy for you that I now begged the Count for further particulars concerning you. What I heard filled me with horror and indignation. With cynical candour he informed me that he had spent fabulous sums upon Sorr that he might be near his charming wife, who at last, when he had actually purchased her of her wretch of a husband, vanished without a trace.'

"Such, dearest Adèle, was the Finanzrath's story, which he concluded with assurances of his profound secrecy.

"I cannot describe my sensations while he was speaking, of mingled fear lest he should betray my secret and give Count Repuin some clue to my retreat, and aversion for the man himself. I quivered with anger when he called me, as he did repeatedly, 'dear Fräulein Müller,' and yet I did not dare to show him that it offended me, lest I should provoke his resentment. Celia, who came from the castle with the salts, at last relieved me from my embarrassment. The Finanzrath left us. Then I determined to leave Hohenwald, but, as the days slipped by and the Finanzrath made no further allusions to my secret, I decided to remain, since the noble old Freiherr would surely grant me his protection in case of any disagreeable advances from his son. Each day the shadow that the Finanzrath's revelations had thrown upon my peaceful life here faded still more; my courage returned to me. I believed myself quite safe in my beloved Hohenwald with my dear Celia, when one wretched moment blasted all my hopes.

"I must go; I cannot stay here, for Arno has just told me that he loves me. I thought his heart was dead to all affection, and he has just declared his passionate attachment for me.

"I suffered indescribably when all that I could do in answer to his frank avowal of affection was calmly and coldly to crush his hopes forever. I wept bitter tears when he left me, and yet--yet the consciousness of his love brought happiness with it as well as misery.

"Strength was given me to fulfil my duty; not by look or word did I betray what I felt in rejecting him, but could I resist him a second time? I must flee from my own weakness.

"I can write no more, dear Adèle, and must close. I am filled with but one desire,--to go away from here as soon as may be. I rely upon your aid again, my dear, kind friend; try to find me another asylum. I do not care where it is or what it is, only let it be far, far away from here and from all of you.

"Help me, dear Adèle; protect your

"Lucie."

CHAPTER XI.

Celia peered into the forest on either side of the road; she had ridden from the castle more quickly than usual, that she might not be unpunctual, and for the first time Kurt was not at his post. She listened with bated breath, but no sound was to be heard except the rustling of the boughs overhead and the soft note of a woodland bird.

What could have happened? He had hitherto always been awaiting her at their place of meeting. How could he allow anything to curtail, even by a few moments, the short hour to which they both looked forward so eagerly? Although he could not be to blame, still she felt aggrieved. Pluto, too, seemed to find his absence very unnatural. He pawed the ground impatiently with his fore-foot and shook his black mane; then pricked his delicate ears with a neigh as a distant crackling of the underbrush was heard, and a minute afterwards Kurt made his appearance. He was very warm and quite out of breath with the haste he had made to atone for his want of punctuality.

"Now this I call scant courtesy!" exclaimed Celia, who had intended to punish him by a cool reception for his tardiness. She was quickly appeased, however, when she saw how warm he looked from his hasty walk. She held out her hand to him, and when he took it leaned down towards him. "You do not deserve a kiss for keeping me waiting so long, but I will temper justice with mercy. Poor fellow! you are terribly warm; you ought not to have walked so fast!"

What had become of Kurt's good resolutions? They had shared the fate that awaits such resolutions generally. How could he resist when Celia smiled so bewitchingly upon him? The temptation was too great. Besides, he had only resolved never by a single word to betray Celia's childlike trust in him, to treat her as a brother would treat a tenderly-loved sister, and is it not perfectly allowable for a brother to kiss a dear sister? He was not wrong in kissing her. Had he been wrong several weeks before, when Celia, after some slight dispute, offered him her rosy lips in token of reconciliation, not to refuse the precious gift? Celia, in her innocent purity, never could have comprehended such a refusal, and would have been deeply grieved by it.

Since then it had become a custom for the young girl to receive him daily with a kiss, and to take leave of him with a kiss, and they called each other by their first names. It would have been ridiculous in Kurt, after becoming so intimate with Celia, to adhere to the formal "Fräulein von Hohenwald" in addressing her. It had vanished; neither Kurt or Celia could tell when or how; it had done so so naturally.

Still, after that kiss of reconciliation Kurt had not felt perfectly comfortable as he walked home to Grünhagen; he was dissatisfied with himself. Cool reflection told him that he had been false to his resolve,--he, a man to whom life and its perils were familiar, should have conquered himself; he should have been a guide to Celia, who was half a child, and who had no idea that there could be any danger in her guileless familiarity. But his heart bore away the victory from his understanding. Kurt quieted his conscience when it would have reproached him. Was it his fault that he did not go directly to Celia's father and declare his love for her, and that she loved him in return? Ah, how gladly would he, if he could, have done this! But the miserable family feud, the invincible prejudice of the old Freiherr, forbade all approach. Should Kurt, then, sacrifice the happiness of his life, his love for Celia, to such a phantom? Should he reject the dear girl's confidence because the old Baron in his obstinacy had an unaccountable hatred for the name of Poseneck? No; he could not and he would not. He never had asked Celia whether she loved him and would be his; but there was no need of such words between them. He knew that her heart belonged to him, and his determination to win her hand was absolute, although he vainly sought in his imagination for some means to attain this end.

Castle Hohenwald was surrounded for him by an insurmountable wall; there was no possible way by which he could approach Celia's father. Did not the Finanzrath whenever he came to Grünhagen loudly lament that it was impossible for him to invite Herr von Poseneck to return his visit? The attempt, too, which Count Styrum had made to influence Arno had been without result. Arno was as inaccessible as his father. Castle Hohenwald was closed against Kurt.

Yet he would not resign hope; he was resolved that his life should not be ruined by a silly prejudice. Although Celia was now too young to bestow her hand where she chose, perhaps, in direct opposition to her father's will, it would not always be so. Thus Kurt hoped in the future for some lucky chance that would make it possible for him to surmount the barriers that kept him from Castle Hohenwald.

With these hopes he soothed his conscience when it reproached him for yielding to the spell that Celia's confidential familiarity cast around him. He knew that no unholy thought stained his devoted love for the dear girl, and knowing this, he believed himself justified in enjoying the bliss

of the present.

"But you were angry with me, Celia," he said, as, after her kiss, he walked slowly along beside Pluto. "You were angry with me for keeping you waiting. Confess it; your first words hardly sounded kind."

"Well, yes; I will not deny," Celia replied, "that I was a little vexed and hurt. I had been thinking of you all day long, and you were not here; I did not know what to think. You never kept me waiting before; indeed, you spoil me, Kurt, as does every one,--you, and my father, and Arno, and my dear Anna. You all spoil me, and ought not to be surprised when I am impatient."

"I am only surprised that you forgave me so quickly."

"Oh, I was so glad to have you here, although I ought to have scolded you for walking so fast in this terrible heat. You look warm still."

"I could not help it. I was afraid you would think I was not coming and would ride home again. In my heart I cursed that tiresome Assessor for detaining me, and when at last I escaped from him, I walked straight across the Hohenwald fields to meet you here."

"You need not have done that, you dear, kind Kurt. I should have waited an hour here for you at least." Again she held out her hand to him, and surely it was but natural that he should kiss it passionately.

"Have you another visitor at Grünhagen?" Celia continued, without being put at all out of countenance by the tender kiss imprinted upon her hand. "You said something of a tiresome Assessor who had detained you."

"Yes, an Assessor von Hahn, who has lately been transferred to the courts at A----, saw fit to pay my uncle a visit this morning. With his usual hospitality my uncle invited him to stay, and to my horror he accepted the invitation. He is a commonplace, tiresome man, and incredibly inquisitive. He has only one good quality, which is that he is a distant relative of yours."

"Yes, the Hahns are remotely connected with my mother's family, but I never heard anything of them, and did not even know of the existence of an Assessor von Hahn."

"I assure you it would mortify him excessively to hear you say so. He has already told my uncle and myself much with regard to his relationship to the Hohenwalds, and has deeply lamented that Castle Hohenwald is closed even to near connections. When he heard that your father had consented to have a governess for you he was overwhelmed with astonishment, and asked every imaginable question concerning Fräulein Müller, where she came from, who she was, how she looked; whether she were ugly or pretty, young or old, learned or ignorant. He wanted to know all about her, and I could see was greatly dissatisfied with the scanty information he gathered from us. He tormented me with questions about you and your brothers and your father, and I escaped from him only by slipping off when he was engaged for a moment with the newspaper. My uncle told him that I was in the habit of taking a solitary walk in the forest every afternoon, upon which he offered to accompany me, and was not at all dismayed by the terrible picture I drew of the difficulties of the path through the underbrush. I could not get away from him except by secret flight."

"My precious cousin seems to be a very agreeable man," said Celia, laughing.

"He is insufferable, and yet I ought to be glad of his visit. In his loquacity he supplied my uncle and myself with some important information which made it especially desirable that I should see you this afternoon."

"Information that concerns me!----"

"That concerns your brother Werner," Kurt replied, very gravely. "I am afraid he has allowed himself to be drawn into certain schemes which may place your father and Arno in a very embarrassing situation, although I do not believe that, as the Assessor hinted, they have any share in them. I never regretted so deeply as to-day that your father's and Arno's wretched prejudice against our family made it impossible for me to hasten to Hohenwald to warn your father, and to entreat him to turn a deaf ear to Werner's insidious whispers. I long to do this, but how would he receive one of the hated Posenecks? He would not credit my information, just because it came from me; he would repulse me as an unauthorized intruder. My warning would probably do more harm than good, and Arno is just as inaccessible as your father."

"Unfortunately, you are right," Celia said, sadly. "You would not be kindly received at Hohenwald. But can you not tell me what you wish to say to my father and Arno? I am afraid that neither of them would pay me much heed, but I will induce Anna to help me, and my father at least will be influenced by her. Arno, to be sure, is incorrigible; even Anna has no effect upon him."

"Has Fräulein Müller any influence with Werner?"

"I do not know," Celia replied, thoughtfully. "I have sometimes thought so; at all events, the

relations between them seem to me very odd and quite incomprehensible. She cannot endure him, and avoids him whenever she can, and yet he pays her devoted attention. I cannot understand it."

"It might be dangerous, then, to trust Fräulein Müller?"

"Now you are unkind, Kurt!" Celia exclaimed, indignantly. "You must not speak so of my Anna."

"But you yourself said----"

"I never said or thought anything that could imply a want of confidence in her. I trust her entirely. But you have told me nothing of these mysterious schemes of Werner's. I know nothing as yet."

"You shall know all that I know myself, although it may be wrong for me to acquaint a young girl of sixteen with political intrigues existing perhaps only in the diseased fancy of this garrulous Assessor."

Celia hastily withdrew the hand which Kurt had held in his own as he slowly walked along beside Pluto. "You are very disagreeable, Kurt," she said. "I am no longer a child; girls are far more precocious than boys, and at sixteen I may surely be trusted. And I am very much interested in politics: I read the papers daily; have we not often discussed them together? I continually scold papa and Arno for abusing Bismarck as they do."

Kurt could not but smile at her indignation. "Do not be angry with me, dearest Celia," he said. "I will tell you all I know, which, unfortunately, is not much; the Assessor's hints were rather vague and confused. Since you read the daily papers you know well how imminent is the danger of a war with France. At such a time it is the duty of every German to be true to the fatherland, and yet there is a large party in Germany who ignore this, and who, because they are opposed to the Prussian government, wish for a war with France and the overthrow of Germany and Prussia. To this party your brother Werner unfortunately belongs."

"Unfortunately!" Celia said in confirmation of his words.

"Those belonging to it," Kurt continued, "know nothing of true patriotism. Prompted by mean self-interest and by silly hatred of Prussia, they are ready to ally themselves with the Frenchman, the arch-enemy of Germany, who believes that when war is declared all the enemies of Prussia in Southern Germany, in Saxony, and in Hanover will flock to his banner. There are at present French agents scattered through Germany employed in plotting and arranging for this disgraceful treachery. These agents are of every nation; some of them are even Germans of rank, who believe that their names shelter them from suspicion, and that they can pursue their dark designs unobserved. But they are mistaken; the leader of Prussian polities is not so easily hoodwinked as they think; he knows his treacherous opponents, and will know how to bring them to the punishment they deserve."

"And you are going to tell me that Werner is one of these treacherous agents," Celia interrupted Kurt, "I suspected it; this is why he has taken these frequent journeys. Werner is sufficiently unprincipled to lend himself from vanity and ambition to such treachery, but Arno, I assure you, Kurt, is incapable of it. He is stern and hard, but he never would dream of aiding in treason against his country. You must not suspect him for an instant."

"I do not suspect him, but others do, and therefore I fear both for him and for your father. The gossiping Assessor hinted to my uncle and myself that Castle Hohenwald is the centre of various treasonable intrigues, that Werner is in constant communication with the most dangerous French agents, with a certain Count Repuin, for example; nay, that he is himself such an agent, working in the French interest among the Saxon nobility, and that he is probably assisted by your father and Arno, whose hatred of Prussia is well known. The Assessor implied further that Castle Hohenwald is under strict surveillance, and that it is only a question of time when these treasonable intrigues are to be crushed out by the arrest of all the Hohenwalds. Your father and Arno must be put upon their guard against Werner, but how it is to be done I do not know."

"I will warn them!" Celia said, decidedly.

"Will they believe you? Will not your father's first question be whence came your information?"

"Of course it will, and I know he will be terribly angry when he knows all; still, I must not mind that if he and Arno are in danger of arrest. He will get over it in time. The worst is, that until he does he will forbid my riding out, or will always send Arno with me, so that we shall not see each other. But I must bear that too. It has perhaps been wrong for us to have these meetings here every day. I have never been able to look papa full in the face when the Posenecks were mentioned, or any allusion made to my afternoon rides. I never before had a secret from my dear old father, and he has a right to be angry that I have concealed from him what he ought to have known long ago. But if I should hesitate now from fear of his anger to tell him that danger threatens him, and that you have informed me of it, how could I ever forgive myself if anything should really happen to him? Tell me, dear Kurt, am I not right?"

"Yes, you are right, darling courageous child that you are. I do not know how I can bear to lack the sight and sound of you every day; I shall be wretched without this hour of delight; but you are right. We must not think of ourselves, but of how to avert the danger that threatens your father and Arno."

"You are the dearest and the best fellow in the world!"

As she spoke, Celia allowed Kurt to lift her from her horse and conduct her to a rustic bench, which he had himself constructed, just upon the borders of the Grünhagen forest, where they usually parted from each other. Many a time lately they had sat here side by side, but to-day every moment seemed more precious than ever, the future was so uncertain.

They sat silent for a long while, his arm about her waist and her lovely head reclined upon his shoulder, while her eyes were downcast; she was reflecting upon the coming parting.

"Will your father believe you when he knows that your warning comes from me?" Kurt asked, suddenly. "Will he not suspect me of giving it with a view of arousing his gratitude, and thus obtaining an entrance into Castle Hohenwald? If I did not fear that this would be so, I would go to him myself, his commands to the contrary notwithstanding; but, as I told you before, I dread his transferring his doubt of him who warns, to the warning itself to the extent of rejecting it incredulously. The same thing will happen if you tell him that it is I who warn him; he will even be more suspicious and mistrustful in his anger at our intimacy, which has become such without his knowledge and against his will."

Celia's eyes sparkled. Hard as she knew it would be to put a stop to these meetings by a frank confession, she was still resolved to make the sacrifice, but Kurt's words showed her that it would be useless; she was quite ready in a moment to convince herself that for the present it was best that her father should be ignorant of her meetings with Kurt, lest he should regard the warning with suspicion.

She raised her head, and looking at Kurt with a happy smile, said, "Anna will help us; we will tell her all. If she puts my father upon his guard and tells him that she cannot mention the source whence comes her information, but that she knows it to be correct, he will pay heed to her; he has the greatest confidence in her, and it never will occur to him that she could deceive him."

Kurt had no objection to urge to this. He consented that Celia should confide everything to her friend, both as regarded their daily meetings, and as to what Kurt had heard from the Assessor von Hahn.

Thus conversing, the time flew by so quickly that the lovers did not suspect the lateness of the hour. The outer world was forgotten, when suddenly they were recalled to it by an unfamiliar voice, that gayly interrupted their confidential talk with, "Found at last! I beg ten thousand pardons for disturbing you; I never suspected that I should find Herr von Poseneck in such charming society. Now I understand his sudden disappearance; but pray don't let me disturb you; I am thoroughly discreet; I will not boast of it, for discretion is a gift of nature; I possess it, and would not for worlds interrupt a delightful *tête-à-tête*."

Kurt and Celia, as soon as the voice fell upon their ears, started up from the bench, Celia looking down blushing, greatly confused, while Kurt, with anger flashing in his eyes, confronted the Assessor, who, in the best of humours, did not seem to perceive how unwelcome was his presence. This first appeared to occur to him when Kurt approached him, saying sternly, "Sir, what do you mean? how dare you thus follow me without my permission?"

The Assessor retreated a step, taught by the angry gleam in Kurt's eyes that his jesting remarks had been quite out of place. In much confusion he stammered, "I beg pardon; indeed nothing was farther from my intention than to intrude; I am inconsolable at having disturbed you."

The poor little man, as he shrank from Kurt's indignant glance and poured out his terrified excuses, cut so odd a figure that Celia could not help smiling, although she was anything but pleased with the present aspect of affairs. She could see that Kurt's indignation was still further aroused by the intruder's apology, and she whispered to him as gently as possible "Be calm, dearest Kurt, I pray you, for my sake."

Her words produced an instant effect. Kurt's brow grew smooth, the angry look vanished from his eyes, which sparkled strangely as he looked at Celia, and then turned with an air of sudden determination to the Assessor, saying, in a much gentler tone, "It is not to me, Herr von Hahn, that you should excuse yourself, but to my betrothed, Fräulein Celia von Hohenwald." As he spoke he cast at Celia a quick glance of inquiry, afraid lest his words might offend her; but no, she did not even look surprised; an arch smile quivered about her lips for a moment, and she nodded to him assentingly.

The Assessor's amazement, however, was unbounded; his large and rather prominent blue eyes grew larger and more prominent as he looked from Kurt to Celia. "Ah--really--indeed"--he stammered, bowing low--"I had no idea--I humbly beg the lady's pardon--permit me to offer my cordial congratulations--indeed--I am so surprised that I hardly know what to say."

Celia laughed; she could not help it: the flaxen little Assessor was too comical; and Kurt smiled; he was no longer angry, but inexpressibly happy. Celia's hand was in his and returned his pressure. How could he be angry with the Assessor, who had been the cause of his sudden resolve? "Never mind, Herr Assessor," he said, kindly. "We will credit you with the most heartfelt good wishes. But"--and he suddenly changed his tone to one of grave admonition--"since chance has willed that you should be the recipient of our confidence, I must pray you not to misuse it. You know that there exists an hereditary feud between the Hohenwalds and the Posenecks, which some of the members of the families have not yet agreed to forget, therefore we, my betrothed and myself, do most earnestly enjoin upon you to be silent as to what you have learned. Any allusion to it to others would be an indiscretion for which I should be obliged to call you to account. I am sure we may rely upon you."

"Absolutely. I swear it!" the Assessor eagerly replied. "Not a word shall escape my lips. I am silent as the grave!"

"I am quite sure that your promise will be kept. And now we will no longer detain you from the enjoyment of your walk. This broad road leads to Castle Hohenwald; by pursuing it until you reach three huge oaks in a group you will find a by-path on the right, which will give you a pleasant stroll through the forest and lead you out into the open, whence you will perceive Grünhagen in the distance."

The Assessor bowed. Clearly he was dismissed. He would have liked to exchange a few words with his relative Celia, whose voice even he had not heard, but there was something in Kurt's manner that told him it was hardly advisable to linger here longer. In a few choice phrases he expressed to Celia his delight at this chance meeting with so charming a cousin, and his sorrow that circumstances over which he had no control would prevent him from calling upon her at the castle. Then imagining that Herr von Poseneck was growing impatient, he took his leave, turned in the direction that had been pointed out to him, and was soon out of sight.

"Are you angry with me, dearest Celia?" Kurt asked so soon as this was the case.

"Why should I be angry with you?"

"I could not help it; I had to decide on the instant what to do, and it was only by presenting you as my betrothed to the Assessor that I could prevent him from speaking of having seen us."

"And why should I be angry with you? It was perfectly natural; you only said what we have both long known. I am glad you said it; I only wish I could tell my dear kind father how very, very happy I am. But," she added, with a little sigh, "it would not do,--it would not do at all; he would be terribly angry, for he does not know you, Kurt, does not know how dear and good you are, and if I should tell him we were betrothed he never would give his consent. Anna must help us. I will tell her everything to-day; she has more influence than any one else over him, and she will contrive to have you come to Hohenwald,--she is so good and so wise!"

Kurt shook his head doubtfully, but he could not shake Celia's confidence in Anna's power over the old Baron. Meanwhile it had grown late; they had been together much longer than usual. Pluto was evidently impatient; still, Celia had more to say than ever before. Kurt put her on her horse again, and, when she begged him to turn back with her for a little way, walked slowly beside her along the broad forest road.

CHAPTER XII.

Lucie's resolve was a hard one. Castle Hohenwald was to her as a home. The thought of leaving Celia and the old Freiherr gave her intense pain, but it must be done,--she could not stay. She had written her letter to Adèle with feverish haste, almost immediately after Arno had left her; but now that it lay before her sealed and addressed she hesitated to despatch it. She shrank from so decisive a step.

Did stern duty really require of her to leave this loved asylum and brave the world again and the danger of Repuin's persecution? Here she was safe both from the Russian and from Sorr; both the old Freiherr and Arno would extend protection to her, and must she give it all up just because Arno loved her? No; not for that. Had she been sure of her own heart she might have remained. She had not felt the need of fleeing from Werner's distasteful devotion.

But Arno! She had summoned up strength to utter the words that annihilated his hopes; but she felt that in so doing she had almost exhausted her self-control. Could she have withstood his

pleading a moment longer? Even while writing to Adèle the thought would not be banished from her mind that she was actually free, bound by no obligation to the wretch who himself on that terrible night had sundered the tie that had linked her to him!

But could he sunder it? No; it must still remain a brazen fetter chaining her to her unworthy husband, although she were forever parted from him. As she had herself said, her marriage could not be dissolved; she was free only in spirit,--only the death of the dishonoured thief could make it possible for her to form another tie.

Her heart rebelled against so unnatural a chain; but cool reason told her that she could not disregard it without dishonour. Sorr's wife must not listen to Arno's words of affection; if she could not slay within her the love she now knew that he had awakened there, he must never know it.

The sealed letter trembled in her hand; if it were to be sent it must go instantly. From her window Lucie saw already saddled and standing in the court-yard the horse upon which the groom was to take the daily mail from the castle to A----. Frau Kaselitz stood upon the steps just about to close the post-bag. One minute more and it would be too late. A day at least would be gained, a day for reflection, and a day, too, of imminent peril, a day in which Arno might repeat his protestations, his entreaties!

She hastily threw open the window. "Wait one moment, Frau Kaselitz; I have a letter to go!" she called out into the court-yard, and then hurried down the great staircase to the hall-door. She could not trust herself, and it was only when she had seen the groom gallop away bearing her letter with him that she breathed freely again.

The die was cast, and she could think clearly and calmly. Her strength of will returned, and she knew that she could brave any struggle which the next few days might bring her. She had regained the calm self-control that would enable her to fulfil her duties towards the Freiherr and Celia during the time she should yet remain in the castle, and this fulfilment should instantly be put into action. Celia should suspect nothing during lesson-hours of the mental agony that had so tortured her teacher.

But where was Celia? She had not made her appearance, although the time had long passed at which she usually returned from her afternoon ride. Lucie inquired of old John, who was on his way to the stables, and learned that Fräulein Celia was still out in the forest. She never had stayed so late before, the old man added; indeed, she had had time to ride up and down the broad forest road to Grünhagen at least twenty times. Of course that was where she was; she always rode there. John could not see why she never tired of that road. Lucie was not ill pleased to hear that the girl was still in the forest: she longed for its cool depths; and since John assured her that she could not fail to meet Fräulein Celia, she determined to go in search of her. She declined John's attendance, for she felt perfectly secure in the vicinity of the castle. Quickly tying on her hat she sallied forth.

Her walks hitherto had never extended beyond the castle garden and the park. This was her first flight into the "forest depths," from which the castle took its name. She gazed in wonder at the mighty oaks and beeches. Around her brooded the mystery of the primeval forest; in the vicinity of the castle no axe had rung a discord in the poetry of woodland life. The deep silence, broken only by the low notes of the woodland birds, harmonized with Lucie's mood; she sauntered dreamily along the path, passing in mental review the events of the day, and particularly the struggle with herself, in which--and there was a measure of content in the consciousness--she had come off conqueror.

Lost in thought, she almost forgot that she had come out to look for Celia; her gaze wandered unconsciously over the wealth of foliage on every side of her. She did not observe, when she had reached the loneliest part of the forest, a solitary stranger walking towards her, and hastening his steps with every sign of amazement upon seeing her. Not until he had approached her very nearly did she look up and start in terror. Could she believe her eyes? The Assessor von Hahn, whose element was fashionable society, here alone in the woodland solitude? She could not be deceived; the Assessor stood before her as elegant as if bound upon a round of morning visits, staring at her out of his wide blue eyes, and twirling, as was his wont when startled or surprised, his flaxen moustache; it was indeed Herr von Hahn as large as life.

The good Assessor was no less startled than was Lucie. "Is it possible?" he exclaimed; "am I awake or dreaming? Frau von Sorr here in the forest! This is a surprise indeed,--a most agreeable surprise of course. I am enchanted to meet you, madame."

As he spoke he held out his hand, and Lucie was obliged to place her own within it and to allow him to kiss it; she could not show him how unwelcome was his presence here. Of all her former acquaintances she would have preferred to have almost any one invade her retirement rather than the gossiping Assessor, but she could not let him perceive this; she banished all surprise and terror from her face and said, not unkindly, "A most unforeseen meeting. I never should have expected to find you in this remote corner of Saxony, Herr von Hahn."

"My presence here is easily explained, madame. I have been transferred to A----, and, as there is scarcely any society in the tiresome little town, I beguile my leisure by visits to the

neighbouring gentry. I am at present enjoying the Amtsrath Friese's hospitality, in Grünhagen, and was just taking a woodland walk. But you, madame,--how happens it that I meet you here? You must be living either at Grünhagen or in Castle Hohenwald. Oh, I see, I see. My cousin, the old Freiherr, has overcome his antipathy to your charming sex and has admitted into his household a governess for my lovely cousin Celia. You are this governess of course. This is why you vanished so suddenly from the face of the earth. It must be so; my keen perception has penetrated the mystery. I do not boast, for keenness of perception is one of the gifts of nature, and her gifts are variously bestowed, but I possess it. Confess, madame, that I am right."

The Assessor, who had now succeeded in twirling the ends of his moustache into two long thin points, stayed the torrent of his words for a moment to regard Lucie with a triumphant look of inquiry.

What should she reply? Chance had revealed to him her retreat in Castle Hohenwald; he now knew too much to admit of his not being told more. She dreaded his loquacity, but perhaps he might be induced to curb it if she appealed to his honour. And, besides, he need keep silence only for a short time; in a few days she hoped her friend Adèle would have provided another refuge for her, and then the good Assessor's love of gossip could do no harm. "Your keen perception has not been at fault, Herr Assessor," she replied. "I live in Castle Hohenwald as governess to Fräulein Celia von Hohenwald, but I need hardly tell you that in order to obtain such a situation I have been obliged to change my name. The consequences would be disastrous to me if any one in Castle Hohenwald should learn my real name, and still more so if any one save yourself, Herr Assessor, whom I trust implicitly, should suspect that I have taken refuge in Castle Hohenwald. Your perceptions are too keen to make any explanations necessary as to the painful circumstances that have driven me thus to change my name and to take refuge in the deepest seclusion. I rely upon your honour, and am convinced that you will not abuse the knowledge you have gained by accident, and that you will mention to no one our meeting to-day."

The Assessor bowed profoundly, feeling immensely flattered. He seized Lucie's hand and kissed it with fervour, "Your gratifying confidence is not misplaced. I swear it by my honour!" he exclaimed, his hand on his heart. "I will be torn limb from limb sooner than that Herr von Sorr or Count Repuin or any enemy of yours, dear madame, shall learn where you have found an asylum. Rely upon me, madame, and if you should need counsel or aid I am always at your service."

"Thank you, Herr von Hahn. I knew I could trust you, and therefore I have bestowed upon you my entire confidence. If I need your assistance I shall certainly apply to you, but at present I ask only your silence and your forgiveness for concluding this interview; I must not be seen in your society."

"I understand and respect your wishes, madame; I am discreet; I make no boast of it, but----"

"I know it, Herr Assessor, and I thank you for it. But before we part let me ask one question. Have you encountered upon this road a young lady on horseback?"

"Ah, you mean my fair cousin, Celia von Hohenwald."

"Do you know Celia?"

"Certainly; that is, I have seen her."

"Did you meet her?"

The question was a simple one, and yet it confused the Assessor. He remembered Herr von Poseneck's words and felt very uncomfortable. True, he had not been told not to mention meeting Celia. Kurt's prohibition had borne reference only to his betrothal, but he had expressly declared that he should call the Assessor personally to account for any indiscretion, and Herr von Poseneck seemed to be a man very likely to keep his word. Would he not consider it an indiscretion to direct Frau von Sorr to where she would find the lovers together? He would not run any risk, and so answered with some hesitation, "I really do not know, madame; I hardly remember----"

"Whether you have met Celia in the forest? You can hardly have forgotten it."

"Certainly not, but--some one is coming. You desire that we should not be seen together; I hasten to comply with your wishes. Adieu, madame!"

He bowed very low, glad to have any pretext for his flight, and walked away so quickly that he was in danger of overlooking the group of mighty oaks near which was the by-path to which Kurt had directed him. Fortunately, he discovered it in time and was soon lost to sight.

Lucie looked after him, at a loss to understand his conduct. Why should he find such difficulty in answering her simple question with regard to Celia, and hurry away in such confusion? He must have seen Celia; why not say so? She quickened her pace and soon reached a turning-point in the road that opened a long vista before her. Here her glance instantly encountered Celia, who was riding slowly towards her, attended by Kurt, whom Lucie instantly recognized, having seen him upon the evening of her arrival at Castle Hohenwald. Celia held her bridle negligently in her left hand; her right was clasped in that of Kurt, towards whom she was leaning, talking so

earnestly that at first she did not perceive Lucie, who stood still transfixed with astonishment.

This, then, was the reason of the Assessor's mysterious behaviour; this was the explanation of Celia's devotion to her daily rides in the forest.

Pluto was the first to become aware of Lucie's presence; he tossed his head and neighed; this attracted Celia's attention, and she perceived her friend. "Anna!" she exclaimed in a tone of delighted surprise, in which there was not the slightest trace of terror. She withdrew her hand from Kurt's and urged her horse to where her friend stood. "Anna, my darling Anna!" she said, tenderly. "I am so rejoiced to see you! Now you shall learn all. Kurt himself can tell you all about it. Yes, Kurt, tell Anna everything,--how we first came to know each other, that we are betrothed, and that nothing now can separate us; tell her, too, what you told me awhile ago of Werner. Ah, how glad I am that chance has brought you two together! Now, Kurt, you will know my dearest Anna, and will see how wise it is to confide in her absolutely. Adieu, my darling Anna! Au revoir, dear Kurt!"

She kissed her hand to Lucie and Kurt, then gathered up her reins and galloped towards the castle.

Lucie looked after her very gravely. She was inexpressibly pained by the discovery she had so unexpectedly made. It had never occurred to her that Celia, gay, innocent, frank child that she seemed, could be engaged in any secret love-affair; she would have rejected any such idea with indignation.

And yet here was the proof. She felt grieved and ashamed; grieved because she had believed herself possessed of Celia's entire confidence, and ashamed that her care of her pupil had been so negligent that the girl had been able to deceive her from the first day of her arrival at Hohenwald.

Her anger, however, was not for Celia, but for Kurt; Celia was an inexperienced child, who did not and could not know the peril of such secret entanglements; Kurt's was all the blame.

It was therefore a very stern and forbidding look with which she received Kurt, who approached her with some embarrassment in his greeting. He knew that her judgment of him could hardly be a favourable one. She had seen him but once, when his courtesy in proffering assistance and his whole air and manner had made a very pleasant impression upon her, an impression in which she had been strengthened by what she had learned of him from the Finanzrath and from Adèle's letters. Even now, as she looked at him with severe scrutiny, she could not but admit to herself that his appearance was greatly in his favour. He was not, strictly speaking, handsome, his features were not perfectly regular; but his countenance was frank and manly in expression, his fine eyes were honest and true, and about the firm mouth there were lines that betokened great gentleness and kindliness of nature. Lucie easily understood how a young man of so pleasing an exterior could win the heart of the inexperienced Celia, who was debarred all society, and her indignation was the deeper that Kurt should have so unscrupulously used his power over an innocent child.

"You will have the goodness, Herr von Poseneck, to give me the explanation to which Celia has just alluded," she said, gravely and sternly.

Kurt bowed, and not without some confusion, for his conscience was not quite clear, he replied: "You have a right, Fräulein Müller, to ask this explanation of me, and I give it you the more readily, since my betrothed was about to give you her entire confidence this very evening. Even without this chance meeting you would have learned from her what you are now to learn from me."

"Your betrothed?" Lucie repeated the words with sharp emphasis. "Your betrothed? Are you not aware, Herr von Poseneck, that a child of sixteen cannot be betrothed without her father's consent? So far as I know, the Freiherr von Hohenwald has not given his paternal consent to your betrothal to his daughter, nor will he, for reasons with which you doubtless are familiar, ever be likely to do so."

"You condemn me without hearing me!" Kurt said, sadly.

"I have heard from Celia and from you that you are betrothed to my pupil, although you know that the Freiherr is hostile to your family, and that you can never hope for his consent. Was it right, was it honorable, that you, a man of ripe knowledge of the world, should induce a young, innocent girl, almost a child, to grant you private meetings in the forest, and finally to betroth herself to you against her father's will?"

"You are right, Fräulein Müller; I cannot deny it; I have often said just the same thing to myself; but my heart was stronger than my head. I hope, however, that you will judge me less severely when you have heard that I came to know Celia by chance, and that my love for her soon grew to a consuming passion that was beyond heeding the sage suggestions of reason. Only grant me a short interview; I promise you that I will be absolutely frank with you. Will you not hear me?"

Lucie consented, and the short interview ended in a long conversation between the two as

they slowly paced to and fro in the woodland road.

Kurt kept his promise to be entirely frank and candid; he began with his first accidental meeting with Celia, who had won his heart at once, although he had determined that he would entertain for her only brotherly friendship. He described eloquently how this love had grown within him, until he had been carried away by it so far as to reveal it to Celia, and how he had been, as it were, forced by the Assessor's intrusion to utter the decisive word that betrothed them on this very day. He went on to tell Lucie how he had agreed with Celia that she was to acquaint her dearest friend with their secret, and ask her for aid and counsel; that he had at first been resolved to go to the old Freiherr and confess everything to him, but that he had been deterred from doing so by Celia's entreaties and representations. He informed Lucie of all that he had heard with regard to Werner's schemes, and of the danger threatening the Freiherr, adding that Celia looked to her to aid in averting it. "And now," he said, in conclusion, "you know everything. Judge for yourself whether I am as culpable as you thought me at first. I confess that my only excuse is my passionate affection for my darling Celia."

Lucie did not reply immediately,--she pondered well upon all that Kurt had said; his candour and integrity she could not doubt,--truth shone in his eyes; she could not help believing him. "I cannot approve your conduct," she said, after a long silence, "but neither will I judge you too harshly. What is done cannot be undone; we can do nothing with the past, but I demand that you atone in the future, as far as in you lies, for the wrong you have committed. There must be an end to these meetings with Celia; this you must promise me,--this duty you must fulfil, however hard it may seem to you. Do not answer me immediately, but reflect. I know that at this moment you think it impossible to comply with my demand; nevertheless it must be done. You must have sufficient self-control to enable you to resign a fleeting moment of happiness. If you love Celia truly and honestly, and would not separate her from her father, you must sacrifice thus much for her sake. You ought not to see Celia again unless by the Freiherr's consent. If you promise me this, Herr von Poseneck, I will promise you to do all that I can to influence the Freiherr in your favour. I will try to combat his unjustifiable hatred of you; I will be silent with regard to what I have seen to-day, although it is perhaps my duty to put him on his guard. Will you make me the promise that I ask, Herr von Poseneck?"

"Can I make it? Would not Celia doubt my faith and affection if she should not find me in the forest at the accustomed hour?"

"Celia will never again, while I am at Castle Hohenwald, ride in the forest alone, and she shall learn from me with what a heavy heart you make the sacrifice to your love which I have asked of you. It is very likely that she, too, will rebel against this sacrifice, and will blame both you and me; but this consideration ought not to deter you from doing your duty; thus only can you enable me to keep silence to the Freiherr, who, if he should learn now, without any preparation, that his daughter is secretly betrothed to a Poseneck, never would forgive you!"

"You demand an impossibility!" Kurt replied. "I cannot make a promise which I may be forced to break. If Celia should call me, should need my help, should I not hasten to her aid? And how easily this might happen! Am I not Celia's natural protector? You know what danger threatens the Freiherr through the Finanzrath's intrigues; if he, with his two sons, should be placed under arrest, to whom could Celia turn for aid and counsel? Ought I then, bound by a promise, to refuse her this aid? I could not!"

"Nor do I ask this. Your promise is not to be held binding in so extreme a case. Give it me with this condition."

"You are very cruel."

"I am only doing my duty, and requiring that you should do yours."

Lucie's firmness conquered, and Kurt submitted after much hesitation. He could not but admit to himself that Lucie was right, and that in her influence with the Freiherr lay his only hope for the future. He gave the required promise.

CHAPTER XIII.

Away into the open air, to field or forest, wherever nature offers solitude! This was Arno's thought; he longed to be alone, to collect himself, after the fearful blow he had received. He crossed the court-yard and hurried through garden and park into the depths of the forest. Arrived there, where he felt sure of encountering no one, he threw himself down upon the moss-carpet at

the foot of a giant oak. The quiet soothed him; he needed it to aid him to control the storm of emotion within him. What had he just undergone? To his humiliation he had been harshly rejected,--rejected in a manner that wounded his pride as well as his heart. What folly his former suspicions of Anna had proved to be! He had preserved towards her a cold and chilling demeanour to convince her that her feminine arts to attract him were vain. How she must have smiled at the silly vanity for which he was now paying so dearly! And he had asked for so little, for only one ray of hope, only for permission to love her, and even this she had coldly and firmly denied him. He had thought his heart desolated by the deceit from which he had suffered years before, but the contrary was proved in the bitter pain that now tortured him. He loved, and she whom he loved scorned his affection. Was her heart no longer free? Did she love another? She had denied this; but could he believe her? He remembered all that Werner had told of her, that she had been betrothed and forsaken by her lover when her father's wealth had vanished. Could she still cling to one so worthless? No; it was impossible. She must despise such a man, and she was too noble to give affection where she could not esteem. Had Werner's studied attentions produced any impression upon her? No; her tone, in speaking of him, had been that of contempt; she saw through him,--he never could touch her heart. And yet how could "duty and honour," of which she had spoken, demand that she should reject forever a genuine devotion, and that she should declare, "We must part forever!" The claim of another upon her affection could alone make it her duty to refuse to listen to his protestations. The thought was torture. He could endure everything save that. He was a prey to a savage jealousy of this unknown who robbed him of all that could make life fair, and he had to force himself to reflect that he had not an atom of foundation for this jealousy, which, nevertheless, he could not crush out of his heart. There it was, and it would assert itself, laughing to scorn the arguments of sober reason.

The sun was low in the heavens when Arno was roused from his long brooding reverie by the crackling of the underbrush, caused as he thought by some animal making its way through the thicket. But no; in a few moments there emerged upon the open space, in the midst of which stood the giant oak at whose feet he was reclining, Hauk, the chief inspector of the Hohenwald estate.

The man was much surprised at encountering thus his young master, whom he had never supposed to be addicted to daydreams in the depth of the forest, and he evidently reflected that his presence here, instead of in the fields superintending the labourers, might seem strange to Baron Arno. He approached him, hat in hand, with an air of some embarrassment. "I beg pardon for disturbing you, Herr Baron," he said, "but I never dreamed of finding you here."

"True, Herr Hauk," Arno replied, recalled to the actual world by the Inspector's presence, "nor could I have expected to find you here instead of in the fields."

The Inspector's embarrassment was increased by the reproof conveyed in the young Baron's words; and it suddenly seemed to him that the reasons for which he had undertaken his walk through the forest were mere folly. "I beg pardon, Herr Baron," he said, meekly, "I should not have left my work with the men, but I saw Herr von Poseneck again, and I wanted to know what the young gentleman is after on our land. Something must be wrong when a Poseneck tramps about our forest!"

"You are dreaming. Inspector!" Arno rejoined, harshly. "What could bring Herr von Poseneck to Hohenwald? Go back to your men, and refrain from woodland rambles while harvesting is going on."

The Inspector had never before received so stern a rebuke from the young Baron, and the faithful fellow felt aggrieved. "Of course, if the Herr Baron orders it I will return immediately, but it is a pity that I should not discover what Herr von Poseneck is continually after in our forest. Still, it is no business of mine why he is sneaking here, if the Herr Baron does not care about it."

Arno's curiosity was aroused; he had thought at first that the man's story was an invention to cover his neglect of duty, but he now saw clearly that he had wronged Hauk, who had been a faithful servant for many years. Therefore, in a much gentler tone, he asked, "What is it you are saying about Herr von Poseneck? Explain your meaning, Hauk."

"I mean only, if the Herr Baron will excuse me, what I say. Young Herr von Poseneck, who lives at Grünhagen with the Amtsrath, has been for a long time sauntering about in our forest every day; what he is after I do not know, but since he is a Poseneck, it can be no good. He usually takes the path along the Grünhagen boundary, and gets into the forest that way; but to-day I saw him hurry directly across the Hohenwald meadow. Early in the spring, Kunz, who was ploughing near the Grünhagen boundary, saw him do just the same thing. I watched him enter the forest to-day with my own eyes, and I came through it from the other side, thinking to strike the very path he must have taken, and catch my fine gentleman in the act, if, as I suspect, he is at any poaching work."

This was a strange piece of news. It was folly to suspect Kurt von Poseneck of poaching; the idea was begotten in the Inspector's mind by the universal mistrust of the Posenecks that was rife among the Hohenwald tenantry and servants; still Arno wondered what could bring the young gentleman daily to the Hohenwald forest, and he thought the matter called for an explanation. "Are you sure, Hauk, that you are not mistaken in the man?"

"Perfectly sure, Herr Baron; besides, all the men at work saw him as well as myself."

"Strange! And you say that he has been in the habit for some time of wandering about in our forest daily?"

"Yes, Herr Baron; he has often been seen, mostly by the women when they were gathering sticks, but they said nothing about it, for they themselves were on forbidden ground."

"Mere old women's gossip then!"

"No, Herr Baron; the forester has seen him too, but he did not speak to him, because the Freiherr has ordered us to avoid all quarrels with the Grünhageners; and Kunz saw him, as I said, long ago."

"Long ago? That is very vague. How long ago?"

"I cannot tell exactly, but it must have been about the time that Fräulein Müller came to Hohenwald, for Kunz was with the Herr Baron that night in the quarry, and he told me shortly afterwards that he had seen young Herr von Poseneck cross our field to the forest; that he had not been sure it was he until he saw him that night in the quarry; but that then he was perfectly certain of him. So he must have been seen first about that time, and since then scarcely a day has passed that he has not been seen by some of the people in the wood."

Arno's brow darkened. Kurt was no poacher, but he thought he had discovered the reason for his walks in the Hohenwald forest. Following the path by which he had been seen to enter it, he would reach the lake in the park, upon the shore of which, hidden among the shrubbery, was a bench, whence there was a lovely view of the little sheet of water. This spot was a favourite one with Fräulein Anna Müller. Whenever, as was, to be sure, but rarely the case, she walked in the park during Celia's absence upon her afternoon ride, this bench was always her goal, for she knew that even Werner would not venture to intrude upon her there. Her reason for seeking this retreat was now plain, as was also Kurt's attraction for the Hohenwald forest.

And yet Anna had said that her heart was free! Could she lie? Why had she not frankly confessed the truth? He would have had no right to blame her; her avowal would, indeed, have pained him, but the pain would have been easier to bear than distrust of her. He suffered in the thought that she was no better than the rest, that she could descend to a falsehood when the happiness of a man who loved her devotedly was at stake.

"Is it the Herr Baron's commands that I should return to the harvesters?"

The Inspector's question aroused Arno from his confused imaginings. "Yes, Herr Hauk," he said, with hardly-won composure. "You had best do so." Then seeing the man's discontented expression, he added, "I will myself endeavour to encounter Herr von Poseneck, but I do not desire any one to spy upon his movements. Let him walk as much as he pleases in the Hohenwald forest; I am sure that no ill will towards us brings him here, and I will not have him interfered with. Tell this to the people, Hauk, and bear in mind what I say. My father's desire that all disputes with the Grünhageners shall be avoided must be strictly complied with. Good-afternoon, Hauk."

"As you please, Herr Baron," the Inspector replied, with a bow, as he took his departure.

Long after he was gone Arno stood leaning against the trunk of the oak, uncertain what to do. Was Kurt at this very moment perhaps seated beside Anna on the bench near the lake? Jealousy impelled him to discover whether his suspicions were correct. In vain did he represent to himself that he had no right to spy upon Anna's actions. He strode through the wood and soon reached the borders of the broad Hohenwald forest road, which he was obliged to cross in order to reach the lake. Here, as he was making his way through the bushes that lined it on either side, he heard a voice that thrilled him; it was Anna's. He could not distinguish what she said, nor the words of the reply, which was given in clear, manly tones. He cautiously proceeded a few steps farther, until, parting the bushes, he obtained a clear view of the broad road. His worst fears were confirmed: Kurt and Anna were slowly walking along it engaged in earnest conversation. They approached the spot where Arno stood concealed; a few more steps and he should hear every word that was said, for they did not suspect a listener near. For a single instant a wild desire possessed Arno to penetrate Anna's mystery; he leaned forward as far as was possible without discovering himself, but the next moment he rose superior to the disgraceful temptation. His cheek flushed at the thought that he had been deaf though but for an instant to the dictates of honour. Silently and hastily he withdrew, moderating his pace only when he could no longer hear the sound of voices. As he returned to the castle he felt that although he had heard nothing he had seen enough.

Lucie parted from Kurt as his friend, and as she slowly walked back to the castle she reflected upon the perils encompassing the people who had become so dear to her. She pondered how to put the Freiherr upon his guard without betraying Celia's secret, and how at the same time to influence the old man to relinquish his foolish prejudice against Kurt. She could hardly warn him directly, but could it not be done indirectly through Werner, perhaps? If she should inform the Finanzrath that his connection with Repuin and other French agents was no longer a secret, that his movements were watched, that he was in danger of arrest, and that his presence in Castle

Hohenwald imperilled the safety of his father and brother,--if she begged him to leave the castle, would he not comply with her advice?

Celia hastened to meet her friend; she had not been able to remain within-doors. Arrived at the castle, the girl threw Pluto's bridle to old John and hurried to her room to change her dress, thinking that she would await Anna in their sitting-room; but, although the windows there were all wide open, the confinement seemed to stifle her; she wanted air,--not the air of park or garden, but that of the cool, fragrant forest. As she issued from the gate of the court-yard and was just about to turn into the broad forest road she encountered Arno, and was hurrying past him, longing to see Anna and hear what she had said to Kurt, when he detained her, saying sternly, "Where are you going?"

"That is not your affair," she pertly answered her brother's harsh question. "I might as well ask you, Where have you been?"

"I have been in the forest."

"And I am going to the forest."

She would have passed him, but he still detained her. "Do you usually select this road for your afternoon ride?"

Celia blushed. What did he mean by the question? Did Arno know anything of her meetings with Kurt? With feminine evasion she hastily rejoined, "Why should I always choose this tiresome broad road?"

"Why, indeed? How long since you returned from your ride?"

"About a quarter of an hour ago," she answered, frankly.

"And did you ride on the broad road to-day?"

"What a foolish question! Let me go, Arno! How can it possibly interest you when or whore I ride?"

But Arno still held her hand fast, seeming not to notice her embarrassment. He gazed darkly down the forest road. If Celia pursued it she would meet Kurt and Anna together. Such a discovery would be but a merited punishment for Anna, but what impression would it produce upon his innocent sister? A second glance along the road reassured him,--Anna was slowly approaching the castle alone. He let go Celia's hand, relieved of an ugly dread lest Anna should have confided to her pupil her love-affair with Poseneck. That Celia knew nothing about it was clear from her replies to him; the "will-o'-the-wisp" was so frank a creature.

So soon as she found herself free, Celia ran towards Anna, bestowing not another thought upon Arno, who went his way. Throwing her arms around her friend, she whispered, as she caressed her tenderly, "At last you are come! My darling, darling Anna! Now all is well, and my conscience is once more clear."

"You ought to have had confidence in me," Anna said, in a tone of gentle reproof.

"Oh, I have often said that to myself. I have repeatedly determined to tell you all, but I was so afraid lest you would be angry, and perhaps forbid my meeting Kurt, and so--I cannot live without just saying a few words to him every day."

"You must try it, my dear Celia; you must not meet Herr von Poseneck in the forest again."

"I thought you would say that!" Celia exclaimed. "I knew it, but you are mistaken if you think I shall obey you. I am not a child; I know what I am doing. Kurt is my betrothed, and I have a right to meet him. But no, Anna dear, I will not be angry with you, only do not ask that of me. If you think it wrong for me to see Kurt alone in the forest,--and I have sometimes been afraid that it was,--then come with me; we have no secret from you; only you must not ask me not to see him again,--I cannot obey you: and if you will not go to the forest with me I must go by myself."

"It will be of no use. Herr von Poseneck has promised me that he will not meet you in the forest again."

"That is detestable of you,--detestable!" Celia exclaimed, indignantly. She had been so utterly unused to control that she was really angry, and it was only after a long and grave explanation upon Lucie's part that the girl was brought to see that her friend's counsel was dictated by the truest motives and an earnest desire for her happiness. At last, however, she agreed to be guided entirely by her "darling Anna," and the compact was sealed with a kiss.

Relieved to have been successful with Celia, Lucie now applied herself to the second task she had undertaken, and, instead of entering the castle, turned into the garden, where the Finanzrath was usually to be found towards evening.

"Are we going to the garden?" Celia asked, surprised. "We cannot talk together there, for Werner, as you know, will instantly join us, and we shall not be able to get rid of him."

"I am going purposely to meet him this afternoon," Lucie replied, "and I beg you to leave me with him when he joins us."

"Have you more secrets with him?" Celia asked, fretfully.

"I must speak with him," was Lucie's calm reply. "I promised Herr von Poseneck to warn your father of the danger that threatens him. I cannot do this directly, since I cannot say whence comes my information."

"And you are going to warn him through Werner?" the girl asked, shaking her head. "Don't attempt it, Anna dear; you do not know Werner,--he will not believe you; he thinks he knows more than any one else. Do not have any confidences with Werner; speak to Arno,--he is true and trustworthy; he will find a means to put papa on his guard and to force Werner to go away."

"I must speak with the Finanzrath," Lucie insisted; "do not try to dissuade me, dear child; I cannot help it."

Celia said no more; she silently accompanied Lucie into the garden, and walked beside her along the winding paths until, as had been foreseen, Werner joined them, when she lingered behind to pluck a flower, and then, turning into a side-path, left her brother and her friend to themselves.

Werner greeted Lucie after his usual smooth, courteous fashion; but she interrupted the flow of his complimentary speeches by saying, in a very grave tone, "Our meeting this afternoon, Herr Finanzrath, is owing to no chance. I came into the garden expressly to find you, for I have an important communication to make to you."

Werner's attention was aroused; Lucie frankly admitted that she had come in search of him. What could she have to tell him? And Celia had evidently left them together intentionally. She could have done so only by Lucie's desire. A secret hope that his endeavours to obtain the beautiful woman's favour were about to prove more successful flashed across his vain soul, but vanished as he looked into his companion's grave and even stern face. "I am extremely happy, madame, in receiving this proof of your confidence," he said, "and await with eagerness what you have to tell me."

"It is of no agreeable nature," Lucie went on; "but I will go directly to the point. You are in great peril, Herr Finanzrath; your connection with Count Repuin has aroused suspicion that you are of the number of French agents who are at work here, in the interest of the French Emperor, endeavoring to effect the dissolution of the treaty that unites the South German states and those of the North German alliance, with Prussia, and who are plotting against Prussia among the people as well as in the army."

Werner stayed his steps and looked searchingly into Lucie's face. His cheek grew a trifle paler, and his voice was not quite so firm and clear as usual, as he replied, with forced composure, "Your information is indeed startling, madame; I am excessively grateful to you for it, but you must permit me one question. Whence comes your knowledge that so foolish and ungrounded a suspicion attaches to me?"

"There are all-sufficient reasons, Herr Finanzrath, why I cannot answer your question and reveal to you the source of my information, but I can assure you that my warning is sent you by a sincere friend of yours and of your family, who is well aware of the necessity for it. But let me proceed, and then you can judge for yourself of the magnitude of the peril menacing you."

"I am all ear, madame."

There was a dash of contempt in his tone, and Lucie saw that her refusal to mention the source of her information had shaken his belief in its truth; but she went on quietly: "The suspicion of which I have told you, whether it be well founded or not----"

"Do you doubt me, madame?"

"I have no right to form an opinion, and there is no reason why, if formed, I should express it. Of course, since you declare the suspicion unfounded, I have no choice but to believe you; nevertheless, it exists, and it attaches not only to you, but to your father and brother. The authorities are convinced that your relatives know of your schemes, and aid and abet them, and that Castle Hohenwald is a centre for treasonable plots and conspiracies. The castle is already under surveillance; how strict this is I cannot say, nor whether it extends to the letters sent from here, but I know that it exists, and that the authorities have it in mind to crush any treasonable scheming before it becomes dangerous, by the arrest of the entire Hohenwald family. I think, Herr Finanzrath, that under these circumstances you will see that you owe it both to your family and to yourself to leave the castle as soon as possible. Your presence here imperils your father's safety. He will, on the other hand, be left undisturbed, though not unobserved, if you, the cause of this *groundless* suspicion, absent yourself from Castle Hohenwald for a while. Your father's age and infirmity, his seclusion from the world, will shield him from all annoyance as soon as you are away, since it certainly must be the aim of the authorities to avoid exciting indignation in Saxony by any useless arrests. This is all that I had to say to you, Herr Finanzrath. I hope that my well-meant warning will effect its purpose, and that you will, by a speedy departure from Castle

Hohenwald, both protect your relatives from the danger of arrest and insure your own safety."

Werner had listened in silence, an evil sneer playing about his lips the while. "Then my departure from Castle Hohenwald is the purpose of your communication, madame?" he asked, watching Lucie with keen scrutiny.

"It is; I confidently hope that your departure will remove all danger."

"Indeed? You are extremely kind. I really cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for your care, but I must pray you to fill the measure of your kindness by telling me to what good friend you owe your information, which has the air of proceeding directly from the Chancellor himself, if, indeed, it be not the fabrication of an idle fancy or of a well-laid scheme."

"I do not understand you, Herr Finanzrath," Lucie asked, amazed. "Do you really imagine I could wish to deceive you?"

"Let me beg you again for the name of your informant."

"Let me repeat that I cannot, or rather will not, give it to you; you have no right to demand it of me."

"I do not demand it, madame; I do not even desire it, but perhaps you will allow me to mention it to you myself."

"You cannot know it!"

"But I can guess it. I see through the game that is playing with me. Have a care, madame, that the bow is not too tensely bent; the string might break."

"I do not understand you."

"Then I must speak more clearly. You shall have your will and understand perfectly. Yours be the consequences of allowing me a glimpse into your heart,--of ruthlessly annihilating my fairest hopes. You shall not escape unpunished from the intrigue which you have spun to drive me from Castle Hohenwald."

Werner's eyes flashed fire and his cheek was crimson as he spoke. His agitation Lucie could not understand, and it terrified her. She had never seen the calm, easy Finanzrath thus moved. "You speak in riddles, Herr Finanzrath," she said, looking frankly in his face. "I do not understand your anger. What do you mean by your threat, and by accusing me of intriguing to drive you from Castle Hohenwald?"

"Am I not yet sufficiently clear?" Werner continued, even more angrily. "Do you still imagine you can deceive me? You are mistaken. I see through your game. You choose that I should speak it out plainly? Well, then, so be it! I am weary of the restraint that I have put upon myself for months I will no longer be your plaything! I have loved you passionately since the day when I brought you to the castle; to win your love in return was my highest aim in life, my fondest hope----"

"I must not listen to you. I must leave you!" Lucie exclaimed, indignantly.

"You must listen; I will force you to hear me!" Werner declared.

"You are mad!"

"You have made me so. Thank yourself that my passion asserts itself, that I cast aside the fetters that have bound me for months. As long as I hoped to win your love I endured their restraint; now, since I see through your schemes, I will do so no longer. I suspected it all long since. I have often told myself that you were but playing with my love, but never until now did I know it surely. Do you think I have been blind,--that I have slumbered through these long weeks? No, jealousy has spurred me on to constant watchfulness; not a look exchanged between Arno and yourself has escaped me. I have been insane with jealousy when you were alone with him in the library, but I would not believe that you could prefer him to me, and so I deceived myself and you deceived me. You may well desire my absence. I could by a single word put a stop to all your loving dalliance. Arno is your informant; he would thrust from his path the brother in whom he suspects a rival, and he thinks to drive me away by the threat of an imaginary danger. Fool! I see through his game."

Lucie listened in blank amazement to the accusations thus heaped upon her, which, in their suddenness and strangeness, bewildered her comprehension. Was this Werner, the polished, easy man of fashion, confronting her now with angry eyes and laying bare before her the inmost secrets of his soul? What should she reply to so disgraceful an attack? A contemptuous silence was all that it deserved. And she was silent, but this Werner regarded in the light of a confession; he thought she was trembling at his anger and unable to reply. He laughed scornfully, and continued, "Am I sufficiently clear now, madame? Now you know, I imagine, that you can no longer deceive me. You are right not to attempt it by any denial. One thing, however, you have forgotten, that I know your past, and that one word from me can put an end to your brief dream

of love. My precious brother is an idealist who might indeed bestow his heart upon Celia's poor governess, the lovely Anna Müller, but who would turn with aversion and disgust from the runaway wife of Herr von Sorr! Hitherto I have kept your secret faithfully, but I might easily be tempted to forget to do so in future. Herr von Sorr has not resigned his rights; he is still searching for you, and it is owing to my silence alone that he is not now here asserting those rights in defiance of which you would vainly seek protection from Arno. Your safety here you owe only to the love which, spite of all the offence it has received at your hands, still glows within me, a consuming flame. Have a care that you do not convert it to hatred, Frau von Sorr. Continue to reject my devotion, to play with my jealousy, and you shall bitterly repent!"

Not a word could Lucie utter. Amazement, shame, and indignation overwhelmed her. Werner no longer awaited a reply; he left her not as was his wont with a low bow, but with head proudly erect, hurrying towards the castle, and not even looking back at her whom he had so insulted. He did not see the intense scorn and disgust expressed in her face as she gazed after him, nor hear the word "wretch!" that passed her lips as she did so.

CHAPTER XIV.

For a few moments after leaving Lucie Werner's features wore a smile of triumph; he thought the proud beauty subdued and terrified by his threats; but when he reached his own apartment, and had time for reflection, he felt by no means so sure of his victory. As his excitement subsided he became greatly discontented with himself, and bitterly regretted having yielded to one of the outbursts of passion which had cost him dear in his boyish years, but which he had lately learned to control. Pacing his room to and fro, he pondered upon the occurrences of the past hour. While in Lucie's presence, rage at the thought of his brother's successful rivalry had bewildered his understanding; he could not think clearly. Reason had returned, and he confessed to himself that he had played the part of a jealous fool. His brother was no intriguer, his ways were never those of a schemer. But whence, if not from Arno, could Fräulein Müller have received her information? She saw no one but the inmates of the castle, and she had lately received no letters, as no one knew better than Werner, who distributed the letters from the post-bag every morning. He grew very uncomfortable; Lucie had known of his acquaintance with Repuin, and she had now learned of what nature this acquaintance was; she still maintained a correspondence with influential people in Prussia, Adèle von Guntram, President von Guntram's daughter, was her most intimate friend, and any information forwarded to them would soon reach the Chancellor's office.

The longer the Finanzrath reflected the more grave did the situation appear to him. Vague pictures of an examination of his papers, of an arrest, and possible trial for high treason presented themselves to his imagination. Finally, he seated himself at his writing-table, and thought he would write to inform Repuin of what he had heard. This, however, proved to be by no means an easy task; he could scarcely do it without implicating Lucie, and should he mention her relations with Adèle von Guntram the Russian's suspicions would surely be aroused; he would make his appearance at the castle with Sorr, who would enforce his marital rights. Should this occur, Lucie would be restrained by no considerations from betraying him. At present she would feel obliged to have some regard for the man who knew her secret and held her fate in his hands. He tore up his letter to Repuin, and decided to attempt to avert in another way the danger that menaced him. Lucie was not implacable; she had no reason for bringing distress upon the Hohenwald family by betraying him; only a desire for revenge or to defend herself from attack could prompt her to do this; he would ask her pardon for expressions used in the heat of passion, and would not allow his love for the beautiful woman or his jealousy to carry him so far again. Soothed by these reflections, Werner began to look to the future with confidence.

What now? Lucie had asked herself, when left alone in the castle garden. To answer this question was not easy. Suppose that Werner, impelled by anger and jealousy, should discover her retreat to Count Repuin, would not her best course be to leave the castle immediately, and await in some secluded village the result of Adèle's efforts to procure her another situation? The thought of the consequences of Werner's betrayal of her secret filled her with horror. What if Sorr, summoned by the Finanzrath, should appear at the castle and require her to return to him! She felt sure that the old Freiherr would grant her his protection, but what would it avail her against her husband! And Arno? Lucie's heart died within her as she thought of the pain that a knowledge of her secret would cause him. Nothing was left her but a hurried flight. But no, she would not leave Hohenwald; had she not promised Kurt and Celia to use her influence with the old Freiherr to induce him to forget the wretched feud with the Posenecks? Could she disappoint Celia's confidence in her by forsaking her at her need, in selfish care for her own safety? Would not Kurt in that case have a right to recall the promise he had given her? And what mischief might ensue! No, it was her sacred duty to watch over Celia; she would not leave the castle for

some time yet. But she had written to Adèle begging her to procure another situation for her as soon as possible. The letter had gone; should she not write another and revoke her request?

In the midst of her uncertainty, Celia, who had seen from her window that Werner had returned to the castle, joined her again, eager to know the result of the interview with her eldest brother. "Well?" she asked.

"You were right, I ought not to have spoken to your brother," Anna replied; "he does not believe me. I cannot tell you more, Celia; it is enough that my appeal to him was quite in vain."

"I knew how it would be," the girl said, sadly; "I wish you had taken my advice, but it is not yet too late. Let me call Arno; he is in his room, I saw him go to it; he will be here in a few minutes. Indeed, dear Anna, Arno has the best heart in the world. He is not so amiable and agreeable as Werner, he cannot pay compliments, but you can rely upon him. I have often watched him when he thought no one was observing him, and I am quite sure that he likes you very much. He will believe you, and soon devise some way of shielding our dear old father from danger. Do speak with Arno, dearest Anna. Let me call him. May I?"

"Yes; I will await him here."

Celia's gratitude was shown by a fervent kiss, and she flew towards the castle, returning in a few moments with Arno, whose hand she held in hers.

"Here he is!" she exclaimed as she approached Anna. "Only think, the miserable fellow refused to come at first. Scold him well, Anna dear; although he does look so grim, he is really dear and good. There, he is smiling; now you need not be afraid of him. Adieu!"

And she was gone, tossing a kiss to her friend as she vanished in the shrubbery.

The smile which her merry talk had called forth faded from Arno's grave face as he bowed formally to Lucie. "I await your commands, Fräulein Müller," he said. "You must forgive my momentary hesitation to follow my sister. I thought her jesting when she told me you wished to speak with me."

"Celia was not jesting, Herr Baron. I requested an interview with you, and I thank you for complying with my wishes."

A low bow was Arno's only reply.

Lucie had thought it would be easier to begin a conversation with Arno. As he now walked beside her, grave and serious, without smoothing the way for the opening of their talk by a single word, she felt exceedingly uncomfortable. Her last words to him in the library had deeply offended him, as was evident from the formality of his manner. She had determined to make no allusion to their previous interview; but how could she help it? And she longed to say one kind word to him.

"You are angry with me, Herr Baron," she began, and her fair face flushed slightly; she could not look up at him as she spoke,--her eyes sought the ground. "I regret deeply if what I was forced to say to you offended you. I did not mean that it should. It was my duty to tell you the perfect truth; if I did this too harshly, I pray you not to be angry with me. I told you to-day that your words would drive me from Castle Hohenwald; I was overhasty. After calm consideration, I have decided not to go away. I know that Baron Arno von Hohenwald is too proud and too noble to repeat words that could pain me; I know that although I was forced to offend him, he will still be my friend. May I not cherish this conviction, Herr Baron?"

As she spoke the last words Lucie looked up at Arno and held out her hand, but he did not take it. He replied, coldly and with a low bow, "You are very kind, Fräulein Müller. I am glad that you do me justice; I am, indeed, too proud ever again to intrude upon you after the harsh rejection I have experienced. I assure you that you shall never hear from me a word that could cause you to leave Hohenwald sooner than you would otherwise intend. May I hope that this assurance is satisfactory to you, and that you will inform me to what I owe the honour of this interview?"

Lucie slowly let fall her hand; Arno's cold refusal to take it, and his measured politeness, convinced her that she had nothing to fear from him, and yet she was not glad that he was thus able to command his feelings; his cold words grieved her. But he must not suspect this; she forced her composure to equal his own as she explained to him that she had a duty to fulfil towards the Freiherr and himself in telling him of the warning sent to them from a perfectly trustworthy source. His brother's plots were discovered, Castle Hohenwald was under surveillance, and such suspicion rested upon his father and himself of sharing in the Finanzrath's schemes that they were threatened with arrest. "I trust you, Herr Baron," Lucie concluded, "to devise means for averting the threatened danger. I had hoped that the immediate departure of the Finanzrath would effect this, and therefore I first appealed to him, told him what I have told you, and begged him to leave the castle, but he would not believe in my information, refused to be guided by it, and thus forced me to turn to you, Herr Baron."

"Which you would not otherwise have done," Arno rejoined, bitterly. "Nevertheless I am grateful to you for your warning; but you must excuse me for putting one question to you. You tell

me that Werner refused to believe in your information. Did he tell you his reason for doubting it?"

Lucie hesitated to reply. She had not expected this question, and yet it was a very natural one. How could Arno expect to induce his brother to depart if he were not informed of the entire state of the case? He must know that the Finanzrath mistrusted him, and this Lucie could tell him only by letting him know of Werner's jealousy. It offended her sense of delicacy to inform Arno of this; but it was her duty to overcome her scruples and let him know what insane folly possessed Werner.

"You do not answer," Arno continued, after a short pause, "and yet my question is a very simple one."

"It shall be answered, Herr Baron. The Herr Finanzrath thinks that I have been induced by you to acquaint him with a fictitious tale of danger, in hopes that terror may drive him from Castle Hohenwald."

"Indeed? The suspicion is like him!" Arno exclaimed, indignantly. "And why should I wish to drive him from the castle, and why should you lend yourself to second me by a falsehood? I do not perceive the connection here."

Lucie's cheeks were crimson; but, hard as it was to reply, she did it bravely. "The Herr Finanzrath explained this in a manner very insulting to me. He thinks that it is my desire as well as yours to banish him from Castle Hohenwald, that we may escape his observation. You will not require me to explain further the disgraceful suspicions aroused in his mind by an unfortunate passion."

"Shameful!" Arno exclaimed. "I have long known of his passion for you,--his cold, calculating nature is incapable of a genuine affection; his love is an insult to you. I did not believe that he would dare to offend you by such unworthy suspicions; he is more worthless than I thought him. I thank you from my heart for bestowing your confidence upon me; rest assured you shall not repent it."

For a few minutes they walked on in silence, Arno thinking of Werner's silly suspicion that he was the author of Anna's warning. Who was its author? The answer that instantly occurred to him to this question disturbed the satisfaction that Anna's frankness had afforded him. Her information could proceed from but one person, from him with whom he had so lately seen her in earnest conversation; from Kurt von Poseneck.

But a moment ago he had regarded with profound contempt Werner's groundless jealousy, and yet now he suddenly felt a like sensation with regard to the rival who had robbed him of Anna's love. Her warning lost all credibility in his eyes; he rebelled against receiving it from a man whom he hated, and felt inclined, as Werner had done, to believe that it had been given with some unworthy aim. He must have certainty upon this point.

All that was genial vanished from his manner as he turned to Lucie, and with the same icy courtesy that had characterized his first address to her, said, "I owe you a debt of gratitude, Fräulein Müller, but let me pray you to complete your information. It is very important that I should know the source of your warning. Tell me frankly, do I owe it to Herr Kurt von Poseneck?"

"How did you know? What made you think of him?" Lucie asked, greatly surprised.

"Thank you, Fräulein Müller; I am answered. You do not deny, then, that Herr von Poseneck has commissioned you to communicate with me?"

"Why should I deny it? But I really cannot understand how----"

"How I arrived at the knowledge of your intimate relations with Herr von Poseneck? Chance revealed to me your secret. I saw you to-day in the forest engaged in confidential discourse with him. I now know why you refused me all hope in the future."

"Herr Baron!----"

"Say no more! Why should you blush because I allude to your relations with Herr von Poseneck and to our interview? You never gave me a right to hope for your love; it was my fault if in my conceit I cherished hopes which you crushed as they deserved. I reproach myself, not you. I deserved the harsh repulse which I received, but I did not deserve that you should deceive me at the very time when my heart was laid bare before you. Had you but told me frankly that you loved another it would have pained me deeply, it is true, but my confidence in you would have been unshaken. At such a time you should not have told me a falsehood."

"Herr Baron, I assure you----"

"Would you still deceive me? That first falsehood was enough, and more than enough. Let us break off this conversation. Let me give you one last piece of advice in return for your warning. You know the dislike that my father entertains for the Posenecks. For this reason, perhaps, you have refrained from any mention of your intimacy with thus gentleman, and you certainly are right, for even your powerful influence would hardly avail, I fear, to conquer the hereditary

hatred of a Hohenwald for a Poseneck; but if you would keep your secret, let me advise both you and Herr von Poseneck to be more circumspect in future. The people on this estate have noticed his daily visits to a certain part of the Hohenwald forest, and will shortly discover to whom these visits are paid unless you are more careful."

It was positive torture to Lucie to hear Arno's icy tone as he gave her this advice. She perceived how he suffered; he had betrayed his pain when he showed her how deeply he felt the suspicion of her untruth. This wretched mistake! But could she undeceive him without betraying Celia? And if she did,--if she proved to him that it was solely upon Celia's account that Kurt came daily to the Hohenwald forest, might there not be danger of reviving hopes which he had resigned? Still, she could not bear that he should leave her with a doubt in his mind of her integrity.

As he turned to go, with a formal bow, she lightly touched his arm. "We must not part thus, Herr Baron," she said, gravely. "You owe it to me at least to listen to me."

"What can you have to say, Fräulein Müller?" Arno asked as he paused.

"You have brought a grave accusation against me," Lucie continued, "and you have done so deceived by appearances."

"Was I deceived when I saw you scarcely an hour ago in the forest with Herr von Poseneck?"

"No; you saw correctly."

"Is it not true that Herr von Poseneck has, since your arrival at Castle Hohenwald, daily sought a certain spot in the Hohenwald forest?"

"This, too, is true."

"Is it not true that in the forest he sought the seat hidden in shrubbery near the lake, where you are so fond of dreaming away a solitary hour?"

"That is not true, at least so far as I know."

Arno's face expressed doubt and amazement, but Lucie's eyes flashed. "I have never given you cause to doubt my truth," she said, more sternly than he had ever heard her speak. "My word must suffice; I assure you that I have seen Herr von Poseneck but twice in my life, once upon the night of my arrival here, and this afternoon for the second time. I stand in no relation whatsoever with him, and our meeting to-day was entirely accidental."

"But you were talking to him so earnestly."

"And about most important matters. I esteem Herr von Poseneck very highly, I do not deny. He, inspired by the purest friendship for the Hohenwalds, begged me to warn you as I have done."

"Was this all you were talking of?"

"This and something else no less important. What it was is my secret, and I feel under no obligation to give you farther information, as you, Herr Baron, have no right to doubt my truth. This is all I wished to say; I will no longer detain you."

Arno was dismissed; he bowed in some confusion as Lucie left him, and yet, in spite of the severity of her words and manner, his heart felt lighter than before, and hope began to stir within him. "She does not love him," he repeated to himself. "There is no falsehood in those eyes."

Lucie hurried to her room before joining the family circle, according to daily custom, in the garden-room, where the old Freiherr was already looking for her,--she wished to write a few lines to Adèle. This she did hastily, delivering her letter herself to the Inspector when it was sealed, and begging him to see that it was put into the bag for the next morning's post.

A few moments after Lucie had left the Inspector's room Werner entered it. He had watched her from his window, had seen the letter in her hand, and had been filled with vague misgivings. "That letter I must see!" he had said to himself.

"Can a messenger be sent on horseback to A---- to catch the evening mail?" he asked of the Inspector, who was just putting Lucie's letter into the bag.

"Certainly, Herr Finanzrath, very easily," Hauk replied. "Old John can go on Fräulein Celia's Pluto; there is plenty of time."

"Give me the post-bag then,--I have an important letter to send; and tell John to saddle Pluto, and I will have it ready for him."

The Inspector handed him the bag, which Werner instantly carried with him to his room and opened. With a triumphant smile he took from it Lucie's letter addressed to Fräulein Adèle von Guntram. "I thought so," he muttered to himself. "I am just in time." Then tearing off the

envelope he read:

"What will you think of me, dear Adèle, if a few hours after writing my last letter I tell you not to heed the request it contained? I hope soon to be able to let you know why I do this, but I cannot tell you to-day. I cannot leave Castle Hohenwald, and so you are relieved of the burden of looking for another situation for me. Farewell, dear; you will soon hear further from your LUCIE."

Werner dropped the letter disappointed. "Nothing more?" he muttered. "I need not have opened this letter, although I had better know what she intends to do." He tried to put the letter in its envelope again, but it could not be done, the latter was too much torn. There was nothing for it but to destroy it. He tore it up therefore, and threw it into his waste-paper basket. Then putting several unimportant letters into the post-bag, he took it out to John, and despatched the old man upon his useless errand.

CHAPTER XV.

The time at which the old Freiherr expected his family to assemble about him every evening in the garden-room had come. Werner on his way thither encountered his brother, who was awaiting him at the foot of the staircase. In a few indignant words Arno informed him that Fräulein Müller had acquainted him with the manner in which her well-meant warning had been received, and said all that was possible in so short a time to induce his brother to leave Hohenwald as quickly as he could. "In the castle," he added, "there are none who do not look upon your fine-spun schemes as treasonable plotting, and it is unjust that peril should threaten all on your account."

Werner, however, who had now entirely recovered his usual self-control and ease of manner, treated his brother's words with contemptuous indifference, and thus the two men entered the garden-room together, the elder dissembling his jealousy and rage beneath an easy amiability of manner, the younger vexed and indignant at his failure to influence the brother whose ambitious vanity and want of principle were abhorrent to him.

The Finanzrath evidently felt perfectly secure, and exerted himself to prove to Fräulein Müller his sincere regret for his late want of self-control. He begged her for one of her charming songs, and meeting with a curt refusal, acquiesced in it without a word. He was all that a courteous, high-bred cavalier should be; and yet, in spite of his efforts to maintain the conversation, it flagged continually, for each member of the little circle felt a secret oppression, which made it impossible to join in it with any interest.

Arno was unusually taciturn; he possessed none of the versatility that enabled Werner so quickly to forget the serious matters that had lately occupied him. Even Celia seemed to have lost all her wonted sprightliness; she sat buried in thought beside her father's chair,--her stool placed so that he could not see her face, for she could not look him frankly in the eyes to-night, and her heart was too full to allow her to take any part in the conversation. This would soon have become monosyllabic in spite of Werner's exertions had he not casually mentioned a visit that he had paid a few days before to Grünhagen. So favourable an opportunity of turning the conversation upon Kurt did not escape Lucie; she asked Werner, with evident interest, how young Herr von Poseneck liked Grünhagen, and whether he was readily adapting himself to the European mode of life. Werner could not understand why Lucie should take so vivid an interest in Kurt, but he was glad to have found a topic upon which he could command her attention. He expatiated willingly upon Kurt's excellent capacity as a landed proprietor, and upon the admirable understanding that seemed to exist at Grünhagen between uncle and nephew.

The Freiherr listened silently; that the topic was not an agreeable one to him the frown gathering on his brow told plainly.

Arno, too, said not a word, but sat glancing now and then at Lucie with displeasure in his look. What could be Fräulein Müller's aim in this show of interest in Kurt? If it were intended as a punishment for his jealousy, it seemed but a petty revenge.

Celia, however, sat quite still, with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks; she said nothing, but not a word that was spoken escaped her. Werner suddenly appeared kind and amiable in her eyes

as he thus praised Kurt.

For a while the Freiherr endured Lucie's continued inquiries about Grünhagen and Kurt; but at last his patience was exhausted. "You seem to take a remarkable degree of interest in this fellow Poseneck, Fräulein Anna," he said, crossly; "for Heaven's sake leave him to himself in Grünhagen,--the less I hear of him the better I am pleased!"

This was the very outbreak for which Lucie had been hoping. She turned to the Freiherr and, pushing her chair nearer to his, said, "What has poor Herr von Poseneck done to you, Herr Baron, that you should be so angry with him?"

"He has done nothing to me, but I hate the Posenecks one and all," was the harsh reply.

"I am quite sure that you would like Kurt von Poseneck if you knew him, Herr Baron," Lucie rejoined.

"I don't want to know him!" the Freiherr exclaimed, discontentedly.

Nevertheless Lucie continued, boldly, "He is the very man to please you. Honest and true, earnest in character, but with the enthusiasm of youth, a thorough gentleman, but no fop, he has won golden opinions from every one during the short time that has passed since his arrival in Europe."

The Freiherr stared at her in amazement; her unexpected praise of Herr von Poseneck did not at all please him, but as she spoke she looked at him with so charming an air of entreaty that he could not be angry with her,--he even smiled as he shook his finger at her, saying, "Aha! Fräulein Anna seems quite infatuated with the young man. I had no idea that she knew him so intimately."

"Oh, yes, I know him very well, although I have really seen him but once; my opinion of him is based upon that of a far more competent judge than I am. Count Styrum, my friend Adèle's lover, is a relation of Herr von Poseneck; his word is the best warrant for the young man's excellence. A man to whom Count Styrum gives his friendship and esteem is certainly deserving of them."

"Make your acknowledgments for the compliment, Arno! Count Styrum is your friend too," the Freiherr said, with a laugh; and he then continued, half in jest and half in earnest, "The friendship of the Count, for whom I have a great regard, is certainly a recommendation for the young man, but fortunately I am entirely indifferent as to whether this Herr von Poseneck deserves your praise or not, for I have nothing to do with any of the Poseneck crew. One thing strikes me, however, and that is, that I must stop abusing them when Fräulein Anna is by. Well, well, we shall not quarrel about them, only, if she persist in singing this young fellow's praises, she will make her old adorer jealous."

Lucie smiled in reply; she had done enough for to-day, and Celia's grateful look thanked her. She arose, and going to the piano unasked, sang one of the old man's favourite songs, which would have won him to forgiveness even had he been angry.

The tones of her voice had just died away when old Franz entered the room with the post-bag, which he said had just been brought to the castle by an extra messenger, and must contain news of importance.

The Freiherr eagerly opened it, and seizing the newspapers, which, with a few letters for the Finanzrath, were all that it contained, searched them for the expected news of importance. This he found in the first one that he opened; it contained the telegram reporting the abdication of the Crown Prince of Hohenzollern. With eyes sparkling with joy the Freiherr read it aloud. "Thank God!" he exclaimed. "I trust we have done with this miserable war. Franz, bring a bottle of champagne in honour of the good news!"

"I must leave you this evening; my duty recalls me to Dresden, as I learn from this letter," Werner said, after having eagerly looked over his letters.

"What! this evening?" the Freiherr asked, and, although the question expressed surprise, there was no regret in his tone.

"I must obey the call of duty," Werner replied. "While Franz orders the carriage I will pack my portmanteau, and I hope I shall be in time to catch the night train."

He shook hands with his father, and then turned to Lucie, who was standing near the window. "I comply with your wish, and leave you; forgive me," he whispered; adding aloud, "Have you any commands for Dresden, Fräulein Müller? No?" as she answered by a gentle shake of the head. "I am sorry, but pray remember that you may always command me as you please. Adieu, Celia; be diligent and good, you little romp. Adieu, Arno; I trust you will forget, as I do, that there have lately been some differences of opinion between us; upon reflection I see that you were right in the last conversation we had together, this letter has convinced me."

He offered Arno his hand, but the latter refused to take it. "I have no confidence in you," he said, in too low a tone to be heard by the others. "I do not know your reason for this sudden departure, but I am sure that it is not regard for the safety of your family."

"Are you then implacable?"

"I refuse to reply to deceit with deceit."

"What is the matter, boys? Do not quarrel when you are taking leave of each other," the old Freiherr interposed; and Werner, with a shrug, let fall the hand he had offered his brother, and, with another general "adieu," left the room.

In his own apartment, he packed a few necessaries in his portmanteau, devoting all the time he had to a careful disposition of his papers. It was not until he was certain that not a scrap of writing was left either in desk or writing-table that he locked his portmanteau and gave it to old Franz, who came to announce that the carriage was waiting.

As he drove off, just in time to catch the night train, those whom he left behind him at Hohenwald by no means experienced the usual relief felt in his absence. They did not believe in the reason assigned by him for his hasty departure, and it aroused in his father's mind suspicions that he was more deeply implicated in rebellious plots than he had hinted. No one of the little circle could throw off the gloom that oppressed all, and the old Freiherr was rolled into his bedroom much earlier than usual.

In the course of the next few days the political horizon again darkened; all Germany keenly felt the insult offered to the King of Prussia by the French Emperor, and was ready to resent it.

"Disgraceful!" Arno exclaimed, after reading the account of it aloud in the newspapers, "This is enough to make every German forget all petty jealousies and prejudices. We should be one nation in the struggle that France thus forces upon us. I am quite sure, father, that you will gladly see me leave you to take my part in the war that now seems inevitable for the fatherland."

"Go, and God speed you, my son! Only cowards and traitors can hesitate now!"

The Freiherr spoke with profound emotion, regarding with paternal pride the while the son in whom he delighted. Celia threw her arms around her brother's neck and kissed him tenderly. "You are my own darling Arno!" she exclaimed; "the best and truest fellow in the world!"

And Lucie? She bestowed upon Arno a smile that fairly intoxicated him and impelled him to offer her his hand, in which for one fleeting instant she placed her own.

The small circle at Castle Hohenwald presented a picture in miniature of the sentiments of the entire country at this time, and every day's developments served but to increase the patriotic enthusiasm everywhere. No sooner did the cry resound from Paris, "On to Berlin!" than it was decided that as soon as war was formally declared Arno should apply for re-admission to the army, and with a view to so doing he set about arranging affairs on the estate so that his absence might cause his invalid father as little annoyance as possible. Those cares kept him from home almost every day,--it was only in the evenings that he could make one in the family circle; but these evenings, when his father's welcome was so affectionate, Celia's so enthusiastic, and Lucie's so fall of gentleness and sympathy, more than indemnified him for the hard labour of the day. Only one drawback marred the pleasure they gave him, and this was the manner in which he was constantly reminded by Lucie herself of his last *tête-à-tête* with her. What reason could she have for perpetually dragging in Kurt von Poseneck as a subject for conversation, when she could not but perceive that it was distasteful both to the old Freiherr and to himself? This the Freiherr frankly declared many times, but considerate as Lucie usually was of his wishes, on this point she paid no regard to them. With persistent obstinacy she made use of every available opportunity to refer to Kurt, to extol his admirable qualities, to describe his adventures in America, in short, to depict him as a young man of distinguished qualities both of mind and of heart.

Of course Arno never dreamed that Celia had supplied Fräulein Müller with her accurate knowledge of Herr von Poseneck's life, and it seemed to him excessively strange that she should be so well informed concerning a man whom, according to her own declaration, she had seen but twice. This contradiction struck the Freiherr also, and he expressed his surprise at it, but Lucie only smiled and replied, "Oh, I have a private source of information which I know just how far to trust. I do not mean to describe Herr von Poseneck as an actual angel in beard and moustache, but he certainly is a charming fellow, whom you, Herr Baron, would especially like if you only knew him, as I sincerely wish you did."

Celia grew crimson at this reply, but, fortunately, no one save Lucie noticed this. The old Freiherr shook his head and declared that he felt "no desire to know any Poseneck," but, nevertheless, it was plain to be seen that Lucie by her persistency had aroused in him a species of interest, and finally one evening, when she had been recounting some of Kurt's war adventures in America, he remarked that that Poseneck must be a brave fellow since he had attained the rank of major so soon.

Arno was not so easily cured of his prejudice against Kurt, Lucie's constant reference to whom was utterly inexplicable, and at times roused within him the bitterest jealousy. He was worried and anxious, too, with regard to Werner, from whom nothing was heard after his departure. Whether the Finanzrath were really in Dresden neither his father nor his brother knew, and when Arno at times saw accounts in the newspapers of the arrest of persons suspected of being agents of the French government here and there in Germany, he could not but fear lest a like fate might

overtake Werner, and he knew that such a disgrace would crush his father to the earth.

CHAPTER XVI.

On one of the last days in July an unusual crowd thronged the platform of the railway station of A----, looking eagerly for the train, in which, so crowded was it sure to be at this time with troops, it was difficult for civilians to find places. On this particular occasion there were only three passengers for A----, and these had been obliged to content themselves with places in a baggage-wagon, every carriage being crowded with troops in process of transportation. As soon as these three stepped upon the platform they were besieged with questions of all kinds from the throng of men waiting there,--questions which seemed especially annoying to one of the three, an apparently choleric, elderly gentleman, who elbowed his way right and left through the crowd, now and then giving vent to his irritation in a good round oath, as he declared, "I know nothing and care less!" and all the while evidently on the lookout for some one whom at first he could not find.

At length his face cleared. "Hollo, Assessor!" he called; and then, with another struggle to clear himself of importunate questioners, "Deuce take you all!" he exclaimed, "I have something better to do than to answer every fool's questions!"

The people about him grumbled, but perceiving that there was no satisfaction to be gained from him, turned their attention to the other two passengers, and the elderly man was left to pursue his way successfully to where the Assessor von Hahn stood awaiting him. "Here I am at last!" he said, holding out to him the hand unencumbered by his travelling-bag. "I have been trying to get to you for the last three days, but not even standing-room could I find in the railway-trains, which are nothing but military transports. I had to pay an enormous price to-day for a place in a baggage-wagon."

The two men were now quite clear of the crowd, and the Assessor shook the new-comer cordially by the hand. "I am rejoiced to see you!" he said. "You know how entirely I am at your service, Herr----"

"Fernheim!" the stranger interrupted him before he could pronounce the name.

"Fernheim? Really, I do not know----"

"Call me Fernheim. It is as good a name as any other," the stranger said, in a tone only to be heard by the Assessor. "I do not wish these curious people to know who I am, or what I want. The news of my coming might else reach Castle Hohenwald sooner than I desire that it should."

"You are right, Herr Fernheim. I never thought of it; but you are right, you were perhaps in more danger than you thought. Do you know by sight the Finanzrath von Hohenwald or Count Repuin?"

"No, I have no knowledge of the scoundrels!"

"Then you do not know that they were your fellow-passengers in the train?"

"Not an idea of it. But thanks for the information. I shall know them again when I see them. The bearded fellow is the Russian of course. Pity that Sorr is not with them; the noble trio would then be complete."

"He is not here."

"I know that; I am familiar enough with the rascal's face. I suppose those two precious rogues are bound for the castle, so the sooner we are on our way there the better. You have kept your promise, Herr Assessor, to prepare everything for a visit to Hohenwald?"

"Of course; I have awaited you at every train since I received your despatch. The carriage is here to take you instantly to Grünhagen, Herr----"

"Fernheim. Do not forget the name. And no one in Hohenwald suspects my arrival?"

"No one."

"A thousand thanks, Herr Assessor. We will leave instantly, since so much depends upon our arriving before those two worthy gentlemen." And preceded by the Assessor, he passed through

the station-house, and getting into the carriage waiting for them, they were well on their way before the Finanzrath and Count Repuin had extricated themselves from the crowd of eager inquirers on the platform.

The Finanzrath had good reasons for answering all questioners civilly, here so near his home, where there was special need that he should preserve a character for patriotism. During the last few days several of his friends who had dared in Munich, Leipsic, and elsewhere to express unpatriotic sentiments had been roughly handled by the enraged populace. In fear, therefore, of a like fate, Werner judged it wisest to answer all questions with the greatest amiability, re-echoing bravely the curses of the French heard on all sides, and even his companion, Count Repuin, thought it prudent to follow his example.

The Finanzrath informed his hearers that war had been declared the day before; that Bismarck had announced this officially in the Reichstag, and that the enthusiasm in Berlin was boundless,--any amount of funds for the prosecution of the war would be voted unanimously. Werner bore his part admirably in the wild shouts of exultation that followed this intelligence, waving his hat with the foremost, hurrahing for Bismarck, and even adding his fine bass voice to the yelling rather than singing of "Die Wacht am Rhein," in which the enthusiasm of the mob culminated.

By degrees, however, the crowd dispersed, and the two men were left alone on the platform. "Low-lived canaille!" the Russian exclaimed, giving vent to his suppressed indignation. "I would have every scoundrel of them well thrashed!"

"You do them too much honour, my dear Count, in allowing them to ruffle you!" Werner calmly rejoined. "Let them roar their 'Wacht am Rhein' as they please. I am annoyed only by Sorr's non-appearance. He cannot have arrived, as he is not awaiting us here."

"True, I had forgotten the rascal in the midst of their shouts; but you are right. Baron, he should have been here if he obeyed my commands and left for A---- two days ago. What can have happened to him?"

"Nothing; we have seen the difficulty that exists now in getting from one place to another. He will come by the next train,--but it is very unfortunate for me to have to wait here at the station. I am so well known in A---- that people will wonder why I do not go immediately to Castle Hohenwald."

"Unfortunately, there is no help for it."

"Why should not you await him here while I go on to Hohenwald alone?"

"Impossible; you know that I cannot appear at Hohenwald, and that Sorr must accompany you thither, since, if introduced there by you, his wife cannot refuse to give him a hearing. Then when he swears that he has broken off all connection with me, she cannot refuse to follow him, and should she, your father would refuse protection to a wife so false to her duty. Sorr will do as I say, swear what I dictate to him, and the result is certain."

"But what, after all, Count, can the result avail you? You know Frau von Sorr detests you. Will she not instantly return to Hohenwald when she finds that she has been deceived?"

"That is my affair, my dear friend," Count Repuin replied, with an ugly smile. "There are means to tame the wildest bird, and of those means I shall avail myself."

What means, the Finanzrath asked himself, would the Russian use to bend the young wife's will, to conquer her hatred of him? Brutal force spoke in the Count's words and gleamed in his treacherous eyes. And to such villainy he, Werner von Hohenwald, was lending himself!

A few days previously, in a burst of indignation at hearing that he had been denounced to the government, the Finanzrath, believing that Lucie had caused this, had revealed to the Russian the place of her retreat; now he bitterly repented having done so, and blushed for the part he was playing. He would gladly have warned her of the danger threatening her, but the ties that bound him to the Russian were of such a nature that he dared not provoke the man's resentment, and every precaution must be taken lest his suspicion should be aroused. With as easy an air as he could assume he said, "I suppose you will find means to attain your object, but I would advise you to take care. The lovely Frau von Sorr would, I imagine, hesitate at nothing if driven to extremes, and might appeal to the law. If I go on now to the castle I can prepare my father's mind for Sorr's visit, and insure his refusal to grant her his protection in case she should rebel against her husband's authority."

As he spoke Repuin eyed him with a contemptuous smile. "Counsel for counsel, my dear Baron," he replied, with a composure equal to Werner's. "Take care that I do not suspect your good faith towards me. In your delay in informing me of Frau von Sorr's whereabouts there has been quite enough to put me on my guard. I mistrust you. I will not have you going to Castle Hohenwald alone, nor will I permit you one word with Frau von Sorr, except in her husband's presence."

"Your suspicion is insulting, Count Repuin."

"You can allay it by making no attempt to provoke it. I do not wish to offend you; we are allies, and I desire that we may continue friends, but I swear to you that any obstacle laid by you in the way of my plans here, will transform me into your mortal foe. Candour for candour, then; is it to be peace or war between us?"

What could Werner reply? He had no choice. Lucie must be sacrificed to save himself. He adopted an aggrieved tone and answered, "I shall remain here until Sorr arrives, and upon your head be the consequences of your imprudence."

Several hours passed, and it was afternoon before Sorr arrived in a crowded train, in which he was the only civilian. During the last months he had greatly changed. There was in his appearance not a trace of the elegance that had formerly characterized it. His dress was neglected, his beard unshaven, his face bloated. He looked like a man given over to drink and debauchery.

When he emerged from the railway-carriage he looked eagerly about for the Count, whom he did not immediately perceive, but who greeted him upon his approach with the air of a master addressing his slave.

Sorr, however, interrupted the imperious commands of the Russian with, "One moment, Herr Count; I have most important news for both Baron von Hohenwald and yourself, which will doubtless affect your plans. We are betrayed! You as well as the Herr Finanzrath are not safe for a moment. Your arrest is already ordered; your intention to visit Castle Hohenwald is known, and it is there that you are to be arrested."

The Finanzrath turned pale and his voice trembled as he exclaimed, "I am warned from all sides; this news must be true!"

"It may still only be over-anxiety on the part of our friends," said Repuin. "Where did you get your information, Sorr?"

"From Herr von Waltershausen."

"Then we must indeed be upon our guard. By the infernal gods, this is danger! What else did Waltershausen tell you?"

"He has received trustworthy intelligence that Castle Hohenwald is to undergo a thorough search to-day. The Finanzrath von Hohenwald and Count Repuin, if they are found there, are positively to be arrested, the old Freiherr and his son Arno only in case circumstances require it. The prisoners are to be taken to Königstein. That the matter is considered of importance in Dresden and Berlin is shown by the fact that the arrests are to be made under the command of Count von Schlichting, colonel in the army, and formerly an intimate friend of the old Freiherr von Hohenwald. The notorious Geheimrath Steuber is associated with him in the search of the castle. When I went to the railway depot this morning, Count Schlichting was standing on the platform eagerly conversing with some officers. I was afraid that he was to come down by the very train in which Waltershausen had procured me a place, and he knows me. Waltershausen, who was with me, feared this too. He is extremely well acquainted with the Count, and no one suspects him of any connection with Count Repuin, so he did not hesitate to address Schlichting, who spoke to him without reserve of his plans.

"It appears that the colonel has been waiting since yesterday evening for the Berlin Chief of Police, the Geheimrath Steuber, and was determined that if he did not arrive by this afternoon he would take the train for A---- without him, and would make a requisition here for the military force needed to carry out his orders. Herr von Waltershausen enjoined it upon me to beg you both, gentlemen, not to delay an instant in escaping the threatened arrest. He is convinced, from matters being placed in charge of an officer so high in rank, that a court-martial will immediately ensue, and he is further convinced that there would be no hope for you under such circumstances at this juncture. Life and death are at stake, he bade me tell you!"

"He is right," the Finanzrath said, eagerly. "Let me conjure you. Count, to desist from your insane schemes, which may ruin us all. We can still save ourselves by flight into Hanover, where we can be concealed until we find means of getting to England. It would be madness to persist in going to Hohenwald."

Sorr's news had made Repuin anxious, but Werner's words enraged him. "No power in the world," he exclaimed, "shall force me to turn back when I have so nearly reached the goal of my desires! Yes, I will fly with you, but only if Frau von Sorr accompany us. And if by word or even by look you attempt to thwart me, look to yourself, Herr Finanzrath. I will not spare you if you refuse to fulfil your promise to me. I will not rest until you have reaped the harvest of your treachery if you fail me now."

"But how can our putting our heads into the trap at Castle Hohenwald aid you, Count?" Werner cried, in deep agitation.

"I do not ignore the danger," Repuin replied; "but I am determined to meet it, and have no doubt that we shall succeed in escaping it if you will stand by me. We still have several hours in which to act. Follow the plan that I will mark out for you, and to-night will see us in safety. As

quickly as possible have at our disposal two vehicles and a trusty messenger on a good horse, and the rest is very simple. While you drive in one of these vehicles to the castle with Sorr, I will wait here at the station. I know Count Schlichting by sight, although he does not know me; it therefore cannot excite his attention for me to leave the platform as soon as he arrives and despatch the messenger to you at Hohenwald, while I get into the other carriage and drive to R----, where I will await you. Before Count Schlichting has obtained the military aid he requires I shall be miles from here and in perfect safety. You, in the mean time, will have time enough at the castle to explain matters to your father and to employ every means to induce Frau von Sorr to follow her husband, for not until you receive by my messenger the empty envelope, which is all I shall send, addressed to you, will there be any occasion for haste on your part, and even then it will be several hours before Schlichting with his dragoons can reach Hohenwald. Of course you will not return here with Sorr and the lady, but drive directly from the castle to Baron Kronburg's at R----, whence we will pursue our journey together. This is my plan; you must admit that it is simple and deals with certainties only, not probabilities. Are you agreed?"

Werner found some difficulty in replying. "It would be much more prudent," he said, "to fly at once; but if Herr von Sorr consents----"

"Herr von Sorr must consent. His opinion is not asked; all I wish is to know yours."

Sorr seemed not to hear the insulting words. "I shall do just as you please," he said, with the air of a slave before his master.

Repuin hailed Werner's compliance with a triumphant smile. "You never shall regret your amiable readiness to further my plan," he said; "but now to action! We must be prompt!"

Matters were soon arranged according to the Russian's directions. Werner, with his companion, drove off towards Castle Hohenwald, leaving a trusty messenger, who had formerly been an inspector on the Hohenwald estate, and a second carriage at the disposal of the Russian, who took his stand upon the railway platform to await the next train from L----.

He supposed that several hours would elapse before its arrival; but here he was mistaken,--it made its appearance much earlier than he had expected, and as it rolled slowly into the station Repuin recognized in one of the carriages Count Schlichting in earnest conversation with Count Styrum. This startled the Russian, and he feared instant recognition; but Styrum was so absorbed in what Schlichting was saying that he did not look up until Repuin had left the platform. Before the guards had opened the doors of the railway-carriages the Russian had despatched his messenger to warn Werner at the castle, and was himself seated in the carriage he had retained for his own use, driving rapidly towards R----. An evil smile hovered about his lips as he reflected that he should shortly see the lovely Fran von Sorr again. He never doubted his power to bend her will to his, and, leaning back among the carriage-cushions, he resigned himself to pleasing dreams of the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lucie had withdrawn after dinner to the library, to pore over the newspapers, now so filled with exciting intelligence. She was alone, for Celia was in the garden usually at this hour, and since her harsh rejection of Arno he never sought the library when Fräulein Müller was there. She sat for a while lost in thought. Arno had applied the day before for re-admission into the army; he was to leave for Dresden on the following day, and her heart told her that this would be a separation forever. She was so absorbed in her revery that she did not notice old Franz's entrance, and looked up startled when he held towards her a note and announced, with a grim air of discontent, "For Fräulein Müller."

"For me, Franz?" she asked, in great surprise. "Who could have brought it?"

"The Fräulein may well be surprised at the fellow's impudence. A servant-man from Grünhagen brought it, and refuses to return without an answer!" was the reply. After which Franz left the room with the air of having made his protest, although vainly, against some crying sin.

Lucie paid him but little heed; she opened her note and read:

"Dear Fräulein Müller,--I am to leave Grünhagen to-night for I cannot say how long, perhaps

forever. I am going to Berlin to obtain permission to enter the Prussian army as a volunteer. Must I go without seeing my dearest Celia once more? May I not bid her good-bye and tell her how dear she is to me? I promised you not to see Celia again until you consented to our meeting, and I will keep my promise if you refuse to release me from it upon this one occasion; but I pray you to allow us to see each other once more, perhaps for the last time in this world.

"I do not ask to see my darling alone. Pray come with her to the old place of meeting in the forest, where I will await you. Let me hope that you will grant my request. I need not tell you with what impatience I look for your answer, a simple 'yes' or 'no,' by the bearer of this.

"With the greatest regard, yours,

"KURT VON POSENECK."

Lucie was profoundly touched by Kurt's note. Celia too, then, was to suffer the pain of seeing her lover depart for the war. Poor, and yet happy Celia! She might hope that if he whom she loved returned alive the old Freiherr would relent, and her love be crowned with happiness; while if Arno returned, if he should ever seek her again, what then? For her hope did not exist.

She took up a pen and wrote hurriedly:

"I will be at the appointed spot at the usual time; whether Celia will accompany me or not depends upon the decision of the Freiherr von Hohenwald. ANNA MÜLLER."

She sealed her note, addressed it to Herr von Poseneck, and hurried down to the court-yard to deliver it herself to the Grünhagen messenger, upon whom she enjoined the utmost despatch. She did not observe that as she spoke with the man Franz was watching her from the hall, while Arno, who was crossing the court-yard, paused in astonishment as he heard her words. Was she really so intimate with young Poseneck that she corresponded with him? Perhaps the letter after all might not have been for Kurt von Poseneck; but all doubts on this head were set at rest by Franz, who, exercising his prerogative as a privileged servant, said grumblingly, as his young master passed him in the hall, "Fine doings in Hohenwald, when the Fräulein receives letters from Herr von Poseneck, and even condescends to answer them!" This was enough to arouse once more within Arno's heart the demon of jealousy, which Lucie's words to him should have killed forever.

Meanwhile, entirely unconscious of the suffering she had caused, Lucie walked slowly towards the garden-room, to carry into effect the plan she had hastily formed. The Freiherr greeted her with a smile of welcome. "Why, here we have Fräulein Anna!" he said, in great satisfaction. "Have you come to bestow your charming society upon an old fellow at this unwonted hour? But what is that?" he added, pointing to Kurt's letter, which she held in her hand. "I owe the pleasure of your visit to business, I see, not to my own attractions. Never mind, I am always delighted to see you, whatever brings you."

"Indeed, Herr Baron? May I rely upon that?" Lucie asked, meaningly, as she drew a chair to his side and sat down. "Are you sure that you will not drive me away indignantly if I come to prefer a request that does not please you?"

"A request? 'Tis granted before 'tis asked; I know of nothing that I could refuse you."

"I might take you at your word, Herr Baron, but that I will not do. You shall not be bound by a promise to grant my request, you must do it of your own free choice."

"Why, this sounds quite solemn. I am curious; out with your request, whatever it is. What do you ask?"

"Nothing for myself, Herr Baron. My request concerns Herr von Poseneck."

The Freiherr was not made in the least angry, as would formerly have been the case, by this mention of the name of Poseneck; on the contrary, he laughed, saying, as if in badinage, "Always Poseneck! Really, child, I believe you are in love with this infernal Poseneck, who must be a tremendously fine fellow to excite such an interest in you."

"That he certainly is, Herr Baron, although I just as certainly am not in love with him. He is a noble-hearted fellow, who now, after having served with honour in America, is going off to Berlin to enter the army there as a volunteer. His life in America never lessened his honest love for his German fatherland."

"He is a fine fellow then, and I honour him. I never would have believed it of a Poseneck," the Freiherr said, with a kindly nod at Lucie.

"You may believe anything that is good and true of him," Lucie continued; "his self-devotion

costs him more than it does most men. He not only has to conquer his ambition as a former major in thus entering the army as a common soldier, but he sacrifices his whole future happiness. He passionately loves a young girl, whose father is a bitter enemy to Prussia, and who never will give his daughter to a man who fights for Prussia in this war."

"Who is the scoundrel?" the Freiherr exclaimed, indignantly.

"You do an excellent old man great injustice, Herr Baron," Lucie replied, with a smile. "He is a man of honour, but the victim of a prejudice which so possesses him that he cannot conquer it sufficiently to call a Prussian his son-in-law."

"Then he does not love his child!" the Freiherr eagerly asserted, and then suddenly paused and eyed Lucie suspiciously. "Stop! stop, child!" he said. "I begin to suspect that you have been playing your own little game with me. Honestly, what has all this to do with your request?"

"Will you really not be angry with me, Herr Baron, if I speak perfectly frankly to you?" Lucie asked, laying her little hand on the old man's brown, wrinkled fist, and bestowing upon him one of her charming smiles.

"Little flatterer, how can any one be angry with you? Oh, you have the old bear fast in your toils, and now come, tell me all about it."

"You shall hear, Herr Baron. First read this note which I received not an hour ago from Herr von Poseneck; it will tell you all, and when you have finished I will tell you how it came to be written."

The Baron read Kurt's note, while Lucie noted with keen anxiety every change in his features as he read. She saw his face darken, and then a smile dawned about his mouth; he was not very angry. She could have shouted for joy at her victory.

"A most interesting production!" the Freiherr said, he handed the note back to her. "Really, this Herr von Poseneck----"

"Wait until you hear all, Herr Baron, and then judge," Lucie interrupted him.

And she went on to tell the old Freiherr how Celia had accidentally made the young man's acquaintance; how, in her childlike innocence and trust, she had grown to love him, and how, at last, chance had betrayed her secret. She told how Kurt had given his promise never to see Celia without her governess's consent, and how faithfully he had kept his word. "And now for my request, Herr Baron," she said, in conclusion. "I know it will be hard for you to grant it, but I hope everything from your magnanimity. Let me take Celia with me; she knows nothing of this note, and if you refuse me she shall know nothing; but you will not be so cruel. There must be a farewell,--a last farewell. May not Celia go with me?"

"You are a white witch, and know how to wind the old ogre round your finger," the Freiherr said, shaking his finger at Lucie. "In fact, I ought to be excessively angry with you, but as this is impossible I may as well take my pill without a wry face. The will-o'-the-wisp had certainly better see the young man under your auspices than run off, perhaps through the night and storm, to take leave of him; the child might do it if she should hear that Poseneck was going away. But one very serious word I must speak. Your Poseneck certainly is an honest, honourable young fellow, his note and his whole conduct show that. Celia in her unsuspicious innocence might have fallen into bad hands. You cannot expect me to be quite content, but time will bring counsel. Only there must be no more of it all for the present; no talk of a betrothal as yet, no tender exchange of letters and such stuff. Celia is as yet little more than a child. If the young man ever comes back from the war he may come and see me here and we will talk it over together. But before then I'll not listen to another word about it. Do you agree, you white witch?"

"Your will shall be my law in the matter, Herr Baron, and I thank you from my very heart for conquering for your child's sake your dislike of a Poseneck."

"You may spare your thanks, child, or rather keep them for yourself, who honestly deserve them for taking care that my dislike should gradually subside. Have you not hammered away at my heart with your Poseneck every evening, for weeks, until at last the tough old muscle has grown quite tender?"

The Freiherr had caused his rolling-chair to be pushed near the open glass doors of the garden-room, that he might inhale the fragrance which now towards evening was borne in upon the delicious breeze from the garden, already lying in shadow from the lofty forest. The papers lay upon the table beside him. His thoughts were busy with the occurrences of the day. "Where can Werner be?" he suddenly asked himself. Several letters that had arrived at the castle for the Finanzrath and had been forwarded to his address in Dresden had been to-day returned, with the notice on the envelopes that he had left Dresden. Hence the question that the father asked himself. He nearly started from his chair when old Franz flung wide the folding-doors leading into the hall and announced, "The Herr Finanzrath!"

His visit was not welcome, and when Werner entered, not alone, but daring to introduce a stranger without permission, the old man's patience was too sorely tried. The look with which he regarded his son was by no means amiable, but that with which he greeted his companion was darker still. He was very unfavourably impressed by this man from the first instant of his appearance. In spite of his long seclusion from society the Freiherr had always retained the greatest neatness, and withal an old-fashioned elegance, in his dress. Nothing was more distasteful to him than a want of cleanliness or an air of neglect, and both of these characterized the former fastidious Herr von Sorr, whom Werner now presented to his father. And Sorr's countenance did not belie his dress. The pale flabby cheeks, the watery eyes, the whole expression indeed of the man, bore witness to his degraded, debauched character and made him odious to the old Baron. For such a guest no consideration was necessary.

"What in thunder do you mean?" he said angrily to Werner. "How dare you bring a stranger here? Don't you know that I receive no visitors? Whoever you are, sir, learn that I permit no invasion of my seclusion! There is the door!"

Sorr, trained though he had been by Repuin to submit to all sorts of contemptuous treatment, was nevertheless abashed by this reception, and might perhaps scarcely have ventured to persist in his intrusion had not Werner come to his aid.

"Before you express yourself so angrily, sir," he said to his father, "you should hear the reasons that exist for my transgression of your commands and my introduction to you of Herr von Sorr. I appeal to your sense of justice, sir, in informing you that Herr von Sorr has no desire to intrude upon you, but has come hither because I have assured him that no Freiherr von Hohenwald ever refused what another had a right to claim, and that his just demand must be made directly to yourself."

"What have I to do with this man?" the Freiherr asked, crossly.

"This you can only learn, sir, by granting a hearing to Herr von Sorr, not by repulsing him in a manner that cannot but be offensive to a gentleman who comes hither at the request of your eldest son."

Again, as often before, the Finanzrath's imperturbable composure asserted its sway over his father's passion. The old man gave his son a dark look, but yielded, and turning to Sorr, said, with forced calmness, "Approach, sir; I regret it if my hastiness offended you,--such was not my intention. I can make no exception to the rule which I have observed for years of denying myself to visitors, and therefore I beg you to tell me as briefly as possible what you desire."

Sorr complied with the invitation in spite of the ungracious manner in which it was conveyed, and took a chair near the old man, but when he met his dark, searching eye the words which he had committed to memory that they might serve him in this need would not at first be uttered. He cleared his throat in a vain endeavour to begin with some fitting introductory phrase.

"Well, sir?"

The Baron's impatient tone admitted of no further delay, and Sorr began, overcoming his first stammering hesitation as he proceeded. "Herr Baron," he said, "you see in me a wretched man, who appeals to you for aid in recovering his lost happiness. In the terrible misfortunes that have overwhelmed me I have not been guiltless, but I assure you on my honour that I repent the wrong I have done, and that I am determined to begin a new life if through your aid I succeed in attempting it."

"What is it that you want of me? What business have you to ask me for your lost happiness?" the Freiherr interrupted Sorr's studied speech.

"Forgive me, Herr Baron, if, carried away by my emotion, I fail to use the right words in which to convey my request. Bear with me for a little while and you shall learn all. I will be as brief as possible, A few years ago I was a happy man, my fortune was considerable, I enjoyed the esteem of my friends, an exalted position in society, and I possessed a charming wife, to whom I was ardently attached. I lacked but one thing,--the strength to withstand temptation. One passion ruled my life,--the love of gaming. Although I was usually fortunate, my success in winning large sums destroyed in me all appreciation of the value of money. I indulged in the wildest extravagances, and my income was always exceeded by my expenses. Thus my property dwindled almost without my knowledge. My wife, who loved me tenderly, warned me, entreated me, but even her prayers, all-powerful in every other direction, availed nothing to induce me to resist the fatal temptation offered me by cards. It dragged me down into an abyss that engulfed my fortune and that of my wife also. I found myself at last a beggar, my fortune, friends, position in society, and, worse than all, the affection of a wife whom I idolized, all gone. Meanwhile, one of my friends had, with inconceivable cunning and treachery, abused my confidence. The evenings that I spent at the gaming-table he passed with my wife, representing himself as having been sent by me to beguile her solitude. He was enormously wealthy, and no sacrifice being too great in his eyes where the attainment of his vile ends was concerned, he at times forced upon me large sums for the payment of my debts, and I--with shame I confess it--was weak enough, when my wife complained to me of the persistent attentions of this treacherous friend, to entreat her not to offend him by any harsh rejection of them. I had utter confidence in my wife, and never

suspected to what depths of infamy my false friend would descend."

"What the devil have I to do with all this?" the Freiherr burst out, more and more disgusted with Sorr, who had hoped his theatrical pathos was producing a very different impression. "For Heaven's sake, come to the point!"

"I am about to do so. My treacherous friend, Count Repuin----"

"Stay! What name was that? Count Repuin, the Russian, Werner's friend and confidant,--was he the man?"

"The same, Herr Baron. I lost the greater part of my fortune to him; he systematically contrived my ruin, believing that when I found myself a beggar, my wife, with destitution staring her in the face, would lend an ear to his vile proposals. When I had lost all, so that I knew not where to turn for the barest necessaries of existence, he carried to my wife the false report that I was dishonoured, that I had been detected in cheating at cards, and that it was in his power to send me to a jail. It was a bold falsehood, but it found credence with my wife, whose esteem for me my passion for play had destroyed; and when he further informed her that, in consideration of a large sum of money, I had resigned to him all claim upon her duty, in short, that I had sold her to him, in her despair the wretched woman believed this lie also."

"Infamous! incredible!" the Freiherr indignantly exclaimed, involuntarily interested at last in Sorr's recital.

"But the scoundrel failed in his schemes, although he has plunged me into misery. Devilish though his cunning was, he failed to take into account one thing,--in which, indeed, he had no faith,--that a woman might be impregnably virtuous. He did not know my Lucie. What was his wealth to her in comparison with her honour? She spurned his offers with contempt, and yet she believed him, and driven by despair almost to madness, she secretly left my house. When on the morning after the fearful night in which I had sacrificed my last hope at the gaming-table I sought my wife's apartment to pray for her forgiveness and to make her the promise for which she had so often implored me, that never again would I touch a card, I found upon her table this terrible letter. Read it, Herr Baron; it will explain to you better than any words of mine the depth of my misery." And Sorr handed to the Freiherr the letter that Lucie had left behind her on the evening of her flight. The old Baron read:

"You have given back to me my freedom; I accept it. It is your desire that we should part; it shall be fulfilled: you will never see me again. Should you dare to persecute me, you will force me to denounce you publicly, and to give to the world the reasons that justify my conduct. The detected thief, who would barter his wife's honour, has forfeited the right to control her destiny.--LUCIE."

An odious smile hovered upon Sorr's lips as he watched the Freiherr while he read this letter aloud, and as he marked the impression that it produced upon him. He exchanged a significant glance with Werner, and then, when the reading was finished, continued: "I was beside myself with grief and fury when I found that my adored Lucie had left me. She had fled, that was clear, although I could understand neither her threat nor her strange intimations that I had desired to part from her, that I had sold her. She had vanished; no trace of her could I find, although I even summoned the police to my aid. Surely, as a forsaken husband, I had a right to do so. All was in vain. Again and again I read her mysterious letter, and at last, upon a sudden impulse, I hastened to Repuin, showed him Lucie's note, and demanded and received its explanation. The wretch had the effrontery to tell me with a smile, of the manner in which he had destroyed the happiness of my life. We fought. I arose from the sick-bed, where a wound received in the duel prostrated me for weeks, an altered man. I have taken a vow never again to touch a card. I have since that day earned my daily bread by honest toil, correcting proofs for publishers, and giving lessons in French and English. I have now an assured although moderate income. In this period of struggle one hope alone has sustained me, that of finding my Lucie again. She is my wife by the indissoluble bond of marriage, a marriage blest by the Church. I know that she will gladly return to me and share my toil and my poverty when she knows of my change of heart and life. And chance has befriended me, Herr Baron, leading me to a knowledge of your son, the Herr Finanzrath, from whom I have learned that, in order to secure herself from fancied persecution, my wife has taken refuge in a feigned name, and that she dwells beneath your roof as Anna Müller."

The Freiherr stared at Sorr in blank amazement. "Good God, sir! what do you mean? Are you mad?" he exclaimed. "Fräulein Müller a wife, and your wife!"

"Ask your son, Herr Baron," Sorr replied; "he will confirm my words."

"Herr von Sorr speaks but the truth, father; it is my duty to attest this. Frau von Sorr has seen fit to undertake to fill the position of Celia's governess under a feigned name. I had, of course, no idea of this when I engaged her through Frau von Adelung. I learned her true name only lately and by chance, and I felt it my duty to acquaint Herr von Sorr with her place of abode."

When the first shock of his surprise had passed, the old Freiherr looked from Werner to Sorr and from Sorr to Werner in a kind of fury. He had no suspicion as to the truth of Sorr's story; he

remembered that, by Count Styrum's desire, no allusion was ever made to Fräulein Müller's past; there could be no doubt that Anna was Sorr's unfortunate wife, forced by a sad fate to fly from her husband. What the Freiherr did doubt, what, indeed, utterly discredited, was the man's assertion of an altered course of life. One glance at his bloated features, at his watery, crimson-lidded eyes, proclaimed the fact that Sorr was deeply plunged in debauchery and drunkenness. This man had never aroused himself to a life of honest toil. It was no affection for his wife that impelled him to seek her out.

The Freiherr's mind was filled with vague suspicion as to the man's motives, suspicion that attached in a degree also to Werner, to whose last words he sharply rejoined, saying,--

"So you have been playing the spy here that you might betray the poor thing's confidence?"

"As Frau von Sorr never honoured me with her confidence I could not possibly betray it," Werner replied coolly to his father's reproach. "When I saw how great was her husband's misery, and how sincere his resolution to amend, I judged it my duty to acquaint him with his wife's retreat."

"I owe the Finanzrath an eternal debt of gratitude for bringing me hither," Sorr interposed, "and for promising to set the crown upon his kindness by doing all that lies in his power to induce my beloved Lucie to fulfil the duty that she owes to an unfortunate husband."

The Finanzrath bit his lip. Sorr's words reminded him, as they were meant to do, of the promise he had made the Russian to do all that lay in his power to further his schemes. The part assigned him here was odious enough, but the fear inspired by the Russian's threats conquered his distaste for it. He had gone too far to retrace his steps, and he therefore replied to Sorr, "I will certainly keep my word, although I think there will be little need of any influence of mine. Frau von Sorr, I feel assured, will willingly follow you; but should she refuse to do so, my father will surely not sustain her in such a departure from her duty. Castle Hohenwald cannot possibly be an asylum for a wife who has deserted her husband in misfortune and refuses to return to him."

As Werner spoke these words he did not look up; he did not dare to meet his father's eyes, and therefore he did not see the contempt that shone in them as the Freiherr turned from his son to Sorr and said, sharply, "What you ask of me, then, Herr von Sorr, is that I shall force this unhappy woman to return to you. Is this so? Speak out, sir; I want a candid reply."

"Your words sound harsh, Herr Baron," was Sorr's humble reply. "I never thought of force, but only that you would place no obstacle in the way of an unfortunate man who only seeks to maintain his rights. I have made an expensive journey hither from Munich in the confident hope that it needed only an interview with my dear Lucie to induce her to take her place once more beside me as my faithful wife whom I dearly love and will never forsake. Surely the last sad months have atoned for my wrong-doing. I have a right to demand that she should follow me when I solemnly assure her that I have broken off all connection with Repuin. She is my wife before God and man, and what God hath joined let not man put asunder. You certainly, Herr Baron, would never protect a wife against the claims of a husband."

The Freiherr did not immediately reply. This Herr von Sorr inspired him with a disgust which his evident and nauseous hypocrisy only served to increase, and yet he could not but admit to himself that the man's claim, as he represented it, was a just one.

He rang the silver hand-bell upon his table and said to Franz, who immediately made his appearance, "Beg Fräulein Müller kindly to come to me as soon as she can."

Then, turning to Sorr, he said, "I will not listen to another word from you until I hear the other side of the question. I reserve my decision until then. Not until I have spoken to Fräulein Anna,--I always call her so, and I have grown very fond of her under this name,--and until she has confirmed your statement, will I accord it full belief."

"I am convinced, Herr Baron----"

"Not another word, Herr von Sorr! I will keep my judgment unbiassed. You shall be confronted with the accused after I have first spoken with her alone."

"I have accused no one but myself, Herr Baron."

"I attach no importance to that; it shall be as I say. I will hear what Fräulein Anna has to say; I will talk with her alone,--she shall not be influenced by the presence of any one. I am sure that she will tell me the whole truth."

This arrangement was not at all satisfactory to Sorr. He feared that Lucie might tell the Freiherr of his conversation with her on the evening preceding her flight, and so destroy his web of specious falsehood. He would at least make an attempt to prevent this. "I entreat you, Herr Baron, to permit me to repeat in Lucie's presence what I have told you. It wounds me that you should doubt my words. Lucie's testimony shall prove to you that I----"

The Freiherr harshly interrupted him, "I will not hear another word. It shall be as I say!

Werner, take Herr von Sorr out upon the terrace; you can walk up and down there until I call you; I wish to be alone."

"But, Herr Baron----"

"What the devil, sir,--will you do as I say or not? I am still master in my own castle, I believe, and I will not be contradicted; I wish to be alone. Your place for the present is out there on the terrace. If you refuse to obey my orders, the servants will show you the shortest way out of the castle."

When the old Baron fell into a downright rage there was nothing to be done with him, as Werner knew, and as Sorr perceived; he did not dare further to gainsay his will, and, with a low bow, he followed the Finanzrath out upon the terrace.

The Freiherr sat alone, awaiting with the greatest impatience Anna's appearance; but the minutes passed and she did not come, nor did old Franz return to explain the reason why. The Freiherr rang his bell again, and Werner and Sorr, who had been awaiting this summons, instantly entered from the terrace.

The Freiherr received them with a good round oath. "I was ringing for that old ass Franz!" he roared out to Werner. "Stay outside on the terrace with your Herr von Sorr until I call you by name!"

The two men were obliged to withdraw. The Freiherr rang his bell a second and a third time without any result, until at the end of a good half-hour Franz appeared, with the intelligence that Fräulein Müller was nowhere to be found. She was not in her room; Fräulein Celia said that the Fräulein had gone for a walk in the garden or park; but he had searched for her there in vain, and the gardener had helped him, and was sure she could not be either in the park or in the garden.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Oh, my darling, darling Anna, how can I thank you?" Celia laughed and cried and kissed her friend amid tears and smiles, dancing about her room like some wild sprite.

"Come, Celia; pray be reasonable, child!" Lucie at last admonished her.

"Anything but that, dearest Anna, you must not ask that; I am half mad with delight. My dear, good old father! How unjust I have been to him! How could I keep anything from him? It was shameful! oh, if I only had told him all about it the very first day when I met Kurt!"

Lucie said nothing; but she had her own opinion as to whether the result would have been a very happy one for Celia if she had told her father of her first meeting with Kurt. The girl went on pouring her innocent delight into Lucie's ears, and repeating that she owed it all to her darling Anna.

The castle clock struck four.

"At last!" Celia exclaimed, and begged Lucie to make the greatest haste, lest Kurt should have to wait. Her friend complied; it would have been cruel to detain the girl longer than was necessary to hasten along the broad road, down which Celia had so often galloped upon Pluto to the appointed spot.

They soon espied the light straw hat, and an instant afterward Kurt hurried towards them.

"I have fulfilled your wish, Herr von Poseneck," Lucie said, offering her hand to the young man.

"How can I thank you sufficiently for so doing! for relinquishing your purpose of referring my request to the Freiherr von Hohenwald----"

"No, no, dearest Kurt!" exclaimed Celia. "She did not relinquish it. Yes, you may well be surprised, you unprincipled fellow, who would have persuaded me to meet you again without the knowledge of my darling, kind old father. But, oh, Kurt, we are so happy, and Anna has done it all!" And the girl, amid tears and laughter, told her amazed lover of the success of Anna's exertions in his favour.

In his joy that there was no longer an insurmountable barrier between himself and his love, Kurt gladly promised to obey every condition imposed upon him by the Freiherr, declaring that never would he write so much as one word to his darling except under cover to her father.

When Lucie had explained to him all that she had promised in this way on his behalf she took no further part in the conversation, wandering along the grassy path a little in advance of the lovers, anxious that Celia should enjoy to the full every moment of this short hour of bliss, and lost in sad reflections as to her own future.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!"

Kurt and Celia, who had forgotten all the actual world, and Lucie, in the midst of her sad dreaming, looked up startled. They had just reached the spot where the footpath from Grünhagen crossed the broad road, and confronting them stood the Assessor von Hahn. He took off his hat with an exceedingly low bow to Celia in particular.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Fräulein von Hohenwald, for intruding again, but I am discreet; I make no boast----"

"There you are quite right, Herr Assessor, for surely there is not much discretion in appearing where you have once been told that your presence is an intrusion."

The Assessor grew crimson at Kurt's words; he retreated a few steps and said, in great confusion, "You wrong me deeply, Herr von Poseneck; you will, I am sure, retract your hasty words when I tell you that my presence here has nothing to do with you or with my respected cousin, but with Madame--that is--I mean, I wish the honour of a few words with Fräulein Müller. I learned in Grünhagen, where I arrived half an hour ago, that Herr von Poseneck had gone to the forest, and I suspected that the two ladies would take their afternoon walk in the same direction. Therefore, as it was highly important that I should speak with Madame--that is, Fräulein Müller, I ventured to come hither."

Lucie bestowed upon the Assessor a glance of anything but welcome, but she could not refuse to respond to his look of appeal. "You have attained your purpose, Herr Assessor," she said. "You probably bring me a message from my friend Adèle. The Assessor is an old acquaintance of mine," she added to Kurt and Celia, who looked rather surprised, "and is a constant visitor at the President von Guntram's."

The Assessor's courage returned upon hearing Lucie acknowledge his acquaintance, and he went on with much more confidence than before: "Certainly, Madame--that is, Fräulein Müller, I bring you a message from Fräulein Adèle, and not merely a message. I am not alone; there is a gentleman in the shrubbery who wishes to speak with you. I brought him at Fräulein Adèle's express desire."

Lucie recoiled in terror. Had the gossiping Assessor betrayed her secret? Had he brought hither either Repuin or Sorr? They were the only persons who could have any interest in discovering her retreat. She gazed towards the spot indicated by the Assessor, and, in dread of encountering Repuin's detested form, moved closer to Kurt as if for protection. "Whom have you brought here?" she asked.

"I cannot mention any name, Fräulein Müller," the Assessor replied. "I promised not to do so, and I am a man of my word. But I can assure you that you will rejoice to see my honoured companion. He wishes to meet you alone, therefore I pray you step aside to where he is awaiting you in the forest only a few steps from here."

"I will not go!" Lucie declared. "Whoever your companion may be, he has no right to require that I should go into the forest to meet him."

"You do not know of whom you speak, Fräulein Müller," the Assessor said, with unusual earnestness. "I entreat you not to refuse. I assure you you will rejoice to see my companion, who longs to clasp you to his heart."

Lucie shot at the little man a glance of flame. She turned in indignation at such insolence to Kurt, saying, "I have nothing further to say to this gentleman. May I beg you, Herr von Poseneck, to continue our walk?"

"But, Madame--Fräulein Müller, I would say--you place me in the most embarrassing position; there can be no reason why you should not see my honoured companion. I give you my word of honour that he comes by Fräulein Adèle's express desire; he is the only man in the world whom I would have conducted hither. I was so glad to meet you here in the forest, and not to be obliged to go to the castle to find you, and now you refuse to go a few steps to meet him when he has come so many miles to see you. Do you mistrust me? I do not deserve it of you!"

There was so much of honesty and good will stamped upon the Assessor's face, he was evidently so aggrieved by Lucie's distrust of him, that his words produced some effect upon her. She hesitated, and wondered whether she were right in her refusal; but before she could reply an elderly gentleman, the same whom the Assessor had received at the railway station, emerged from the forest and hastened towards her.

She gazed at him for a moment, and then, with a shriek of joy, threw herself into his arms, and, clasping her own about his neck, kissed him again and again. "I have you again! Thank God! thank God!" she cried. "This is too much joy! Now I will hold you fast. You must not leave your child again."

The gentleman was much moved, and the tears stood in his eyes as he returned Lucie's kisses. "My child! my dear, good child!" he whispered, tenderly. "You are mine once more, and I shall know how to protect you from your dastardly persecutors."

"We are not alone, we must remember that," Lucie said, at length, extricating herself from her father's embrace.

The old man turned, with his daughter's hand still in his, and extended his right hand to Kurt. "Forgive me, Herr von Poseneck," he said, "for presenting myself so unceremoniously to Fräulein Cecilia von Hohenwald and yourself. I had hoped that my daughter would comply with our friend the Assessor's request and come to me in the forest; but her natural reluctance to do so is the cause why you are the witnesses of a meeting between a father and daughter who have been separated for years."

For a few moments the poor Assessor found himself upon a pinnacle of glory. The modesty with which nature had endowed him was in danger of great deterioration, so enthusiastic were Lucie's thanks to him for his kind interest, so gratifying was the appreciation of his services by his fair cousin and Herr von Poseneck. But alas, poor man! he soon experienced the uncertainty of such a position, and felt himself no better than the fifth wheel to a coach with the two couples, who evidently desired to be left to themselves. Kurt and Celia paid him not the least attention, and Lucie was so wrapped up in her newly-found father that she soon seemed entirely to have forgotten Hahn's existence. He was therefore fain to amuse himself by botanizing among the forest flowers.

Lucie clung to her father's arm as if fearful of losing him again should she leave him for an instant. They walked on in advance of the lovers, and as soon as they were out of hearing the daughter gave words to her delight. "I am so happy, my darling father; I can scarcely believe the evidence of my senses that I am looking into your dear eyes and feeling your strong arm support me. Oh, father, how could you stay so long away from your child? All would have been different if you had been here!"

"I could not have prevented Sorr from ruining himself and you," Ahlborn gloomily replied. "Do not reproach me, my child. I did what I was forced to do, and the result has crowned my work. When I left you without even taking leave of you, I determined never to return unless in possession of all, and more than all, I had lost. Even then I suspected how bitterly we had been deceived in Sorr, and my only object in life was to work for you, my darling, that your future might be secure. With this one thought in my mind I went to America and plunged into a life of toil, in which, when I might have faltered and fallen, the thought of you sustained me. I added dollar to dollar with the parsimony of a miser. I embarked, like a madman, in the boldest speculations. All that I touched seemed to turn to profit. But why dwell upon those wild years? I hate to think of them, for, although I never stooped to what the world calls dishonesty, it galls me now to remember how different was the system of mad speculation by which I regained my lost fortune from the plodding industry by which I first obtained it.

"Three months ago I arrived in Bremen, and hurried to Berlin, where my worst fears with regard to Sorr were confirmed. His reputation was gone, his property lost; and I was told that he had removed with you to M----. When I reached M---- it was too late, you had vanished unaccountably, and Sorr, too, was not to be found."

"Did not Adèle tell you where I was?" Lucie asked.

"I never thought of going to her, so wide-spread was the report that in your despair you had destroyed yourself. I left M---- a broken-hearted man; of what use was my wealth? My aim in life was gone.

"I tried to divert my mind by travelling aimlessly hither and thither; and at Frankfort-on-the-Main, seeing by the papers that a fine estate on the banks of the Rhine was for sale, I purchased it, in hopes of finding relief from my misery in the care of it. But the peaceful solitude to which I had looked to soothe my pain only increased it, and again I began my wanderings, which suddenly found their close in Berlin. Last Friday I was sauntering aimlessly along the street there when I met the Assessor von Hahn. Remembering that in former days he was in the habit of frequenting our house, where he was one of your adorers, I did not rebuff him when he recognized me and with a cordial welcome on his lips walked along by my side. I soon wearied of him, however, and paid no attention to the gossip he continued to retail to me, until I was aroused from my absence of mind by the question, 'Have you been to see your daughter yet?' If he were conscious that your friends mourned you as dead, why ask so cruel a question? I begged him instantly to tell me all that he knew of you, and this threw the little man into the greatest confusion; my joy was unbounded when he assured me positively that you were still alive, although he refused to reveal to me your retreat, and referred me to your friend Adèle. An hour later I was in the train bound for M----, and the next morning I had an early interview with your friend, who was in raptures at recognizing me. But, ah, my child, what a tale she told me! My

poor darling, to what a fate did I resign you! Now, however, I know all,--all, for Adèle even gave me your last letter to her to read, entreating me to go instantly to your aid, to carry you to my home on the Rhine, far away from Castle Hohenwald, where, as you said, each moment was torture to you."

"Did Adèle say that?" Lucie asked, in surprise. "Did she not show you my second letter, which she must have received almost simultaneously with the first?"

"I know nothing of any second letter; but your friend regretted deeply that she had not yet been able to procure you the situation for which you implored her, and added that she was upon the point of writing to you, to insist that you should return to your old retreat beneath her father's roof. We consulted together what was best to be done. We agreed that you must leave the castle immediately, but in view of the eccentricity of its lord, I judged it best to accept the friendly offices, so frankly offered, of Herr von Hahn to procure an interview with you, rather than to present myself in person to the Freiherr.

"I telegraphed to the Assessor at A---- to meet me at the station there, and as soon as I was able to procure a place in the crowded trains came hither. He was waiting for me on the platform, and before we left the station he pointed out to me two gentlemen who had arrived by the same train as Count Repuin and the Finanzrath von Hohenwald."

"Good heavens!" Lucie exclaimed. "Werner and the Count! This is, indeed, wretched news. I feared it, I feared it, although I could not conceive that the Finanzrath could be so basely treacherous. But let Count Repuin come,--I am no longer defenceless; I will confront him boldly in the presence of the old Freiherr." Then as she reflected that her kind old friend was absolutely ignorant of her past, now probably to be so misrepresented to him, she went on, in feverish agitation: "But, oh! my father, there is a danger which you cannot avert. What if my kind friend should be led to doubt me by the falsehoods that will doubtless be poured into his ears? I will not lose his esteem and affection; we must see him before the Finanzrath and the Count reach the castle. Perhaps it is already too late. Protect me from them, father, if they should be there, and stand beside me while I tell the Freiherr my wretched story."

But to this her father was not inclined to agree. Had it not been for the presence of Repuin he would gladly have allowed his child to acquaint the Freiherr with all her past, but he could not doubt the Russian's close association with Sorr, and from her husband even Lucie's father could not protect her. Should Sorr require her to follow him, nothing remained for her save to elude him by a secret flight from the castle without even bidding the old Freiherr farewell. Only when beneath her father's roof could she thank Baron von Hohenwald for all his kindness and explain to him the grounds for her sudden and secret flight.

When, however, Herr Ahlborn explained his wishes on this head to his daughter, he encountered a determined opposition on her part; she was so unwilling to leave without one word of explanation what had been to her a dear asylum, that at last, trusting in Sorr's absence, the father yielded to Lucie's entreaties and consented to accompany her to the castle.

CHAPTER XIX.

The time passed with incredible swiftness for all save for poor Herr von Hahn. Celia had so much to say to her lover that when Lucie reminded her that it was time to return she begged for "one more quarter of an hour, dearest Anna!" and was only pacified by the permission given to Kurt to accompany her to-day on the walk back to the castle.

Thus all turned their faces towards home. Celia wished the road were miles long. She went first with Kurt, and Lucie and her father with the Assessor followed them. The lovers paused at the gate of the court-yard; Kurt could go no farther. As Celia was looking back for Anna, her attention was diverted by the noise of a vehicle, and through an opposite entrance came a carriage that drew up before the steps leading into the castle hall. Two gentlemen descended from it,--one was Werner, the other an entire stranger to Celia "Anna," the girl said to her friend, who was still too far off to look into the interior of the court-yard, "Werner has come, and he is not alone,--there is a stranger with him."

The intelligence did not startle Lucie; she had feared that the Finanzrath and Repuin would reach the castle before her, but in another instant she stood by Celia's side, and recognized in the stranger not Repuin, but her miserable husband.

"Sorr is there himself; you will not now return to the castle?" her father, who instantly

recognized his son-in-law, asked.

Lucie did not reply; she was too much dismayed to appreciate at first the result which a meeting with her husband in Castle Hohenwald might bring about.

"I yielded to your wish," said Herr Ahlborn, "when I supposed that Count Repuin would be the Finanzrath's companion; but since Sorr himself is here, doubtless with the intention of asserting a husband's rights, you must not lose a moment, but must follow me instantly."

"Only let me say one word of farewell, father."

"No, you must not expose yourself to such peril."

"What will the Freiherr think of me if I fly thus without a word? Herr von Sorr will not venture to malign me if I confront him in the Baron's presence."

"But he will demand his rights, and, in spite of his baseness, he has the law upon his side. You owe it to me, your father, as well as to yourself, to come with me. Fräulein Cecilia will carry your farewell to her father, and you can soon write to him and explain everything."

All that Celia, standing by in utter amazement at the words exchanged between father and daughter, could understand was, that the stranger with Werner, whom they called Sorr, threatened Anna with great danger, from which her father was entreating her to fly, and that her friend was unwilling to leave the castle without a word of farewell. Celia had often pondered the mystery of her friend's past, and was firmly convinced that whatever it might be Anna never could have been to blame.

"What are you saying?" the girl exclaimed, in great agitation. "Are you talking of leaving Castle Hohenwald without one word of farewell to dear papa and Arno? Oh, no, Anna! Indeed, you must not think of doing so. Whatever may be the evil intent of Werner and his companion, papa and Arno will know how to protect you."

"Fräulein Cecilia, do you really love my daughter?" Ahlborn asked, earnestly.

"Do I love her?" the girl rejoined. "She is my dearest friend. I owe to her all the happiness of my life." And her glance sought Kurt.

"Then, if you really love her, you will not try to persuade her to enter the castle, when I assure you solemnly that she will by so doing imperil the happiness of her life. Trust me, I implore you. You shall soon hear from us and learn all that want of time now forces us to conceal. Everything depends upon her leaving here with me without a moment's delay. Would you yet persuade her to remain?"

"No! no! you shall not stay, my darling Anna!" the girl exclaimed, more impressed by the old man's tone and manner than by his words. "If your happiness is at stake never think of us. I do not know how I shall live without you now that Kurt and Arno are both going to leave us, but not for worlds would I keep you. Go with your father, and I will tell papa how sorry you are not to say good-bye to him, and that you will soon write and explain everything."

Lucie was deeply agitated. Her heart rebelled at the thought of leaving the castle thus, but her reason told her that it was her only chance of safety, and she yielded to Celia's unselfish entreaty. At Herr Ahlborn's request the girl promised not to acquaint her father with Fräulein Müller's secret departure until late in the evening, and to state in answer to any inquiries concerning her that she had complained of headache and had gone to take a solitary walk.

The friends then took leave of each other with many tears, and Lucie, with her father and the Assessor, struck into the foot-path leading through the forest and village of Hohenwald to Grünhagen. Kurt lingered for one moment for a last embrace of his darling, and then, joining Lucie, walked silently by her side.

Lost in thoughts of Hohenwald and of what Arno would say when he heard of her flight, Lucie walked on swiftly. Suddenly she paused with a thrill of delighted surprise, for he of whom she was thinking stood before her.

Arno was on his way from the village of Hohenwald, and owing to the windings of the path was close beside the two gentlemen, who were in front of Kurt and Lucie, before he saw them. His surprise was great on beholding the Assessor, with whom he had formerly been slightly acquainted, and who now bowed profoundly, while his elderly companion accorded him a reluctant greeting by slightly raising his hat. Arno was about to accost them when he perceived, to his still greater astonishment, at some little distance, Fräulein Müller accompanied by Herr von Poseneck.

There had been another meeting in the forest, then. It had doubtless been arranged in the letter that had aroused his jealousy. His soul was filled with bitterness. How great had been his folly in trusting Anna's words rather than his own eyes! How she must have smiled at his futile irritation when she persisted in reiterating Poseneck's praises! What did she mean now? She suddenly stood still as she perceived him, and on her lovely face there dawned a brilliant smile as

she held out to him both her hands. "What an unexpected pleasure!" she exclaimed.

He did not take her proffered hands, and would have passed on with a bow, but this she prevented. She took his hand. "We must not part thus, Herr Baron," she said, with so kindly a look that in a moment his bitter mood was changed; he carried her hand tenderly to his lips, and she did not withdraw it.

"You are displeased with me, Herr Baron," Lucie continued; "but you do me great injustice. Now that I see you I can in some measure explain the grief that my hasty departure from the castle causes me. I told my father--but you do not know my dearest father yet. This, father dear, is the Baron Arno von Hohenwald."

Herr Ahlborn was by no means pleased at this meeting in the forest; it must lead to explanations which he would fain have avoided. He uttered a few phrases of conventional courtesy, and regretted that the necessity for reaching A---- that very evening would prevent any prolongation of the interview. "I shall not fail," he added, "to communicate shortly by letter the reasons which make my daughter's sudden departure from Castle Hohenwald an imperative necessity."

All that Arno gathered from this was the fact--and it filled him with dismay--that Anna was to leave Hohenwald. "What!" he cried, "are you going, going to desert my father and Celia at the hour of their sorest need? No, Fräulein Müller, I cannot believe this. Tell me you will remain. My infirm old father and Celia cannot do without you, and I--but no, I will not speak of myself, of the wretchedness that the thought of not finding you here upon my return from the war would cause me. I will plead only for my father and Celia. Stay with us! do not forsake us!"

"It must not be. I cannot!" Lucie replied, in much agitation.

"Every moment is precious!" Ahlborn exclaimed, impatiently. "Farewell, Herr Baron! Lucie, take my arm."

"No, father; you must grant me a few minutes of private conversation with Baron von Hohenwald. I owe him some explanation of my conduct."

"Lucie, take care!"

"It must be, father; I cannot help it. I will follow you in a few minutes."

"You are your own mistress," Ahlborn rejoined, grumblingly. "You must do as you please, only I implore you to remember the danger that lies in delay."

He touched his hat to Arno, and then taking the Assessor's arm and accompanied by Kurt, he pursued the path until one of its windings screened Lucie and the Baron from their sight, when they paused and waited.

Lucie left alone with Arno, resolved not to leave him until she had justified herself in his eyes, and yet she was irresolute how to begin. Her cheeks glowed with shame at the idea of imparting to him the sad mystery of her life, and yet the precious minutes were flying; something must be said immediately.

"And you are really going to leave us?"

This simple question from Arno broke the silence and relieved Lucie's hesitation. "I must, Herr Baron," she replied. "I had hoped to find a home in Castle Hohenwald, but a sad fate has snatched it from me."

"Am I the cause of your flight?" Arno eagerly asked. "Do you so dread the few hours that are all I can yet pass in the castle? I leave it to-morrow. Do you hate me so bitterly?"

"I do not hate you," Lucie gently replied. And in her candid eyes, in the pressure of the little hand that still rested in his, Arno saw that she spoke the truth. "You are not the cause of my leaving Hohenwald. Your brother, who is now at the castle, will tell you the reasons for my flight."

"Werner? You have confided, then, in him?"

"No; an unfortunate chance betrayed to him my sad secret, and he has made sad use of it. Even without his interference I should have followed my father, who is restored to me after years of hopeless separation, but I should not have been forced to steal away thus, like a criminal, without one word of farewell to your father, who has treated me with such paternal kindness."

"You speak in riddles. I do not comprehend you."

"I will solve them for you," Lucie sadly replied. "You will comprehend all when I tell you that the man whom your brother has just introduced at Castle Hohenwald is the cause of my misfortunes, is my miserable husband, Herr von Sorr!"

Arno fairly staggered beneath the blow; he dropped Lucie's hand and gazed at her in horror.

"You are--you--you are----"

He could not finish the sentence; hope seemed slain within him; his future was a blank.

"Do not be angry with me," Lucie said, taking his hand again. "I implore you not to be angry with me. I am so wretchedly unhappy. I could not part from you without telling you the whole truth. I have longed to do this so often, and I have bitterly repented ever coming to Hohenwald under a feigned name."

"Lucie, we are waiting!" Ahlborn called from the distance.

"Must I leave you without one word of forgiveness from you?" Lucie continued. She still held Arno's hand in hers and gazed at him with eyes of sad entreaty. Hitherto she had suppressed all expression of her sentiments towards him. Never in the intercourse of daily life at Hohenwald had she for an instant relaxed in the stern watch and ward that she kept over every gesture, every look that might encourage any hope in his mind. But this was a supreme moment; they were parting forever, and her heart clamoured for its rights.

Arno was profoundly agitated. Heart and mind were filled with tumult. Anna the wife of a wretch from whom she was forced to flee! He suddenly comprehended why she had denied him all hope; and now, as he looked into her imploring eyes and felt the soft pressure of her hand, the thought thrilled him with sudden ecstasy that she returned his love, that her lips and not her heart had rejected his affection, that she had but fulfilled a duty. He drew her closer to him, and for an instant, with a burning blush, she yielded to his embrace.

"Lucie! Lucie!" came Ahlborn's warning voice, in more impatient tones than before.

"You love me!" Arno whispered, all else forgotten in the overwhelming bliss of the moment.

Lucie extricated herself from his embrace. "We must part!" she said, sadly. "Fate divides us forever, but in this last sad moment let me implore you never to lose confidence in me, whatever you may hear upon your return to the castle!"

"Lucie! it is time we were gone!"

"I must go. We must part," she said. Once more Arno clasped her to his heart and kissed her passionately. She did not resist, but in an instant turned and hurried to her father. As she reached the winding in the pathway she turned, waved her hand, and then vanished in the forest.

Arno gazed after her like one in a dream, conscious only that just at the moment when the blissful certainty was his that she returned his love, she was lost to him forever. She was the wife of another, and Werner, his brother, had brought to Castle Hohenwald that other, her unworthy husband, from whom she had been forced to flee under a feigned name. In an instant he comprehended that it was his part to hasten to his father and espouse Lucie's cause. As he entered the castle garden he observed two persons walking to and fro on the terrace: one was his brother, the other then was Sorr.

The garden-walk wound among shrubbery, whence Arno could watch the man for a while without being perceived, and disgust stirred within him at the thought that a man so evidently steeped in low dissipation should be Anna's husband. He felt that he hated both him and Werner, who had brought him hither. Resolved to defend his love against them both, he soon reached the terrace.

Werner awaited his brother's approach, and intercepted his direct entrance to the garden-room. A malicious smile played about his lips as he laid his hand upon Arno's shoulder. "Are you in too great a hurry, Arno, to spare me a word of greeting when we have not seen each other for several days? I will only detain you for one moment, however, to present to you in Herr von Sorr a guest whom you will doubtless be glad to welcome when I tell you that he is so fortunate as to be the husband of the beautiful Frau von Sorr whom we have learned to know by another name. For reasons of which you shall be informed hereafter, Frau von Sorr thought fit to select our house for her abode under a feigned name. We know her as Fräulein Anna Müller."

Werner had arranged his sentence so that its conclusion should be a sudden revelation to his brother. He had exulted in the prospect of Arno's amazement and horror at the intelligence that Anna Müller was Sorr's wife, but to his astonishment his brother did not betray the slightest surprise, bestowing only a slight glance at the "guest," who, hat in hand, but in evident confusion, stammered various conventional phrases suitable, as he thought, to the occasion.

Werner could not understand Arno's unlooked-for composure, and when his brother coldly rejoined, "Frau von Sorr has already informed me of your bringing this gentleman to Hohenwald," he hastily exclaimed, "You have spoken with Frau von Sorr?"

"Not long ago."

"And she told you that I was at the castle with her husband?"

"Yes."

"She must have seen us then as we drove hither."

"Very probably."

"Why, then, does she not come to my father? She is evidently avoiding us. Where did you see her? My father has been waiting impatiently for her for more than half an hour."

"Indeed? Then it will gratify him to learn tidings of her."

And with these words Arno passed on into the garden-room; but in the doorway he observed that Werner and Sorr were following him; he paused therefore, and, barring the way, said, gravely, "The tidings that I bring of Fräulein Anna Müller are for my father's ear alone."

"Herr von Sorr certainly has a right to know where his wife is and what you have to say to my father with regard to her."

"The devil he has!" the Freiherr angrily exclaimed. "I told you before, Werner, that you are to remain out upon the terrace with your Herr von Sorr until I call you. No man in the world, and this Herr von Sorr least of all, has a right to hear what my son wishes to tell me alone. Understand that, Herr Finanzrath. Now go! I wish to be alone with Arno!"

Werner suppressed the angry retort that rose to his lips, and, withdrawing once more, paced the terrace impatiently with Sorr. He knew that when his father was as angry as at present there was nothing for it but to obey.

"What have you to tell me of Fräulein Anna? I will still call her by the name I love. I can hardly believe that she is the wife of that low-looking scoundrel," the Freiherr said, when Arno had taken his accustomed seat beside his chair.

His son as briefly and as simply as possible told of his interview with her in the forest,--how she had presented her father to him and told him that she was forced to flee from her unworthy husband. He also delivered Anna's farewell to the Freiherr, and her entreaty that no one would judge her harshly, but wait until a letter from her should explain all.

The old Baron interrupted his son frequently with exclamations of surprise and with questions, and when he had concluded, declared "It is a most extraordinary story, and I can make nothing of it; but I am glad you said nothing about her to those fellows outside, for Werner is evidently hand in glove with this precious Herr von Sorr. What they want I cannot imagine; perhaps you may guess when you hear that fellow's story." The Freiherr then related as briefly as he could the tale told him by Sorr, adding, finally, "I must do the man the justice to say that he acknowledged that he alone was to blame in his quarrel with his wife; he never accused her, and I might have put some faith in his protestations if it had not been for the scoundrelly hang-dog look of him. I don't believe one word of his repentance and change of life. There is a screw loose somewhere in his story about Count Repuin. If he had fought a duel with the Russian is it likely that Werner would bring his friend's mortal foe here? I had hoped to hear the truth from Fräulein Anna, but now that she has gone, what's to be done I don't know."

"Celia may tell us something."

"True, she may; that's an idea!" the Freiherr exclaimed. "She went with Anna into the forest. Go, Arno, and bring the child here."

Arno found Celia in her own room, and with difficulty persuaded her to accompany him to her father's presence; where, until Arno finally told her of his late interview with her dear Anna, she refused to give any information with regard to Fräulein Müller's disappearance. Then, however, she told the little that she knew; no more, indeed, than what Arno had already learned, that Anna was forced against her will to leave the castle instantly to escape a great peril, and that she would shortly write and explain all.

"We are no wiser than we were before," the Freiherr declared, when Celia had finished speaking. "We know that she has fled, but we do not know why or whither; there is some comfort in the thought that she is with her father, and the question now is, what is to be done with those two fellows outside. I must give them some answer." As he spoke, the Freiherr glanced towards Werner and Sorr, and observed to his surprise that they were no longer alone. A man, hat in hand, was handing Werner a letter. "Is that not Hesse, our old Inspector?" the Freiherr inquired of Arno. "Look, Arno, how agitated Werner seems; he must have received some important intelligence; yes, here he comes again, without waiting for a summons."

Werner, followed by Sorr, now hurriedly entered. "I can wait no longer, father," he said, approaching the Freiherr. "I must beg you to decide instantly. Important information which I have just received forces me to leave here immediately with Herr von Sorr. I trust Frau von Sorr will accompany us. Surely you will not deny a husband his rights,--will not compel him to have recourse to the law."

The Freiherr did not reply.

"I entreat you, sir, to delay no longer,--every moment is precious," Werner went on. "Any long

stay here is fraught with peril for me."

"I will not delay you; go when you please."

"Shall I have come in vain? Will not Frau von Sorr accompany her husband?"

"I have no right to detain her."

"But you allow her to reside in the castle, while duty calls her to follow her husband. You sustain her in her disobedience to duty by permitting her to remain beneath your roof."

"What a shameful accusation!" Arno cried, indignantly, but his father interrupted him.

"Hush, Arno!" he said, authoritatively. "I will have no disputing between you brothers. My decision is made; I will not interfere between Herr von Sorr and his wife!"

"You will not shelter her, sir?" Werner asked.

"No!"

"Thank you. I expected no less of you."

A contemptuous smile played about the Freiherr's lips as he rejoined, "I am greatly flattered. Thus the whole matter is ended. You can find Frau von Sorr, and tell her from me that I can no longer permit her to stay in Castle Hohenwald. The rest is your affair, or rather that of Herr von Sorr, whom I must now beg to leave me. I am far from well, and will hear nothing further; therefore adieu to both of you. Find Frau von Sorr, compel her to go with her husband, or do what you please, only leave me in peace. Success to you, Herr von Sorr; adieu, Werner!"

The old man leaned back in his chair, and by an imperious wave of the hand dismissed his son.

Werner left the apartment, followed by Sorr, whose fulsome gratitude the Freiherr cut short by another impatient wave of the hand. As soon as they had left the room, Werner, still accompanied by Sorr, hurried first to the library where he hoped to find Lucie, and then up-stairs, where the maid informed them that Fräulein Müller had not been seen since four o'clock, when she had gone for a walk with Fräulein Celia; old Franz had searched both garden and park for her in vain.

Werner burst into a rage at this information of the maid's. "Arno saw her!" he exclaimed, when he was once more alone with Sorr in the castle court-yard. "He knows where she is, and must tell us where to find her." He then returned to the garden-room alone, leaving Sorr to await him in the court-yard. The reception he met with was of the coldest; his father swore he would not hear a word from him, Arno refused to answer any questions, and Celia continued her performance of one of her father's favourite sonatas without deigning even to look at him. He dared not linger longer in the castle,--there was nothing for it but to return to the court-yard, where the vehicle in which he had arrived stood ready for departure.

"We must go, Herr von Sorr," said Werner; "time flies. My father, brother, and sister are evidently in league with your wife; they know where she is, but utterly refuse to tell,--it would take hours to find her, and every moment is priceless."

"We cannot leave without my wife; I do not dare to confront Repuin without her."

"Then stay here; I am going," Werner resolutely declared. "I will not imperil my freedom by a fruitless search, and besides we may chance to meet her on our way. Will you come?" He opened the carriage-door and sprang in. Sorr hesitated a moment, and then followed him; the coachman whipped up his horses, and they galloped off at a rattling pace.

Not more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed when there appeared, on the road to the castle along which they had so lately passed, a mounted gendarme, preceding, by another quarter of an hour, an open barouche, in which sat three gentlemen, two officers and a civilian. Colonel von Schlichting, with his adjutant, Lieutenant von Styrum, and the famous, or, as some would have it, the notorious police official, the Geheimrath Steuber, from Berlin; a second civilian, his assistant, sat on the box beside the coachman.

The gendarme, when in sight of the castle, awaited the barouche, behind which came a detachment of mounted dragoons, and reported that he had seen nothing suspicious, no carriage either going towards or coming from the castle.

"The birds are probably not yet flown," the Geheimrath said, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "The castle can be approached only in this direction. I was afraid upon learning at the station that immediately after our arrival a carriage and a horseman had left it at full speed that they might have got wind of our coming, but now I rather think we shall find the entire band of conspirators, including Count Repuin, together."

The Geheimrath was evidently elated at the prospect of a good haul. There was a smile upon

his ugly face, which, to Count Styrum, made it look uglier still, and his view was shared by Count Schlichting. Both officers were fulfilling a disagreeable duty; they had received their orders from the highest authority, and were instructed if the arrest of the Freiherr von Hohenwald were really unavoidable, to proceed with the greatest caution and delicacy. Count Schlichting and Count Styrum, the latter of whom was but just re-admitted to military service, had personally been informed by their august commander how painful it was to him to issue orders for a search of Castle Hohenwald, which might result in the arrest of the Freiherr and his son Arno in addition to that of the Finanzrath and Count Repuin, which had already been ordered. Stern necessity alone had overcome considerations which would else have prevailed even with the highest authorities, and both search and arrests were confided to the charge of the famous Geheimrath, who was at the head of all investigations of the treasonable combinations still existing after war had been declared. Thus the police official was, in fact, the leader of this expedition to Hohenwald, although for form's sake he appeared as the colonel's assistant, and this galled the old soldier, for the Geheimrath's past was more than questionable; he owed his lofty position entirely to his cunning. Schlichting would gladly have replied harshly to the exultation of the man who, with his old, wrinkled face and large, prominent eyes glaring through round spectacle-glasses, looked like nothing so much as a malicious and evil-minded kobold, but considerations of duty kept him silent. Styrum, however, felt bound by no such considerations, and when the Geheimrath went so far as to stigmatize all the inmates of the castle as conspirators he indignantly repeated the obnoxious word, and added, in a deeply offended tone, "You would do well, Herr Geheimrath, to be better informed before you apply such an epithet to the old Freiherr von Hohenwald or to my comrade and friend, the Freiherr Arno. As to the latter, I can vouch for his patriotism and devotion to his country; he is incapable of treason, and there is nothing but unfounded rumour, so far as I can learn, that can cause you to regard the old Freiherr as a conspirator."

The colonel nodded approvingly to the younger officer, while the Geheimrath looked at him with a smile half of pity and half of contempt as he replied, "It is the privilege of youth to trust and to hope; you must not wonder, however, that with my experience I am readier to believe in guilt than in innocence. This, however, shall not prevent me from searching with equal vigilance for proof of the innocence as well as of the guilt of those under suspicion. If your friend is, as you believe, innocent, his fate is in good hands; I am terrible only for the guilty."

"And you believe that Baron Arno may be guilty?"

"I believe nothing, Herr Count. I only know that there are incontestable proofs that the Finanzrath von Hohenwald has treasonable relations with Count Repuin and other French agents; that he has employed leave of absence granted him from official duty to make various expeditions from Castle Hohenwald to the large South German cities, always returning thither again, and that in his letters he has expressed the hope of winning over his father and brother to what he calls the 'good cause.' I know further that he has lately developed a feverish activity, and that this very morning he arrived at Station A---- in company with Count Repuin, the most dangerous of all the French agents, doubtless intending to visit Castle Hohenwald in order to mature with their associates those arrangements that cannot be confided to paper. Therefore you must not be offended, Herr Count, if an old police official makes use of the word 'conspirator' in designating these associates. If your friend Baron Arno is no conspirator so much the better, but at present his case has an ugly look, and I must warn you both, gentlemen, not to allow your belief in his innocence to betray you into any action detrimental to the success of our expedition hither."

"We know our duty, and need no reminder that it is to be fulfilled," the colonel haughtily replied.

"I am convinced of it, and beg to assure you that no 'reminder' was intended," Steuber rejoined, after which, leaning back in the carriage, he made no further attempts at conversation.

Arrived in the castle court-yard, the Geheimrath sprang out of the barouche with youthful agility, and after a few whispered words to his assistant, requested the colonel, who followed him somewhat less briskly, to place guards at every point of egress from the castle into the garden, and then to present him to the Freiherr von Hohenwald. "The sooner the search is begun," he added, "the more secure we are of results."

With the best grace he could muster the colonel ordered Styrum to place guards as required.

Meanwhile, old Franz, hearing the clatter of the horses upon the stones of the court-yard, made his appearance, staring in dismay at the strangers who dared, against his master's commands, thus to invade Castle Hohenwald.

"We wish to speak with the Herr Freiherr von Hohenwald. Conduct us to your master!"

Franz gazed open-mouthed at the man who uttered these words in an imperious tone. What, show a stranger into his master's room unannounced, and no permission asked! It was inconceivable.

"The Herr Baron cannot see any one."

"He will see us!"

"No; the Herr Baron has expressly ordered that no strangers are to be announced."

"You are not to announce us, but to conduct us to him!" And as he spoke, the man with the spectacles had so threatening an air that old Franz felt constrained to obey. "This way, then!" he said, sullenly, leading the way to the garden-room, followed by the colonel and the Geheimrath.

Fatigued and agitated, after Werner's departure the old Freiherr lay wearily back in his rolling-chair, his thoughts busy with Anna, who had so often sung him the very song that Celia was now beginning to play on the piano. Arno sat beside him silent and sad, listening to his sister's charming rendering of the well-known melody.

"It is past; and all is so different from what I had hoped," the Freiherr said, after a long pause, taking his son's hand and pressing it. "She has left us, and all my hopes are crushed."

"What were your hopes, father?"

"It is useless to speak of them." Another pause ensued; the old Baron sadly gazing at his son, who was again lost in thought. Then he spoke once more, "Tell me frankly, Arno, am I wrong in thinking that our Anna had grown very dear to you?"

At this unexpected question Arno hastily started from his seat, and paced the apartment to and fro, then paused and confronted his father. "Why ask such a question?" he said, reproachfully. "What is to you, father, or to any one, whether I loved or hated her? Our Anna, do you call her? Have you forgotten that she is the wife of that wretch whom Werner has chosen for his friend? She is Frau von Sorr! Do you know, father, that at times I think the thought will drive me mad!"

"I thought so!" the old Baron rejoined, taking his son's hand as he stood before him. "It has been so great a pleasure to me to watch you during these last few weeks. My Arno will be happy after all, I thought. I dreamed of her as the lovely mistress of Hohenwald, and now--now it is all over."

Arno did not reply. Again he paced the room restlessly to and fro, never heeding the unusual bustle that had arisen in the court-yard.

The Freiherr too was only aroused from his brooding reverie by the sound of footsteps in the hall and the sudden flinging wide of the doors to admit Count Schlichting, followed by the Geheimrath Steuber, while almost at the same moment steps resounded upon the terrace, and two dragoons with drawn sabres stationed themselves at the glass door leading to the garden. At this sight the old Baron's sadness was converted into violent anger. "Thunder and lightning, Franz! How dare you introduce visitors unannounced!" he exclaimed, furiously, to the old servant, who stood in the doorway quite uncertain which to fear more, his master or the terrible man in spectacles.

"Don't scold your servant, old friend," said Count Schlichting, approaching the Freiherr's rolling-chair and taking his reluctant hand. "He conducted myself and this gentleman hither only upon compulsion. And we do not intrude voluntarily upon your seclusion, but in obedience to an august command, which, I am sure, will be respected by the Freiherr von Hohenwald."

The Freiherr gazed at the colonel with flashing eyes. He had not seen him for more than fifteen years, and had not at first recognized him. Now he remembered his old friend well, but his anger was not diminished thereby, and he had to put the greatest restraint upon himself to suppress another outbreak. He looked from the colonel to the Geheimrath, and then out upon the terrace at the two dragoons stationed there, and the case suddenly became clear to him. He was not surprised that suspicion should attach to him in consequence of Werner's intrigues. True, he had never contemplated being arrested, but his anger died away when he reflected that the colonel was merely fulfilling his duty as a soldier, and he had no fear of consequences, for he was conscious of his innocence.

Quickly regaining his composure, he returned the pressure of the colonel's hand and said, "Those two blue fellows out there explain the 'august command' which brings my old friend here. It is not your fault that you must fulfil your duty, which, however, may perhaps allow you to inform me why the Freiherr von Hohenwald is arrested in his own castle."

"Not quite that yet, old friend,--no fear of that," the colonel replied, kindly. "My orders certainly are to arrest the Finanzrath, your eldest son, and Count Repuin, your guest, and to assist this gentleman, the Geheimrath Steuber, from Berlin, in the execution of his orders, which are to search the castle for treasonable matter. Until this is over I must indeed beg you not to leave this room."

"A request with which I shall have no difficulty in complying, since I am, as you see, confined to my rolling-chair," the Freiherr replied, with a smile.

"I see it with regret; but this gentleman also,--Baron Arno von Hohenwald, if I do not mistake,"--Arno bowed in silence,--"and the young lady,"--the colonel greeted Celia with chivalrous courtesy,--"I must entreat to remain here until my disagreeable duty is finished. The first and hardest part of it, unfortunately, concerns your eldest son and Count Repuin, for whom I am forced to make search."

"It will be fruitless," the Freiherr quietly replied. "My son Werner was in the castle, but he left it more than half an hour ago. Count Repuin I do not know. He has never been my guest."

"That is not true!" the Geheimrath exclaimed. "The Count certainly accompanied the Finanzrath to Hohenwald,--both must be concealed in the castle!"

"Sir! how dare you accuse me of falsehood!" the Freiherr burst out; but the colonel laid his hand upon the old man's shoulder and said, kindly, "Be calm, old friend. The Herr Geheimrath has in his zeal for duty made use of a wrong expression. He cannot mean to accuse of falsehood a nobleman whom he has been ordered to treat with the greatest consideration. He will apologize for his error."

This the Geheimrath immediately did, conscious that he was in the wrong, and never reluctant to make use of smooth words. Nevertheless he maintained that both the Finanzrath and Repuin were probably still in the castle, although without the Freiherr's knowledge. He chose his apologetic phrases so well that the old Baron was entirely appeased, and even condescended so far as to explain that a certain Herr von Sorr, and not Count Repuin, had been his son's companion, and that they had left the castle together about half an hour previously.

"For this you have my friend's word," the colonel remarked.

"The word of honour of the Herr Freiherr von Hohenwald will suffice me," the police official rejoined.

"My simple assertion must suffice you, sir," the old man burst forth again.

The Geheimrath looked keenly at him for a moment, and then said, with a courteous bow, "It is the word of a man of honour, and therefore a word of honour; it suffices entirely. May I now beg the Herr Baron to allow me to proceed in my search of the castle?"

"I have nothing to say; do your duty!"

"For the present, then, Herr Baron, I take my leave, only requesting that the colonel will accord me the assistance of his adjutant in my search, if he would himself prefer remaining here with his old friend, I hope shortly to be able to report to you the result of what I feel convinced will be a fruitless investigation."

This proposal was most welcome to the colonel, who rejoiced to pass the time with his friend instead of assisting in searching the castle, a duty that would have been extremely repugnant to the old soldier. He therefore acceded to all the Geheimrath said, and Steuber left the room.

Outside, his first care was to despatch his assistant upon a fleet horse, taken from one of the dragoons, to intercept the flight of the Finanzrath and Repuin, giving the man the most minute directions as to how this was to be done, and how he should procure the assistance necessary to his success in so doing.

Then he turned to old Franz, over whom two dragoons had mounted guard, and demanded his guidance over the castle. Poor Franz was so completely subdued by the martial array about him, and above all so terrified by the glance of the eyes behind the spectacles, that he obeyed with submissive promptitude. Encountering in the hall Count Styrum, who had just concluded the posting of his dragoons, Steuber detained him as he was about to pass on to the garden-room, and said, "May I pray you to follow me, Herr Count? The colonel has permitted me to demand your assistance in the search I am about to begin."

Styrum would gladly have refused to fulfil so disagreeable a duty; his pride rebelled against assisting in a search in his friend's house, but the Geheimrath, who suspected what was in his mind, soothed his wounded sense of honour by adding, "I do not ask you, Count, to take any part in this search, which indeed I now believe will be entirely fruitless. The aid I need, and which your superior officer permits me to require at your hands, consists simply in your presence as a witness during my search. Thus you are a substitute, as it were, for your friend Baron Arno von Hohenwald, to whom you may be able to render essential service. May I look for your kind compliance with my wish?"

"I am ready," Styrum replied, and, with old Franz for a guide, they betook themselves to Werner's apartment.

CHAPTER XX.

The Finanzrath, when he stayed at the castle, occupied a spacious room in a retired wing, where, between the windows, stood his writing-table with its many drawers and compartments. This immediately attracted the Geheimrath's attention. Upon it lay an unopened letter, which Steuber at once took possession of and coolly opened. Looking up as he did so, he smiled at the expression of an outraged sense of honour on Styrum's face, and then read the letter aloud. "Make no further attempt to win over your father and brother,--it might be dangerous. Unfortunately, some of our friends have been very imprudent. I have received trustworthy information that many of us are under strict surveillance. The greatest caution is necessary; a new associate could avail us little,--one traitor might ruin us. Your brother's friend, Count Styrum, has already applied for re-admission to the army; if your brother should do likewise, he will rank among our foes, not our friends. Therefore I must entreat you to acquaint neither your father nor your brother with any of our plans. More when we meet; until then be upon your guard!" "And this precious epistle is signed 'A,'" the Geheimrath added. "It tells me nothing new of the Finanzrath or his friends, but it hints strongly that neither the old Freiherr nor his younger son knows anything of the Herr Finanzrath's schemes. Do you still think I did wrong to open the letter, Count?"

Without waiting for a reply the Geheimrath went on to search in the most careful manner every drawer and pigeonhole of Werner's desk, but his trouble was vain. The drawers were all unlocked, but not one piece of written paper was to be found anywhere. "Hm! the Herr Finanzrath has been expecting me," Steuber muttered, impatiently. "There is nothing here, and I have searched everything except the waste-paper basket." Thereupon he proceeded to examine all the papers it contained, worthless scraps, one and all, until nothing remained except some small fragments at the very bottom of the basket. Then, while the Count looked on in impatient wonder, he carefully assorted these, perceiving that they consisted of two kinds of paper, one bluish and stiff, the other creamy and delicate, murmuring, as he did so, "There can hardly be more than two notes here, or the number of scraps would be greater."

Styrum's interest began to be aroused. Since the Geheimrath now seemed inclined to believe in the innocence of Arno and his father he was no longer so distasteful to the Count, who testified his awakening interest by drawing a chair up to the table and closely watching the arrangement of the fragments of paper. His attention flattered the Geheimrath, who showed himself in the most amiable humour. "We will first undertake the strong, bluish paper," he said; "there are fewer of the scraps, and our work will be comparatively easy. I fear, however, that we are very indiscreet; the writing here is a lady's, and I suspect we have to do with a love-affair." In a short time the sheet lay completely fitted together before the official, who rubbed his hands with his peculiar chuckle and said, "It is no love-letter; I was mistaken; but it is from a lady, and not even addressed to the Herr Finanzrath, but to Fräulein Adèle von Guntram, in M----."

"A letter to Adèle!" Styrum exclaimed. "Do you know Fräulein von Guntram, Count?" "Certainly; the letter is addressed to my betrothed." "Then the contents, which are quite incomprehensible to me, will interest you all the more; perhaps you may divine from them how the note came to be torn up in the Finanzrath's waste-paper basket." And he read:

"What will you think of me, dear Adèle, if a few hours after writing my last letter I tell you not to heed the request it contained? I hope soon to be able to let you know why I do this, but I cannot tell you to-day. I cannot leave Castle Hohenwald, and so you are relieved of the burden of looking for another situation for me. Farewell, dear; you will soon hear farther from your

"LUCIE"

Styrum listened with the greatest attention, but, although his betrothed had told him of the letter from Lucie in which she had entreated that another position might be found for her, he could give the Geheimrath no information as to why this letter, which had evidently been written since, should be found in the Finanzrath's waste-paper basket.

Steuber tossed it aside and began upon the creamy-coloured scraps, over which he worked diligently for nearly an hour. When the letter lay complete before him he uttered an involuntary exclamation of delight. "This," he said, "is a very important document; it puts me upon a fresh scent. It is addressed to Count Repuin, care of Colonel von Berngberg, in Cassel. Colonel von Berngberg has never before been suspected of hostility to the government; this is a reward for all the trouble we have had." Again the malicious twinkle of his eyes, the joy he evidently felt at the implication in treasonable schemes of a man hitherto thought loyal, disgusted Count Styrum, who, on the spur of the moment, said haughtily "I must pray you, Herr Geheimrath, to spare me the contents of this letter; any prying into official secrets is of course extremely distasteful to me as a soldier and officer."

Steuber looked up from his work for a moment and nodded kindly. "I understand you, Count, but, unfortunately, I cannot relieve you from the duty of listening. I am working under orders, and in the service for the time of your superior officer, whom you now represent. Besides, I will wager that you will not regret listening to the letter that now lies before me. It was written by the Finanzrath, and afterwards, for some unknown reason, destroyed by him; and it runs thus:

"I write in the greatest haste, my dear Count, to tell you that I have received intimations, whether from a trustworthy source or not I cannot say, that our correspondence is known and watched. It is better to be careful: therefore do not intrust your letters to the post again. Send them in the way you know of; it is more secure, although less speedy, than the post. I will make one more attempt to win over my father and my brother, but I tell you frankly that I fear it will be fruitless. My father is no politician, and Arno is an idealist whose heart is set upon a united Germany. If he should re-enter the service he will probably fight against our friends. Indeed, he is so enthusiastic a 'patriot' that it is questionable whether it would be wise to attempt to influence him. Always yours,

"'W. Von H.'"

As he finished it the Geheimrath looked up to his companion with a smile of triumph. "Are you satisfied now with my work, Count?" he asked. "We may inform Count Schlichting that there can be no possible pretext for arresting the Freiherr or his son Arno; not a shadow of suspicion rests upon them. What do you think? For my part I consider our search ended; there is nothing more to be found here. Let us go and report to the colonel. My task at Castle Hohenwald is over."

Count Schlichting felt a sense of relief when the Geheimrath left the garden-room and he found himself alone with his old friend and his children.

"This is but a sorry errand of mine here, Hohenwald," he said, seating himself beside the Freiherr's rolling-chair; "but you must not take it ill of me, since I accepted the part assigned me in hopes that you would rather see a friend than a stranger, odious although his duties might make him in your eyes. I am rejoiced that Werner got wind of our coming and has vanished; now my hope is that that cursed Geheimrath may poke his infernal nose wherever he chooses in the castle without raking up any evidence against you and Arno."

"Have you any doubts on that head?" the Freiherr asked, bitterly.

There was a degree of embarrassment in the colonel's air as he replied, "No, not that; but politics nowadays are puzzling. I have the greatest confidence in you; but who can judge for others? Here's the Finanzrath doubtless an excellent fellow in other respects, has dabbled in plots and schemes which are now thought treasonable, but which may, at another turn of the wheel, lead him to a ribbon and star. To-day a warrant of arrest is out against him, but who knows whether in another month he may not be held in high honour in Saxony and Southern Germany? I should be very sorry if you, old friend, and your son, who fought the Prussians bravely four years ago, had been led into any indiscretions; but indeed I could not blame you, for, God knows, it is hard enough for us Saxons to fight shoulder to shoulder with our former foes, against those to whom we owe it that we are not to-day in the position of the poor Hanoverians and Hessians. I am an old soldier, and go wherever my king sends me; but I cannot say that this time I unsheathe my sword with any enthusiasm."

"I never rejoiced more to draw mine!" said Arno, whom the colonel's expressions had evidently pained. "In 1866 I fought with bitterness, a German against Germans, and I left the service with a savage hatred for Prussia smouldering within me; to-day it is forgotten in love of country, of the German fatherland, of which Prussia is now the representative, standing foremost in the conflict with the arch-enemy of German freedom, and as the defender of our German Rhine against French greed of territory. If my brother can have forgotten the duty he owes to his country, it is all the more incumbent upon me to do what I can to wash away all stain of treason from the Hohenwald name."

"That you will surely do, my dearest brother!" Celia cried, with glowing cheeks. "Your fidelity will atone for Werner's treachery, and our father will bless you for vindicating the honour of his name."

The colonel looked at them with a smile as he stroked his gray moustache, and said, "Aha, I see clearly that Steuber's long nose will soon forsake Castle Hohenwald! You have cause to be proud of your pretty daughter and your son, old friend; still, we will not judge Werner; let every man be true to his own convictions. I hear with pleasure, Herr von Hohenwald, that you wish to re-enter the army. I am at your service in this matter; nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to have so brave an officer in my regiment, and I will, if you authorize me to do so, apprise the king of this when I take him the news to-morrow of our fruitless errand to Castle Hohenwald."

This offer Arno gladly accepted, and it was thereupon agreed that he should accompany the colonel to Dresden that he might immediately join his regiment. All of the little party in the garden-room, in the interesting conversation that ensued, quite forgot the object of the colonel's visit, and were only reminded of it after a long hour by the entrance of Count Styrum with the Geheimrath.

While Arno was greeting his friend with cordial delight, Steuber set the colonel's mind entirely at rest by his report, and by the request that the dragoons might be sent back to A---- and himself relieved of all further duty, since no possible suspicion could attach to any of the present inmates of the castle.

A quarter of an hour later the obnoxious official took his departure, while the colonel and Styrum, upon the Freiherr's earnest invitation, remained in the castle a few hours longer, that Arno might conclude his preparations for leaving, and accompany them to A----, there to take the night train to Dresden.

The time for parting came. The colonel and Styrum took leave of the old Baron and went down into the court-yard, where the carriage was in waiting. Arno was left alone for a moment with his father and sister. The old man was deeply moved. It evidently caused him an effort to release his son's hand from the firm clasp in which he held it, while a tear rolled down his wrinkled cheek upon his silver beard. "Farewell, Arno! farewell, my dear son, pride and delight of my age," he said, drawing his son gently down to him and, for the first time since that son had grown to manhood, pressing his lips to his brow. "Farewell, Arno!" he repeated. "Make me one promise before you go. If, when you return, I am no longer here, be a father to my Celia. I place her happiness in your hands. You must not sacrifice it to an hereditary prejudice, but make good a promise I gave our Anna, and if you ever meet Kurt von Poseneck in the war forget the family feud, and treat him kindly. For Celia's sake look upon him as a brother, for I have promised our Anna that when he comes back he shall be Celia's husband."

Celia threw her arms around her father's neck and burst into tears, but the old man gently put her away from him, and, paying no heed to Arno's look of startled inquiry, lay back in his chair. "Go, children!" he said, in a feeble voice. "You must leave me. This parting is almost more than I can bear. Celia, go with Arno to the carriage. Farewell, my dearest son! Your father's blessing be upon you in the coming struggle for the fatherland!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Months had passed since the beginning of the war; the German hosts had overrun France, and were girdling Paris with an iron ring, making its surrender but a question of time, while upon the ruins of the empire that had crumbled to decay at Sedan the young republic had been born to pursue with the energy of despair the strife that had been bequeathed to it by imperial policy.

The pretty village of Assais was among the foremost to declare itself devoted to the republic, following the lead of the Marquise de Lancy, the widowed châtelaine of the castle of Assais, who, although a Russian by birth, was an enthusiastic supporter of the new government. Towards the end of September, however, the Marquise had departed for England, leaving the castle in the charge of a cousin, the Baron de Nouart, who had arrived at Assais only a short time previously in company with the brother of the Marquise, a Russian count. The Baron was reported to have been so busy in Germany in the French interest that an asylum in the castle of Assais was exceedingly welcome to him. His reputation in this respect stood him in good stead with the villagers, who otherwise were by no means favourably impressed by the appearance and manner of the substitute of their fair châtelaine, which were those of a man of dissipated life given over to the vice of drinking.

Assais had hitherto escaped any visit from the Prussian soldiery, but its time of immunity had passed. One morning in October an officer of Uhlans, with a small detachment of Prussians, spread terror in the village by galloping through its principal street towards the castle, where he demanded to speak with the Baron de Nouart. The Baron, who had been apprised of the approach of the Prussians, had prepared to receive them after rather a singular fashion. Retiring to his apartment, he had donned a fiery-red wig, with a false beard and moustache of the same colour, while a pair of dark-blue glass spectacles made the colour of his eyes entirely undistinguishable. Thus disguised he appeared before the young officer of Uhlans in the court-yard of the castle. The officer scanned the strange figure before him rather curiously as he asked whether he had the honour of addressing the Baron de Nouart, and whether he could speak German. Upon being assured of the Baron's identity, as well as of his inability to speak German, although he understood it perfectly, the young man continued the conversation in French,

informing the Baron that a regiment of infantry and a squadron of Uhlans were about to occupy Assais; that quarters must be provided in the castle for the colonel, officers, and part of the men,--the rest could be accommodated in the village. The more willing the inhabitants showed themselves to receive the Prussian soldiers the less cause should they have for complaint. Having delivered himself thus, and having been assured by the Baron that the castle should be at the disposal of the colonel when he arrived, the Uhlan departed with his men to inspect the village accommodations.

The Baron was as good as his word. Towards evening, when Colonel von Schlichting, with his officers, arrived, the preparations for their reception were far more complete than was required by the rules of war. The Baron kept himself in the background, and was visible only to the Uhlan commander and the colonel, who was by no means favourably impressed with the man who, hat in hand, received him in the castle court-yard and in execrable German declared that he would gladly do all in his power for the comfort of the German officers, but must request to be allowed to retire, as he was a very sick man, most of the time keeping his bed by the physician's orders. His servile demeanour disgusted Count Von Schlichting; but he was obliged to admit that he did not promise too much, so admirable was every arrangement for his comfort.

At dinner, several of the officers expressed their surprise at finding such luxurious quarters and such excellent wines in so secluded a spot, and loudest in his praise was the Uhlan captain of horse, who had been ordered with his squadron to the support of the Saxon regiment in the work of ridding the surrounding country of the bands of franctireurs by which it was infested. "There are no such quarters in all France!" the captain cried, with enthusiasm; "such rooms, such a kitchen, and such a cellar! Indeed, gentlemen, the Baron de Nouart deserves a toast for his hospitality. He is not handsome, that there is no denying; but here's to his health!"

The Saxon officers joined, laughing, in the Prussian captain's toast, and even the colonel did not refuse it, although he drank it with no genuine cordiality. He turned to Count Styrum, beside whom he was sitting at the large round table in the dining-hall. "Are you as much pleased with our host, Count, as are our Prussian comrades?" he asked, in a tone too low to be heard by the others; "although I must confess that our reception here has exceeded my expectations, I am most unpleasantly impressed by our host; he reminds me of some one whom I have seen, I cannot remember whom."

"That's odd," Count Styrum replied; "my own experience is the same. I only saw the man for a moment, and at a distance, and yet it seems to me that I have seen him somewhere formerly, though where I cannot for the life of me remember."

"Are you sure?" the colonel asked.

"No, colonel; such fancies are very little to be relied upon. It struck me, however, that the Baron beat a hasty retreat as soon as he espied me, although I may have been mistaken there, too."

"It is a singular coincidence, however, and I begin to think that Monsieur may have some reason for requesting that we will in future communicate with him through his factotum Gervais."

The conversation was interrupted by Captain von Hohenwald, who came to report that the men had been peacefully distributed among the inhabitants both of Assais and of the neighbouring villages. Arno had scarcely taken the place at table indicated to him by the colonel, with whom he was a favourite officer, when the young Uhlan lieutenant, who had brought the news of the approach of the regiment to Assais in the morning, entered the dining-hall, and was presented by his superior officer, Von Säben, to Count Schlichting as Lieutenant von Poseneck.

Arno's attention was at once arrested upon hearing the familiar name. He had never yet encountered Kurt von Poseneck,--Von Säben's squadron had joined Count Schlichting's regiment only two days previously, Kurt reported that he had made a reconnoissance in all directions and had found no traces of the enemy. This information convinced the colonel that, for the present at least, there was no risk in enjoying to the full the repose and hospitality offered at Assais.

And this the young officers certainly did. The best possible understanding seemed to exist between the Prussians and Saxons, and the hall resounded with mirth and laughter from the various groups into which the large assembly soon divided.

One of these consisted but of three, Count Styrum, Arno von Hohenwald, and Kurt von Poseneck. They had withdrawn to a corner of the hall and were engaged in earnest conversation. How much there was to hear and to tell! Arno felt every trace of the foolish hereditary prejudice fade within him as he looked at the handsome young fellow, who showed in every word and glance his pleasure in thus meeting his Celia's brother. Only from Celia's letters had Arno heard of Kurt, who had written of his advancement to the old Freiherr. Now Kurt was not only begged for the story of his experience since the beginning of the war, but Arno drew from him the account of his first meeting with Celia, and of how Frau von Sorr--Arno felt the blood mount to his cheek at the name--had learned by accident of the intimacy between them.

To that noble woman, Frau von Sorr, Kurt declared, glad indeed to make a confidant of Celia's brother, did he owe it that his love for Celia was no longer a secret. He had faithfully kept his

promise never to write to Celia, but he had written to Frau von Sorr two letters to be forwarded to the Freiherr. One of these he feared had miscarried, as Frau von Sorr had not alluded to it in her last letter to him.

Arno's heart beat furiously as he asked, with all the indifference he could assume, "You correspond, then, with Frau von Sorr?"

"Yes. Frau von Sorr permitted me to write to her, and promised to forward my letters to your father when there were any tidings of me to be transmitted to Castle Hohenwald."

"Then you know where Frau von Sorr is at present, and how she has been since leaving the castle?"

Kurt, all unmindful of the suppressed eagerness with which this question was put, replied by giving a detailed account of Frau von Sorr's departure from Grünhagen for Berlin, whence she had retired with her father to his beautiful estate, Kaltenborn, on the Rhine, not far from S----, where she had found a secure retreat from her husband's persecutions. On this score Herr Ahlborn was now quite easy, since Sorr and the Finanzrath had both been obliged to flee the country as proscribed traitors, and any return to Germany for them was impossible until the war should be ended. In her last letter Frau von Sorr had described her life with her father as all that she could desire, telling Kurt that she, with various other women of S----, had established a lazaretto for wounded soldiers, and that she had also prepared accommodations at Kaltenborn for some few, for whom pure country air might be specially desirable. She expressed a hope that Kurt never might be wounded, but prayed him if he were and could contrive it to be sure and be brought to her at Kaltenborn.

"And this," Kurt concluded, "I shall certainly do, if an unlucky bullet should chance to lay me up for a time. I honour that woman from my very soul; she is an angel!"

It was with difficulty that Arno restrained himself from chiming in with Kurt's enthusiastic admiration; his respect for his sister rose on the instant. What penetration and judgment she had shown in bestowing her heart upon this excellent young fellow! As a reward he allowed Kurt to read Celia's last letter,--a letter that transported the lover in thought to the Hohenwald forest, so vividly did it bring his love before him in all that makes girlhood bewitching.

Thus the hours flew by unheeded until the three friends found themselves alone in the spacious hall, when, as they were not weary, Kurt proposed a short walk before retiring to rest, and they all sauntered out into the autumn moonlight that was flooding the garden and park. They walked on aimlessly until, emerging from a thicket of shrubbery, they saw before them one of the wings of the castle. All the windows here were darkened except two upon the ground-floor directly opposite them. The friends paused and gazed involuntarily into the apartment thus revealed to them. It was a large room, luxuriously furnished. In a cushioned arm-chair, beside a round table in the centre of the apartment, sat the Baron de Nouart, and on the table, at his elbow, stood a glass and a half-empty bottle.

Just as the officers emerged from the bushes some slight noise probably attracted the Baron's attention. He raised his head, seemed to be listening for an instant, and then arose hastily and drew close the heavy curtains that had been open to admit the air.

"Let us turn round," Kurt said, in a low tone; "the Baron may else suppose that we wish to spy upon him."

"Which would be a poor reward for the hospitality he has shown us," said Arno.

Styrum said nothing, but followed his companions, and not until they had reached the open lawn before the balcony of the dining-hall did he remark, "The Baron seemed in a great hurry to screen himself from observation."

"Naturally," Arno rejoined; "he had good reasons for so doing. Unless I am much mistaken, that was no wine-bottle at his elbow; it held good cognac. A fellow at such night-work hardly likes to be seen."

"They told me in Nontron that he was an incorrigible drunkard; never sober after noon," Kurt added.

Styrum shook his head; natural as was this explanation of the Baron's conduct, it did not satisfy him. "He may be a drunkard," he said, "but I am convinced that he had other reasons for drawing those curtains so quickly,--the same probably that made him turn away this afternoon when he saw me. I have surely seen that man somewhere; he knows me and fears my recognition. What else did you hear about him in Nontron, Kurt?"

"Not much, but quite enough to justify any suspicion of his honesty. He is said to be a distant relative of the widowed Marquise de Lancy, the owner of the castle, where he made his appearance only a few weeks ago; and although he is a zealous patriot, he is not, they say, a Frenchman, but a Russian. They say, too, that he can speak German extremely well, and yet this morning, when I addressed him in German, he could scarcely reply in the same tongue, although he said that he understood it perfectly. He is a suspicious character."

"I do not see any reason thus far for your distrust of him," Arno observed.

"Nevertheless, the colonel shall learn what Kurt has told us," said Styrum. "It is best to be upon our guard."

The friends then separated and betook themselves to repose.

CHAPTER XXII.

It had been a weary day for the Baron François de Nouart; he had not even been able to have recourse to his usual stimulant, so impressed was he with the necessity of keeping every faculty upon the alert in the trying position in which he found himself. That this Saxon regiment of all others should have been ordered to Assais was a stroke of terrible ill luck! Not until Gervais reported to him that all was quiet in the castle for the night did he venture to seat himself comfortably at the table in his room with the brandy-flask at his elbow. And even then five minutes had scarcely elapsed when a slight noise causing him to turn his head, he plainly saw through the open window the three officers on the moonlit lawn, and that one of them was the man whom he so dreaded, Count Styrum. He started up and closed the hangings instantly, hearing distinctly as he did so Kurt's words, "Let us turn round; the Baron may else suppose that we wish to spy upon him." Then through a chink in the curtains he watched the three men disappear among the bushes, his heart beating violently the while from fear of detection. After watching some minutes longer he crept softly to Gervais's room, and having received the steward's assurance that the young Uhlan officer with his two friends had returned from the garden, and that all three were now locked in their rooms, he made a stealthy round of the castle. All was quiet, and he once more returned to his room to seek the forgetfulness that he so craved.

But the poor man had scarcely drained a few glasses of his favourite beverage when he was once more disturbed, this time by a low tap upon the window, which he had closed. Could it be a belated officer? Hardly; he would not announce his presence thus. It must be some friend, who for certain reasons did not dare to seek an entrance to the castle more boldly.

Again the knocking came, quicker and more impatient; with uncertain steps the Baron went to the window, and, as he looked through the curtains, uttered an involuntary exclamation of horror, "Count Repuin!" and in an instant the curtains were drawn aside and the window opened. "Are you mad, Count? Do you not know that the castle swarms with Germans?" he whispered, in dismay.

"Then give me your hand and help me to get in at this cursed window," whispered Repuin, who stood without in the disguise of a peasant. "Quick! Am I to stay here until the guard discovers me?"

"I implore you to fly, Count. You will ruin both yourself and me; we shall be shot if you are found in the castle."

"I will not be found. Do as I tell you, and give me your hand!"

The Baron had no choice but to obey. He extended his hand to the Count, who seized it, and with but little difficulty clambered in at the window, which was but a few feet from the ground.

Scarcely had he closed it and drawn the curtains behind him when he turned with a look of scorn to the Baron, "What a coward you are, Sorr!" he said; "your hand trembles like a woman's. Shame on you! Why, I do believe the fellow is drunk again. There stands the empty brandy-bottle. I wonder whether there is enough sense left in your drugged brain to make it worth while to talk reason to you."

Repuin's insulting words made no impression on Sorr; he was too well used to such from the Russian. But the fright that the Count's visit caused him, and the sense of the danger with which it threatened him, helped to sober him. He drank several glasses of cold water, and then bathed his head and face, after which he was sufficiently himself to turn to the Count and say, "What evil star brought you to Assais? Are you resolved upon my ruin?"

"Bah! what is your ruin to me!" the Count rejoined, contemptuously. "You run no greater danger than I do. Are you sufficiently collected now to understand me?"

"Yes; what do you want?"

"I wish to convince myself by personal information how matters stand here in Assais; there is

no confidence to be placed in the reports circulating everywhere; these French make mountains out of mole-hills. You must give me exact intelligence with regard to the enemy."

"How am I to do that? Do you suppose that Count Schlichting makes me his confidant?"

"Ah, Colonel Schlichting is here, then?"

"Yes; with his whole regiment, and a squadron of Prussian Uhlans."

"Hm! They are too many for us as yet, then,--we must wait a few days. Is Count Styrum here? I suppose so from your disguise; you look like a scarecrow."

"Yes, he is here, and also Arno von Hohenwald."

"Baron Arno, my rival with your lovely wife. Let him look to himself!"

"What can you do? The Germans are too strong for you."

"Just at present they are, but in a few days we shall outnumber them; victory has made them over-bold; they are venturing too far northwest, and they imagine that they have to do only with some scattering bands of franctireurs. I have learned enough for to-day, but you must contrive to keep me informed of all that is going on here. For a messenger you must employ the village maire, Fournier; his boy Louis was shot a few days ago by some of these very Germans, and the man is thirsting for revenge; he will do all and venture all to bring destruction upon these men."

"But they have placed their sentinels so that it will be impossible to elude them, and, besides, how could anything of importance reach my ears?"

"Leave the eluding of the sentinels to Fournier, and for important information we must depend upon Gervais; let him listen well. These officers can have no idea that he understands German perfectly?"

"Not the least; the colonel always speaks to him in execrable French."

"Then let him be constantly on the watch for news, and let me hear it instantly through the maire. May I rely upon you?"

"You are playing a dangerous game, Count! We shall be discovered; and if we are, we are lost, for Count Schlichting knows no mercy."

"Then none shall be shown him."

"He will need none. I implore you, Count, to moderate your zeal; you will only plunge into ruin if you attempt to attack an enemy that so outnumbers you. We, the maire and I, shall both be shot if we are suspected of holding any communication with you."

The Count gazed sternly at Sorr. For a moment he seemed to bethink himself; then he said, laying a sharp stress upon each word, "I am almost tempted to believe you capable of playing the traitor, Herr von Sorr. I would not advise you to contemplate such a course; one step in that direction and Count Schlichting shall learn by a letter from me whom your clumsy disguise conceals. Remember you are closely watched. If you are true to me you shall have your reward; but if you are a traitor, by Heaven! you shall meet a traitor's death. If you should escape a German bullet, a French one shall find its way to your heart. Now you know where you stand. One more piece of advice: for God's sake avoid that cursed brandy-flask for the next week at least. Come, be a man, Sorr; promise me that you will not drink a drop for the next eight days."

Sorr promised, and Repuin took his departure, leaving, as he had come, by the window. Sorr closed it softly behind him and stood at it for a long while, dreading to hear a shot in the shrubbery, but all remained quiet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The next few days were gloomy with misty, rainy weather, and Count Schlichting grumbled incessantly at the enforced idleness of his command. Arno and Kurt employed the time in improving their knowledge of each other, and passed many a pleasant hour together with Count Styrum in exploring the park and gardens of the castle, which were remarkably fine and spacious. On returning from one of these walks about a week after their arrival at Assais, they

found the castle court-yard a scene of much bustle and excitement, and learned that orders had arrived recalling the Saxon regiment to Nontron and Chalus,--orders that had been received with enthusiasm, since they pointed to a general massing of forces preparatory to a move upon the French army of the north. The colonel came into the dining-hall with a very cheerful countenance, and, taking his seat with the Uhlan captain, Von Säben, and several officers, drank a bumper to an energetic continuance of the war, and to its speedy victorious termination.

The Uhlan captain alone was depressed, and with good cause; for while the Saxon regiment was to take up its march to Nontron on the following morning, the squadron of Uhlans was to remain at Assais until further orders, to prevent the formation of bands of franctireurs in the surrounding country. Although this was an honourable service, it was one that could be crowned by no laurels, and life in the castle, after the departure of the Saxon officers, would be by no means attractive. The captain's only hope was that the colonel might be right in declaring that before many days the Uhlans also would be withdrawn from so advanced a post.

Kurt von Poseneck too was greatly disappointed at the prospect of losing sight of Arno von Hohenwald. He had so rejoiced in the new-formed friendship with his betrothed's brother, and now it was to be thus nipped in the bud. As soon as was possible without churlishness, Styrum, Arno, and Kurt withdrew from the circle of their comrades on this last evening and passed together a farewell quiet hour. When they separated Arno pressed Kurt's hand. "We shall perhaps not see each other to-morrow," he said; "let us say farewell to-night; only for a short time, I trust. When you send a letter to the Rhine remember to send my greetings in it, and in return I will send yours to Celia, and tell her that the greatest pleasure I have had during the campaign has been to learn to know and to cordially like my future brother-in-law. Farewell, Kurt!"

The three had lingered longer together than they had intended, and when they separated at the foot of the staircase leading to Styrum's and Arno's apartments perfect quiet reigned throughout the castle. Kurt's room was at the end of a long corridor on this second floor, and as he walked along it his steps sounded so loud in the intense stillness that he took care to make his tread as light as possible, lest he should arouse his sleeping comrades. The corridor was very long, and his room lay next to his captain's, the windows of both looking out upon the court-yard. The night had grown cloudy, and the long window before him, that would have given some light if the weather had been clear, was of no use to illuminate the darkness around him, but Kurt cared little since he could not possibly miss his door, the second from the end on his right. He had reached about the middle of the passage when his attention was roused by a noise upon his left; he thought he heard approaching footsteps. He paused and listened; yes, he was right; a door opened softly upon his left; he had a momentary glimpse of a spacious, dimly-lighted apartment, and Monsieur Gervais stood before him holding a lantern, the light of which fell full upon the young officer. The man was evidently much startled, but quickly regaining his self-possession, bowed with the courtesy he always displayed to the Prussian officers, and offered to light the lieutenant to his room, excusing himself for having, under the impression that every one in the castle had retired to rest, extinguished the lights.

He then preceded Kurt with his lantern, and only left him when he had lighted the candle in the young man's room.

Why had the Frenchman been so startled, so evidently frightened, at first sight of a Prussian officer? and whence came Monsieur Gervais? These were questions which Kurt asked himself as soon as he was left alone,--questions which he could not answer. It occurred to him that, confident in their numbers, the officers quartered in the castle had neglected many precautions that prudence would have suggested. Not one of them had hitherto thought it worth while to explore all the rooms and passages of the huge old castle. All had been content with the comfortable quarters assigned them by Monsieur Gervais, and had not reflected upon the facilities that the other rooms might afford for concealing spies and traitors. Kurt determined to use the first unemployed hours of the following day in exploring the castle thoroughly, and particularly in ascertaining whence the door led at which Monsieur Gervais had appeared. As far as he could judge at present, the large room, of which he had had a glimpse, must be traversed to reach the wing built out into the park, at present inhabited by the Baron de Nouart.

With the determination to atone for a neglected duty he ceased to think of Monsieur Gervais or of danger threatening him; he dwelt rather upon Arno's last words to him; his heart beat at the thought that he had accepted him as a brother-in-law, and Celia's lovely image accompanied him to the land of dreams.

He never suspected that Monsieur Gervais was standing outside his bedroom-door listening with bated breath to every movement of the young officer, and that his ear was not removed from the key-hole until the long, regular breathing inside told him he had nothing to fear from the Uhlan's wakefulness. The enemy slept. Monsieur Gervais could now pursue his way unmolested, but he would guard against a second surprise. He put the lantern on the floor, took off his boots, and in his stockings glided swiftly to the grand staircase, which he mounted to the very topmost story of the castle, then through a labyrinth of lumber-rooms he reached the door of a retired apartment; here he knocked softly three times; a bolt inside was drawn and the door opened. "Is all secure?" was whispered in the steward's ear.

"Yes; they are all asleep at last," was the whispered reply. "There is no time to waste; take off your boots; you must go in your stockings as I do."

"Whither are you taking me?" the man asked.

"Down-stairs and through the blue room to the Baron."

"Why not down the back-stairs, as I came up?"

"Because two sentinels were placed there this very after noon. Quick! quick! we have no time to parley; the Baron has been expecting you for more than an hour."

The maire, for it was Fournier, of whom Repuin had spoken to Sorr, obeyed. In his stockings he noiselessly followed his conductor, who cautiously guided him down the grand staircase to the door of the blue room, at which Gervais had appeared before Kurt. When it had admitted them and was closed behind them, the steward gave a sigh of relief. No officers were quartered in this wing; he paused and handed the lantern to the maire, saying, in a low tone, "Now you can find your way to the Baron without my help. I will slip back to my room in the darkness."

"Are you not coming with me to the Baron?"

"No; it is unnecessary; he knows all that I have been able to discover; he will tell you what you ought to know. Farewell, Monsieur Fournier; I will go and pray the saints to get you safely out of the castle."

"I shall get off safely; at least these cursed Germans shall never capture me alive, and woe to the man who attempts to detain me! I will not die unavenged!"

The two men separated, and the maire pursued his way to the door of the Baron's room, where he found instant admittance.

De Nouart was pacing restlessly to and fro; he had been awaiting Fournier for more than an hour, and had begun to fear that some accident had befallen him. "At last you are come!" he exclaimed. "I was almost crazed with terror lest you had been discovered!"

"No one suspects that I am in the castle."

"Thank God! If I could but know you once in the forest and on the way to our friends, I should indeed bless my lucky star! We have all taken our lives in our hands, maire."

"And what of that? To-day or to-morrow what matter? I would rather it were to-day, but that I have some hope of vengeance upon these accursed Germans."

"You will have abundant opportunity for that," the Baron rejoined; "but you have a long journey to make to-night."

"Be quick, then; tell me my errand and let me be gone," the man said, gloomily.

"You can serve your desire for revenge upon your boy's murderers in no way more surely than by carrying the important intelligence to Count Repuin that the enemy is to depart to-morrow morning early for Nontron and Chalus; the Uhlans only are to remain in Assais, and this probably only for a few days. All this Gervais has learned from the colonel himself. If Count Repuin has collected a sufficient force to make an attack, he must be quick about it or he will find no foes in Assais."

The thought that the hated Prussians might escape lent wings to the maire's resolve; he leaped from the window, as Count Repuin had formerly done, and vanished the next instant in the mist. Again, as formerly, did the Baron listen, lest a shot should tell of the discovery of the fugitive, whom in truth he cared for as little as for that other, and yet for whose safety he trembled. His anxiety was unnecessary, the deep silence of the forest was unbroken.

He turned from the window and gave himself up to reflection upon the dangers that encompassed him. Had he done right in apprising Repuin of the intended departure of the Saxons? If the Count should make the attack and be repulsed, would not Prussian vengeance first strike the French inmates of the castle? It had been folly to incite the Count to an attack! But no, whatever came of it he must keep his word to the Russian. Prussian vengeance he might escape; the Russian's never. He was bound body and soul to this man whom he hated; he could not free himself from the chain.

His head ached with the thoughts that crowded upon him; he was terribly weary and exhausted. There was one way to cure this dull pain, one means to scare away this terrible weakness; but he had promised not to use it. A single glass of the fiery liquid in the flask on the sideboard would send the blood dancing in his veins again; a single glass! Repuin was far away, there was not the slightest danger threatening for the moment; was he an utter slave to the Russian? No; he would endure it no longer. He poured out a glass from the flask and emptied it at a draught. Ah, this was strength and courage to face the future! Another and another. He had not slept o'nights of late, now he began to feel delightfully drowsy. By the time the flask was finished he had slipped from his arm-chair to the floor, where he lay until the following day.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Early the next morning, immediately after sunrise, the Saxon regiment fell back upon Nontron. The weather was superb, and had its effect upon both officers and men, although Count von Schlichting felt it his duty to warn Captain von Säben before his departure that he must be upon his guard against treachery. The old colonel did not like to leave so small a force in so hostile a country, infested on all sides by franctireurs, and not even the brilliant sunshine and the relief from inaction could altogether dispel his regret at leaving them thus.

Kurt von Poseneck was at some distance from Assais when the Saxons left it. He had, with a command of about a dozen Uhlans, been ordered to make a reconnoissance in search of franctireurs, and he could not, of course, take leave of his friends. When he returned in the afternoon Arno and Styrum had both gone, and Kurt found only his captain, Von Säben, and two comrades ready in the large dining-hall to partake of the excellent dinner provided for them by Monsieur Gervais.

Had the sun not shone so brilliantly the large hall would have seemed gloomy enough, and even as it was the emptiness and quiet of the apartment, where lately so much noisy gayety had held sway, had a depressing effect upon the Uhlan officers, which Kurt's report was not calculated to dissipate. Even Von Säben looked grave, and was reminded of the colonel's parting words.

Kurt had nowhere found an enemy; if there really were bands of franctireurs in the vicinity they had withdrawn into the forest of Assais, which afforded hiding-places from which cavalry were powerless to drive them. This forest was a sort of continuation of the castle park, and if danger there were, it lay in the probability of an attack upon the castle from this direction. That such a danger existed Kurt was convinced by the behaviour of the country-people in all directions. They had shown no open hostility to the Uhlans, but their demeanour had been that of men looking forward to a time near at hand when they might take revenge upon their foes. At all events this had been the impression produced upon Kurt's mind, and Captain von Säben so far heeded it as to double the watch at various posts around the castle, and to take other precautions to insure safety.

Kurt withdrew early from the dinner-table, intending to write letters in his room, and as he passed along the corridor towards it his resolve of the previous night suddenly occurred to his mind. He was directly opposite the door at which Gervais had appeared, and the steward was at present busy in the dining-hall, which he could not leave for some time to come. There could be no time more favourable than the present for his exploration of this part of the castle. He tried the door at which he stood: it opened easily; he entered, and closed it behind him.

He found himself in a large room hung with blue, and somewhat dark, as it was lighted by but one window; it was only a thoroughfare, as was plain from the furniture, that consisted simply of cabinets placed against the walls. Kurt went to the window, and found that he had been correct in suspecting that the room led to the wing extending into the park, in which were the Baron's apartments; before him was the lawn, in front of the Baron's windows, and to the left was the park itself; he could even see the path by which he, with his two friends, had on the previous day visited the stables at the back of the gardener's house, where the Baron kept a fine pair of riding-horses, belonging to his cousin the Marquise.

Which of the four doors that opened into this apartment should he select? He tried the one nearest him; it was unlocked, and he entered a room furnished with the greatest luxury, and leading by an open door to a bedroom as gorgeously fitted up. A writing-table stood beside the window, and an open portfolio, from between the leaves of which, as Kurt took it up, fluttered a torn envelope, addressed in German to the "Herr Count Repuin." Count Repuin! Kurt knew the name but too well. Herr Ahlborn had at Lucie's request told him his daughter's sad story, and this name was branded in his memory as that of Lucie's unprincipled persecutor. And he found it here upon an empty envelope postmarked Brussels. The connection was easy to divine, Repuin was the brother of the Marquise de Lancy, and the former inmate of this room. But he had not fled to Germany alone: Sorr had accompanied him. There suddenly occurred to Kurt an explanation of the fact that Styrum, Arno, and the colonel, to all of whom Sorr was personally known, had been puzzled by the resemblance of the Baron de Nouart to some one whose name they could not recall. If all this were as he suspected, if Repuin, the proscribed French agent, were really the brother of the Marquise de Lancy, if his tool, Sorr, were here in the castle in disguise, certainly the greatest caution was necessary; there was danger of treachery on every hand, danger that perhaps could be averted only by the instant arrest of the Baron de Nouart. And yet, could mere suspicion justify such an arrest? The man would have to be taken to Nontron, and tried there by a court-martial, which, under the direction of the pitiless Count Schlichting, could end but in one

way,--death.

Kurt thought of Celia's friend, of Frau von Sorr; the death of her worthless husband would restore her to life. But in an instant he spurned the unworthy thought. His friendship for Lucie should never influence him where duty was concerned. This duty, however, bade him reveal his discovery to his superior officer; it was for him to command in this matter, Kurt's part was to obey.

The light was dying in the west, he had not time to continue his explorations thoroughly, and, after satisfying himself that this room was connected with De Nouart's apartments by a winding staircase, which led past servants' rooms, Kurt returned unmolested to the blue room, whence he issued unobserved into the corridor leading to his own and Von Säben's quarters.

He found his captain just returned to his room from a tour of inspection of the posts about the castle, and quite ready to listen to all that he had to say. Of course Von Säben knew nothing of Repuin or of Sorr. Kurt explained who they were, and their complicity in treasonable plots in Germany, without in any way mentioning Frau von Sorr. They were both proscribed French agents.

"The address on the envelope is, after all, your only ground for suspicion that the proscribed Count Repuin is one and the same person with the brother of the Marquise de Lancy, and that the Baron de Nouart is a German, and the Herr von Sorr of whom you speak," the captain said, when Kurt had finished his narrative.

"That and the resemblance observed by Count Schlichting, Count Styrum, and the Baron von Hohenwald between the Baron de Nouart and some one whom they had seen."

"But neither of these gentlemen was reminded of Sorr. Count Schlichting has told me that he has an excellent memory for faces, and should recognize one that he had once seen, even after twenty years. Would he not instantly have known Sorr?"

"He probably never imagined that he should find him here in France under the name of the Baron de Nouart. The Baron's avoidance of us, and his pretended ignorance of the German language, seem to me very suspicious circumstances." Kurt remarked.

"And yet they are hardly sufficient to warrant my arresting him and sending him to Nontron," the captain replied. "The colonel is an excellent man, but he is fond of a short shrift, and apt to take suspicion for certainty. If he should discover Sorr and the Baron to be one and the same person, he would have the poor devil shot without more ado; and it may be that, even although he wishes to avoid us, he does not meditate treachery. I am not fond of courts-martial, Herr von Poseneck, and I do without them when I can. Your discovery is certainly of importance, and it behooves us to be more upon our guard than ever. We have been imprudent in instituting no thorough search of the castle. This shall be undertaken to-morrow, and if we find proof of the Baron's guilt he shall be brought to justice."

All the officers, Kurt with the rest, retired early on this evening, Kurt imagining that the fatigue and excitement of the day would insure him instant repose. But this was not so; he lay awake hour after hour; sleep fled his eyelids. In vain did he woo her by all familiar means, counting slowly to one hundred, reciting mentally verses learned in childhood; he could not banish from his mind his last conversation with his captain.

At last he sprang out of bed. Better to pace his room to and fro for an hour than toss restlessly there. The moon was at the full. Kurt went to the window, whence he had a clear view of the spacious court-yard of the castle. Opposite lay the farm-buildings in which a part of the Uhlans were quartered, the stalls being appropriated to their horses, and back of those Kurt could in the brilliant moonlight get a view of a portion of the broad road leading to the village. The court-yard was empty; the two sentinels posted in front of the stables were slowly pacing to and fro, their sabres resting negligently in their arms, and one of them, as Kurt was looking, so far forgot his duty in his sense of security as to lean against the house and rest. This was a culpable want of the vigilance which the captain had enjoined upon the guards on the previous evening. The lives of many might depend upon the watchfulness of any one of the sentinels posted in the court-yard.

Kurt left the window and dressed, not hastily, but quite leisurely; he would himself go down to the court-yard and make an example of any soldier not vigilant at his post. He needed no light; the moonlight was all that he required. When quite dressed he sat for a moment, his head resting on his hand, reflecting whether it were not perhaps best to visit the sentries placed in the park, when he was suddenly startled by a shot; another and another came in quick succession, and then followed a sharp rattle of musketry, apparently in the very court-yard.

Kurt rushed to the window. Where was the scene of repose and security upon which he had looked out little more than a quarter of an hour previously? A disorderly crowd of armed men, some hundreds strong, was pouring in at the court-yard gates and rushing towards the farm buildings and stables, while along the road from the village a dark mass was moving quickly, the moonlight glinting here and there upon polished rifle-barrels. In a few moments the assailants had attained their end; the two sentinels were shot down, the doors of the farm buildings and

stables were forced; there were but a few scattered carbine-shots in answer to the continuous rattle of musketry; victory over the Uhlans quartered there was easy for such overpowering numbers.

One glance sufficed to show Kurt the danger threatening the entire squadron. All in the farm buildings were lost; it might still be possible, however, to save the officers in the castle and the men in the village, but not a moment must be wasted, for already about thirty franctireurs had turned from the farm buildings and were advancing towards the castle. Kurt's presence of mind stood him in stead now as it had done formerly in America. He saw plainly that there was but one course by which death or capture could be evaded,--flight. Resistance to such an overwhelming force would be madness. He could not even rouse his brother officers on the ground-floor of the castle; the franctireurs would be there before him. The captain he could rouse, and together they might escape into the side wing of the castle, through the room explored so short a time since by Kurt, and thence into the park. If they could succeed in reaching the stables behind the gardener's house, where they had seen the horses, they might perhaps be able to ride by roundabout ways to the village in time to save the Uhlans quartered there. In an instant Kurt had girded on his sabre and armed himself with a revolver; then opening the door of the captain's room, he found Von Säben just about to step out of it. He had been unwilling, after his conversation with Kurt, to go to bed, but had determined to inspect the various posts after midnight, and had thrown himself into an arm-chair, where, however, he had slept soundly until awakened by the noise of the struggle in the court-yard. He, too, had recognized from his window, as Kurt had done, the folly of resistance to so numerous a foe, but he was nevertheless about to go down to the court-yard when Kurt rushed into his room. "You were right, Herr von Poseneck," he said; "that villain Sorr has betrayed us! All is lost! There is nothing for us but to die with our brave fellows; our place is down there among them."

He spoke as quietly as though he were inviting Kurt to walk with him in the park; he awaited no reply, but was striding on to the head of the grand staircase when Karl detained him. "There is nothing to be done down there captain," he said; "the castle is lost, but we may escape to the village and muster our men."

"How? In one minute the rogues will be in the castle; the maire of the village and Gervais--I recognized them both--are leading the band that is evidently resolved upon capturing us in our rooms."

"Still there is no need to throw away our lives,--we must make an attempt to save our fellows in the village; perhaps escape is possible through the side-wing."

"Go on; I will follow you!"

Not another word was spoken; Kurt hurried on, revolver in hand, the captain close upon his heels. When the two officers had reached the blue room they could plainly hear the blows of the franctireurs upon the doors of the rooms on the ground-floor; in another instant the two men had entered the room, closed the door behind them, and hurried through the other apartments towards the side-wing.

"Saved," whispered Kurt; "no one is quartered in this wing, we shall encounter no enemy here." He was right; neither the Baron de Nouart nor Gervais had dreamed that the German officers could escape through this unknown wing and no precautions had been taken to prevent their doing so. The wing was deserted and silent; the din of the struggle in the court-yard sounded indistinct and muffled. Kurt, followed by his captain, rushed down the winding staircase to the passage on the ground-floor. By this the captain would have gained the park; but Kurt again detained him. "That door can be seen from the court-yard," he said, "and if we are perceived we shall have the whole rabble about our ears. We must find a way into the park through the window of some one of these rooms." He tried the first door they came to; it opened and admitted the two officers to a lighter apartment. Here an unexpected sight met their eyes. In an arm-chair before a table, upon which stood his beloved brandy-flask, sat the Baron de Nouart. He had had recourse to his favourite stimulant to steady his nerves while he sat in terrified expectation of the attack. A revolver lay upon the table ready, if he should be forced to take any part in the fray.

When the door was suddenly opened and he saw before him the two Prussian officers, Kurt with a revolver, the captain with a drawn sabre, the Baron sprang to his feet and glared at the intruders with lack-lustre eyes. He was half intoxicated, he could hardly stand upright, but he still had sense enough to clutch at his revolver to defend himself.

But his hand never touched the weapon; before he could grasp it the captain stretched him on the floor with a tremendous blow, delivered with all his force, of his drawn sabre. He fell without a sound.

"Is he dead?" the captain asked.

"We cannot wait to see," Kurt replied; "at all events he cannot betray us!" And he hurried to the window. The lawn between the wing and the forest lay quiet in the moon light; not a man was to be seen. He listened,--only the distant noise in the court-yard fell upon his ear.

He opened the window and lightly sprang out; the captain followed him, confiding himself blindly to Kurt's guidance. They ran with lightning speed across the lawn, and then in the shadow of the forest to the gardener's house. All here was quiet,--every one had hurried to the court-yard; the stable-door was open; there stood the two noble horses, their saddles and bridles hanging upon the wall.

In less time than it takes to tell it the two cavalry officers were in the saddle and galloping furiously by a back-road to the village.

A savage yell resounded from the castle. From one of the lighted windows of the wing several shots were fired, but the bullets whistled harmlessly past the riders' ears; the bewildering moonlight prevented the marksmen from aiming truly.

"Our flight is discovered. The forest is our only chance. This way!" Kurt cried, as he drove the spurs into his horse's sides and turned towards a narrow forest road that led by a longer roundabout way to the village.

The captain followed; but just as he entered the woods several shots again flashed from the castle window; he wavered in his saddle: a bullet had struck him in the side; he grasped his horse's mane with his right hand, and managed to keep his seat and continue his furious gallop after Kurt.

The fugitives succeeded at last in gaining the open beyond the wood, but here Kurt first noticed his companion's convulsive grip of his horse's mane and his failing exertions to keep himself upright in the saddle. "Are you wounded?" he asked, anxiously.

There was no reply. Loss of blood had produced unconsciousness, and Kurt caught his captain in his arms just in time to prevent him from falling from his horse. He dismounted with his lifeless burden, and, laying it upon the grass beneath a tree, looked about for help. He remembered that a mounted sentinel had been stationed here, where the forest road ended in the open; but there was no horseman to be seen. He could not have deserted his post; a brief inspection of the surrounding field in the moonlight showed him that the soldier had been true to his duty; he was lying dead in a pool of blood at a little distance; his horse was nowhere to be seen, probably his murderers had carried it off.

What was to be done? Every moment of delay was ruin. The enemy had discovered the flight of the two officers, there were horses enough to be had for pursuit, and, although Kurt's short experience of his steed had convinced him that he need not dread this for himself, he could not desert his captain; how was he to be carried to a place of safety? Duty called Kurt to Assais, where, as a few straggling shots informed him, the fray had already begun, and duty forbade his abandoning his wounded captain to the pursuing franctireurs. He could not delay, the moments were priceless. "To Assais!" he exclaimed to himself. The outnumbered Uhlans there needed a leader, who might perhaps save some few from captivity and death; the captain himself would never have hesitated to sacrifice his life for his men; had he been conscious he would surely have ordered his lieutenant to leave him to his fate.

He swung himself into the saddle again and rode towards the village, but reined in his horse as he reached the top of a small eminence, whence he had a full moonlit view of Assais. A dark mass of combatants was heaving to and fro between him and the nearest houses of the village, whence came a sharp rattle of firearms; the crowd parted, and a portion of it approached him rapidly. His heart beat high as he recognized it to be a detachment of Uhlans that had escaped from the village and was now galloping towards him. There were but a dozen of them, and as he rode to meet them with a thundering "Halt!" they obeyed instantly, and an old sergeant, who recognized the lieutenant, gave him an account of an attack upon the village, which had taken place almost simultaneously with that upon the castle. The outlying guard must have been fallen upon unawares and murdered by the villagers, as not one shot had been heard from them. The Uhlans had been surprised in their quarters by an overwhelming force of franctireurs,--ten Frenchmen to one Prussian,--but in the general confusion this little band had managed to get to horse and cut their way through the enemy. "If the cursed Frenchman had only known how to handle their chassepots better," the old man added, "not an Uhlan would have escaped." He did not fear pursuit, "for the bumpkins had no idea of managing an Uhlan horse."

The sergeant's tale convinced Kurt of the tragic fate of the squadron,--probably for the most part surprised in their beds, murdered or taken prisoner; all thought of rescuing them was vain. And yet the young officer was sorely tempted to make one dash into Assais at the head of the fugitives to rescue any of their comrades who might be prisoners there. It cost him a hard struggle to decide to leave Assais without one blow struck at the foe; but he knew that duty called him to Nontron. He ordered three men to ride on before as quickly as their horses could carry them to announce the fate of the squadron, and with the rest he rode back to where the captain was lying, that he also might be safely transported thither.

CHAPTER XXV.

There was savage revelry in Assais. It was the first victory that these men, but lately mustered into service, had gained over the dreaded Prussians,--a victory all the more brilliant since it had been won at so little loss. Only two franctireurs had fallen in the short conflict,--five or six had been wounded, and the Baron de Nouart had been found dead in his room with his skull cloven.

This was the entire loss suffered by the fortunate victors, who had almost annihilated an entire squadron of those Uhlans of whose ferocity such fearful stories were told.

The light-hearted conquerors paid no heed to the fact that a couple of dozen of the enemy and several officers had escaped; they had no fear of the fugitives, they had not even attempted to pursue them.

Intoxicated with victory, the exultant franctireurs rushed through the village; the slight bonds of discipline that had restrained them at the beginning of the attack were rent asunder, and Count Repuin, their commander, with two or three French officers, attempted in vain to stem the torrent; all commands were unheeded.

The franctireurs associated the villagers with them in a search for any Prussians that might still be concealed in the village, murdering any such when found, and dragging their corpses through the mud with savage yells, that made night hideous. Even women, drunk with the desire for revenge, aided their husbands and sons in this ferocious work, mutilating the dead in their fury and inciting others to the same horrors. But there were exceptions; here and there a wife or maiden of Assais risked her life to conceal some Prussian fugitive from the fury of husband or lover.

Count Repuin looked on aghast at the savagery of the insane mob, who had thus thrown aside all law and order. He hated the Prussians from his soul, he was their implacable foe; but this wholesale murder, this cowardly mutilation of the dead, aroused his indignation; he felt that he had conjured up spirits that he lacked the power to control.

Again and again he attempted to restore some degree of order, but his commands were received with shouts of derision, and he owed it to the interference of some of his officers that the rage of the franctireurs was not turned against himself. There were scowling looks accompanying muttered curses of the foreigner who dared to intercede for Prussians, and he was obliged to look on inactive at the murderous work.

He was perhaps the only one of the victors who felt no joy whatever in the victory. His plan had been to inspire his raw troops with courage and confidence by an easy conquest, and he had intended to withdraw in good order with his prisoners as soon as the victory was won. He now withdrew, after a last vain attempt to restore order, to the dining-hall of the castle, where, with one of his young officers, he paced restlessly to and fro. At each outburst of exultation that reached his ears from without he vented savage curses upon the canaille, who did not deserve that a man of honour should command them. He knew only too well that each hour as it sped past increased the danger that the easy-won victory would be converted into a disgraceful defeat.

The officers of the squadron had escaped; the two lieutenants on the ground-floor had probably been awakened by the first shots and had fled into the forest, leaving their uniforms behind them; from these there was not much to fear, but the captain and his companion, who had slain the Baron de Nouart when he had probably attempted to impede their flight, had also escaped, and upon two fleet horses. The shots fired after them had been unavailing; they could reach Nontron in a short time and summon the colonel, Count Schlichting, to the rescue.

And then? Repuin cast a glance at the stiffened corpse of the Baron de Nouart, which had been brought into the dining-hall and lay there on the floor in a corner half covered with a piece of carpet. He thought of his last conversation with him, of how he had been warned by him not to attempt an attack upon a foe so much the stronger. "Count Schlichting knows no mercy!" had been Sorr's words. Then the Count had received them with a sneer; now, as he thought of the near future, they filled him with horror. The colonel had already heard of the struggle in Assais; he was even now at the head of his regiment on the way hither from Nontron to rescue and to avenge.

Repuin was innately brave; he could laugh danger and death to scorn in the heat of battle, but the idea of being taken prisoner and shot in cold blood by the hated Germans drove the blood from his cheek. He turned to the young officer at his side and confided his fears to him, commissioning him to make one more attempt with a few experienced soldiers to assemble the men in some degree of order.

The officer promised to do his best, but his efforts were fruitless until it was too late.

The franctireurs, scattered through the village, refused to obey the bugle-call; they were

engaged in a wild orgie with some of the country-people. Wine flowed in streams, and there were loud shouts of "Vive la France! vive la victoire!" that never ceased until a breathless messenger spread the news through the village with the speed of lightning that a German host was marching upon Assais along the roads from Nontron and Chalus, and that it would be upon them in less than half an hour. This intelligence sobered in an instant those drunk with wine and conquest. Now they hurried to obey the bugle-call, but it was too late! An orderly retreat was no longer possible. This Repuin perceived, as from the castle he marked the close ranks of the approaching enemy, who, thanks to the mad neglect and want of discipline of the franctireurs, was so near that he would reach the village before the scattered Frenchmen could assemble together. Were not fugitives already scouring the fields upon the horses of the slain Uhlans? Should a panic ensue, rescue would be impossible; there might be something, an honorable death at least, gained from a stubborn defence of both castle and village.

The bitter conflict lasted several hours; the Frenchmen, so lately taken from the plough and work-bench, the franctireurs, so despised by the Germans, defended every house in the village, and last of all the castle itself, with a courage and heroism worthy of better success.

The same franctireurs who, scorning all discipline, had been converted into a mob of murderous savages by victory over defenceless Uhlans surprised in sleep, returned instantly to their duty when a hard battle was imminent. The example of a few cowards who escaped upon the Uhlan horses found no followers. The young men with the villagers fought with desperate courage; even the wounded refused to yield, and fell fighting to the last in a hopeless struggle against the superior organization and numbers of the Saxons, who, although at heavy loss, stormed every house in the village, and finally gained possession of the castle itself.

Only a very few of the French succeeded in escaping to the forest, where they scattered; the rest atoned with their lives for their brief period of conquest, and the crimes committed in Assais.

The conflict had been terrible, crushing for the conquered, and tragic enough for the victors, who had sustained heavy losses. If the franctireurs had been better marksmen and had not suffered from the death of their leader, Count Repuin, early in the fray, they would have prolonged the struggle, and the German losses would have been greater still, for the French had the advantage of a sheltered position.

The village of Assais, when the battle was over, presented a ghastly spectacle. Among the dead and dying that cumbered its streets the Saxon soldiers were searching diligently for wounded comrades, who were carried to the castle, where the regimental surgeons had their hands full.

The wounded officers, of whom there were not a few, were carried into the dining-hall, where pallets had been arranged, upon which they might rest for the brief space of time that the regiment could remain in Assais. Its work of vengeance completed, it must immediately fall back again upon Nontron.

The colonel's face was grimly sad as he entered the hall for a personal inspection of the wounded. "We have suffered heavily," he said to Count Styrum, who, with his arm in a sling, approached him. "Much noble blood has been shed, and I take blame to myself for it."

"What possible blame can attach to you, colonel?"

"I might have nipped the treachery here in the bud. From the first I mistrusted that Baron de Nouart and his tool Gervais. But for my weakness they would both have been brought to a court-martial, and then all their villainous schemes would have come to light, your arm, Styrum, would have been free from a sling, and your best friends, Hohenwald and Poseneck, would not be lying there severely wounded. How is it with Arno? What does the surgeon say?"

"He gives us good hope. The wound is serious; he is still unconscious, but the surgeon says that he thinks careful nursing will bring him round."

"Careful nursing!" said the colonel. "And where is he to get careful nursing in this God-forgotten corner of France? In two hours at the latest we must take up our march for Nontron, and even there our wounded cannot rest. I must send them on farther. What nursing can they have in the nearest hospital? They are all over-crowded. And can Hohenwald bear the transportation to a hospital?"

"He can bear a farther journey than that if taken carefully. I believe, colonel, that I can save Hohenwald's life if you will allow of my undertaking his transportation to the only place where he will find health for both body and soul."

"I do not understand you, Count."

"Upon a charming estate on the Rhine, near S----, a lady has established a private hospital; beneath her care Arno will, I am sure, recover."

"Aha! I see, an affair of the heart. Who would have suspected it of our misogynist? But S---- on

the Rhine is far from here."

"I will undertake to deliver him there safely with your permission, colonel. My wound makes me incapable of service for some weeks, but I have strength enough to superintend the transportation of poor Hohenwald and of my cousin, Kurt von Poseneck, to S----. Your permission is all that is needed, colonel."

"That you shall have. All that I can do for your friends shall be done. How is Poseneck?"

"Doing fairly well. He has recovered his consciousness and can answer for himself. His bed is the last; Arno's is next to the last."

The colonel walked down the row of beds, accompanied by Styrum, saying a few kind words to each of the wounded officers. He paused for some minutes beside Arno's couch, gazing sadly at the pale, unconscious figure stretched there. "My poor old friend!" he murmured. "It will be a hard blow for him to learn that his darling son is severely wounded. I must write to him. Better hear it from me than from the papers. It ought to console him to know how his son has distinguished himself to-day."

"It will console him still further, colonel," Styrum observed, "if you will add in your letter that by your permission I have taken Arno and my cousin Kurt to Kaltenborn, near S----. He will be quite satisfied that Arno will be preserved to him if he knows that he is to be tended and nursed by one whom the old Baron honours and loves as he does Frau von Sorr."

The colonel turned hastily and looked in surprise at Styrum. "What name did you say?" he asked, eagerly.

"Fran von Sorr is the lady who has instituted a private hospital on her father's estate of Kaltenborn."

"And you wish to take Arno to her; you would confide him to Frau von Sorr's care?"

"Yes, colonel; Frau von Sorr lived at Castle Hohenwald for some time as governess to Arno's sister; she is warmly attached to the family, and I know that the old Freiherr holds her in high esteem."

"And Arno?"

"Esteems her no less than does his father."

"Hm! After a different fashion, perhaps," the colonel said, with a smile. "Be assured I will do all that I can to further your wishes. And, by the way, what has become of that scoundrel Sorr? Has Poseneck's suspicion been confirmed? Is the Baron de Nouart, whom Captain von Säben laid low with a sabre-stroke, found to be one and the same person with Herr von Sorr?"

"There he lies," Styrum gravely replied! "I have no doubt upon the subject, although the features seem greatly altered. I saw Sorr only once at a ball, but I remember him perfectly, and recognized the dead man's face, although it is disguised by a huge false beard."

The colonel turned and looked at the corpse of the supposed Baron. A compassionate maid had washed the blood from the face, and in so doing had loosened the false beard, which the colonel now tossed aside, and all doubt as to the man's identity instantly vanished from the minds of the two officers.

"It is indeed he," said Schlichting; "he has reaped the reward of his treachery, as has also Repuin, who was shot dead early in the engagement. I think, Styrum, that both you and Herr von Poseneck will agree with me that it is best so; we are spared the dealing out to them the death of traitors."

As he spoke he went up to Kurt's couch, and the young man was quite able to express his thanks for the colonel's promised aid in transporting him to Kaltenborn. The surgeon, however, at this moment made his appearance and forbade further conversation, as Kurt's wound was in the chest and he had suffered from loss of blood. Count Schlichting therefore gave his hand a farewell pressure and left the hall.

Several months have elapsed; how, during this time, those who have played principal parts in our story have prospered may be gathered from the following communications from the widowed Frau von Sorr to her dearest friend:

"KALTENBORN, December 18, 1870.

"DEAREST ADÈLE,--What weeks of suspense have passed since I last wrote you!--passed amid hopes and fears, terrible distress, and yet happiness unspeakable. I could not write; every moment that was not spent in care of him seemed wasted in disloyal neglect.

"At last the staff surgeon came to me yesterday with a beaming face and the delicious words, 'Out of all danger!' Since then I have been in a dream of happiness, and my first thought is to make you the sharer of my joy.

"That Arno is spared to me I owe entirely to the self-devotion of your Karl. He has, I know, written to you how he obtained permission to bring Arno and Kurt von Poseneck across half France to be nursed here by me. But he has not, I am sure, told you at what an expense of trouble and strength he with his wound did this. I never shall forget the moment, now just six weeks ago, when he came to meet me below in the hall. A messenger on horseback, from S----, had brought word that three wounded officers, among whom was Lieutenant Kurt von Poseneck, had been by their desire transferred to Kaltenborn for lodgment and nursing, and that they would arrive in an hour at the latest. I was ready to receive them, too glad to take charge of Kurt, and little dreaming how near the other two were to my heart. I never can tell you, dear Adèle, of all that I suffered during those first few days. Count Styrum's exertions in bringing his charge to this place had been superhuman; his own wound, not serious at first, had been greatly aggravated, and for a time he was utterly prostrated. But now the dreadful days are all past when the angel of death lingered beside the two so near to me, Arno and Kurt. As soon as your Karl recovered from the disastrous effects of his journey he joined me in care of them, and never shall I forget the consolation of his presence and his words. When I gave up all hope of Arno's recovery, Count Styrum was always ready to tell me how, in '66, he had recovered from a worse wound, and to bid me rely upon his vigorous constitution. And during the long hours when together we watched beside Arno's or Kurt's couch. Count Styrum recounted to me the terrible events of which he was an eye-witness at Assais. From him I learned the fate of my unhappy husband,--that death had dissolved the tie that bound me to him.

"It would be hypocrisy, dearest Adèle, to attempt to conceal from you that this knowledge brought with it a sense of relief to which I had long been an utter stranger, and that I breathed still more freely when I learned that I need no longer dread the persecutions of Count Repuin, who also fell fighting at Assais. As to Herr von Sorr, I forgive his sins against me, and when I think of him in future I will recall the time when he certainly did not inspire me with terror."

"December 26.

"Arno is making rapid strides towards recovery. To-day he was able to sit up for an hour; his voice is clear and strong, and when he looks at me his eyes sparkle, as they did once at Castle Hohenwald."

"December 30.

"You see, dear, I write oftener. Kurt is nearly well; he took a walk in the garden yesterday, and the doctor says he will be able to return to his regiment in two weeks, when your betrothed also leaves us. I am glad to know them so far recovered, and yet how we shall miss them!

"Arno will chafe at being obliged to take no share in the glorious termination of the war, but he must submit; the doctor says he cannot possibly be fit for service for some months yet. I will confess to you, dear Adèle, that when the old doctor uttered this verdict I could have kissed him. Arno had been so much pleased at his increasing strength that he had entertained hopes of leaving Kaltenborn with your Karl and Kurt, and of course he was disappointed at first. Then he looked at me; I suppose my joy was evident in my face, for his brow cleared instantly, and he said no more about leaving."

"Kaltenborn, January 15, 1871.

"Adèle, my darling Adèle, I am the happiest woman in the world! I am betrothed! Ah, how fair life is! You must hear all about it, although no one else is to know of it for some time to come. Listen, I will tell you all. Early this afternoon I was seated in my little drawing-room at my writing-table, when I heard the door open behind me and some one say, 'Excuse me, madame, I would not intrude. Modesty is a gift of nature; I do not boast, but I possess it----'

"Of course there was no need to turn round to recognize the good Assessor von Hahn, my former admirer. Yes, there he was, and the oddest figure imaginable. Had not the red cross on his left arm informed me in what capacity he had come to the Rhine, I should have supposed him dressed as a brigand for a masquerade; his costume, with a huge sabre dragging at his heels, was so comical.

"I could not but smile as I welcomed him to Kaltenborn, and told him how glad I was to see by his red cross to what service he had devoted himself.

"'Yes, madame,' he said, twisting his moustache after his old familiar fashion, 'I serve the fatherland; this very evening I must take up my journey to France; duty demands it, and I am a slave to duty; I do not boast, but I am so. I have stolen a moment on the way to assure you of my

devotion to you, and to bring you some news which will, I am sure, surprise you. I have the honour of being in charge of supplies for some of our hospitals in France. Early this morning, as my train was about to leave the station at Minden, as I stood upon the platform, my attention was attracted by an old gentleman who was berating a railway official in no measured terms. The official had just informed him that this was a train bearing supplies, and that no places could be procured on it for passengers, and the old man's anger found vent in a good round oath; he was ready to pay any price for places, and have them he must and would. He was supported on the arm of an old servant in livery, and beside him stood a young girl. I could not see her face, but her figure was charming. I passed around her and recognized--but surely, madame, you have guessed whom I recognized----'

"I tried in vain to solve the riddle, mentioning the names of several ladies known to each of us, but in vain.

"'Wrong, madame; I am sure your astonishment will equal mine when I tell you that I recognized in the young lady with the charming figure my lovely cousin, Celia von Hohenwald.'

"My astonishment was indeed great; the Assessor was delighted. 'Yes, Celia von Hohenwald; she was with her father, my respected relative, the Freiherr von Hohenwald. Fortunately, I met them upon the railway platform at Minden, and was able to be of service to them.'

"'The Freiherr von Hohenwald!' I exclaimed, now amazed indeed. I could hardly believe that my dear old friend had left his forest castle, where he had so long been confined to his rolling-chair, but the Assessor eagerly went on to explain it all to me.

"The Freiherr's health had improved wonderfully during the past summer, as I knew from Celia's letters, but she had not told me that he had for some time been able to walk in his beloved garden supported by old Franz, and she herself had never dreamed that he would think of undertaking a journey. He had heard first from Count Schlichting and then from Kurt, as he told the Assessor, of his son's wound, and had determined not to await his recovery, but to go himself to Kaltenborn, that he might be near him. So, accompanied by Celia and old Franz, he had set out, and felt better and stronger than he had done for years. His desire to see his son again was intense, and hence his angry outbreak when told that he could not leave Minden by this train. The Assessor instantly offered both Celia and himself seats in his own coupé, while old Franz was accommodated in a freight-wagon. The good little man fairly glowed with enthusiasm as he described his delightful journey and the charms of his fair cousin, to whom he has evidently lost his too susceptible heart.

"Arrived at S----, the Assessor instantly came by extra post to Kaltenborn to announce the arrival of the Baron and his daughter, that Arno might be prepared to meet them. They were, the Assessor concluded, awaiting his return at S----, whither he was to carry intelligence of Arno's condition and my father's permission to visit Kaltenborn.

"You may imagine, dear, how happy the good Assessor's news made me. To think of seeing once more my dear old friend and Celia! My heart beat quickly as I went with the Assessor to Arno's room, where the little man contrived with great tact to announce to him the arrival of such dear friends.

"My father was out walking, but I sent in his name a cordial invitation to the Freiherr, and the Assessor took leave of all of us in a state of the most amiable self-complacency.

"After his departure I had too much to do in preparing for the reception of my dear guests to leave time for reflection. I had just finished arranging flowers in their rooms when their carriage stopped at the hall-door. I really do not know how I got down-stairs, but I found myself at the carriage-door. I felt Celia's ardent kisses, and the next instant I was in the carriage and in the Freiherr's arms. He kissed my forehead tenderly, and then, clasping both my hands in his, held me off from him with a smile of perfect content on his dear old face. 'You never thought, my dear child,' he said, 'that your old adorer would leave his rolling-chair and come to look for you. I could not help it; a longing for the sight of you and anxiety for my boy have brought me here. No, not anxiety, for even when the Poseneck fellow wrote me word that he was very ill I knew that my dear child's tender nursing would preserve him to me; and so it was. I owe my Arno's life to you.'

"I would have disclaimed his praise, but he would not let me speak. 'I know better about it than you do, child; his heart needed healing, and I knew his body would follow suit. You alone could be his true physician. But never blush about it; postpone that, dear child, until you and I have had a private talk together. Thunder and lightning! The will-o'-the-wisp has rushed directly into the Poseneck fellow's arms! Here's a pretty business!'

"The tone in which this outburst was uttered was far from grim, and the words themselves were contradicted by the sparkle in the old man's eyes as he looked out of the carriage. Kurt stood in the doorway with Celia clinging to him. Clasped in each other's arms, for the moment the world about the happy pair was forgotten; the Freiherr's exclamation recalled Kurt to a sense of the present. He would have hurried out to the carriage, but Celia only clasped him the closer, crying, amid tears and laughter, 'No, no, Kurt, my dearest, I have you now, and you shall not go; papa is not so angry as he pretends. Look how glad he is that we are all happy together at last!'

"'Let go the Poseneck fellow, you romp!' the Freiherr called from the carriage. 'Let him come here, I want to look at him.'

"Kurt sprang forward to offer his arm; before the Baron took it, however, he scanned the young man with keen scrutiny. The result of it must have been satisfactory, for he nodded complacently at Kurt, and then, with his help and with Franz's support, descended heavily from the carriage.

"When I handed him his crutch-handled cane from the carriage, he let go of Kurt's arm. 'You would, of course, rather conduct the will-o'-the-wisp than the old father,' he said to Kurt, with a laugh. 'Give your arm to your Celia, then, for she is yours; I can't prevent that. My child here will take me to Arno,' he added, nodding towards me.

"I was by his side in a moment; he put his arm in mine and, leaning over me, whispered, 'Will you not promise, my darling, to support your old father thus as long he lives?'

"I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. I could not speak; but he needed no reply, as he looked at me with a happy smile.

"Thus we walked slowly through the hall, and were received at the door of his room by Arno himself, leaning upon your Karl's arm, so strong that he hardly needed its support.

"As the old man embraced his darling son the tears rolled down his withered cheeks; he held him clasped in his arms for a moment, and then turning to me, said, with profound emotion, 'We owe this happy moment to our Anna. She has been the guardian angel of those two,' pointing to Kurt and Celia; 'softening my old heart until I gladly receive Kurt as a son. She has restored you to life, Arno. The dark cloud that divided you has vanished, serene skies smile above your future. Have you nothing to ask at her hands, Arno?'

"What Arno replied I cannot tell you. I felt his arm about me, his lips upon mine, and heard the ecstasy in his whispered words, 'Mine,--mine for all eternity!'

"This was our betrothal. My dearest father joyfully gave us his blessing, and Kurt and Celia, Arno and I have just passed the happiest evening of our lives, in the circle of those dearest to us, where only you, my own faithful Adèle, were wanting. Count Styrum recounted to the Freiherr his adventures in the castle of Assais, and the old Baron told in his turn of how the danger that had threatened the Finanzrath had fortunately been averted by the kind interference of influential friends. Upon Werner's promise, made in writing, never to return to Germany, the warrants out against him on a charge of high treason have been withdrawn, and he is living in Vienna in great seclusion. The thought of Werner, so different from his father, brother, and sister in his whole character and nature, disturbed my happiness for a moment, but only for a moment. One glance at Arno was enough to dissipate any cloud called up in my mind by the remembrance of his unworthy brother.

"Darling Adèle, my heart is full. The shadows of the past lie behind me, the future is brilliant with glorious sunshine. Farewell, my own true friend; I know how you will rejoice with and for your LUCIE."

Spring had again returned, and with it the blessings of peace to the fatherland. In the latter days of May there was joy indeed at Castle Hohenwald, where a double marriage was celebrated. Of course Lucie and Arno, Celia and Kurt, were the happy pairs, and Count Styrum, with his charming young wife, was present on the auspicious occasion.

FOOTNOTES:

Footnote 1: Councillor of finance. It is best to give these titles in German; they must always be awkward in English. A. L. W.

Footnote 2: Forest-depths.

THE END.

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