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2. The author's name E. Werner is a pseudonym for Elisabeth Bürstenbinder.

NO SURRENDER.

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FROM THE GERMAN OF

E. WERNER.

BY

CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
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1881.

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NO SURRENDER.

CHAPTER I.

The whole landscape lay in bright sunshine. Clear as a mirror gleamed the broad smooth surface of the lake, faithfully reflecting the image of the town which rose in picturesque beauty on its shores, whilst in the distance, vividly distinct, appeared the jagged peaks and dazzling summits of the snow-mountains.

A suburb rich in villas and gardens lined the shore. In its midst stood a pretty, detached habitation of modest aspect. It was a one-storied cottage, by no means spacious, and showing signs of no special luxury within or without. An open vine-traceried veranda formed well-nigh its sole ornament; yet there was an air of refinement about the little place, and it had a right friendly pleasant look, thanks to its fresh white walls and green jalousies; while the surrounding garden, not very large, truly, but highly cultivated, and stretching away to the border of the lake, had a peculiar charm of its own, and greatly added to the general attractiveness of the little country-house.

In the veranda, which afforded ample protection from the sun's ardent rays, and where, even at noonday, a certain degree of coolness might be enjoyed, two gentlemen were pacing, talking as they walked.

The elder of the two was a man of, it might be, about fifty years; but old age seemed to have come upon him prematurely, for his form was bent and his hair as grey as it could well be. The deeply-furrowed face, too, bore evidence of bygone struggles, perhaps of sorrows and sufferings of many kinds endured in the past, and the sharp, bitter lines about the mouth gave a harsh and almost hostile expression to a countenance which must once have been bright with ardour and intelligence. In the eye alone there still blazed a fire which neither years nor the hard experiences of life had had power to quench, and which was in singular contrast with the silvered head and drooping carriage.

His companion was much younger; a man slender of build and of average height, with features which, though not strictly regular, were yet in the highest degree attractive, and grave, earnest blue eyes. His light chestnut hair waved over a fine open forehead. There was that slight paleness of complexion which tells not of sickness, but of keen intellectual activity and a constant mental strain; and the predominant expression was one of quiet steadfastness, such as is but rarely stamped on a face at seven or eight and twenty. There could hardly be a sharper contrast than that afforded by these two men.

"So you are really going to leave us already George?" asked the elder, in a regretful tone.

The young man smiled.

"Already? I think I have made claim enough on your hospitality, Doctor. When I came, I had no intention of staying on for weeks; but you received me with such hearty kindness, I might have been some near and dear relation, instead of a stranger who could only boast a college friendship with your son. I shall never forget----"

"Pray do not thank me for that which has been a pleasure to myself," the Doctor interrupted him. "I only fear that at home you may have to pay a penalty for the hospitality you have here enjoyed. To have stayed at my house will be accounted a crime in Assessor Winterfeld--a crime which will hardly meet with forgiveness. I have never concealed from you the fact that your visit here is a venture which may compromise your whole position."

The ironical tone of this warning called up a transient flush to young Winterfeld's brow, and accounted for the vivacity with which he answered:

"I think I have shown you that I am capable of maintaining my own independence under all and any circumstances. My position, I should hope, lays me under no obligation to avoid friendly relations which are of a purely private nature."

"You think not? I am convinced of the contrary. On your return we shall see which of us is right. Remember this, George; you are under Baron von Raven's régime."

"I do not imagine that my chief troubles himself greatly about the holiday excursions of his officials," said George, quietly. "He is severe, inexorable even, in all matters relating to the service, but he never interferes in our private concerns. That justice I must do him, though I do not rank among his friends, I am, as you know, a thorough-going opponent of the tendencies he represents, and therefore personally opposed to himself; albeit, as his subordinate, I find myself for the time being compelled to silence and obedience."

"For the time being?" echoed the Doctor, sarcastically. "I tell you, he means to teach you lasting silence and obedience, and if you do not show yourself teachable he will crush and ruin you. That is his way, as it is the way of all such despicable parvenus."

George shook his head gravely,

"You go too far. The Baron has many enemies, and I do not doubt that in secret much hatred and bitterness are entertained towards him, but as yet no one has ventured to speak his name with contempt."

"Well, I venture it then," said the Doctor, with sudden vehemence; "and, truly, not without good grounds."

The young man looked at him in silence, then, after a pause of a second, he laid his hand on his arm.

"Dr. Brunnow, forgive me if I ask you a question which may, perhaps, seem indiscreet. What is this matter between you and my chief? Whenever his name is mentioned, you betray an amount of bitterness which cannot possibly have its origin in mere political opposition. You seem to know him intimately."

Brunnow's lips twitched:

"We were friends once," he answered, in a low voice; "young men together."

"Impossible!" exclaimed George. "You and----"

"His Excellency Baron Arno von Raven, Governor of the Province of R---, and closest friend and confidant of our present rulers," completed the Doctor, laying a sharp, scornful emphasis on each word. "That surprises you, does it not?"

"Certainly. I had no notion of any such acquaintance between you."

"How should you? it dates almost half a generation back. In those days he was only plain Arno Raven, and as poor and unknown as myself. We learned to know each other in stormy, troubled times, meeting in the ranks of the party to which we both belonged. Raven with his splendid talents and restless energy soon worked to the front, and became leader of us all. We followed him with blind confidence--I more especially, for I loved him as I have loved no human being since, not even my wife or child. All the enthusiasm of my youth was lavished on him. He was my hero, to whom I looked up with ardent admiration--my ideal, my pride--until the day when he betrayed and deserted us all, when he sacrificed honour to ambition, and sold himself body and soul to our enemies, giving us up at the same time to perdition. They call me 'misanthropic,' those wise folk who have never had their illusions rudely dispelled--who have never met despair face to face. If indeed I am a misanthrope, my nature was warped to bitterness on that day when, losing my friend, I lost with him all faith in mankind."

He turned away in great agitation. Evidently the memory of that long bygone event still shook the man's whole being to its depths.

"So there is some foundation for those reports which hint at a dark spot in the Baron's past," remarked George, thoughtfully. "I have heard rumours and vague allusions, but no one ever appeared to have any positive knowledge on the subject. The matter must always have escaped publicity, for Raven is only known as the energetic, unyielding representative of the government."

"Renegades are ever the most untiring persecutors of the faith they have abandoned," said Brunnow, gloomily; "and there was always a dangerous element at work in Arno Raven, a fierce, consuming, all-mastering ambition. This was his ruling passion, the true mainspring of his actions; and this it was which finally brought about his fall. His thoughts were constantly running on power and greatness to be achieved in the future; he longed to govern, to command, cost what it might, and he has obtained his heart's desire. His career is absolutely unexampled. From poverty and obscurity he has risen step by step from one dignity, from one high distinction to another. On becoming the son-in-law of the minister whose acknowledged favourite he had ever been, he was exalted to the rank of Baron, and at this moment he is the well-nigh omnipotent governor of one of the principal provinces of the land. He stands on the lofty pinnacle whereof he used to dream; but I, whom he drove into prison and into banishment, who can look back only on a weary course of years full of the most bitter disappointments, and who, standing now on the threshold of old age, have still to wrestle with the material cares of life--I would not exchange my lowly lot for his greatness. He has paid for it a heavy price--the price of his honour."

The speaker was terribly agitated. He broke off, and, turning, strode a few times up and down the veranda, striving to conquer his emotion. After a while he came back to George, who was standing silent and full of thought.

"I have not touched on this subject for years," he began again; "but I owed it to you to speak frankly. You are no blind, ductile instrument, such as Raven requires, such as alone he suffers about him; and I fear an hour may come when you will find yourself compelled to refuse him obedience, if you wish to remain true to your principles, and to quit yourself as an honourable man. What your after-fate may be beyond that turning-point is indeed another question. Stand fast, George! Through all the dislike and antagonism you nurture in your heart towards him, there runs a subtle, secret vein of admiration for this man, and I can understand it but too well. He has ever exercised a really magic influence over all who have come into contact with him. You yourself cannot altogether escape it, and for this reason I have thought it necessary to enlighten you on the subject of Baron von Raven. You know now what manner of man he is."

"I thought so, I declare! There they are again in the thick of their politics, or immersed in some other interminable debate," said a voice behind them. "I have been hunting for you all over the house, George. Good-morning, father."

The speaker, who now stepped into the veranda, was, apparently, George's junior by some years, but taller and of stronger build than his friend--a fresh-looking, vigorous young man, with a frank open face, clear eyes, and a plentiful crop of curly light hair. He cast one scrutinizing glance at his father's face, still crimsoned by agitation, and then went on:

"You should not excite yourself so much with your discussions, father. You know how injurious it is to you; moreover, you have been hard at work already this morning, I see."

So saying, he walked up to a table covered with books and papers, which stood at a little distance, and began turning over some written pages.

"Let that alone, Max," said his father, impatiently. "You will disarrange the manuscript, and you take no interest in these abstruse scientific studies."

"Because I have no time for them," answered Max, quietly laying down the papers. "A young assistant-surgeon at a hospital cannot sit all day poring over his books. You know I have my hands pretty full."

"Time might be found," remarked Brunnow. "What you lack is inclination."

"Well, inclination too, if you like. Practice is my study, and I dare say it will get me on as far."

"As far as your ambition takes you, no doubt." There was an unmistakable slight in the father's tone. "You will very probably find an extensive practice, and look on your calling altogether in the light of a lucrative profession. I do not question it in the least."

At this Max evidently had to fight down some rising irritation, but he answered with tolerable calm:

"I shall certainly find a practice of my own at the earliest opportunity. You might have done the same twenty years ago, but you preferred to write medical works which bring you in very little money, and, at the best, only obtain recognition from some few choice spirits among your colleagues. Tastes differ."

"As our conception of life differs. You do not know what it means to sacrifice yourself--to live for science."

"I sacrifice myself for nobody," said Max, defiantly. "I intend conscientiously to fulfil my duties in life, and shall think that, in so doing, I have done enough. You have a fancy for useless self-immolation, father. I have none."

"Leave this incorrigible realist to his errors, Doctor," struck in George, who from the irritated tone of both men began to fear a scene, such as was not unfrequent between father and son. "I have long given up all attempt to convert him. But now we will neither of us disturb you any longer. Max promised to go for a walk with me to the wood this morning, as soon as he returned."

"Now, just at mid-day?" asked the Doctor, in surprise. "Why not go later?"

Some slight confusion was visible in young Winterfeld's face, but he quickly mastered it.

"Later on I have to pack up and make ready for my departure, and I should like to take one last look at the lake and the mountains. It is hard on me, I assure you, to go away and leave them."

"That I believe," said Max, with a peculiar and rather malicious intonation; but he relapsed into silence on meeting his friend's half-angry, half-imploring glance.

Brunnow seemed to attach no importance to the matter. He waved them a hasty farewell, and went up to his writing-table again, while the two young men strode through the garden, and, Max having opened the iron gate, struck into the footpath which ran close to the border of the lake. They went on some time in silence. George seemed grave and thoughtful, and the young surgeon was evidently in a very ill-humour, to which the recent conversation with his father and the approaching departure of his friend may have conducted in equal shares.

"So this is the last day you are to spend here!" he began at length; "and what good can I have of it--what good have I had indeed of your visit at all? Half the time you have passed with my father, declaiming against the condition of our beloved country in general, and the dictatorship of Baron von Raven in particular. When, after unheard-of efforts, I have been so lucky as to withdraw you from the political ground, you have abused my friendship in the most shameful manner, making me stand sentry in the noonday glare, at a temperature of 86° Fahrenheit. A most agreeable post, I must say!"

"What a way of speaking!" said George, impatiently. "I merely asked you----"

"To keep watch that you should not be disturbed in your meetings--quite accidental meetings, of course--with Fräulein von Harder. That is what we, in plain English, call 'standing sentry!' How many such chance encounters may you, with or without my co-operation as walking gentleman, have enacted on this stage? Take care the mamma does not get to hear of these sociable little rambles."

"You know that my leave is out, and that I must start to-morrow," was the rather curt reply.

Max heaved a little sigh.

"Ah, the interview is likely to last a tremendous time to-day, I see. Don't be offended, old fellow. It may be very interesting to you to swear eternal fidelity by the sun, moon, and stars, but, for an outsider, the business is excessively tedious, particularly with such a temperature as we have to-day. I may safely say it is the warmest proof of friendship I ever gave a man in my life."

Talking thus, they had reached the "wood," really nothing more than a group of chestnut trees shading a stretch of meadow-land on the border of the lake. It was a favourite and much frequented resort of the townsfolk, for from thence might be had a splendid panoramic view of

the lovely sheet of water and the grand surrounding mountains. Now, at noonday, the spot was quite solitary and deserted. George who had hurried on before, stood still and gazed around expectantly, but in vain. Max sauntered up slowly after him, and in his turn took a general survey, but with no better result. Failing to discover a figure in the distance, he sat down beneath one of the mightiest chestnut-trees, on a grassy bank which formed a natural resting-place, and whence the finest prospect might be enjoyed. Leaning back in the most comfortable posture, he watched his friend with a mixture of raillery and compassion, as the latter paced up and down, betraying in every look and action his feverish uneasiness.

"I say, George, what is to be the end of this love affair, this romance of yours?" he began again, after a protracted silence.

The other frowned.

"How often have I begged you not to speak of it in that tone?"

"Did I not express myself tenderly enough? There is plenty of romance in your love, I should fancy. A young middle-class Government clerk without fortune or prospects, and a high-born Baroness and future heiress--secret meetings--prospective opposition of the whole family, struggles and emotions *ad infinitum*. I congratulate you on all these pleasant things. I should look on the business as an awkward one myself, I know."

"That I believe," said George, with a touch of sarcasm; "but, my dear Max, you really are not competent to pronounce on such matters."

"My nature being an out-and-out prosaic one," concluded Max, with perfect equanimity. "Well, I can't say you there tell me anything new. My father perpetually impresses on my mind the fact that I lack all tendency to the ideal. He has conscientiously striven to impart to me these more elevated views and notions, but unfortunately, it has not answered. I do not belong to the class of 'highly organised natures,' such as yourself, for instance. You are far more to my father's taste, and I think he would not hesitate a moment could he adopt you in my place."

A smile passed over George's face.

"If you agree to it, I have no objection."

"Just try it," said Max, dryly. "He is exceptionally gracious to you, because he happens to have taken a special fancy to you; but, in real truth, he is within an ace of turning misanthrope and man-hater. Nothing satisfies him. All his judgments are distorted, his views tinged by that bitter irritability of spirit which he ascribes to an unappeased yearning after the ideal, and that is the ground of the incessant warfare between us. He cannot forgive me for finding myself tolerably comfortable in this miserable, worthless world, with which he himself is at perpetual loggerheads. In fact, matters between us are growing more and more unbearable day by day."

"You do your father an injustice," said George, soothingly. "The man who has given up, as he has given up, home, standing, and freedom, to that which he calls his ideal, has a right to apply a higher standard to the world and to his fellow-creatures."

"But I am not up to the higher standard, you see," declared the young surgeon, testily. "You are much nearer the mark. This my father detected at once, and sequestered you to his own use accordingly. You would sink wonderfully in his estimation though, if he could guess that, in the very first days of your stay here, you committed the boundless folly of falling in love."

"Max, I beg of you," his friend broke in angrily; but Max was now fairly under way, and was not to be stopped.

"I repeat what I have said: it is folly," he asserted roundly. "You, with your serious views of life, your unceasing toil, your ideal aims--very superfluous things in reality, no doubt, but with you they must be taken into account--and this perverse spoilt child--this Gabrielle von Harder, who has been brought up in the midst of riches and in the lap of luxury, and has been innoculated with all the prejudices of her aristocratic caste! Do you really imagine that she will ever have the smallest understanding for the things which interest you? I tell you she will give you up directly the grave consequences of this holiday idyll become apparent to her, and the influence of her family makes itself felt. You will stake your all on this game, will waste your best strength in struggling with the relations, only to be sacrificed at last to some count or baron, who by birth will be a suitable *parti* for her young ladyship."

"No, no," said George, with a burst of vehemence. "You hardly know Gabrielle. You have never been in her company more than a few minutes at a time, whilst I----" He stopped suddenly, then went on in a softened voice--"I know well that there is a gap between us, a great divergence besides that of outward circumstances, but she is so young, she has hitherto seen life's sunny side only--and there are no limits to my love for her."

Max shrugged his shoulders in a way which plainly said that the last reason appeared to him highly unsatisfactory.

"Every man to his taste!" he said coolly. "This limitless love would not exactly be mine, and, so

far as I see, there is very little to be gained by it. But"--he stood up--"it is time for me to go on duty, for I see the flutter of a light garment out yonder near those elder-bushes, and a glow on your countenance as though the seventh heaven had opened to your delighted vision. George, do me one favour, I entreat. Let not the fact altogether escape your mind that there is such a thing as the noonday hour, and that ordinary mortals are accustomed then to take a repast. An extremely unpractical idea of yours, this rendezvous just in the middle of the day! I hope you will not let me perish from starvation, as a reward for my self-denying friendship."

Having thus delivered himself. Max Brunnow beat a retreat. Young Winterfeld hardly heard what he said. He was intently watching the light slender figure of a girl who now approached from the outskirts of the wood. She came swiftly and gracefully over the grass towards him, and in a few minutes stood at his side.

"Here I am, George. Have you been waiting long? It really seemed as if I should not get away to-day unnoticed, and I very nearly gave up the attempt altogether. But it would have been too cruel to let my knight languish here in vain. I believe you would never, never have forgiven me, if I had let you depart without a solemn farewell."

George held fast the little hand, which after the first slight pressure sought to withdraw itself, and there was a reproachful accent in his voice, as he said:

"Is this separation so light a thing to you, Gabrielle? Have you no other words for me at parting than these teasing quips and jests?"

The young lady looked up in surprise.

"Separation? Parting? Why, we shall see each other again in a month."

"In a month! Does that seem to you so short a time?"

Gabrielle laughed.

"It is just four times seven days. You must manage to live through them in some way; but after that we shall be coming to R--- ourselves, you know. You have a great deal to do with my guardian, have you not?"

"With Baron von Raven? Certainly. I work in his bureaux, as you are aware, and have to make reports to him from time to time."

"I hardly know him," said Gabrielle, indifferently. "I have just seen him now and again when he has come on a short visit to the capital, and that is all. The last time was three years ago. On that occasion his Excellency hardly deigned to notice me--treated me, in fact, exactly like a child, though I was then quite fourteen. You may imagine that I was in no way delighted at the prospect of living under his roof for the future, until"--here she smiled roguishly--"until I made the acquaintance of a certain George Winterfeld, and heard from him that he had the privilege of being one of my guardian's secretaries."

A strange look flitted across George's features, a look which seemed to say he was of a different opinion as to the "privilege."

"You deceive yourself if you build any hopes on that circumstance," he replied gravely. "The intercourse I hold with the Baron is purely official in its nature, and he well knows how to restrict it within the narrowest possible limits. In all else I stand wide as the poles apart from him. A young, middle-class man, holding as yet only a subordinate government appointment, does not find admittance to the Governor's circles, and can hardly venture to claim acquaintance with the Baroness von Harder. There will be distance enough between us, even though I come daily to the house in which you dwell. Here in this holiday freedom we have had the chance of learning to know, to love each other."

"In reality, you owe it to our boat which struck on the sand-bank just at the right time," put in Gabrielle. "Do you remember our first meeting, George? To this day mamma believes that she was in deadly peril, and looks on you as her deliverer, because you brought us cleverly through the shallow water to land. She would hardly have consented else to receive such frequent visits from one bearing your plebeian name; but the man who has saved one's life must be an exception, of course. If she did but know that her hero has already made me a declaration of love!"

The undisguised triumph expressed in the last words seemed to grate upon the young man. He fixed his eyes on her countenance with a scrutinising, anxious gaze.

"And if the Baroness should hear of it, sooner or later, what would you do?"

"Present you to her in all due form as my future lord and master," declared Gabrielle, with comic solemnity. "There would be an explosion, of course: tears, reproaches, hysterics--mamma is a capital hand at all these, but it comes to nothing. She invariably gives in at last, and I get my own way."

She said all this airily, carelessly, laughing gleefully as she spoke. The thought of a catastrophe which would have filled any other maiden with alarm, was, it appeared, positively diverting to the young Baroness Harder. She had seated herself on the grassy mound, and taken off her straw hat. The sunbeams, which here and there pierced through the thick leafy canopy of the chestnut-trees, played on her luxuriant fair hair and blooming face, whence a pair of great sparkling brown eyes looked merrily forth into the world. The face, with its delicate, pure outlines, was undoubtedly of fascinating loveliness, but it was wanting in that soul-speaking depth of expression which gives to the human countenance its highest charm. Beneath this radiant, beaming gaiety, one might have sought in vain any token of graver, deeper feeling. This want, however, hardly lessened the attractiveness of her fresh beauty, for all about her breathed of rosy youth, of life's happy, blossoming spring-time. She seemed the embodied reflection of the landscape out yonder, sunny and light as herself.

George looked at her with a singular mixture of vexation and tenderness.

"Gabrielle, you treat all this as so much sport, and seem to have no idea of the troubles which menace us, of the battles we shall have to fight!"

"Is the thought of battle alarming to you?"

"To me?" A flush mounted to the young man's brow. "I am ready to cope with every difficulty, if only you will stand steadily by me. But you mistake if you reckon on your mother's customary compliance in this instance, when all her prejudices will be aroused, all her family traditions evoked in opposition. And even if you should succeed in winning her over, nothing will change your guardian's views. I know him. He will never give his consent."

Gabrielle leaned her fair head against the tree's mighty trunk, and plucked carelessly at some blades of grass.

"I do not care for his consent," she said. "I shall not allow him to dictate to me one way or the other. Let him try to coerce me!"

"No one will attempt to coerce you, but they will separate us," replied George. "The very moment our love is discovered, our separation will be decreed. I know it, and it is this knowledge alone which imposes silence on me. You little guess how the secrecy, which has such a charm for you, the continued anxious concealment, distresses and humiliates me; how contrary it is to my whole nature. Now for the first time I feel all the hardship of being poor and unknown."

"What does it matter if you are poor?" asked Gabrielle, carelessly. "I shall be very rich one day. Mamma is always telling me that I am to be Uncle Raven's sole heiress."

George was silent, setting his lips tightly as though to keep down some bitter feeling.

"Yes, you will be rich," he said at last; "you will be only too rich."

"I really believe you mean it as a reproach," pouted the young lady, with a highly ungracious look.

"No; but it opens out one more gap between us. If you were in the same position of life as myself, I might come to you fearlessly, and ask, not for your hand at once, perhaps, but for your plighted faith, until such time as I could offer you a home of your own. As it is, what would Baron von Raven say, I wonder, if I ventured to propose to him for the hand of his ward and presumptive heiress? He stands in your father's place. You are under his authority."

"Yes; but only until I come of age. In a few years, my lord's guardianship and authority will expire together. Then I shall be free."

"In a few years!" echoed George. "And what will be your feelings then?"

There was such sorrowful apprehension in his words that Gabrielle looked up half-frightened, half-offended.

"George, do you doubt my love?"

He clasped her hand tightly in his.

"I have faith in you, my Gabrielle; trust me in return. I am not the first man who has worked his way up, and I have always been taught to look forward with confidence, and to depend on my own strength. I will strain every nerve for your sake. You shall not be ashamed of your choice."

"Yes; you will have to make me the wife of an Excellency at least," laughed Gabrielle. "I shall fully expect that you will become a Governor or a Minister some day. Do you hear, George? No other title will suit me."

George suddenly dropped the hand which still rested in his own. He had, no doubt, looked for some other answer to those fervent words which had come from the very depths of his heart.

"You do not understand me. How, indeed, should you know anything of the serious, earnest

side of life! No shadow has as yet crossed your path."

"Oh, I can be serious enough," Gabrielle assured him. "Most uncommonly serious. You do not know me, my real nature, thoroughly yet."

"Possibly," said the young man, with a rush of bitterness. "In any case, *I* have not had power to arouse your deeper self."

Gabrielle saw very well that he was hurt, but it did not please her to notice his humour. She teased and jested on, giving full rein to her high spirits, and indulging in all her wilful little ways, sure of her influence which had often stood fiery tests, and which worked again now. The cloud dispersed from George's brow. Anger and resentfulness could not hold good before the chatter of those rosy lips, and when the dear face looked up at him, roguish and smiling, it was all over with his resistance--he smiled too.

The clocks in the town on the opposite shore began to strike twelve. The chimes rang out distinctly over the lake, warning the young people that it was time to part. George raised his darling's hand to his lips, and kissed it passionately. The near neighbourhood of the high-road and of the adjacent country houses forbade any further mark of tenderness. Gabrielle did indeed seem to take the parting lightly. For one moment a shade fell over her, it is true, and a tear even glistened in her brown eyes, but next minute all was bright and sunny again. She threw a last kiss to her faithful lover, and hurried away. George's eyes followed her until she disappeared from view.

"Max is right," he said, dreamily. "We are ill-mated, this spoilt child of fortune and I! Why must I love her, of all others, differing from me as she does in all wherein we should be most united? Why, indeed? Ah, I love her--and that is all the answer."

In spite of his indignant repudiation of it, his friend's warning seemed to have found an echo in the young man's breast; but what could reason and reflection avail against the passion that had taken possession of his whole being? He knew from experience that there was no fighting against the charm which had taken him captive on their very first meeting, and to which on each succeeding occasion he had succumbed afresh.

CHAPTER II.

"Once more I entreat your Excellency to recall these harsh measures. We cannot possibly make the town responsible for the acts of a few individuals."

"I too am of opinion that it is not necessary to proceed with such rigour. It will not be difficult to trace out the guilty parties, and to secure them."

"Your Excellency should not attach such importance to the affair. It really does not deserve it."

The Governor, Baron von Raven, to whom all these remonstrances and remarks were addressed, appeared but little moved by them. He answered with cold politeness:

"I am exceedingly sorry, gentlemen, to find myself in such direct opposition to you in this matter, but I have formed this resolution after mature consideration; besides which, you know that I never recall a measure once decided on. My instructions will be carried out."

The gentlemen assembled in the audience-room of the R--- Government-house seemed to have been engaged in a long and animated conference. They were all more or less excited, with the sole exception of the Baron himself, who leaned back in his chair with an air of imperturbable calm.

"I should have thought that my voice, being that of the chief magistrate of the town, would have carried some weight with it," said he who had first spoken. "Particularly as on this occasion the Superintendent of Police declares himself on our side."

"Certainly," assented the official alluded to; adding, however, with prudent reserve, "but I have filled my present post too short a time to be thoroughly acquainted with the local concerns. His Excellency is, no doubt, better qualified to judge than I am."

"I only fear," began the third personage, who wore the uniform of a colonel--"I only fear, Baron, that this severity may be misinterpreted, that it may be construed into alarm for your own personal safety."

A contemptuous smile played about the Baron's lips.

"Make your mind easy," he replied. "They know me too well in R---- to ascribe fear to me. That reproach will be spared me, I know, come what may."

He rose, thereby giving the signal for the breaking up of the conference.

Baron Arno von Raven, at six or seven and forty, might have been taken as a type of mature and vigorous manhood. He was still in the plenitude of his strength, physical and intellectual, and still, as was generally admitted, of a most imposing presence. There was an air of command in the very carriage of his tall and powerful form. His marked features, on which haughtiness and an indomitable energy were plainly written, could not now be styled handsome--they had indeed never been so--but they were striking and characteristic in every line. The thick dark hair was untinged with grey, except on the temples, where some silver threads denoted that life's meridian was past. The dark eyes, so full of fire, seemed, however, to tell another tale. They spoke of life in all its pristine force and vigour; but there was a stern, uncompromising look in them, and when they rested on any given object, they seemed literally to transfix it. His bearing was one of quiet dignity blended with proud reserve. Nothing in him betrayed a trace of the parvenu. The man looked as though from his earliest years he had had the habit of command.

"This is not a question of myself," he said. "So long as abuse and menaces were conveyed to me in anonymous letters, I simply consigned them to the waste-paper basket, and thought no more of them; but if bills containing threatening and seditious language are, openly and before the eyes of all the world, to be pasted up on the walls of the Government-house, if attempts are to be made to insult me when I drive out, while the more respectable citizens demonstratively refrain from interfering, it becomes my duty to take some serious steps in the matter. I hold the highest post in this province. If I suffer these misdemeanours, if I tolerate these offences directed against my person, I thereby endanger the authority of the Government, which it is my office to represent, and which I am bound to uphold under all circumstances. I repeat, Mr. Mayor, that I regret to be under the necessity of ordering certain police-regulations which may prove irksome and vexatious, but the town has only itself to thank for them."

"We know by experience that your Excellency does not allow any considerations of public convenience to influence you in such cases," said the Burgomaster, sharply. "I can do no more, therefore, than leave with you the entire responsibility of such harsh proceedings--and with this, I think, our interview may come to an end."

The Baron bowed stiffly.

"I do not know that I have ever sought to evade the responsibility of my official acts. I certainly shall not do so in this instance. Good morning, gentlemen."

The Burgomaster and the Superintendent of Police left the room, and walked together through the broad galleries towards the entrance-door. The former, a grey-haired and somewhat choleric old gentleman, could not help giving vent by the way to his long pent-up anger.

"So with all our prayers, our remonstrances, and representations, we have obtained nothing but this sovereign dictum, 'My orders will be carried out,'" said he to his companion. "This famous phrase, a favourite with his Excellency, seems to have had its effect even upon you. Your opposition was silenced by it in an instant."

The Superintendent of Police, a man much younger in years, with a keen, cunning face and extremely polite manners, shrugged his shoulders, and answered quietly:

"The Baron is at the head of the administration, and as he has declared that in any contingency he will cover me from all responsibility, I----"

"You do as he bids you," concluded the other. "After all, one cannot wonder. It is not likely you should wish to share the fate of your predecessor in office."

"In any case, I hope to show myself more competent to fulfil the duties of my post than he was." The answer was courteous, but decided. "So far as I know, my predecessor was removed on account of incapacity."

"You are much mistaken. He fell, because he was not agreeable to Baron von Raven, because he occasionally took upon himself to have an opposite opinion of his own. He had to give way, of course, before the all-powerful will which has held arbitrary sway over us for so long. The attitude assumed by our Governor to-day will have shown you better than a month in office what the situation of affairs here really is, and, if I am not mistaken, you have chosen your side already."

The last words were spoken in a very pointed manner, but the Superintendent seemed not to remark it. He only smiled affably by way of reply; and as they had now reached the door of exit, the two gentlemen parted company.

Meanwhile the Baron and his third visitor had remained closeted together. Colonel Wilten, commanding officer of the garrison stationed at R----, was a man of right soldierly appearance,

yet, notwithstanding his natural advantages, enhanced as they were by his uniform and the orders he wore, he could not bear comparison with the tall and stately figure of his host in plain civilian attire.

"You really should not proceed with too great severity, Baron," the Colonel remarked, taking up the thread of the conversation when the others had left. "These perpetual conflicts with the respectable citizens are looked on with great disfavour in high quarters."

"Do you suppose the conflicts are agreeable to me?" asked Raven. "But in this case to forbear would be to show weakness, and that I hope, will hardly be expected of me."

The other shook his head dubiously.

"You are aware that I have been absent, spending a few weeks in the capital," he began anew. "During that time I mixed a good deal in ministerial circles, and I must tell you, confidentially, that opinion there is not favourable to you. You are in ill-odour."

"I know it," said Raven, coldly. "I have not shown myself docile enough, subservient enough to them; and, besides this, they cannot forgive me my plebeian origin. To stay and hinder me in my career was beyond their power; but there has never been any real cordiality towards me in those quarters."

"For which reason it behoves you to be prudent. Attempts are constantly being made to undermine your position. There is talk of 'arbitrary action,' of a 'tendency to encroachment;' and every measure adopted by you is discussed and subjected to sharp, if not malignant criticism. Do you apprehend no danger from all the intrigues which are being woven against you?"

"No, for I am too necessary in high places, and shall take good care to remain so, notwithstanding my 'arbitrary action' and 'tendency to encroachment.' I, better than any one, can estimate the difficulties of my position here. They will not so easily find another man equal to the task of governing this province, and especially this rebellious, opposition-loving city of R----. But I thank you for the warning, nevertheless; it accords perfectly with the advices I have myself received."

"Well, I thought I would give you a hint, at least," said the Colonel, rising to go. "But now I must be leaving. You are expecting visitors to-day, I hear."

"My sister-in-law, Baroness Harder, and her daughter," replied the Governor, accompanying his visitor to the door. "They have been spending a part of the summer in Switzerland, and are to arrive here to-day. I am expecting them every minute."

"I had the pleasure of occasionally meeting the Baroness in the capital some years ago," remarked the officer; "and I shall hope to renew the acquaintance at an early date. Meanwhile, may I beg you to present my best respects to the lady? Good-morning, Excellency."

Half an hour later, a carriage rolled up beneath the portico of the Government-house, and Baron von Raven came down the main staircase to receive his guests.

"My dear brother-in-law, what a pleasure it is to see you again at last!" cried a lady seated in the carriage, stretching out her hand to him with much animation and tender haste.

"I bid you welcome, Matilda," said Raven, with his customary cool politeness, as he opened the door and helped her to alight. "Have you had a pleasant journey? It was rather disagreeably warm for travelling."

"Oh, terribly! The long drive has quite shattered my nerves. We had at first intended to stay and rest a day in E----, but the longing to see our dear uncle was so strong within us, we really *could* not wait."

The "dear uncle" received the compliment with great indifference.

"You would have done wisely to make a halt at E----, certainly," he said. "But where is the child Gabrielle?"

That young lady, in the act of springing lightly from the carriage without waiting for his aid, flushed scarlet with indignation at this most insulting question. The Baron himself gave a slight start of astonishment, and looked long and curiously at the "child," whom he had not seen for full three years, and whose appearance now evidently took him by surprise. But his astonishment and Gabrielle's consequent triumph were of short duration.

"I am glad to see you, Gabrielle," he said quietly, and, stooping, touched her forehead with his lips. It was the same slight, formal caress which he had formerly bestowed on the maiden of fourteen, and, as he vouchsafed it, his stern, dark eyes rapidly surveyed her with one single look, sharp and penetrating, as though he would at once read the inmost workings of her mind. Then he offered his arm to his sister-in-law to lead her upstairs, and left the young lady to follow them.

The Baroness launched into a torrent of pretty speeches and affectionate inquiries, which met with monosyllabic answers alone. Her flow of words, however, was not to be checked; it only

ceased on their reaching the wing wherein were situated the rooms destined to the ladies' use.

"These are your apartments, Matilda," said the Baron, pointing to the open doors. "I hope they will be to your taste. This bell summons the servants. Should anything be wanting to your comfort, I trust you will let me know. I will now leave you for a while. You must both be fatigued from your long journey, and require rest. We shall meet at dinner."

He went, visibly relieved at having accomplished the awkward and troublesome task of welcoming his guests. Hardly had the door closed behind him, when the Baroness, hastily throwing off her travelling wraps, began to inspect her surroundings. The four rooms appointed to their use were fitted up with great elegance, and even with an amount of splendour. The furniture was very handsome, the curtains and carpets being of the thickest and richest materials. In all things the habits and convenience of high-bred visitors had been consulted, and regard had been had to their every possible requirement. In short, there was no fault to be found; and Madame von Harder came back from her tour of inspection in an eminently contented frame of mind.

Presently she noticed that her daughter was still standing in the middle of the room they had first entered, not yet divested of her hat and travelling-cloak.

"Will you not take your things off, Gabrielle?" she asked. "What do you think of the rooms? There will be comforts about us here, thank Heaven! such as one is accustomed to. We shall prize them after all the hardships of our long Swiss exile."

Gabrielle paid no heed to the words.

"Mamma, I don't like Uncle Raven," said she suddenly, with the utmost decision.

The tone was so unusual, in so sharp a contrast to the young lady's habitual style, that her mother looked up in surprise.

"Why, child, you have hardly seen him!"

"Never mind, I don't like him. He treats us with an indifference, a condescension which is absolutely offensive. I can't understand how you could put up with such a reception!"

"Nonsense, dear," said the Baroness, soothingly. "It is my brother-in-law's natural manner to be formal and chary of speech. You will get accustomed to it when you know him better, and grow fond of him."

"Never!" cried Gabrielle, vehemently. "How can you expect me ever to grow fond of Uncle Arno, mamma? I have never heard anything but ill of him. You always used to say he was a horrible tyrant; papa never spoke of him except as a parvenu or adventurer, and yet neither of you ventured to be anything but friendly to him, because----

"Hush, child!" interrupted her mother, looking round in alarm to see that no one had overheard the treasonable words. "Have you forgotten that we are quite dependent on your uncle's goodness? He is implacable when he thinks himself insulted. You must never attempt to contradict him."

"Why did you all show him so much deference if he was only an adventurer?" persisted Gabrielle, obstinately. "Why did grandpapa let him marry his daughter? Why has he always been considered the leading personage of the family? I can't understand it."

"Nor I either!" exclaimed the Baroness, with a sigh. "The power that man exercises has always been inexplicable to me, as was your grandfather's predilection for him. He, with his plebeian name and his position, at that time a very subordinate one, ought naturally to have looked upon his admittance into our family as an immense privilege, as an unmerited piece of good fortune, instead of which he took it exactly as if it had been his due. No sooner had he established a footing in our house than he began to govern every one in it, from my sister down to the servants, who stood more in awe of him than of their own master. He had my father so completely under his control that nothing was done without his advice or assistance, and all the others he simply put down extinguished. How he did it I cannot say--enough that it was so; and not only in our family circle, in society and the political world he rapidly gained surprising dominion. No one ventured to oppose or thwart him."

"Well, he will not extinguish me," cried the girl, with a defiant toss of the head. "Oh, he thought he should frighten me with his great solemn eyes which seem to bore one through and through, as though they would read the most secret thoughts of one's heart; but I am not a bit afraid of him. We shall see whether he can bend me to his will, whether he will find me as pliable as he has found other people."

The Baroness grew alarmed. She feared, with good reason, that this exceedingly spoilt daughter, who ruled her mother in everything, and was by no means accustomed to put a restraint on herself, would now give the reins to her waywardness, and display it in her behaviour to the Baron himself. She exhausted all her stock of arguments and entreaties, but with no satisfactory result.

Miss Gabrielle seemed to take a peculiar pleasure in roundly expressing her defiance of her guardian, and showed herself in no way disposed to abandon the warlike attitude she had at once taken up towards him. But her serious mood had already spent itself, having lasted a most unusual length of time. The old petulant gaiety returned in full force.

"Mamma, I do believe you are in real earnest afraid of this old ogre of an uncle," she cried, with a merry laugh. "Well, I am more valiant--I shall beard the monster in his den, and I promise you he will not eat me."

CHAPTER III.

The Government-house of R--- was an ancient castle, which for long years had been the dwelling-place of a princely family, but which in the ever-changing course of events had become the property of the state, and now served as the seat of the provincial government and the residence of its temporary head. The grand, spacious old edifice was situated on a hill just outside the town, and, in spite of the prosaic destiny which had overtaken it in these latter days, still preserved much of its mediæval aspect.

A most picturesque object was it, with its salient towers and bay-windows, and its fine commanding site which overlooked all the country round. The original ramparts and fortifications had, it is true, long ago disappeared, surrendered to the march of modern progress, but in their stead a perfect forest of noble trees had sprung up, clothing the castle-hill, whence a broad and easy road led down to the town. From the windows of the noble old château, which rose, proud and stately, above the leafy crests, a full view might be had of the city and the wide valley beneath, all circled in by mountains.

The main body of the building was exclusively assigned to the Governor's use, the upper part being inhabited by him, while his bureaux, or "Chancellery," occupied the ground-floor. In the two side-wings were situated the other public offices and the quarters of such of the higher functionaries as were domiciled beneath its roof. Notwithstanding these very practical arrangements, the interior of the building, no less than the exterior, retained its antique character, which, indeed, was ineffaceably stamped on every line of its architecture.

The vaulted chambers with their deep door and window recesses belonged to the last century; long gloomy galleries and arched corridors met and crossed in every direction; echoing stone staircases led from one story to another, and the court and garden of the old stronghold were still maintained in their primitive condition. The "Castle" as it was briefly termed in all the neighbouring country, was, and had been from time immemorial, the pride and ornament of the good city of R---.

The present Governor had now filled the post for a long series of years. Had it not been a fact well known that he was the son of a subaltern official who had died early, leaving no fortune, his middle-class origin would never have been suspected, for the appearance he made in public and his style of living were as thoroughly aristocratic as his manners and person.

How it had come to pass that Raven had become the favourite of the then all-powerful Minister, no one knew. That Minister's penetrating glance had most probably detected rare ability in the young aspirant for honours.

Some pretended to know that there were other and secret reasons which had combined with this: so much is sure, he was suddenly appointed secretary to his Excellency, and in this new capacity acquired opportunities of developing his talents which he had not possessed in his former subordinate position. The secretary was soon promoted to be his master's friend and confidant, was preferred and put forward on every occasion, and even admitted into the great man's family circle. The lower rungs of the official ladder were quickly climbed, and one day society in the capital was astounded by the news, which at first seemed to be too wonderful to be believed, that the Minister's elder daughter was betrothed to the young newly-appointed Councillor. Shortly afterwards the rank of Baron was conferred on the bridegroom expectant, and therewith he was fairly launched on his career.

The son-in-law of so influential a man found his way smoothed for him in every direction, but it was not this alone which bore him aloft with such dizzy speed. His really splendid abilities seemed only now to have found, their proper field, and soon displayed themselves in a manner which made all adventitious aid superfluous. A very few years later, the "inexplicable" conduct of the Minister who, instead of opposing, had favoured the *mésalliance*, became sufficiently intelligible. He had taken his son-in-law's measure; he knew what was to be expected from the

young man's future, and it is certain that his daughter, as Madame von Raven, played a far more brilliant part than her sister, who married a nobleman of high lineage, but of utter personal insignificance.

When the Baron was nominated to the important and responsible post of R---, he found matters there in a critical condition. The storm of faction, which some years before had convulsed the whole land, had no doubt spent itself for the time being, but signs were not wanting that it was merely repressed, and not completely and finally laid. In the --- province especially, a perpetual ferment was kept up, and great, populous R---, the chief city of that province, stood at the head of the opposition which arrayed itself against the Government. Several high officials, succeeding each other in rapid order, had endeavoured in vain to put an end to this state of things; they lacked either the necessary resolution or the necessary authority, and confined themselves to half measures, which adjusted temporary difficulties, but left the deeper discord strong and abiding as ever. At length Raven was appointed head of the administration, and city and province soon became aware that a firmer grasp was on the reins. The new Governor went to work with an energy, and, at the same time, with a reckless disregard of such persons and interests as stood in his way, which raised a perfect storm against him. Appeals, protests, expostulations and complaints flowed in to head-quarters in one unceasing stream, but the Ministry knew too well the value of their representative not to lend him full support. Another so placed might have recoiled before the unbounded unpopularity which his proceedings brought on him, have given way, vanquished by the difficulties and vexations inherent to the situation--Raven remained at his post. He was a man who in every circumstance of life sought, rather than avoided, a contest, and the innate despotism of his nature here found ample room for its development. He troubled himself little with considerations as to whether the measures he judged necessary were strictly within legal bounds, and met all the accusations freely hurled at him, all the charges of absolutism and a violent abuse of power, with the one steady reply: "My orders will be carried out!" In this way he at length succeeded in reducing the rebellious elements to submission. Both city and province came to see that it was impossible for them to carry on the war against this man, who adopted as the rule and regulation of his conduct, not their rights, but his own might. The times were not propitious for open resistance. A period of severe reaction had set in, and any active sedition would certainly have been nipped in the bud; so the party of opposition submitted, reluctantly, indeed, and with an ill grace, but still submitted; and the Governor, who had so brilliantly accomplished his task, was loaded with honours.

Years had passed since then. People had grown accustomed to the despotic régime under which they lived, and had learned to regard the Baron with that respect which an energetic, consistent character compels even from its enemies. Moreover, to him was owing a series of improvements which his keenest opponents could not see without satisfaction. This man, whose political action had earned for him hatred and mortal hostility, became in another sphere the benefactor of the province committed to his charge. Indefatigable as its representative when any occasion offered of defending its interests, he was ever ready to introduce, or to support, such reforms as tended to promote the public weal. His resolution and strong powers of initiative, which had worked so banefully in one direction, grew most beneficent when turned to pacific account. Foremost amongst the advocates of any scheme likely to favour industrial enterprise, to befriend the agriculturist, or in any way to enhance the general prosperity, he attached many interests to himself, and thus in time rallied partisans almost as numerous as his enemies. His administration was a model of order, incorruptibility, and strict discipline, and throughout the province were visible blooming evidences of the many improvements he had planned with practical, sagacious insight, and executed with a hand which never wavered in its purpose.

The Governor lived in great style, for he possessed a considerable fortune independently of his official income. His late father-in-law had been very rich, and at his death the property had been divided between his two daughters, Madame von Raven and the Baroness Harder. The former lady's marriage had been one of those convenient matrimonial arrangements so common in the upper ranks of society. Raven had been guided in his choice simply and solely by calculation, but he never forgot that this union had opened to him his career, and his wife had at no time cause to complain of neglect or want of consideration on his part; the affection, which was so signally absent, she did not miss. Madame von Raven was a person of very moderate intelligence, and could never have inspired any serious passion. She had accepted the hand of her father's favourite, hearing it daily predicted that a great future was in store for him, and this prophecy being fulfilled, she did not feel that more was to be desired from life. Her husband responded liberally to all her demands respecting a brilliant establishment and elegant toilettes, and gave her an enviable position in society, so no differences arose between them. They lived together on what is supposed to be a very aristocratic footing, as much apart and as strange one to the other as possible. This union, a pattern one in the eyes of the world, but a childless, had been dissolved, about seven years before the events here recorded, by Madame von Raven's death; and the Baron, to whom the whole fortune descended by will, had taken to himself no second wife. The proud man, whose brain was ever busy with his ambitious plans and projects, had at no time been accessible to the soft influences of love or to domestic joys; and he would in all probability never have married, had not marriage been to him a stepping-stone by which to mount. This motive no longer existing, he did not think of burdening himself with fresh ties; and, as he was now approaching his fiftieth year, his decision on the subject was generally accepted as final.

On the morning succeeding the arrival of Baroness Harder and her daughter, the former lady

was sitting with her brother-in-law in the boudoir which formed part of her suite of rooms. The Baroness still showed traces of beauty, which, however, had years ago bloomed and faded. In the evening, perhaps, by the tempered lustre of wax-lights, the numberless arts of the toilette might have produced a delusive effect; but now, in the broad glare of day, the truth revealed itself mercilessly to the eyes of the Governor as he sat opposite her.

"I cannot spare you these details, Matilda," he said; "though I quite understand how painful they must be to you. The matter must be discussed between us once, at least. By your wish I undertook the settlement of the Baron's affairs, so far as it was possible for me to settle them at this distance. They proved to be in a state of absolute chaos, and, even with the help afforded me by your solicitor, I had the greatest difficulty in mastering their complications, I have at length succeeded, and the result of my labours I communicated to you in Switzerland."

The Baroness pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"A comfortless result!" she said.

"But one not unexpected. There was, I regret to say, no possibility of rescuing for you even a slender portion of your fortune. I advised you to go abroad, because it would have been too mortifying to you to witness the sale of your town-house and the breaking-up of your establishment in the capital. In your absence, what was really an act of necessity took the colour of a voluntary withdrawal from society, and I have been careful that the true state of the case should not transpire among your old intimate friends and associates. Happen what may now, the honour of the name you and Gabrielle bear is safe. You need fear no attack on it from any of the creditors."

"I know that you have made great personal sacrifices," said Madame von Harder. "My solicitor wrote me all the details. Arno, I thank you."

With a touch of real feeling she held out her hand to him as she spoke, but he waved it back so coldly that any warmer impulse in her was at once checked.

"I owed it to my father-in-law's memory to act as I have acted," he replied. "His daughter and grandchild must always have a claim upon me, and their name must, at any cost, be kept free from reproach. It was these considerations which induced me to make the sacrifices, and no sentimental feelings of any sort. Sentiment, indeed, could have no ground for existence here, for, as you are aware, there was little friendship between the Baron and myself."

"I always deeply deplored the estrangement," said the Baroness, fervently. "Of later years my husband sought in vain to bring about a better understanding. It was you who persistently avoided any friendly intercourse. Could he give you a higher proof of his esteem, of his confidence, than to entrust to you that which he held most dear? On his death-bed he named you Gabrielle's guardian."

"That is to say, having ruined himself, he made over all responsibility touching the future of his wife and child to me, whose constant enemy he had been through life. I perfectly understand the value I ought to set on that proof of his confidence."

The Baroness had recourse to her handkerchief again.

"Arno, you do not know how cruel your words are. Have you no pity, no consideration for a heart-broken widow?"

Raven made no reply, but his eyes travelled slowly over the lady's elegant grey silk dress. She had promptly laid aside her mourning at the expiration of the year's widowhood, knowing that black was unbecoming to her. The unmistakable irony she now detected in her brother-in-law's glance called up to her cheeks a slight flush of anger, or of confusion, as she went on:

"I am only just beginning to hold up my head a little. If you knew what cares, what humiliations, preceded that last terrible catastrophe, what losses unexpectedly befell us on all sides! Oh, it was too horrible!"

A faint sarcastic smile flickered about the Baron's lips. He knew right well that the husband's losses had overtaken him at the gaming-table, and that the wife's one care and anxiety had been to eclipse all the other ladies of the capital by the superior richness of her toilettes and the handsome appointments of her equipages. At her father's death the Baroness had inherited the property conjointly with her sister. Her share had been squandered to the last penny, while Madame von Raven's fortune remained intact in her husband's hands.

"Enough!" he said, waiving the topic. "Let us say no more on this disagreeable subject. I have offered you a home under my roof, and I am glad that you have accepted the proposal. Since my wife's death, I have been in some degree dependent on strangers, who preside well enough over the establishment, but who cannot in all things fill the place of the mistress of the house. You, Matilda, know how to entertain, and like receptions, fêtes, dinners, and the like--now it is precisely in regard to these matters that I have felt a want. Our interests coincide, you see, and I have no doubt we shall be mutually satisfied with each other."

He spoke in his usual cool and measured tone. Evidently Baron von Raven was not disposed to glory in the rôle of benefactor and deliverer, though to these relatives of his he had really acted as both. He treated the matter altogether from a business point of view.

"I will do all in my power to meet your wishes," declared Madame von Harder, following her brother-in-law's example as he rose and went up to the window.

He addressed a few further indifferent questions to her, asking whether the arrangement of the rooms was to her taste, whether she received proper attendance and had all she required, but he hardly listened to the torrent of words with which the lady assured him that everything was charming--delightful!

His attention was fixed on a very different object.

Just under the window of that boudoir was a little garden attached to the door-keeper's lodge. In this garden Miss Gabrielle was walking, or rather racing round and round after the door-keeper's two children, for the walk had resolved itself into a wild chase at last. When the young lady that morning undertook a short excursion "to see what the place was like," as she expressed it to her mother, the place itself had but little part in the interest she manifested. She knew that George Winterfeld came daily to the Government-house, and it must be her task, therefore, to arrange some plan for those frequent meetings which George had declared to be impossible, or, at best, exceedingly difficult.

Miss Gabrielle did not adopt this view of the case, and her reconnaissance was now directed to one end and aim, namely, to discover precisely where the Baron's bureaux, in which the young official was employed, were situated. On her way, however, she fell in with the lodge-keeper's small seven-year-old boy and his little sister, and quickly made friends with both. The bright, lively children returned the young lady's advances with confiding alacrity, and these new acquaintances soon drove all thoughts of her exploring expedition, and alas! of him for whose sake it had been undertaken, entirely into the background.

She allowed the little ones to lead her into the small garden which was attached to the lodge, and was entirely distinct from the Castle-garden proper. She admired with them the shrubs and flower-beds, and the three rapidly advanced in intimacy. In less than a quarter of an hour a game was set on foot, accompanied by all the requisite noise, to which Miss Gabrielle contributed fully as much as her young playmates. She bounded after them over the beds, stimulating them to fresh efforts, and provoking them to ever-renewed gaiety.

Unbecoming as this no doubt was in a young lady of seventeen, and in the Governor's niece, to an unprejudiced beholder the spectacle was none the less charming. Every movement of the young girl's supple form was marked by unconscious, natural grace. The slight figure, in its white morning-dress, flitted like a sunbeam between the dusky trees. Some of her luxuriant blond tresses had grown loose in the course of her wild sport, and now fell over her shoulders in rich abundance, while her merry laughter and the children's happy shouts were borne up to the Castle windows.

The Baroness, looking down from her point of observation, was struck with horror at her daughter's indecorous conduct especially when she became aware that Raven was intently following the scene below. What must that haughty man, that severe stickler for etiquette, think of the education of a young lady who could comport herself in this free-and-easy manner before his eyes? The Baroness, apprehending some of those stinging, sarcastic comments in which her brother-in-law was wont to indulge, sought, as much as in her lay, to mitigate the ill impression.

"Gabrielle is wonderfully childish still at times," she lamented. "It is impossible to make her understand that such babyish ways are highly unsuitable in a young lady of her age. I almost dread her first appearance in society--which had to be postponed a year in consequence of her father's death. She is quite capable of behaving in that wild, reckless way in a drawing-room."

"Let the child be natural while she may," said the Baron, his eyes still fixed on the group below. "She will learn soon enough to be a lady of fashion. It would really be a pity to check her now; the girl is a very sunbeam incarnate."

The Baroness pricked up her ears. It was the first time she had ever heard a speech at all genial from her brother-in-law's lips, or seen in his eyes any expression other than that of icy reserve. He visibly took pleasure in Gabrielle's high spirits, and the wise woman resolved to seize the propitious moment, in order to clear up a point which lay very near her heart.

"Poor child, poor child!" she sighed, with well-simulated emotion. "Dancing on so merrily through life, and little dreaming of the serious, perhaps sorrowful, future in store for her! A well-born, portionless girl! It is a bitter lot, and doubly bitter for one who, like Gabrielle, has been brought up with great expectations. She will find this out soon enough!"

The manœuvre succeeded beyond all anticipation. Raven, whom in general nothing would move, seemed for once to be in pliable mood, for he turned round and said, in a quick, decided manner:

"What do you mean by a 'sorrowful future,' Matilda? You know that I have neither children nor

relatives of my own. Gabrielle will be my heiress, and therefore there can be no question of poverty for her."

A gleam of triumph shone in the Baroness's eyes, as she thus obtained the assurance she had long so ardently desired.

"You have never declared your intentions," she remarked, concealing her satisfaction with an effort: "and I, naturally, could not touch on such a subject. Indeed, the whole matter was so foreign to my thoughts----"

"Has it really never occurred to you to speculate on the chances of my death, or on the will I might leave?" interrupted the Baron, giving full play now to the sarcasm he had hitherto partially restrained.

"My dear Arno, how can you imagine such a thing?" cried the lady, deeply wounded.

He paid no heed to this little outburst of indignation, but went on quietly:

"I trust that you have not spoken to Gabrielle on the subject"--he little knew that it had been almost a daily topic--"I do not wish that she should be taught to think of herself as an heiress; still less do I wish that this girl of seventeen should make my will and my fortune the objects of her calculations, as it is, of course, quite natural others should do."

The Baroness drew a deep sigh.

"I meet with nothing but misconception from you. You even cast suspicion on the promptings of a mother's love, and misjudge her who, without fear or care for herself, trembles for the future of an only child!"

"Not at all," said Raven, impatiently; he was evidently weary of the conversation. "You hear, I consider such anxiety natural, and therefore I repeat the assurance I have just given you. My property having come to me from my father-in-law, I intend that it shall one day descend to his grandchild. Should Gabrielle, as is probable, marry during my life-time, I shall provide for her dowry; at my death she will be, as I have said, my *sole* heiress."

The emphasis he laid on the word proved to the Baroness that for herself she had nothing to expect. Her daughter's future being assured, however, she might look on her own as secure also, and thus her double object was attained. The hardly-veiled contempt with which Raven treated her, and which Gabrielle's fine instinct had detected in the manner of his first welcome, was by Madame von Harder either unfelt or unheeded. She had in her secret heart no more love for her brother-in-law than he for her; and in returning sweet words and gracious looks for his brusque curtness and indifference, she was merely deferring to a stern necessity; but the perspective of taking her place at the head of so brilliant an establishment, of shining in R--- as the Governor's near relative, and, in this quality, of taking precedence everywhere, soothed, and in a great measure reconciled her to this necessity.

A few minutes later Raven traversed the ante-room, which had the same aspect as the adjoining boudoir, and, stopping a moment at the window, cast one more glance below.

"Sad that the child should have fallen to such parents, and have had such a bringing-up!" he muttered. "How long will it be before Gabrielle becomes a coquette like her mother, caring for nothing but dress, intrigues, and society gossip? The pity of it!"

As has already been said, the Governor's official quarters, whither he now repaired, were situated on the basement floor of the Castle. He transacted much of his business in his own private study, but would frequently visit the bureaux of the various departments. The clerks therein employed were never safe from a sudden and unforeseen descent of the master, whose keen eyes descried the smallest irregularity. The official who was so unlucky as to be surprised in any breach of the regulations never escaped without a sharp reprimand from "the chief," who, so far as possible, directed everything in person, and introduced into his bureaux the same iron discipline which marked his general administration.

The business of the day had begun long before, and the clerks were all in their places when the Baron entered, and slightly bowing, walked through the offices. Some of the sections he merely passed through with one brief inquisitorial glance around; in others he stopped, put a question, made a remark, in several cases asking to look at a document. His manner to his subordinates was cool and deliberate, but polite, and the young men's faces showed in what awe they stood of the Governor's frown.

As the latter entered the last room of the series, an elderly gentleman, who was at work there alone, rose respectfully from his desk.

Tall and meagre of person, with a face deeply lined, and a stiff, unbending carriage, this individual bore himself with the grave dignity of a judge. His grey hair was carefully brushed, not a wrinkle nor speck of dust was visible on his black suit of clothes, while a broad white neckcloth of portentous dimensions gave to its wearer a certain peculiar solemnity of aspect.

"Good-morning, Councillor," said the Baron, with more cordiality than his manner usually showed, signing to the other to follow him into a smaller side-office, where he generally received his officials in single audience. "I am glad to see you back again. I missed you greatly during the few days you were absent."

Court-councillor Moser, chief clerk and head of the bureaucratic staff, received this testimony to his indispensability with visible satisfaction.

"I hastened my return as much as possible," he replied. "Your Excellency is aware that I only applied for leave in order to fetch my daughter from the convent in which she has been educated. I had the honour of presenting her to your Excellency yesterday, when we met in the gallery."

"It seems to me you have left the young lady rather too long under spiritual guidance," remarked Raven; "she almost gives one the impression of a nun herself. I am afraid this convent education has completely spoiled her."

The chief-clerk raised his eyebrows, and stared at his superior in dismayed astonishment.

"How does your Excellency mean?"

"I mean spoiled her for worldly purposes," the Baron corrected himself, a hardly perceptible smile hovering about his lips as he noticed the consternation depicted in the other's face.

"Ah! yes, indeed, there your Excellency is right"--the chief-clerk never neglected an opportunity of giving the Governor his title, even though he had to repeat it three times in a single sentence--"but my Agnes's mind was never given to the things of this world, and she will shortly renounce them altogether. She has resolved on taking the veil."

The Baron had taken up some papers, and stood glancing over their contents as he quietly pursued his conversation with the old gentleman, the only official whom he admitted to anything like familiar terms.

"Well, that is hardly surprising," he observed. "When a young girl is left in a convent from the age of fourteen to that of seventeen, one must be prepared for some such resolve. Does it meet with your approval?"

"It is hard for me to give up, once and for ever, my only child," said the Councillor, solemnly. "Far be it from me, however, to place hindrances in the way of so holy a vocation. I have given my consent. My daughter is to spend some months at home, to see something of the world before she enters on her novitiate in the convent where she has hitherto been at school. The Reverend Mother wishes to avoid even the slightest appearance of constraint."

"The Reverend Mother is, no doubt, pretty sure of her pupil," observed the Baron, with a touch of irony which happily escaped his hearer. "Well, if it is the young lady's own desire, there is nothing to be said against it; but I am sorry for you, who hoped to find in your daughter a support for your old age, and who must now resign her to the nuns."

"To Heaven," emended the old gentleman, with a pious upward glance; "to Heaven, before whose claims even a father's rights must necessarily give place."

"Of course, of course--and now to business. Is there anything of importance on hand?"

"The advices received from the Superintendent of Police----"

"Yes, yes, I know. They are making a great disturbance in the town about these new measures. They will have to submit to them. Anything else?"

"There is the full and detailed report to the Ministry which has already been discussed. Whom does your Excellency appoint to draw it up?"

Raven considered a moment.

"Assessor Winterfeld."

"Assessor Winterfeld!" repeated the other, slowly, and with dissatisfaction in his tone.

"Yes; I should like to give him an opportunity of distinguishing himself, or, at least, to bring him into notice. In spite of his youth, he is one of the cleverest, most able men we have."

"But not sound, your Excellency, very far indeed from sound. He has a decided liberal tendency; he leans to the opposition----"

"All the younger men do that," interrupted the Baron. "They are all red-hot reformers, eager to set the world to rights, and they consider it a proof of character to do a little in the way of opposition to the Government of their country. These ideas tone down in the course of time. Promotion generally works a cure in such cases, and I dare say Assessor Winterfeld's will be no exception to the rule."

The chief-clerk shook his head doubtfully.

"So far as regards his abilities and many personal advantages, I fully concur in the flattering opinion your Excellency has formed of him; but certain things have come to my knowledge concerning the Assessor, certain things which, I fear, indicate flagrant disloyalty on his part. It is, I regret to say, established beyond all doubt that, on the occasion of his last leave of absence, he formed in Switzerland the most suspicious connections, and consorted with all kinds of Socialists and dangerous revolutionary characters."

"That I do not believe," said the Baron, decidedly. "Winterfeld is not the man to hazard his future in so reckless and objectless a manner. His is not one of those flighty romantic natures which are easily assailable by such temptations. The story has another version, probably. I will inquire into it. As regards the report, I abide by my decision. May I ask you to send the Assessor to me?"

The Councillor went, and a few minutes later George Winterfeld entered the room. The young man knew that, in being chosen for the task now before him, an honour was conferred on him above all his colleagues, but the distinction seemed rather to weigh upon than to elate him. He received his chief's instructions with quiet attention, grasped the short, comprehensive directions fully, caught with apt intelligence the several hints which the Governor thought well to give him, and proved by a few pithy remarks that he had made himself thoroughly conversant with the subject before him. Raven had too often to fight against the dull-witted incapacity of his subordinates not to feel satisfaction at being thus met half-way, some words now sufficing to convey his meaning, whereas he was frequently obliged to stoop to long and wearisome explanations. He was visibly well-pleased. The business in hand was despatched in a comparatively short space of time, and George, having noted down some memoranda of his instructions, only waited for the signal of dismissal.

"One thing more!" said the Baron, in no way changing the quiet, business-like tone he had used throughout the interview. "You spent some time in Switzerland, I believe, during your late leave of absence."

"Yes, your Excellency."

"I am told you there sought out associates, or, at all events, formed certain connections, unsuitable to a man holding your official position. What is the truth of the matter?"

The Baron's eyes rested on the young clerk with that keen searching gaze so dreaded by those under his command. Winterfeld, however, showed neither dismay nor embarrassment.

"I sought out an old college friend in Z---," he replied, calmly; "and at his warm instance stayed some weeks at his father's house, the latter being, it is true, a political refugee."

Raven frowned.

"That was an act of imprudence I should not have expected from you. You should have reflected that such a visit would naturally excite remark and arouse suspicion."

"It was a friendly visit, nothing more. I can give my word that it had not the remotest reference to politics. This is simply and solely a private affair."

"No matter, you should take your position into consideration. A friendship with the son of a man politically compromised might be passed over as harmless, though it would hardly go to further your advancement; but intimacy with his father and a prolonged sojourn at his house should distinctly have been avoided. What is this gentleman's name?"

"Doctor Rudolph Brunnow." The words came in clear, steady tones from George's lips, and now it was his turn to watch his interlocutor narrowly. He saw a spasmodic contraction of the muscles--saw a swift, sudden pallor overspread the stern features, while the lips were tightly pressed together; but all this came and went with lightning-speed. In the next instant the man's habitual self-control prevailed. Accustomed at all times to show an impassive, impenetrable front to those about him, he at once regained his usual perfect composure.

"Ah; indeed; Rudolph Brunnow!" he repeated slowly.

"I do not know whether the name is familiar to your Excellency," George hazarded, but quickly repented of his hasty speech. The Baron's eyes met his, or rather, as Gabrielle expressed it, they bored him through and through, seeking to read the secrets of his inmost heart. There was a dark menace in that searching gaze that warned the young man to go no step further. He felt as though he were standing on the verge of an abyss.

"You are an intimate friend of Dr. Brunnow's son," Raven began again, after the pause of a second; "and therefore, in all probability, intimate with the father also."

"I only made the Doctor's acquaintance this summer, and though his views are occasionally warped by a certain harshness and bitterness, I found him an honourable and upright man, for whom I must entertain the greatest esteem."

"You would do wisely not to express your sentiments so openly," said the Baron, with frigid displeasure. "You are the servant of a State which has passed judgment on a certain class of political offenders, and still inexorably condemns them. You ought not to, and must not, consort familiarly with those who publicly proclaim themselves its enemies. Your position imposes on you duties before which all mere emotional feelings of friendship must give way. Remember that, Mr. Winterfeld."

George was silent. He understood that behind the icy calm of this address there lay a threat; understood, too, that the threat was levelled not at the official, but at the man who had been initiated into the secrets of a past which Raven had probably believed long buried and forgotten, and which now started up, phantom-like, before his eyes. Painful as it might be, the remembrance had not power to move the Baron for more than an instant. As he rose from his chair, and slightly waved his hand in token of dismissal, the old unapproachable haughtiness marked his bearing.

"You are warned now. That which has passed shall be overlooked, considered as a hasty error. That which you may do in future will be done at your own risk and peril."

George bowed in silence, and left the room. He felt now, as he had often felt before, that Dr. Brunnow had been right in warning him against the almost magic influence exercised by Raven over all who came in contact with him.

The young man, after the weighty disclosures which had been made to him, had felt he was entitled to look down from a lofty height on the traitor and the renegade; but the power to do so had gone from him as he re-entered the charmed circle surrounding that master-mind. Disdain could not hold its own before those eyes which so imperatively demanded obedience and compelled respect; it glanced off scathless from the man who carried his guilty head with so high and proud a mien, as though he recognised no judge over him or his actions.

Little as George allowed himself to be affected by the exalted position and imperious bearing of his superior, just as little could he escape the spell of that chief's intellectual ascendancy. And yet he knew that sooner or later a struggle must come between himself and the Baron, who held in his hands Gabrielle's future, and, consequently, all his own chances of happiness. The secret could not be kept for ever--and what would happen when it should be known?

The image of his love rose up before the young man's eyes--of his love, of whom as yet he had caught no glimpse, though she had arrived the evening before, and at that moment the same roof covered them--and by its side appeared the iron inflexible countenance of him he had just left. Now, for the first time, he divined how severe would be the struggle by which he must hope to conquer all that he held dear in life.

CHAPTER IV.

Some weeks had passed. Baroness Harder and her daughter had made and received the necessary inauguratory visits, and the former lady had observed with much satisfaction the respect and deference everywhere shown them on the Governor's account. Still better pleased was she to discover that her brother-in-law really required nothing further from her than to play the hostess and dispense the hospitalities of the Castle; no troublesome or unpalatable duties were imposed on her, as she at first had feared might be the case. All care for, all the responsibility of, the great and strictly-ordered household devolved, now as before her coming, on an old major-domo who had filled the office for many years, and who regulated and directed everything, rendering account to his master alone. The Baron had probably had too good an insight into the management which had obtained in his sister-in-law's town establishment to grant her anything like independent action in such matters. Socially and ostensibly, she represented the mistress of the house, of which, in reality, she was but the guest. Some women might have felt the position in which she was thus placed a humiliating one, but a desire for domination was as foreign to the Baroness's mind as a sense of duties to be fulfilled. She was too superficial to understand either of these great motive-powers. Affairs were shaping themselves in a far more satisfactory manner than, after the catastrophe which followed her husband's death, she had had a right to expect. She was living with her daughter in the midst of luxury; the Baron had assigned to her a sum by no means inconsiderable for her personal expenses; Gabrielle was his acknowledged heiress. Taking all this into consideration, they might well, she argued, bear the constraint which was the unavoidable result of the situation.

Gabrielle, too, had quickly grown accustomed to her new surroundings. The grandeur and ceremony of the Government-house, the scrupulous punctuality and strict etiquette which there

prevailed, the boundless respect and prompt service of the domestics, to whom the slightest gesture of the master's hand was a command--all this astonished the young lady, and impressed her with a certain awe. It certainly presented a striking contrast to the household system she had seen at work in her parents' city home, where the greatest external splendour and the greatest internal disorder reigned together, where the servants permitted to themselves all sorts of trickery and disrespectful negligence, where the claims of family life were lost sight of in the pursuit of pleasure. In later days, too, as the load of debt accumulated, and the difficulties grew more and more pressing, there had come violent scenes between Baron von Harder and his wife, scenes in which each accused the other of extravagance, while the common prodigal outlay went on unchecked. The half grown-up daughter was too often a witness of these altercations. At once spoiled and neglected by her parents, who liked to parade the pretty child, but, beyond this, concerned themselves but little about her, she lacked all serious training. Even the events of the last year, her father's death, and the subsequent collapse of their fortunes, had passed over the young girl's head, leaving scarcely a trace behind. Sorrow and pain seemed to have no hold on that sunny, volatile nature.

Sufficient judgment, however, Gabrielle did possess to see that the existent order of things in this parvenu's house was far more fitting and in better taste than that she had known at home, and she frequently tormented her mother with remarks on the subject.

The Baroness was sitting on the little sofa in her boudoir, turning over the leaves of a fashion-book. A great reception was to be held at the castle in the course of the next few days. The highly important question of what dresses should be worn was now awaiting decision, and both mother and daughter were zealously applying themselves to the study which had such attractions for at least one of them.

"Mamma," said Gabrielle, who was sitting by her mother, holding some stray leaves of the fashion-book. "Uncle Arno declared yesterday that these great parties were a troublesome duty, imposed on him by his position. He does not take the smallest pleasure in them."

The Baroness shrugged her shoulders. "He takes pleasure in nothing but work. I never met with a man who gave himself so little rest and recreation as my brother-in-law."

"Rest?" repeated Gabrielle. "As if he even knew what it meant, or could endure it if he did know! Quite early in the morning he is sitting at his writing-table, and at midnight I often see a light in his study. Now he is busy in his own bureaux, then in the other departments; after that, he drives out, surveying improvements here and there, and inspecting heaven knows what! In between these occupations he receives all sorts of people, listens to reports, issues orders.... I really believe he gets through more work himself than all his clerks put together."

"Yes, he was always a restless creature," assented the Baroness. "My sister often assured me that it made her nervous even to think of the unceasing whirl of activity in which her husband spent his days."

Gabrielle leaned her head on her hand, and mused a little thoughtfully.

"Mamma," she soon began again, "your sister's married life must have been a very dull and tiresome one."

"Tiresome? What makes you think so?"

"Well, I only mean by what I hear in the Castle. My aunt lived in the right wing, and my uncle in the left. Sometimes he would not go near her rooms for weeks, and she never went to his. He had his own carriages and servants, and she had hers. They each went and came as they liked, without giving each other a thought. It must have been a strange sort of life."

"Oh, you are quite mistaken," replied her mother, who evidently saw nothing very shocking in such a state of things. "It was a perfectly happy marriage. My sister had never reason to complain of her husband, who fulfilled her every wish. She, fortunate being, was never subjected to the harsh words, to the scenes, which in later years, I had constantly to endure."

"Yes, you and papa were always quarrelling, that is true," said Gabrielle, naïvely. "Uncle Arno never did that, I am sure; but he took no interest in his wife, though he can take an interest in everything else, even in my schooling. It was very rude of him to say, a little while ago, in your presence, that he thought my education very deficient and neglected, and that it was easy to see at a glance I had always been left to maids and governesses."

"I am, unfortunately, accustomed to such inconsiderate, unkind speeches from him," declared the Baroness, with a sigh, which, however, did not for a moment interrupt her close examination of a pattern before her. "If I submit to them, I make the sacrifice simply and solely with a view to your future, my child."

Her daughter did not seem particularly moved by this proof of maternal solicitude.

"I was catechised like a little school-girl," she grumbled on. "He worried me so with his questions and cross-questions, that I got quite confused at last, and then he shrugged his shoulders and decreed that I should begin taking lessons again. Take lessons at seventeen! He

will have masters out from the town for me, he says; but I shall just tell him pointblank that it is not necessary, and he need not trouble himself about the matter."

The mother looked up from her fashion-plates.

"For Heaven's sake, do nothing of the kind. As it is, you seem to live in a state of continual rebellion to your guardian, and I often tremble with fear lest you should rouse his anger with your pertness and obstinacy. So far, I must say, he has put up with your conduct with wonderful patience, he who could never brook a contrary word!"

"I would a great deal rather he grew angry," said Gabrielle, petulantly. "I can't endure him to smile down at me from that great height, as if I were too insignificant a child to annoy or aggravate him--he invariably does smile in that way when I attempt it--and when he is so gracious as to kiss my forehead, I feel as if I should like to run away from the place."

"Gabrielle, I do beg of you----"

"It is of no use, mamma, I can't help it. Whenever I come near Uncle Arno, I have a feeling as though I must defend myself, defend myself with all my might and main against something--something there is about him. I don't know what it is, but it worries and vexes me. I cannot behave to him as to other people. I cannot, and what is more, I will not!"

The young lady's last words were uttered in a tone of spirited defiance. She took up her hat and parasol from the table, and prepared to depart.

"Where are you going?" asked her mother.

"Only into the garden for half an hour. It is too hot here in these rooms."

The Baroness protested. She wished to have the grave question of the toilette settled first, but Gabrielle seemed to have lost all interest in it for that day, and was, besides, too much accustomed to follow the bent of her own caprices even to heed the objection. Next minute she hurried away.

The garden lay at the back of the Castle, and was bounded by its walls on one side, while on the other it stretched away to the edge of the steeply-sloping hill. The high fortification-walls, which had formerly closed it in on this side also, had been taken down, and were now replaced by a low parapet completely clothed in ivy. A full, free view could thus be had of the surrounding country. Below lay the valley, here widening to its fullest breadth, and displaying to the eye of the spectator its picturesque sites and varied beauties. The Castle-mount was famed for its prospect far and wide. The garden itself still bore traces of those long-bygone times when it had served as pleasance to the mediæval stronghold. Somewhat narrow, somewhat dusky, and very limited in space, it was neither bright with sunshine nor gay with flowers.

One rarer charm, however, it could boast. Majestic ancient limes shaded its walks, and altogether screened it from view; not even from the Castle windows could it be overlooked. Gravely the great trees stood, considering the younger generation which had sprung up on and about the former ramparts, clustering down the hill-sides, and adorning them with their slender stems and fresh tender green. Those leafy giants, the limes, had struck root in the soil more than a century before; their grand old trunks had weathered many a storm, and the mighty branches which formed their crests were interwoven in one vast thick canopy, through which but few sunbeams pierced their way.

The whole space beneath lay in broad, deep shade. Hardly a flower throve in this dim retreat, but under foot was a pleasant stretch of lawn dotted here and there by clumps of bushes, from the midst of which came the low plash and murmur of a fountain. This fountain was in the taste of the last century, and ornamented with old weather-beaten statues, representing, in fantastic fashion, sprites and water-nymphs. Dark, damp moss covered their stony heads and arms supporting shells, from each of which a bright jet of water shot aloft, to fall in a million diamond-drops into the great basin below. Here, too, the grey stones were carpeted with a close mossy velvet which gave a singularly deep colouring to the crystal-clear water. The Nixies' Well, as it was called from the figures which adorned it, dated from the Castle's earliest times, and still played a certain rôle in the traditions of the country-side.

An old legend had attributed some healing power to the spring, and, notwithstanding the fact that the old mountain-fortress had been transformed into a most prosaic official residence, a superstitious belief in that legend was still firmly rooted in the mind of the people. Water was fetched thence on certain days of the year, and employed as a preventive against sickness and as a remedy in various ailments, to the supreme disgust of the Governor, who had done his best on several occasions to put an end to the folly. He had even ordered the Castle-garden, which had hitherto been accessible to the public, to be closed, and forbidden the admittance to it of any stranger. This prohibition, however, had a contrary effect to that desired. The people adhered obstinately to their superstition, and clung more tenaciously than ever to the object of it. The servants of the household were moved by prayers, or bribed by presents, to tolerate in secret that which they dared not openly allow. The Castle-fountain retained its old reputation, and its waters were venerated as almost holy, though, to be sure, the divinities to whom it had been consecrated were pagan enough in their outward semblance.

Gabrielle too had heard of these things, had heard of them from the Baron himself, who frequently alluded to the subject with angry ridicule; and it might possibly be that lurking spirit of rebellion against her guardian, so dreaded by her mother, which led the young lady to select this as her favourite spot. To-day again she sought it, but neither the Nixies' Well nor the noble prospect spreading out yonder on the unenclosed side of the garden had power to chain her attention. Gabrielle was out of humour, and she had some cause for discontent. After the boundless liberty she had enjoyed at Z---, the strict formal etiquette of the Government-house galled and irritated her. She could not reconcile herself to it; the less that this etiquette was an insuperable obstacle to the frequent meetings with George Winterfeld on which she had counted.

Here in R---, the young people were completely separated. With the exception of a chance encounter now and again, always in the presence of witnesses, they were fain to content themselves with a casual glimpse of each other at a distance, with some little secret signal, as when George would pass beneath the window and furtively wave his hand to a slender, white-robed figure above. He had attempted to approach her. His previous acquaintance with them justifying the step, he had paid a visit to the ladies. The Baroness would have had no objection to receive the agreeable young man, as she had received him previously, but Raven gave her very decidedly to understand that he did not desire anything like intimacy between the ladies of his family and one of his young clerks who could have no claim to such a distinction. So the visit was accepted, but no invitation to repeat it was given, and thus the attempt proved abortive.

True, it was impatience, rather than actual trouble of mind, which made Gabrielle rebel against the restraint everywhere surrounding her. Since the Baron had so calmly deposed her to the rank of a child, she had missed George's tender and yet passionate homage, which formerly she had accepted as a thing of course. *He* never thought her education deficient and neglected, *he* never catechised her, or expected her to take wearisome lessons, as did her guardian, who clearly did not know how young ladies of her age ought to be treated. In George's estimation she was faultless; the one woman to be adored; he was happy when she just blew a kiss to him from afar.... And yet she was angry with George too. Why did he not try more to break through the barriers which separated them? Why did he remain at so respectful a distance? Why, at least, did he not write to her? The young girl was too childish and inexperienced to do justice to that feeling of delicate consideration which made her lover shrink from anything likely to cast the least shadow on her, which made him endure silence and separation rather than venture on any step that might imperil her good name.

"Well, Gabrielle, are you trying to fathom the secrets of the Nixies' Well?" said a voice, suddenly.

She looked quickly round. Baron von Raven stood before her--he must just have stepped out from among the bushes. It was a most unusual thing for him to set foot in the garden--he had neither time nor inclination for solitary walks. Some special motive must have brought him here to-day, for he went straight up to the fountain, and began to examine it carefully on every side.

"Well, Uncle Arno, I should think you ought to be better acquainted with the secrets than I am," retorted Gabrielle, laughing. "I am still a stranger in the land, and you have lived at the Castle ever so long."

"Do you think I have had time to listen to these nursery-tales?"

The contemptuous tone in which he spoke jarred on the girl, she hardly knew why. "Did you never care for such nursery-tales, not even as a boy?"

"Not even as a boy. I had something better to think of even then."

Gabrielle looked up at him. That proud, stern face, with its expression of sombre earnest, certainly did not give the idea that its owner could ever have known or cared for the fairy world of youth.

"Nevertheless, my visit to-day is to the Nixies' Well," he went on. "I have given orders to have the fountain pulled down and the spring stopped; but I wanted to see first how it was likely to affect the ground, and what precautions should be taken."

Gabrielle turned upon him in alarm and indignation.

"The fountain is to be destroyed? Why?"

"Because I am tired at length of all the folly connected with it. The absurd superstition is not to be uprooted. In spite of my strict orders to the contrary, water is constantly being fetched from the well, and thus the preposterous delusion is kept alive. It is high time to put an end to it, and that can only be accomplished by doing away with the object to which the superstition clings. I am sorry that one of the Castle's notable old curiosities should have to fall a sacrifice--but no matter, the sacrifice must be made."

"But you will be robbing the garden of its chief ornament," cried Gabrielle. "It is the sparkle and murmur of the fountain which gives to the place its greatest charm. And that silver-clear water is to be driven down into the earth? It is a shame, Uncle Arno, and I won't see it done."

Raven, who was still busy closely inspecting the fountain, turned his head slowly towards her.

"You won't see it done?" he asked, looking at her sharply, but not with the threatening imperious frown wherewith he was accustomed to crush contradiction in the bud; there was even the faintest flicker of a smile about his lips. "Then, of course, I shall have no alternative but to recall the order I have given ... it would be the first time such a thing ever happened to me! Do you really suppose, child, that I shall give up a resolve of mine in deference to your romantic fancies?"

Again there came that superior, half-derisive, half-pitying smile which Gabrielle hated, and the word 'child' which was equally abhorrent to her. Deeply wounded in her dignity as a maiden of seventeen, she preferred to make no answer, but contented herself with casting at her guardian a look eloquent with indignation.

"You are behaving as though the demolition of the fountain were a personal affront to yourself," said the Baron. "I see you still preserve your childish respect for the old hobgoblin stories, and are in right earnest afraid of the nixies and the phantom-folk."

"I wish the nixies would avenge the contempt now shown them and the intended destruction of their home," said Gabrielle, in a tone which was meant to be playful, but which vibrated with real anger. "The chastisement would not fall on me."

"But on me, you think," said Raven, sarcastically. "No, no; make your mind easy, child. It is only your poetic, moonlight natures which are exposed to these things. The nixies' charm would utterly fail if tried on me."

They were standing close to the fountain's edge. The water fell with a soft monotonous splash and ripple out of the stone shells down into the basin below. Suddenly a breezy gust diverted the course of the jet, dashing its spray in a sparkling shower at once over the Baron and Gabrielle. The girl sprang back with a cry. Raven stood quietly where he was.

"That caught us both," said he. "The nixies seem to be impartial in their favours. They stretch forth their dripping arms to friend and foe alike."

Gabrielle had retreated to the garden-seat, and was busy wiping the glittering drops from her dress with her handkerchief. His raillery irritated her beyond all telling, and yet she hardly knew what answer to make. Had any one else so spoken to her, she would have found some gay repartee, would have turned the accident into a joke, and made it a pretext for merry banter. But now she could not do this. The Baron's jests were always caustic. It was irony at most which now and then gleamed in his face, and caused the wonted gravity of his features to relax.

With a rapid movement he shook off the drops wherewith he too was plentifully besprinkled, and drew near the garden-seat in his turn, adding:

"I am sorry to have to spoil your favourite spot, but, as regards the fountain, the edict has gone forth. You will have to make the best of it."

Gabrielle cast a sorrowful look at the shining, falling water. Its dreamy murmur had possessed a mysterious attraction for her from the very first day. She was almost ready to cry, as she answered:

"I know you do not care how your orders vex and distress other people, and that it is quite useless for me to ask a favour of you. You never listen to petitions of any sort."

Raven crossed his arms quietly and looked down at her.

"Ah! you have found that out already?"

"Yes; and nobody ever thinks of coming to you with one. They are all afraid of you--the servants, your clerks, mamma even--every one but me."

"You are not afraid?"

"No!"

The answer came boldly and resolutely from the young lady's lips. She seemed to have reassumed her warlike attitude, and to have determined this time on exasperating the dreaded guardian--but in vain. He remained perfectly calm, and appeared rather amused than offended at his ward's spirit of contradiction.

"It is fortunate your mother is not here," he remarked. "She would be a prey to the keenest anxiety, and quite despair of the perverse young head which will not bend to necessity, as she herself does with admirable self-abnegation. You should take example by her."

"Oh, yes! mamma is docility itself where you are concerned," cried Gabrielle, growing more and more excited; "and she expects the same from me. But I will not play the hypocrite, and I cannot like you. Uncle Arno, for you are not good to us, and never have been good to us. Your very reception of us when we came was so humiliating that I should have been glad to go away

again at once; and since then you have daily and hourly let us feel that we are dependent on you. You treat my mother with a disrespect which often makes me go hot with indignation. You speak in a slighting way of my papa, who is dead and cannot defend himself, and you behave to me as though I were a sort of toy not to be thought of seriously. You have taken us in, and we live in your Castle, where everything is much grander and finer than in my own home, but I would far rather be away in our Swiss exile, as mamma calls it--in our little house by the lake, which was so simple and modest, where we had barely what was necessary, but where, at least, we were free from you and your tyranny. Mamma insists on it I must bear it, because you are rich, and because my future depends on your favour. But I do not want your money; I do not care about being your heiress. I should like to go away from here; the sooner the better!"

She had sprung up from her seat and stood facing him, glowing with passionate excitement, one little foot firmly planted in advance, her head thrown back, her eyes brimming with tears of anger and of mortification; but there was more in this stormy outbreak than the mere defiance of a wayward child. Every word betrayed intense and deeply-wounded feelings; and there was, indeed, but too much truth in the accusation she thus boldly launched at her guardian.

Raven had uttered no syllable of interruption. He had stood immovable, his gaze riveted on her face; but now, as she ceased speaking, and, drawing a long breath, pressed her hands on her bosom, while a torrent of hot tears burst from her eyes, he stooped down suddenly and said, with great earnestness:

"Do not cry, Gabrielle. To you, at least, I have been unjust. I own it."

Gabrielle's tears were stayed. Now only, as reflection succeeded to excitement, did she realise all the imprudence of her words. She had surely counted on an outbreak of swift, fierce wrath; and, in its stead, there met her this inexplicable calm. She stood, mute and almost abashed, looking to the ground.

"So you do not want my money?" went on the Baron. "How do you know what my intention may be with regard to it? I have never made any communication to you on the subject, to my knowledge; yet the topic would appear to have been well discussed between you and your mother."

The young girl flushed crimson.

"I do not know ... we never----"

"Do not attempt to deny it, child. You are as little versed in falsehood as in mercenary calculation, or you would never have adopted such an attitude towards me, I am not angry with you for it. I can forgive open defiance. Hypocrisy and systematic scheming I could not have forgiven you at your age. Thank God, the faulty education has not done so much harm as I feared."

He took her hand quietly, as though nothing unusual had happened, drew her down on to the bench, and seated himself by her.

Gabrielle made a little attempt to move away from him.

"Stay! you must allow me to meet your declaration of war with an answer in due form," said the Baron. "Your mother will not share in the hostilities; at least, not openly. I am sure she has enjoined it on you as a duty to be amiable and gracious in your manner towards the parvenu."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, in confusion.

"Well, the term cannot be unfamiliar to you. It was, I believe, the special designation accorded to me in your father's house."

This time Gabrielle bravely met the look which rested on her face.

"I know my parents had no love for you," she answered. "How could they? You had never been anything but hostile to them."

"I to them, or they to me? but no matter, it comes to the same. These are things whereof you, Gabrielle, are not yet qualified to judge. You have no notion what it is for a man holding an inferior position, such as mine then was, to enter an eminently aristocratic family and the high social sphere in which that family moved. In those circles I had then, and have had since, but one friend, your grandfather. With every one else I had to win my place by force of conquest; and there are but two ways to this end. Either the aspirant must bow his head and meekly submit to all such humiliations as are showered on a parvenu--he must either show himself deeply sensible of the honour conferred on him, and content himself with being tolerated--and to this my nature was not suited--or he must boldly usurp the master's place, assert an authority over the whole clique, show them there is a power mightier than that of their genealogies, and set his heel on all their prejudices and arrogant pretensions. Then *they* learn to bow before him. As a rule, it is far easier to govern and keep men under than is generally supposed. You must know how to overawe them. Therein lies the whole secret of success."

Gabrielle shook her head slightly.

"These are hard principles."

"They result from my experience of the world, and I have thirty years' advantage over you in this respect. Do you think I never had my grand ideals, my dreams, and my enthusiasm? Do you think my heart was never fired with all the ardent imaginings of youth? But these things die out as we advance in life. I could not carry my dreams with me into such a career as mine. They hold you to the ground; it was my wish to mount, and I have mounted. Truly, I had to pay a high price for my chance--too high a price, perhaps; but no matter, I have attained my end."

"And has it made you happy?" The question came almost involuntarily from the young girl's lips.

Raven shrugged his shoulders.

"Happy? Life is a struggle, not a state of beatitude. One must throw one's adversary, or be thrown--there is no third issue. You, indeed, look on all this with other eyes as yet. To you, life is still one long summer day, bright as the light shining out yonder. You still believe that far away in the glistening distance, over those blue mountains, there lies a paradise of joy and content. You are mistaken, child. The golden sun shines down on endless sorrow and misery, and over beyond the blue mountains is nothing but the toilsome road from the cradle to the grave, the long route we diversify with so much strife and hatred. Life is only one great battle to be fought every day afresh: men are but puppets to be governed--and despised."

There was an indescribable hardness and harshness in his words, but there was in them also all the decision and energy proper to the man. He was enouncing a dogma which had become to him indisputable. The bitterness of spirit pervading his profession of faith escaped, indeed, in a great measure his girlish hearer, who listened half amazed, half indignant--listened and wondered.

"But, finally, there comes a time when the everlasting combat sickens," Raven went on; "when a man comes to ask himself whether, after all, the once dreamed-of greatness were worth the stake of all he possessed, when he counts the sum of victories achieved by constant wrestling and unremitting exertions, and, counting them, grows heartily weary of the game he has played so long. I am weary of it often--very weary!"

He leaned back, and gazed out into the distance. There was gloomy care in his look, and the deep weariness of which he spoke re-echoed in his voice. Gabrielle was silent, greatly embarrassed by the serious turn the conversation had taken, and feeling herself led away into quite unknown paths. Hitherto she had seen in her guardian the master only--the master, iron of will and inaccessible to sentiment. His behaviour towards herself had been marked by the mere indulgent condescension with which a man stoops to a child's range of ideas. He had never spoken to her in any but the half-kindly, half-jesting manner he had assumed to-day on first meeting her.

For the first time this taciturn, rigidly reserved nature expanded in a moment of self-forgetfulness. Gabrielle looked down into a depth whereof she had not dreamed; but instinctively she felt that she must not move, must not conjure up the strong emotions stirring below the surface.

A long pause followed. The two looked out silently at the broad landscape lying before them in the warm light of a mellow August day. The month had nearly run its course, and summer seemed before her departure to be shedding all her bountiful stores of loveliness over the earth. Resplendent sunshine steamed over the ancient city spread at the foot of the Castle-hill, flooded the pasture-lands and fields, gleamed on the hamlets which dotted the country far and near, and sparkled in the ripples of the river winding its way majestically through the valley.

Enclosing this valley stood the circling hills, some with softly modulated lines, some rising boldly, jagged and rugged, with their stretches of green meadow and dark patches of forest, out from which, here and there, a pilgrim's shrine shone whitely, or a ruined fortress, grey with age, reared its crumbling walls. In the far distance, half veiled in blue mist, rose the grander mountains, a noble background bounding the horizon, and over all the azure sky smiled serene and gracious, and the great sea of ether was filled with a golden haze. It was one of those days when the earth lies bathed in light, so saturated with warmth and brilliant in beauty, that it would seem as though the world's wide compass held naught else than sunshine, glorious sunshine.

No stronger contrast could have been found than this beaming landscape without, and the deep cool shade of the Castle-garden, buried in its sombre quiet. The mighty crests of the limes, with their closely-woven boughs, shed a sort of mild green twilight on the space below, and from beneath the tall trees came the monotonous plash of the fountain. In unvarying alternation the crystal column rose on high, splintered into a thousand fragments, and sank to earth again. Occasionally a ray of light, straying into this retired nook, would strike the falling spray, transforming it into a shower of diamonds, but next moment the glory was gone. All lay in cool shadow again, and through the misty veil of water the grey figures of the sirens, with their long

serpent hair and stony features, looked spectrally forth.

The still, sultry noon seemed to have hushed all Nature into dreamy repose. Not a bird fluttered, not a leaf stirred; from the Nixies' Well alone came a mysterious murmur, breaking the deep stillness. Thus from time immemorial had the spring rippled and babbled here on the Castle-hill; for more than a century now, clad in the stone vesture into which it had been forced, had this faithful companion fulfilled its duty, quickening the solitude, enlivening the sequestered retreat of the Castle-garden. Over its head had swept all the hurricanes which the old fortress had braved of yore--the hurricanes of war, the stormy, violent times of battle and strife, of victory and defeat. Following on these had come a period of splendour and greatness, during which the ancient stronghold had disappeared, and in its place a princely mansion had arisen. All this the ever-flowing fount had witnessed. Historic events had befallen; generations had come and gone, until, at length, a new era had dawned--the era of modern progress, changing, modifying, ordering all afresh. To this puissant influence everything had yielded--save only and except the sacred spring, fenced around by a rampart of legend and superstition. But now its turn, too, had come. The old statues, which had so long protectingly surrounded it, were to fall, and the bubbling water was to be driven from the cheery light of day down into the dark earth beneath, there to be held captive for evermore.

Were its import a complaint, or a tale of whispered memories, that dreamy murmur exercised a strange fascination over the grave, unbending man, who had never known the musings of solitude or its poetic inspirations, and over the youthful blooming maiden at his side, who, with laughing lips and a merry heart, had hitherto fluttered joyously on her course, unheeding, ignorant of life's earnest. All the fierce wrestling and striving on the one hand, all the happy childish fancies on the other, were resolved, as it were, into some nameless strange sensation, half sweet, half troubled, which held the two in thralldom. So, as they sat listening to the ripple and purl of the water, unvarying, and yet so melodious, the outer world with its shining vistas and wealth of golden warmth receded farther and farther from view, until at length it vanished altogether. Then dim shadows grew up round the pair, a cool watery film gathered round them, and they were drawn down, down into vague mysterious depths, where no sound of life penetrated, where all battling and fierce longing, all happiness and sorrow, died away into one deep, deep dream; and through their dreaming, as from some immeasurable distance, they could still hear the faint spirit-singing of the spring.

In the city below, the bells rang out the noonday hour. The clear resonant chimes were borne up to the Castle-hill, and at their sound all the strange fantasies evoked by the eerie murmur of the water melted away. Raven looked up as though he had been suddenly, roughly awakened, and Gabrielle rose quickly, and, with a movement almost akin to flight, hurried to the ivy-kirtled parapet, where, bending forwards, she stood listening to the distant carillon. The sound came distinctly to her through the still air, as on that day by the lake-shore when she and George ... Gabrielle did not follow out the thought. Why did George's name force itself all at once on her memory, striking her as with a reproach? Why did his image suddenly appear before her--that resolute face which seemed to say it would guard and maintain his rights? On that last occasion, when, in a laughing, jesting humour, she had taken leave of him, the bells had said nothing to her. To-day, at the remembrance of them, a quick sharp pang shot through her, a warning, as it were, not again to let herself be enticed out of the bright familiar sunshine into unknown depths, a hint of some dimly-foreseen danger, now weaving its meshes round her. She was seized by a vague, unaccountable alarm. The Baron had risen too. He came up to where she stood.

"You have taken flight?" he said slowly. "From what? From me, perhaps?"

Gabrielle tried to smile, and to master the uneasiness which possessed her, as she replied:

"From the murmur of the Nixies' Well. It has such a weird, ghostly sound at this noontide hour."

"And yet you have chosen this spot as your favourite haunt?"

"Well, the fountain has now lived its life. Tomorrow, perhaps, by your command, the garden will have been turned into a wilderness, a chaos of stones and earth, and ..."

"Little do I care whether my orders distress other people or not?" completed Raven, as she paused. "It may be so--but, Gabrielle, are you really so fond of this spring? Would it positively distress you to see it stopped?"

"Yes," said Gabrielle, in a low voice, looking up at him. Her lips uttered no word of entreaty; but her eyes besought him earnestly, pleading for the doomed fountain.

Raven was silent. For some minutes he stood by her without speaking. Then he began again:

"I frightened you just now with my harsh views of life, but no one says you must share them. I forgot for a moment that youth has a right to dream, and that it would be cruel to rob you of the privilege. Keep your faith still in the golden far-off future, in the promise of the blue mountains. You may yet put gentle confidence in the world and in mankind; it is little likely you will ever incur their hostility and hatred."

His voice was veiled and wonderfully soft, and all austerity had vanished from his look, as it

rested half sadly on the young girl's countenance; but Arno Raven was not one to be long influenced by such emotions; and, indeed, it seemed that no chance of yielding to them was to be afforded him, for at this moment steps were heard approaching, and, as they turned, the lodge-keeper, accompanied by an elderly man--a mechanic, apparently--entered the garden. They stopped on perceiving the Governor, and uncovered respectfully.

Raven's mildness had already vanished. He had quickly shaken off the unwonted mood.

"What is it?" he asked, in the curt, authoritative tone habitual to him.

"Your Excellency has given orders that the Nixies' Well should be broken up, and the spring stopped," answered the master-mason. "It was to be done today, and my men will be here in half an hour or so. I only wanted to see beforehand whether there would be any difficulty, and if the work was likely to take up much time."

The Baron glanced at the fountain, and then at Gabrielle standing by his side. There was the hardly perceptible delay of a second, and then he pronounced his decree:

"Send your people away. The work is not to be done."

"What! your Excellency?" asked the mason, in astonishment.

"The demolition of the fountain would injure the garden. It is to remain. I will take other measures."

A wave of the hand dismissed the two men. They, of course, ventured on no reply, but surprise was plainly written on their countenances as they left the garden. It was the first time an order so circumstantially given by the Governor himself had ever been withdrawn.

Raven had stepped to the edge of the basin, and was watching the constant falling shower. Gabrielle had remained in her place by the parapet, but now she drew near slowly, hesitatingly--presently, with a sudden movement, she held out both hands to him.

"Thank you--oh, thank you!"

He smiled, not with his usual sardonic smile. A ray of sunshine seemed to flit across his face, as he took the offered hands, and, gently raising Gabrielle's head, stooped to kiss her brow.

There was nothing unusual in this. He was in the habit of thus saluting her when she appeared at breakfast and wished him "Good-morning," and hitherto she had received his caress most unconcernedly; while he, her guardian, had but in cool, grave fashion made use of his 'fatherly rights.'

To-day, for the first time, the young girl involuntarily sought to evade it; and Raven felt that the hand he held in his own trembled a little. He drew himself up suddenly, without having touched her forehead with his lips, and dropped her hand.

"You are right," he said, in a troubled voice. "There is a magic in the Nixies' Well. Let us go."

They turned away. Behind them the spring babbled and murmured, the fountain plashed, throwing its white veil of spray ever on high. That cruel doom of destruction was averted now. The beseeching prayer of those brown eyes, and the glittering tears which stood in them, had saved the well.

Perhaps at this moment the cold, stern man, who had long passed the prime of life, may have felt that his boast had been premature, that not even he in his strength was entirely proof against "the nixies' charm."

CHAPTER V.

George Winterfeld sat at his writing-table in his own room. He looked worn, and almost ill. The transient freshness of tint called up by his holiday excursion had long since vanished, and the natural pallor, which had even then been noticeable on the young man's finely cut and intellectual features, had visibly increased. He was, indeed, apt to exact too much of his working powers. The duties of his position made considerable demands on his time, yet in every leisure-hour at his disposal he devoted himself with feverish zeal to such studies as were likely to advance him in his career.

George often worked at the expense of his health; he was urged on by a nobler spur than ambition. Every step he took forward lessened the gap between himself and the woman he loved, and, though possessed of all becoming modesty, he was yet too sensible of his own abilities and his own worth not to cherish an assured hope that one day that gap would be filled up.

His colleagues, who for the most part contented themselves with getting through the business which fell to them in office-hours, knew nothing of the Assessor's quiet, unceasing toil. He never alluded to it. The chief's penetrating eye alone had discovered with what a fund of perseverance, with what genuine talent the young clerk was gifted, though as yet he had had but small opportunity of turning his gifts to active account.

George always worked best in the morning hours. He was sitting to-day bent over a volume of jurisprudence, and so immersed in its arid contents that he did not notice the opening of the outer door which gave access to his apartments. It was only when he heard a familiar voice say: "Don't trouble yourself. I can find my way to Mr. Winterfeld alone," that he started up from his book, just as the newcomer entered.

"Good-morning, George, old fellow. Here I am, you see."

"Max! Is it possible? What brings you to R---? How did you come here?" cried George, in joyful surprise, hurrying to meet his friend.

"I came straight from home," replied the latter, returning his friend's greeting with equal heartiness. "I only reached the hotel half an hour ago, and came up to see you immediately."

"But why not write me a few lines? Did you wish to take me by surprise?"

"No, not that; the journey was rather a surprise to myself; for, my dear fellow, I am not brought here by any sentimental feelings of friendship, as you may possibly flatter yourself, but by a most real and practical matter of business, arising from our succession to some property. But, in the first place, how are you? You are looking pale, as is but natural to a man who sits brooding in the early morning over his books. George, you are incorrigible."

George laughed, pushed away the hand that was stretched out to feel his pulse, and drew his friend to the sofa.

"Lay aside the doctor for the nonce," said he. "I am perfectly well. So it is some succession-business which brings you here. Have riches peradventure overtaken you?"

"Not riches, exactly," said Max. "It is only a matter of a very modest fortune left by a cousin of ours who owned a small estate in the neighbourhood of R---. I had some acquaintance with him. He had quarrelled with my father out and out, on account of the latter's political past; but now he has died without a will or direct heirs, and my father, as next of kin, has received a summons from the R--- tribunal to make good his claims. This he cannot do in person. You know that he may not set foot in his native land without risking a return to his old quarters in that fortified place which he quitted by the somewhat unusual conveyance of a ladder of ropes. The sentence formerly pronounced on him still hangs over his head, so he has sent me as his representative."

"You have full authority to act?" put in the Assessor.

"Unlimited; but there will be plenty of quibbles and delays, notwithstanding. My father's flight and protracted absence will complicate matters, and my notorious Socialist name will hardly predispose the judicial mind to any special affability towards me. Foreseeing all this, I have taken a rather long leave and I intend to stay in R--- until the business is settled. I count much on your legal advice and assistance."

"I am altogether at your service. The first thing for you to do, however, is to give up your rooms at the hotel, and to come here to me."

"With your permission, I shall decline doing that," said Max, drily.

"Why?"

"Because I don't wish to bring you into trouble with your superiors. Can you give me your word of honour that the visit you paid us this summer passed unremarked, that it has called down on you no word of blame?"

George looked down.

"Well, I certainly was favoured with some rather sharp observations from the chief; but there are bounds even to his jurisdiction and to the regard I owe to my position. I do not mean to offer up to it my friends and private connections."

"You need not do so," returned the young surgeon; "but there is no occasion to go out of your way to challenge a conflict. You know I have not a very high opinion of gratuitous sacrifices, and the invitation you are now so kind as to give me comes under that head. No use to argue, George. I shall remain at the hotel. You will compromise yourself quite sufficiently in the eyes of all loyal citizens by owning me as a friend at all."

The refusal was expressed in so decided a tone that George saw it would be useless to insist; so he yielded the point.

"Well, let me congratulate you on coming in to the fortune, at all events," he said. "Though it be not a very considerable one, it will, I suppose, be of importance to you."

"Certainly; I am especially glad on my father's account. He can now devote himself to his beloved science undisturbed by those material cares which have hitherto held the front rank. I, too, gain by it my much-desired independence. I should long ago have resigned my post at the hospital had it not been necessary to provide for our household an assured income which can henceforth be dispensed with. I shall set to work to establish a practice now and marry."

"You are thinking of marrying?" asked George, in some astonishment.

"Of course I am. A man must have a wife. It is necessary to his comfort."

"But whom do you mean to marry?"

"Ah! that I don't know yet. When I have installed myself in a place of my own, I shall hold a review, make my choice, and lead home my bride."

"Some daughter of Switzerland, I presume?"

"Beyond a doubt. I think very highly of the solid good sense and practical virtues of the Swiss, though it may be there is a little lack of polish about them at times. Moreover, I don't want any tender over-refinement in my wife. Married people should be cut out on the same pattern."

"Well, you seem to have gone thoroughly into it," laughed George, "I dare say you have made out a regular programme, enumerating all the qualities your future wife is to possess. So let us hear. Clause No. 1?"

"Money," said Max, laconically. "Ah! yes; that rouses your sentimental feelings to revolt again. Money is indispensable. Second desideratum, practical domestic education. Third, fine robust health. A doctor, who is knocking about all day among all sorts of maladies, does not want to have to prescribe at home. Fourth----"

"For heaven's sake stop!" interrupted his friend. "I believe there are a dozen *sine quâ non*. Love does not figure among them, I suppose?"

"Love comes after marriage," replied the young surgeon, confidently, "at least, with rational people; and the unions which answer best are those based on the solid grounds of reason and common sense. When, after a mature consideration of character and circumstances, I find that my programme fits, I shall make my offer at once, and get married; and therewith all is said."

George smiled rather sadly as he laid his hand on his friend's arm.

"My dear Max, I know very well for whom your sermon is intended. Unfortunately, it can avail nothing. You will not understand this until some passion, springing up in your own breast, dashes through all your clauses at a stroke, and upsets your conclusions."

"A minute, please. Mine is no romantic nature. I leave romance to certain other people of my acquaintance. By-the-bye, how is your little affair progressing? May I expect again to fill the part of confidant, and, when occasion offers, to resume my former functions as sentinel? I am at your orders."

George sighed.

"No, Max, there is no question of that. I hardly ever see Gabrielle, and have only spoken to her once in her mother's presence. The Governor has built up around his house such a rampart of haughty reserve and exclusiveness, it is impossible to break through it."

"Poor old fellow! the melancholy of your appearance becomes explicable to me. Well, you see the consequences of taking these things too seriously. My programme and my clauses, at which you jeer in a most uncalled-for manner, protect me from such misadventures."

George looked at his watch.

"Excuse me, I must be off to the Chancellery. Our office-hours begin early; but after three o'clock I am at liberty, and I will look you up immediately. Shall I go with you to the hotel?"

The young surgeon preferred to bear his friend company on his way to the bureau, so the two set out together. They walked through the streets, chatting as they went, and at the foot of the hill they came upon Councillor Moser. This gentleman had his quarters at the Government-house itself, but he was in the habit of taking a constitutional in the morning before office-hours commenced, and from this exercise he was now returning. He advanced slowly, with his usual stiff and solemn mien, his chin well buried in his white cravat, and returned his subordinate's greeting with an affable but dignified bow.

"You are looking tired, Mr. Winterfeld," he observed, in a benevolent tone. "His Excellency himself has noticed it. His Excellency is of opinion that you work too sedulously, and that you will undermine your health by such assiduous study. There may be too much even of a good thing. You should not apply too closely."

"That is what I am always preaching to my friend," put in Max; "but in vain. This very morning, at an untimely hour, I found him poring over his books, and had literally to hunt him from them. He throws all my prescriptions to the wind."

"You are a member of the Faculty, sir?" asked the Councillor, evidently expecting that this stranger should be presented to him.

"My friend, Dr. Brunnow," said George; "Mr. Councillor Moser."

The chief-clerk suddenly rose out from the depths of his white neckcloth.

"Brunnow--Brunnow?" he repeated.

"Is the name familiar to you, Councillor?" asked Max, innocently.

All benevolence had vanished from the old gentleman's face. It expressed something akin to horror as he replied sharply:

"The name was well known in former times, first in connection with the rebellion, then with the courts of justice. Finally, it was brought into people's mouths by the escape from a fortified place of a political prisoner who bore it. I trust you stand in no relationship to the Dr. Brunnow to whom I allude."

"In the very closest," said the young surgeon, with a most polite bow. "That Dr. Brunnow is my father."

The Councillor recoiled a step, as though to guarantee himself against any chance contact. Then he turned his back on the young man, and concentrated all his ire and indignation on George.

"Mr. Assessor Winterfeld," he began in a withering tone, "there are officials, clever and competent officials even, who do not, or will not, recognise the first and most sacred duty imposed on them by their service, the duty of loyalty to the state. Are you acquainted with any such?"

George was a little embarrassed.

"I really do not quite understand your drift----"

"Well, I am acquainted with some of that order, and I pity them, for they are, in general, but the victims of false teaching and evil example."

The young clerk frowned. He was, it is true, pretty well accustomed to such philippics from his superior; but now, in his friend's presence, he chafed at the implied reproof, feeling the awkwardness of the situation. So he answered with some heat:

"You may feel convinced that I understand my duties. Beyond this----"

"Yes, yes. I am aware that all young men are born reformers, and that they consider it a proof of character to try a little opposition," interrupted Moser, who dearly loved, in season and out of season, to make use of his chiefs words, which were to him as so many oracular utterances. "But it is a dangerous game, for opposition leads on to revolution, and revolution"--the chief-clerk shuddered--"is a horrible thing!"

"A most horrible thing, Councillor," said Max, emphatically.

"You think so?" asked Moser, somewhat disconcerted by this unexpected adhesion.

"Certainly; and I think, too, that it is well you should make this appeal to my friend's conscience. I myself have often told him he is not loyal as he should be."

The Councillor stood as though petrified on hearing these words, which were delivered with imperturbable gravity. He was about to answer, when suddenly his chin disappeared into his cravat again, and he assumed a reverential attitude.

"His Excellency!" said he, under his breath, respectfully taking off his hat.

And, looking round, they really saw the Governor, coming from the Castle, and going on foot towards the town. On reaching the spot where they stood, he returned the gentlemen's greeting in his cool, measured fashion, took a rapid survey of young Brunnow, and then addressed himself to Moser:

"It is fortunate I meet you, my dear sir. There is something I wish to say to you. Bear me

company for a few minutes, will you?"

The Councillor joined his chief, and the two went on towards the town, while the young men pursued their journey up the hill.

"So that is your despot, is it?" asked Max, as soon as they were out of hearing. "The much-abused, much-dreaded Raven! He is of an imposing presence, that I must allow him. A bearing and dignity that would not ill become a prince; and then that lordly glance with which he took my measure! One can see the man knows how to command."

"And how to oppress," added George, bitterly. "We have had a fresh proof of it lately. The whole city is in a state of ferment on account of the extraordinary new police regulations he has saddled upon it. He means to repress by force the opposition which is daily growing more active, and now threatens to become really troublesome. This last step of his is a flagrant affront to the whole body of citizens."

"And the good townfolk of R--- take it quietly?"

George cast a prudent glance around. The road was clear, and their conversation safe from curious ears, yet the young man lowered his voice as he answered:

"What can they do? Rebel against their ruler, the chosen delegate of the Government? That would entail most serious consequences. I often think, perhaps all that is wanting is to make our Ministers aware of the true state of the case, to acquaint them with all the arbitrary proceedings, the acts of tyranny whereby their representative has abused the full powers conferred on him. Were this openly done, they must let him fall."

"Or silence the inconvenient monitor instead. It would not be the first time such a thing has happened; and this Raven does not look as if he would easily let himself be thrown. He would, at least, drag down his enemies with him in his fall."

"And yet, sooner or later, it must come to that," said George, resolutely. "A brave man will one day be found."

The young surgeon started, and looked searchingly into his friend's face.

"You will not be he, I should hope. Don't be a fool, George, and enter the lists alone in behalf of others. It may cost you your position, your living; and, besides, have you forgotten that the Baron is your adored Gabrielle's guardian? If you rouse his anger, he has at his disposal the means of destroying all your hopes of happiness."

"That he will do in any case," returned George moodily. "He will assuredly try to get his ward married brilliantly and speedily; and when he finds that I am the obstacle to the success of his plans there are hardly any limits to the antagonism I may expect from him."

"And, most decidedly, he is not one whom it will be easy to fight," remarked Max. "I understand that you hate him in his double capacity."

"Hate? I admire much in him, and in one sense the city and province owe him a debt of gratitude. Thanks to his energy, numberless new resources have been opened out, dormant powers have been aroused and made to subserve the public good; but every aspiration towards a greater freedom he has stifled with an iron hand. The cruel period of reaction, which has weighed on us so long, is indebted to him for some of its worst triumphs."

"It is coming to an end," observed Max.

"Yes, thank God, it is coming to an end. The old system is shaken to its foundations, and its upholders are endeavouring to trim their course wisely, so as to save all that may yet be saved. Raven alone holds to the past with rigid consistency. Not the smallest concession--not the most trifling compromise can be wrung from him, and he will not listen to the warning voices which sound even in his ears. Is this wilful blindness, or firmness of character?"

"Firmness of character in a renegade?"

George looked down thoughtfully. Suddenly he said:

"Max, there are times when I would rather doubt your father's word than ascribe a dishonourable action to my chief. Ambition, passion, might lead him to commit a crime; but base, low treachery to his friends! There is not a trait in the man which does not contradict the charge."

"And yet he was guilty of such treachery. Do you think my father would pass this rigorous judgment on the hero he once worshipped without ample proofs? But, indeed, are they needed? Is not the career of this Arno Raven proof enough in itself? He was once an enthusiastic champion of liberty. What is he now?"

"You are right; and yet ... Let us say no more of this. We are at the Castle."

They had, indeed, by this time reached the Government-house, where they must separate. An appointment was hastily made for the afternoon, then George betook himself to the Chancellery, and Max, who was in no hurry to return to the town, strolled about, inspecting the Castle, which was one of the principal sights of R---, and an object of interest to all strangers. The young surgeon, it is true, cared very little for architectural curiosities or the antique Romantic style of art; but the Castle interested him on account of its present inhabitants. He sauntered through the galleries and passages as far as they were accessible; then, turning at length to retrace his steps, he lost his way, and, instead of re-issuing at the main entrance, wandered into one of the side wings. He only remarked his error on finding himself in a corridor which evidently led to an inhabited dwelling. Just as he was about to turn and go back, a door opened, and an elderly woman looked out.

"Ah, you are there, Doctor," said she, gladly. "Pray come in. My young lady is ready, and expecting you."

"Expecting me?" asked Max, astonished at the welcome.

"Surely. You are the doctor, are not you?"

"Well, I am that, certainly."

"Come in then, please. I will let the young lady know." Saying which, the woman, apparently a superior sort of housekeeper, vanished, and Max remained alone in the outer room she had constrained him to enter.

"Now this I call luck," said he to himself, under his breath. "I no sooner set foot in R---, than a practice tumbles unexpectedly into my lap. We shall see what course the matter takes."

For this he had not long to wait. After a few minutes the woman came back, and ushered him into a pleasant, comfortably-furnished parlour. A young lady rose from her place by the window, and came towards him.

She was a very young girl, perhaps about sixteen or seventeen years of age, tall and slender, but fragile, almost sickly in appearance. Transparently pale of complexion, her face, though not beautiful, was delicate and prepossessing. Dark shadows encircled her eyes, and there was hardly a trace of colour in the cheeks or lips. Her costume was of almost exaggerated simplicity, and quite conventual in its cut and fashion. The black dress, unrelieved by the slightest ornament, was fastened high in the neck and closely at the wrists. A square of black lace completely covered her head, so that only a narrow band of the smoothly coiled dark hair was to be seen. Very timid and embarrassed in manner, she stood before the physician with downcast eyes, saying not a word.

"You wish for medical advice, Fräulein?" asked Max at length, having waited in vain for her to speak. "I am at your service."

At the sound of his voice, the girl raised a pair of dark, expressive eyes, but quickly lowered them again, and drew back a step in evident alarm. Even her more mature companion seemed, on closer investigation, somewhat startled and uneasy at the doctor's youthful appearance. She did not budge an inch from her charge's side.

"My father wishes me to consult a physician," the young lady now made answer, in a low, soft-toned voice. "It is not really necessary, for I do not feel exactly ill."

"But you are right-down ill," interrupted the elder woman, who evidently considered herself more as one of the family than as a domestic. "And now the Councillor says he insists on your seeing some one."

"The Councillor? Councillor Moser?" asked Max, a light breaking in upon him. By a sort of intuition, he guessed to whose house chance had led him.

"Yes. Has he not been with you?"

"He was with me about ten minutes before I came here," declared the young man, with difficulty repressing a strong inclination to laugh.

He recalled to mind the look of horror with which the worthy Councillor had shrunk from him on hearing his father's name. Under any other circumstances he would at once have cleared up the misunderstanding; but now he thought of the old gentleman who had treated him so ungraciously; how wrathful he would be, were he to discover, under his own roof, this scion of Socialists and demagogues! Max determined to stand his ground, come what might.

"You look very far from well, however, Fräulein," he went on, taking her hand, and attentively feeling her pulse. "Will you allow me to put a few questions to you?"

The examination began. When Max had a case before him, he became simply and solely the doctor, and forgot all else in his study of its peculiar phenomena. His questions were short, comprehensive, clear. He wasted no words, and never wandered from the subject in hand.

Gradually his young patient seemed to gain confidence. She grew more at ease, more explicit in her answers, and ceased looking up anxiously at her protectress each time she spoke. At last the examination came to an end, and Max appeared satisfied with the result.

"I do not see any grounds for serious apprehension. Your ailments are in a great degree nervous, due, perhaps, originally to mental over-excitement, and aggravated by want of air and exercise."

"That is what I say," broke in the housekeeper, who was evidently accustomed to put in her oar on every occasion. "Fräulein Agnes takes no exercise; she never goes out in the open air at all, except in the morning to early mass. I have always said that so much praying and penance and fasting----"

"Christine!" interrupted the young girl, imploringly.

"Yes, yes, the doctor must be told everything," rejoined Christine. "My young lady overdoes it with her piety, Doctor. She is on her knees all day long."

"That is bad; you must leave that off," said the young surgeon, dictatorially.

Fräulein Agnes looked up at him with a scared expression.

"Doctor!"

"And the daily attendance at early mass as well. That must certainly be discontinued," pursued Max, speaking with the same prompt decision, and unheeding her attempt at remonstrance. "You have every reason to guard against taking cold, and the mornings are beginning to be cool and autumnal. As to fasting, I forbid it once for all. It is as bad as poison to a person in your condition."

"But, Doctor!" said the girl, a second time, and again her protest found no hearing. Max was not to be diverted from his point.

"Now, on the other hand, I prescribe a long walk every day, but at noon, when the sun is bright and warm--as much air and exercise as possible, and a little amusement too, something to vary the thoughts. The winter gaieties will be setting in soon. I would advise you not to dance too much."

Agnes started back three steps at least, thus emulating her father's late hasty retreat.

"Dance!" she repeated, in absolute dismay. "Dance!"

"Yes, why not? All young ladies are fond, of dancing, are they not? You do not want to be an exception to the rule, I suppose?"

"I have never danced," she replied quickly, and with as much decision of tone as her soft voice would admit of. "I have always kept aloof from worldly amusements. They are sinful, and I detest them."

"Well, well, you should try them before you make up your mind," said the doctor, kindly. "But such advice hardly comes within my professional competence. I will give you a prescription for the present, and see you again in the course of a few days. Have you paper and pen and ink at hand?"

Christine brought the necessary implements, and he sat down to write. Agnes had taken refuge by the window, where she stood with folded palms, and a look of consternation on her pale face. When the prescription was finished. Max came up to her again, and unceremoniously disengaged the folded hands to feel her pulse once more.

"Yes; now follow my instructions carefully, and there will, I hope, be an improvement before long. Good-morning, Fräulein."

So saying, he left the room. Christine closed the entrance-door behind him, and then came back.

"He knows what he is about," said she. "He orders and dictates as though no one else had a right to say a word here. What do you think of the doctor, Fräulein?"

"I think him very irreligious," declared the young lady, emphatically.

"Ah, yes; none of your medical men are over-pious," remarked Christine.

"And so young!" went on Agnes, in a tone which implied the weightiest accusation.

"I expected to see an older man myself, but he looks clever, and he certainly is very punctual. He had promised to be here at nine, and on the stroke of nine there he was outside in the corridor. I can't think where your papa is! Something must have happened to detain him, for he wished to be present at the interview."

"The doctor said he had spoken to my father. Do you think I ought to take the medicine, Christine?"

"Of course you must take it. That is what we had the doctor here for. I like him, in spite of that bearish way of his. You mind what I say. Miss Agnes--he will set you all to rights again."

It remained doubtful whether Agnes herself shared this opinion. She had taken up the prescription, and was reading it. After a while she laid the paper down, and said, with a little shake of the head:

"I only wish he were not so irreligious!"

Max, going down the steps, met an elderly gentleman coming up. This personage wore gold spectacles, carried a stick with a gold knob, and had about him an air of great importance. The young surgeon stopped, and looked after him.

"I would wager my head that is my worthy colleague on his way to pay the promised visit. Now he will rack his brains to discover who can have been interfering with his practice, and snapping up a patient before his very nose. And then the wrath of that quintessence of loyalty, the solemn old Councillor, when he hears the story, and sees my name on the prescription! It would be worth something to get a look at his face. I wish I could introduce myself to him in my new capacity as his family doctor."

The mischievous wish was to be fulfilled. At the foot of the Castle-hill Max met the Councillor, who, as in duty bound, had accompanied 'his Excellency' to his destination, and was now on his road back. No sooner did he catch a glimpse of Brunnow, that 'scion of Socialists and demagogues,' than he endeavoured to turn aside, and thus avoid the undesirable meeting. Max, however, went straight up to him.

"I am glad to have the chance of speaking to you again, Councillor. I have just come from your daughter."

This time the old gentleman's face emerged most suddenly from the folds of his white cravat.

"From my daughter?" he repeated.

"Yes, from Fräulein Moser. I can give you the comforting assurance that the young lady's condition need inspire no serious apprehension, though she will require great care and attention. The nervous system is out of order, certainly, but----"

"Sir, allow me to ask how you came to see my daughter?" vociferated the Councillor.

"But this will yield to proper treatment," continued Max, quite undisturbed. "For the present I have prescribed a remedy from which I hope the best results, and in a few days I will call in and see the young lady again."

"But I never asked for your attendance," protested the Councillor, whose head was in a whirl. He could make nothing of the other's astounding communication.

"Excuse me, I was called in. Ask Frau Christine. As I said before, I hope great things from the medicine, and I will look in again the day after to-morrow. No thanks, pray, Councillor; it affords me the greatest pleasure. My compliments to your daughter. Good-morning."

Councillor Moser stood for some seconds rigid and motionless as a statue; then he charged at full speed up the hill to his own dwelling, there to seek a solution of the mystery, while the young doctor laughingly went on his way towards the town.

CHAPTER VI.

The whole first story of the Government-house was brilliantly lighted up. A great reception was annually held there on the occasion of the Sovereign's birthday, when all the notabilities of the town and country around were wont to flock to the Castle. This year the usual levée was to be followed by a ball, an innovation mainly due to the presence of Baroness Harder and her daughter, and one which met with the decided approbation of all the feminine world of R---.

It was too early as yet for the arrival of the guests, but the state-apartments were resplendent with light, and the servants, having put the finishing-touch to their preparations, had withdrawn

to their posts in the ante-chambers and hall. Gabrielle had dressed more quickly than her mother; that lady was still severely exercising her maid's patience by perpetually finding some fresh thing in her attire which needed alteration or improvement. So the young Baroness, knowing how useless it would be to wait, came on alone to a small salon, the first of a long suite of rooms only thrown open on the occasion of great ceremonies.

A conspicuous ornament of this salon was a picture in a richly-gilt frame, well set off by the dark velvet hangings. It represented the Baron's deceased consort, and was the work of a celebrated artist. Not even the painter's cunning hand, however, had been able to endow those rather pleasing, but insipid and unmeaning features with any special interest; a certain aristocratic dignity of bearing, and an extreme elegance in the toilette and accessories, were all that might for a moment captivate attention. An observer of this portrait, calling to mind the Baron's striking appearance, so full of character and power, would feel intuitively how great must have been the intellectual distance between husband and wife, how impossible any mutual attraction or real companionship.

Gabrielle had paused before this picture, and was still considering it, when a door at the farther end of the long suite of rooms, which gave access to the Governor's private apartments, opened, and Raven himself appeared. He was in full dress to-day, in honour of the occasion, and his handsome court-suit with the broad ribbon on his breast lent additional stateliness to his figure, as he walked through the rooms slowly with his accustomed proud and lofty mien.

"Why, Gabrielle, dressed already! What are you doing there, wrapt in meditation before that picture?"

There was audible dissatisfaction in the tone in which the last words were spoken. Gabrielle did not notice it. She answered:

"I was wondering to see my aunt's portrait here. Could you not find a place for it in your own rooms?"

"No," was the short, but decided reply.

"But these salons are not opened many times during the year. Why do you not hang the picture in your study?"

"Why should I?" asked the Baron, coldly. "Your aunt never came there. I had her portrait brought to the drawing-room, which is certainly its most fitting place. Well, what do you think of the state-apartments at the Castle? It is the first time you have seen them fully lighted up."

This sudden diversion proved how irksome to him had been the previous topic. Without more ado, he took Gabrielle's arm, led her away from her aunt's portrait, and began a tour of inspection through the rooms, pointing out and explaining many objects of interest. The folding-doors were all thrown back, so that the eye could wander at will throughout the long and glittering vista. A princely residence, indeed, the Governor could boast, and the grave and somewhat antique style of decoration was in keeping with the architectural taste of the building. The rich ornamentation of walls and ceilings, the deep window-niches and high marble fire-places, dated from the Castle's earlier times. They had been left untouched; but to them had been associated costly damask or satin hangings, heavy velvet curtains, rich gilding, all of which, illuminated by innumerable wax-lights, produced a really dazzling effect.

The young Baroness Harder was not one to remain unimpressed by such a scene. She perfectly revelled in the bright surroundings, as, with a heart brimming over with gladness and expectation, she tripped along by her guardian's side. She had very quickly regained all her old ease of manner in her intercourse with him. That strange hour by the 'Nixies' Well' had long since been forgotten, together with the transient seriousness it had called forth. Like a dream, its influences had come upon her; swiftly and traceless as a dream they had vanished again from her mind. On that sunny ground nothing approaching a shadow could for any length of time hold its own. Gabrielle certainly felt that during the last few days the Baron had treated her with unwonted gentleness and indulgence. He had even determined on giving this ball, in order that, as he said, certain restless little feet might have a chance of dancing themselves weary. It was an unheard-of concession from him, who looked on all festive gatherings at the Castle as so many onerous duties imposed on him by etiquette, so many drawbacks to his position; but the young lady was too accustomed to be spoiled by her parents and all about her, to be struck with any special surprise at the favour shown her. She met her guardian's kindness, as she had previously met his stern reserve, with the petulance and whimsical caprice of a child. Today the thought of the coming fête drove all else into the background. Sparkling and overflowing with all sorts of droll and merry conceits, the clear ripple of her laughter broke again and again on the solemn stillness of those stately galleries.

Raven was grave and silent as usual; but he listened to her chatter with visible satisfaction, and his eyes were fixed, as though unconsciously, on the blooming young creature hanging on his arm and looking up at him with happy, beaming, radiant eyes. Gabrielle had never appeared more lovely than on this evening in her cloud-like white ball-dress, twined here and there with flowery wreaths, and with a garland of blossoms daintily set on her fair head. So fascinating was her charm, so dewy-fresh her youthful grace and beauty, she might have been one of the airy

mischievous elves of the legend quickened into life and come hither to disport itself. In the sea of light which streamed through the halls, she was the culminating point of brightness.

They had finished their round, and arrived at the principal reception-room, which was adorned with the portraits of divers historical and princely personages. A dazzling chandelier lit up the splendid, but as yet untenanted, space, which, in spite of its festive decorations, was almost awesome in its stillness and emptiness. No sound was to be heard but the Baron's echoing step and the rustle of his companion's dress.

"It is like being in an enchanted castle," said Gabrielle, playfully. "We are the only living creatures amid all this sleeping splendour. I had no idea you had so many fine things at your disposal, Uncle Arno. It must be grand to feel one's self the master of such a place."

The Baron cast a general, highly indifferent glance around, as he replied:

"You think there is something very enviable in that, no doubt. I myself have never attached much importance to these adjuncts of my position."

"Nor to this, either?"

Gabrielle pointed to the ribbon on his breast. The order the Baron wore was one of the highest in the land, and was conferred only in very exceptional cases.

"Nor to this either," said Raven, quietly; "though I would not willingly renounce the one or the other. External splendour should mark the seat of power. To the generality of men, greatness is embodied in these outward symbols; they should, therefore, be taken into due account. I have never lost sight of this, but my efforts have been directed to other aims."

"Which you have attained, like everything else in life."

The Baron was silent for a few seconds. His eyes rested with an enigmatical expression on the young girl's face. At length he answered her:

"I have attained much--not everything."

"Do you want to mount still higher?" asked Gabrielle, in naïve surprise.

He smiled. "No; this time I should like to retrograde twenty years."

"But, tell me, why?"

"That I might be young again. I have felt sometimes of late that ... I am growing old."

The young Baroness pointed jestingly to a great panelled mirror opposite them:

"Look there, Uncle Arno, and dare to talk again of being old!"

Raven followed the direction of her hand. There in the clear glass he saw the distinct reflection of his image, the tall commanding figure, in all the vigorous maturity of manly strength. He inspected it with a certain satisfaction, not untinged by a slight secret uneasiness.

"And yet I am close upon fifty," he said slowly. "Do you know that, Gabrielle?"

"Of course I do. But why lay such stress on it? You certainly do not feel as yet any of the premonitory signs of age."

"For which very reason I am sometimes tempted to forget the fact, and this, under given circumstances, may be dangerous. You should be the last to encourage me in such a weakness."

Raven broke off suddenly as he met the girl's wondering, questioning gaze; his speech was evidently quite unintelligible to her. He turned away from the mirror, and went on in a lighter tone:

"So you like living here with me, at the Castle?"

"Certainly, when all is bright and gay, as it is this evening," declared Gabrielle. "But in the daytime the Castle often seems to me very dismal and dull. These high-vaulted ceilings, these deep recesses and massive pillars, keep the whole place in shade, and your study is the very gloomiest room I know. The great heavy curtains shut out every ray of sunlight."

"The sun disturbs me when I am at work," explained the Baron.

The young lady tossed her head pettishly: "But, dear me, man does not live for work alone."

"There are natures--mine, for instance--to which work is a positive want, an absolute necessity. A butterfly, such as you, cannot understand this. It flies and flutters about in the sunshine, gleaming with a thousand hues--to perish when the first sharp touch brushes the many-coloured dust from its wings. Pleasant enough, but very transitory, this gay butterfly existence!"

There was something of the old sarcastic ring in his voice as he spoke the last words. Gabrielle assumed a highly-offended expression of countenance.

"Oh, so you think I am only a sort of gaily-painted, frivolous moth, Uncle Arno?"

"I think it would be unjust to require of you that you should meet suffering, or face struggles of any kind," said Raven, more gravely. "Beings of your order are created for the sunshine, and can exist in no other element. Work and the battle of life must be left to me, and to such as me. To be a sunbeam, and to cheer and lighten the darkness of others, is a vocation, too, in its way. You are quite right, it is foolish inexorably to exclude the brightness for fear lest it should blind one. Why should not autumn, for once, be gilded by its golden rays?"

He had stooped down, and was looking deep into the young girl's eyes, when a side door was noisily opened, and Baroness Harder rustled over the threshold. Raven quickly drew himself erect, casting a glance that was anything but friendly at his sister-in-law, who, happily, did not observe it. She was at that moment passing the great mirror in the wall, and taking in it a last general review of her appearance. The lady had profited by her brother-in-law's liberality in no sparing fashion. Her rich toilette had but one fault: it was a thought too overladen to be in perfect taste. The costly satin train was almost lost to view beneath the velvet and lace which covered it. A whole parterre of flowers adorned her hair, and on her neck and arms sparkled the diamonds which Raven's generosity had rescued from the wreck of the Harder fortunes. All that the many arts of the toilette can effect had been accomplished, and with their aid and assistance the Baroness might this evening have made good her claim to be considered a beautiful woman, had it not been for the youthful, blooming daughter at her side. Before the grace and freshness of that seventeen-year-old maiden, no artificial charm could hold its own; and, by force of contrast, the mother appeared that which, in point of fact, she really was, a faded, middle-aged lady.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting," said she, approaching her brother-in-law with her wonted sweetness of manner. "I did not know you were already in the drawing-room, Arno; and none of the guests have arrived as yet. I hope Gabrielle has been amusing you in my absence."

Raven made no reply. He was visibly annoyed by the interruption.

"Our visitors will be here shortly," he remarked, after a while; and, indeed, scarcely had he spoken the words, when the first carriage drove up.

The Baron offered his arm to his sister-in-law to lead her to her place at the upper end of the room, and, as they went, he glanced with keen scrutiny from mother to daughter.

"Gabrielle does not resemble you in the least, Matilda," he said suddenly, and his tone betrayed a secret satisfaction.

"Do you think not?" said the Baroness, who would probably have preferred to hear a contrary opinion expressed. "It may be that she is more like her father----"

"She does not bear the smallest resemblance to her father either," interrupted Raven. "I do not see that she has inherited a single trait from either of her parents--thank God!" he added to himself.

The Baroness was silent, looking aggrieved, though she could not have caught the offensive words which concluded his speech. There was no denying the fact that Gabrielle possessed neither the Harder features nor those of her mother's family. She was as unlike both parents as she could possibly be.

The first arrivals now appeared, and were soon followed by others. Carriage after carriage rolled up to the portico of the Government-house, and the rooms gradually began to fill. So numerous had been the invitations issued, that the spacious apartments were hardly large enough to contain the brilliant assembly which soon thronged them. Most of the gentlemen were in civilian dress, but interspersed among the black coats was many a handsome uniform; while the ladies, some in splendid, all in bright apparel, bloomed gay as any flower-garden. The heads of the magistrature, the commandant and officers of the garrison, and those of the neighbouring fortress, were there *au grand complet*, as was also the entire bureaucratic staff, and indeed all who in the social circles of R---- could lay claim to a good position or to any sort of distinction.

The occasion being an official one, it was a matter of course that the invitations should be accepted, and for this reason the burgomaster and the other gentlemen of the corporation had put in an appearance notwithstanding the conflict pending between them and the Governor, a conflict which daily grew to greater proportions, and increased in intensity.

Baron von Raven seemed to-day altogether to ignore the existing dissensions. He received these guests, as he received all the others, with finished politeness; but still with that cool reserve of manner which was peculiar to him, and which ever drew about him a sort of invisible barrier.

Baroness Harder at his side did the honours of the house, noting with much satisfaction that she and her daughter were pre-eminently the objects of general interest. The two ladies had hitherto been but little seen in the world of R----, where the autumn gaieties were only just

beginning. This was their first formal introduction to the society of the city which was henceforth to be their home. Strangers still to the majority of those present, their close relationship to the Governor assigned to them at once the most prominent place, and it was but natural that they should form a centre of attraction round which all converged.

While the elder lady received those attentions and marks of deference which fall by right to the lady of the house, her daughter's grace and beauty were achieving triumph upon triumph. The young Baroness was constantly surrounded, courted and admired; the younger men, in particular, fairly besieging her with entreaties for the promise of a dance during the evening.

Now and then Raven would cast a glance over at the groups ever forming and re-forming round his charming ward; but the smile on his lips was rather forced. He saw with what pleasure, and with what self-possession, she accepted the homage done her on all sides.

Such flattering triumphs were indeed the best means of whiling away the time; they helped to assuage the impatience with which Gabrielle looked for the approach of one familiar figure, while endless new faces defiled before her, and strange, unknown names were buzzed into her ears.

George Winterfeld had been in the rooms for some time, but as yet she had hardly exchanged a word with him. When, on his entrance, he had come up to pay his respects to her mother and herself, the Colonel had arrived at the same instant, wishing to introduce his two sons, and had at once claimed the ladies' attention for himself and the young officers.

Some personages of high rank, also numbering among the intimates of the Castle, had joined the circle; and the young clerk, feeling quite isolated and a stranger in their midst, was forced to withdraw, lest he might appear importunate. Since then he had found no means of approaching Gabrielle. She had remained close to her mother and guardian, taking part with them in the reception of the guests; but now he must hesitate no longer; the first strains of music were already sounding, and George, who was determined at any risk to have a few words with his love during the course of the evening, threw off his attitude of reserve. He drew near, and begged the young Baroness Harder to accord him a dance.

Gabrielle had foreseen this, and had taken care to keep at least one free. She promptly consented. The Baron, who was talking to Councillor Moser, heard her reply. He turned round, and looked at the two in surprise.

"I thought you had not a dance at your disposal," said he. "Have you really one free?"

"Fräulein von Harder has been so kind as to promise me the second waltz," declared George.

The Baron frowned.

"Indeed, Gabrielle? If I mistake not, you refused that dance to Colonel Wilten's son."

"Certainly I did. I had already promised it to Mr. Winterfeld."

"Oh!" said Raven, slowly. "Well, he who is first in the field assuredly has the best right. Baron Wilten will deplore his mischance in arriving too late."

As he spoke thus, he scanned Gabrielle's face with a keen investigating glance; then, turning from her, his look riveted itself on George. At this moment the cavalier who had been fortunate enough to secure the young lady's promise for the first dance came up and offered her his arm. George bowed, and stepped back. There was a movement among the company. The younger portion of it streamed off towards the ball-room, while the elders dispersed through the adjoining salons. The great drawing-room grew comparatively empty, and Baroness von Harder was just thinking of leaving her post in it, when her brother-in-law came up to her.

"You know something of Assessor Winterfeld?" he said in a low tone.

The Baroness nodded assent.

"I have told you that we made his acquaintance in Switzerland this summer."

"Did he often come to your house?"

"Pretty often. I was always pleased to receive him, and should have continued to see him here, if you had not expressed so decided a wish to the contrary."

"I do not desire to admit the young clerks to my private circle," replied the Baron, curtly; "and I cannot understand, Matilda, how, in the retirement in which you were then supposed to be living, you could grant the first stranger you met an entrance to your house, and allow him perfect freedom of intercourse with your daughter."

"Oh, it was quite an exceptional case," pleaded the Baroness. "The Assessor had rendered us a signal service one day when we were in danger on the lake. You know that he----"

"Brought you and Gabrielle through the shallow water to land without the smallest difficulty," concluded Raven. "Yes, I know that; and I do not doubt that he has taken advantage of this slight

service, which any fisher-boy could have rendered you, to pose as your deliverer, not altogether unsuccessfully, it would seem. Gabrielle has just accorded him a dance which she had refused to young Baron Wilten, and which, in all probability, she had held in reserve for Mr. Winterfeld. This familiarity may be accounted for, no doubt, by the previous acquaintanceship; but it is a proceeding which I, nevertheless, consider most improper. The promise she has given cannot be recalled; but I beg of you to see that Gabrielle does not dance more than once with this young man. I most decidedly object to it."

There was suppressed, but very evident anger in his tone. The Baroness was rather surprised at his displaying so much irritation, which the occasion hardly seemed to warrant; but she hastened to assure him that she would speak to her daughter, and then took the arm offered her by Colonel Wilten, who had come to lead her to the ball-room.

The Baron sauntered through the other rooms, where much animated conversation was going on. Joining first one group and then another, he would enter into a discussion here, make a few passing remarks there, or merely exchange amenities with some guest he had not hitherto welcomed. With the Burgomaster he chatted amicably, making no allusion to the differences existing between them. Pleasant and affable in his manner to a few, condescending to others, polite to all, he was familiar with none. He bore himself with the ease and quiet assurance of one who is accustomed to occupy the first place, and assumes the lead as a matter of course--a position which all those about him had long tacitly accepted.

"One would fancy we were the guests of our Sovereign himself, and not of his representative," said the Burgomaster to the Superintendent of Police, as the two met. "Upon my word, the airs his Excellency is pleased to give himself on these occasions are ineffable, but they would be more becoming in a monarch than in the governor of a province. Have you been honoured yet with gracious speech and royal dismissal?"

The person addressed smiled his usual ready smile, taking no notice of the other's caustic tone.

"I am really surprised to see you here," he replied. "From the hostile attitude you and the other members of the corporation have lately adopted towards the Governor, I was afraid you might collectively decline the invitation."

"How could we?" asked the Burgomaster, with some heat. "The fête is given in honour of our Sovereign. Had we refused to take part in it, our absence would have been looked upon as a demonstration against the throne; it would have laid us open to misconstruction of the worst kind, and we are particularly anxious to avoid giving offence in those high quarters. The Baron knows very well that it was this consideration alone which brought us here. We should not be likely to come to a ball given in his honour."

"On your side, you should not push matters too far," advised his companion. "You must know Baron von Raven pretty well by this time. There is no yielding, no compromise to be expected from him."

"And from us still less. We intend to stand firmly by our rights, and the future will show whether a Governor, who takes up such an attitude towards us, can permanently hold his own."

"He will hold his own, that is certain," said the Superintendent, decidedly. "You have nothing to hope there. His influence in high places is boundless."

The Burgomaster started, and cast a scrutinising look at the speaker.

"You seem to be very well informed on the subject. True, you came to us from the capital, and have no doubt friends and connections there."

"No, not that," replied the other, coolly repelling the insinuation. "But it appears to me that the Baron's line of conduct shows sufficiently how sure he feels of his position, and how all-powerful he knows his influence to be in certain regions. You would do better not to provoke any open rupture between the town and him. A catastrophe can very well be avoided, even yet."

So saying, he went off. The Burgomaster looked after him with a grim frown of displeasure.

"Yes, yes," he muttered; "avoid a catastrophe at any cost, so that my friend the Superintendent may be able to preserve the neutrality of which he makes such a show. He has positively contrived to pose as the Governor's obedient servant, and at the same time to pass himself off in the town as the amiable, moderate man who seeks to mediate, and only obeys his chief because he must. I would rather by far have an open enemy such as Raven; with him one knows at least what one has to expect, but these neutrals, who speak fair to both parties, and mean honourable by neither--I, for my part, have no faith in them."

Meanwhile, in the ball-room, dancing was being pursued with much spirit, and the couples were already forming for the second waltz. Gabrielle was at the height of enjoyment, and fluttered from one dance to another without rest or respite. She delighted in the amusement at all times, and now drank in, in greedy draughts, the incense offered her on all sides. She lent a willing ear to the flattery and reverential homage of her partners, and never noticed with what a

grave, reproachful gaze George's eyes followed her, as she thus accepted all their tributes with airy playful coquetry.

When at last he came to her to remind her of her promise and lead her out among the dancers, she gave him her hand with a bright smile indicative of perfect content.

"Your young ward is really a charming creature," said Colonel Wilten to his host, who had strolled into the ball-room, and, an unusual proceeding on his part, stayed looking on at the dance. "I only fear your Excellency will not keep her long. Some gay cavalier will be coming to take her from you."

"Bah!" answered Raven, with a touch of impatience. "There can be no question of that at present. Gabrielle is little more than a child."

The Colonel laughed.

"Our young ladies are not children at seventeen. Fräulein von Harder would decidedly protest against such a notion. Just observe how gracefully she floats along with her partner. The sunny style of beauty peculiar to her shines with wonderful effect this evening. Positively, I envy you your fatherly rights where that sweet girl is concerned."

Fatherly rights! The words seemed to jar on the Baron. A deep frown gathered on his brow as, without replying, he watched every movement of the young couple, who now absorbed all his attention.

Wilten had not spoken quite at random. He had remarked the assiduous court his eldest son was paying to the young Baroness, who, as presumptive heiress to her guardian, would certainly be a brilliant match. The Colonel would, decidedly, have had no objection to relieve the latter of his fatherly rights. A daughter-in-law so rich and handsome would have been right welcome to him, and it occurred to him he might by a few words clear the way towards so desirable a consummation. But his hints passed unnoticed, and for the present he was fain to let the subject drop.

"I was speaking just now to the Superintendent of Police," he began again. "He thinks there is nothing to be apprehended; but he has taken all the necessary precautionary measures, in case of any disturbances in the town to-day."

"To-day! why to-day particularly?" asked Raven, absently, and still pursuing his observations.

"Well, a general holiday gives occasion for all sorts of meetings, especially among the lower orders, and in the present irritated state of public opinion this is a fact not to be overlooked. When heads are heated, trouble may come of such gatherings."

The conversation did not appear to possess much interest for the Governor. He hardly listened, being visibly engaged with other thoughts.

"Do you think so?" he replied indifferently.

The Colonel looked at him in surprise.

"Why, Baron, you should know it better than another. We were discussing the matter only yesterday, and it is, unfortunately, no secret that the popular excitement is directed against you in a very special manner. Councillor Moser tells me you have lately received another threatening letter."

Raven shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"I have half-a-dozen of them in my waste-paper basket. Their authors ought to have discovered by this time that such absurdities make no impression on me."

Wilten glanced around. They were standing at the end of the long gallery, and at that moment no one was near enough to overhear their words. The Colonel went on in a low tone:

"You should not, however, absolutely challenge danger. It is most imprudent for you to go into the town on foot and unaccompanied, no measures being taken to ensure your safety. I wanted to speak to your Excellency about it before, to beg you to desist from such ventures. We do not know whether the mob may not be systematically incited to violence. The whole burgher class is leagued together against you."

"So much the better," said Raven, mechanically, his eyes still riveted on one particular spot in the scene before them.

The Colonel gave a little start of surprise.

"Your Excellency?"

The movement recalled the Baron to himself. He turned quickly to his interlocutor.

"Pardon me, I am somewhat absent. I ... I hardly followed you. What were we saying?"

"I was begging you to have more regard for your personal safety."

"Ah! yes. You must excuse my inattention. A man, who is daily called on to give his mind to a hundred different matters, has some difficulty in shaking off the cobwebs, even on a festive occasion like the present."

"Really, the load of work you take on yourself is quite too heavy," observed the Colonel. "The most enduring strength must break down at last beneath such a constant strain. Look at those enviable young people yonder, who have no suspicion as yet of all these cares. They dance, and laugh, and chatter, and are happy among themselves."

"And are happy among themselves," repeated Raven. "Just so."

Deep bitterness lay in his words, and yet no brighter or more animated scene than the one before them could well have presented itself. The handsome, spacious room flooded with light, the gaily-sounding music, and the blooming, youthful crowd swiftly moving to its cadence; surely there was nothing here to arouse a bitter or a gloomy thought! Just then Gabrielle flew by with her partner. The Colonel was right. Never had her beauty shone so radiantly, never had it produced so triumphant an effect as now, when, yielding herself heart and soul to the pleasure of the dance, she sparkled in a very effervescence of happy excitement. The clear stream of light from a thousand sconces, the joyous music, the handsome rooms with their festive decorations--these were the surroundings, this the frame which best suited her figure; here she found her true element, wherein she freely breathed, and her glowing cheeks and bright eyes showed how entrancing to this neophyte were the delights of her first ball. Her whole being seemed transfigured, illumined with radiant contentment, as she floated by in George's arms. He, too, appeared to have forgotten the world about him, to have lost count of all else in the joy of seeing his dear one again, in the bliss of feeling her so near.

Infinite happiness beamed in his eyes as they passed on, her arm resting on his, her breath fanning his cheek; those eyes spoke but too plainly the secret of his heart. The young people were at this moment so supremely blest that they forgot all caution, and a keen observer might easily divine that the light shining in their faces was kindled by something other than the mere intoxication of the waltz. The romantic glamour of a first love was about them, encircling them with its bright aureole.

That keen observer was nigh at hand. Raven still kept his place at the end of the room. A knot of gentlemen had gathered round him and the Colonel, and he was apparently entering with zest into their conversation; but his eyes, as by some fascination, remained fixed on the dancers. As he looked, his gaze grew ever more ardent, more piercing, and it must have had in it some magnetic power of attraction, for, when Gabrielle came round a second time, she turned her head slowly, moved as it were by some mysterious influence, towards the spot where he stood.

For a moment her guardian's eyes met hers. Suddenly a deep glow spread over the young girl's face, and the Baron's features lighted up with one fiery, menacing flash. Then he turned away with a quick, impatient movement.

This dance was followed by a long pause destined for the taking of refreshments. The company left the ball-room, where the heat was becoming intolerable, and sought the buffet and adjoining cool retreats, dispersing at will through the various apartments, and breaking up into merry, chattering groups.

Now at length came the long-looked-for moment when George and Gabrielle might hope to exchange some words in private, free, unconstrained words, such as they had not yet been able to address to each other. Hitherto the eyes of the assembled company had been on them, making familiar speech impossible.

A distant boudoir, untenanted for the time being--though a lively hum of voices told of neighbours in the adjoining room--served as the desired refuge. Thither the young Baroness Harder and Assessor Winterfeld repaired, and, standing opposite each other by the fire-place, entered into what to a chance intruder would have seemed a quiet, commonplace conversation, though, in truth, that low-spoken dialogue differed widely from the conventional talk current in society.

"So at last we have one minute alone together," whispered George, passionately; "the first that has been accorded to us for weeks! I fancied it would be easier to feel you near, and yet beyond my reach."

"Yes, you were right," said Gabrielle, in the same low tone. "We are very, very far apart here, though you daily come to the Castle. I always hoped you would find some means of breaking through the barriers which separate us."

"Have I not tried to the best of my ability? You know how your mother met my overtures. She received me kindly enough when I called, but she was careful not to let fall a word which could be construed into an invitation to repeat the visit. I cannot force myself into a house where I am clearly told that my presence is not wanted."

A slight frown gathered on the young lady's fair brow.

"That was not mamma's fault. She would have welcomed you now as willingly as formerly. It was my guardian who prevented her inviting you. I got mamma to tell him of your call, and of our previous acquaintance, because I----"

"Because you dared not."

"I dare anything that is possible," asserted Gabrielle, with some irritation; "but to hold out under Uncle Arno's look, when one has anything to conceal from him, is just impossible, and it is of no use attempting it. Well, he pronounced most decidedly against the intended invitation. No personal offence to you was meant, for, of course, he has not the faintest suspicion of any understanding between us; but he will not allow any intercourse between us and the younger officials employed in his bureaux--so we had to submit."

"I was sure of it," said George. "I know my chief. He and his must remain inaccessible to all whom he considers beneath him. Well, there is this to be said, not even his despotic will can separate us much more completely than we have been separated during the last few weeks. I have never seen you but from a distance, and when, at last, we do meet, as tonight, we are forced to keep up an appearance of coldness and indifference. I have to look on while you are courted and made much of, to see every one able to approach you but myself. I, who have the first and sole right to you, am condemned to silence and the reserve of a stranger. Gabrielle, I can bear it no longer."

Gabrielle raised her eyes to his face. A bewitching smile played round the corners of her dimpled mouth, as she replied:

"I do not think the 'stranger' is so much to be pitied. He knows very well that I am his, and his alone."

"On a ball-night such as this you certainly are not mine," replied George, rather bitterly. "You are given to the gaiety and the dance and the homage paid you on all sides. You belong to anything and everyone rather than to me. All the time that passed before that waltz, I was striving to meet your glance. Surrounded by your admirers, you had no eyes for me."

The reproach struck home, wounding by its very justice; but the young lady was not accustomed to reproaches in this quarter, and she thought it very cruel and unfair that he should try to spoil her pleasure. The smile vanished from her lips, giving way to a most ungracious expression of countenance, and she was about to utter a sharp retort when Lieutenant Wilten appeared in the doorway.

"Fräulein von Harder," he said, hastening to her. "You are missed in the ball-room. His Excellency and the Baroness have both been inquiring for you. I volunteered to look for you. Will you accept my escort back to your anxious friends?"

Under other circumstances Gabrielle would have let this intruder feel how unwelcome he was; but now she was angry, justly offended, as she thought, and not at all disposed to take the offence patiently--so she bowed her head coldly to George, and accepted the young Baron's arm with great affability of manner. The Lieutenant led her from the room, casting, as he went, a triumphant glance back at the discomfited rival left behind.

George looked after the pair with angry knitted brows. This childish revenge wounded him more than he cared to confess to himself, and again the old tormenting doubt arose within him--the doubt as to whether it were right for him to withdraw this charming but most superficial young creature from the glittering sphere for which she seemed created, and to link her existence to that of an earnest patient worker. True, Gabrielle's love gave him a right to possess her, but--did she love him? Was she really capable of a deep and abiding sentiment? or was her fancy for him a mere caprice, playful and transient as became her gay, butterfly nature? Suppose she were to be unhappy at his side, or he to make the miserable discovery that the wife of his bosom could meet his ardent love, and reward his sacrifices, only with the inconstancy and waywardness of a child? Perhaps they would both pay for this short day-dream with a whole lifetime of misery and regret!

The young man passed his hand quickly across his brow. He would not listen to the whispered monitions of reason, so utterly at variance with the passionate throbbings of his heart. With a great effort he shook himself free from these torturing thoughts, and was about to leave the room when Councillor Moser came in, accompanied by the Superintendent of Police. The former, in honour of the day, wore a brand-new neck-cloth of snowy whiteness, but of such prodigious dimensions that he could hardly move his head in it, a circumstance which lent additional stiffness to his bearing and solemnity to his mien. The two were holding some animated discussion, but on catching sight of Assessor Winterfeld they ceased speaking so abruptly that that gentleman divined he had been the subject of their conversation. This idea was confirmed by the keen glance with which the Superintendent measured the young official from head to foot, while the Councillor walked straight up to him, and without a word of preface, addressed him as follows:

"I am glad to meet you here, Assessor. I have to request you to undertake a commission for

me."

George bowed slightly.

"With pleasure. I am at your service."

"Your friend. Dr. Brunnow"--the Councillor accentuated his words, as though some dread and weighty accusation were conveyed in each--"your friend. Dr. Brunnow, has, without my knowledge or desire, assumed the office of my family physician. He has listened to an invalid's statements, has given prescriptions, and even threatened me with a renewal of his visit. I did not at first comprehend how the matter had come about---"

"It was all a misunderstanding," interrupted George. "Max told me of it. He really believed that medical advice was required from him, and he had no notion into whose house an odd chance had led him."

"Well, he knows now," said Moser, emphatically; "and I must ask you to tell him, once for all, that I should not dream of applying for advice to a doctor bearing so compromised a name, to one whose father is an avowed enemy to the State. Tell him to choose for his revolutionary intrigues some other scene than the house of Councillor Moser, who has ever made it his proud boast that he is surpassed by none in loyalty to his most gracious Sovereign. There are men, gentlemen in the service, who might take example by his line of conduct. It would be well for themselves, for society, and for the State, were they to share the views I have expressed."

With these words the Councillor inclined his head, or rather attempted to do so, for his neckcloth imposed limits on his will, and majestically left the room, sublimely conscious of having, in a figurative sense, crushed and slain his adversary. The Superintendent, who had throughout been a silent listener, now drew near.

"You seem to be in disgrace with our loyal friend," he remarked, in a jesting tone. "He was giving me a long account of your dangerous and treasonable connections. I hope---"

"The Councillor is in error," interposed George, with quiet distinctness. "The connection with which he reproaches me is a perfectly harmless college friendship, bearing no relation whatever to politics. I can assure you that my friend, who is here solely on a matter of business--to make good his claim to some property he has lately inherited--and who by a droll mistake found his way the other day into the Mosers' dwelling, has no thought of carrying on revolutionary intrigues either there or elsewhere, and that he will not give you the slightest motive to take an interest in his person."

The Superintendent laughed.

"So much the better. The Councillor grows quite alarming at times through excess of loyalty. He sees ghosts and spectres at every turn. Could he but guess that his own chief was once the comrade and friend of this very Dr. Brunnow, whom he stigmatises as an enemy to the State! You, probably, are not unaware of this fact?"

"I am aware of it, certainly," said George, taken aback by the question. The police-officer's intimate acquaintance with circumstances so remote surprised him greatly.

"How these early friends get separated! How strangely and widely do their paths in life differ!" remarked the other. "The Governor, Baron Arno von Raven, and a refugee living in exile, no contrast could well be greater! It is said, I believe, that the Baron himself entertained rather extravagant political views in his youth."

He paused, apparently expecting an answer, but none came. Assessor Winterfeld listened in silence.

"I have even heard it asserted that Herr von Raven was in some way mixed up with that trial which resulted in the imprisonment of Dr. Brunnow and his associates. None but vague rumours have reached me, however. You, I dare say, are better informed through your friend and his father."

"Not at all--we have never gone into the subject. But, if the Baron had chanced to be connected with the trial in any way, the fact could easily be ascertained through the official reports of the case."

The Superintendent cast a glance at the young man which seemed to say: "If that were so, I should hardly be wasting my time and pains on so stiff-necked a person as yourself." He replied aloud:

"The Baron's name is not mentioned in the official documents. If he really had anything to do with the business, all accounts were settled between himself and his future father-in-law, the Minister. He must have fully exonerated himself from blame in the latter's estimation, for the brilliant fortunes which have attended him throughout his career date from that precise time."

"Very probably," assented George, with cool reserve; "but these events, which happened fully

twenty years ago, must be more familiar to you than to me. You, I should suppose, were then entering on your professional duties, whilst I was still a mere child."

The Superintendent saw that here there was no inclination to enlighten him, that from this source he should not get the information he required. He gave up the attempt, and when they had exchanged a few unimportant remarks, the two gentlemen parted.

Only once again during the evening did George find an opportunity of speaking to Gabrielle, or rather, she herself it was who gave him the opportunity. As he stood looking on at the cotillon, taking no part in it, she fluttered up to him, light and airy as any sylph, and led him to the dance. While they were making the tour of the room, their eyes met. The moodiness had melted from his face, and about her lips there played again the captivating smile which his words had lately scared away.

"Must I not enjoy myself? Are you still jealous?" whispered Gabrielle, with a delicious mixture of roguishness and penitence. George would not have been young or in love, could he have withstood that smile and that appeal. He was already convinced that he had done wrong to reproach his darling with her radiant gaiety. She was so innocently happy in it--and, in spite of her caprices and wilful ways, had not this beaming, joy-loving child found her way to his very heart of hearts?

"My Gabrielle!" was all he said, but infinite tenderness lay in the softly-spoken words. A slight pressure from her hand answered his. The reconciliation was sealed.

So the hours flew by, and the ball took the brilliant course usual to such assemblies. Midnight had long passed when the guests departed, and the great galleries grew empty once more. Baroness Harder, well satisfied with the part she had played on the occasion, was about to retire to her own room. She had taken leave of her brother-in-law, and had turned to give some directions to the servants, when Gabrielle in her turn approached to bid her guardian goodnight. Raven saw that she meant to give him her hand, but he remained immovable, with folded arms, and there was a look of cold severity on his features, as he addressed her in a low tone.

"I have made a singular discovery this evening, Gabrielle. There appears to be a degree of familiarity between you and Assessor Winterfeld which is highly unbecoming. It is not compatible with his position, nor with yours in my house. I will venture to hope that in permitting him such freedom you have been misled by inexperience alone; but you will have to give me an explanation of this. I must know how far your acquaintance with this gentleman has really gone."

Again a crimson flush suffused the girl's face, deep as the glow which had dyed it some time before when she had met her guardian's accusing glance during that waltz; but this most unwonted tone from his mouth aroused her temper and her defiance. She drew herself up with a resolute air.

"If you wish it. Uncle Arno----"

"Not now," he interrupted, with a wave of the hand. "It is too late to-night, and I do not wish that your mother should be present at our interview. I shall expect to see you in my study to-morrow morning early, and you will then have the kindness to answer such questions as I shall put to you. Good-night."

He turned away without offering her his hand or waiting for a reply, and walked to the farther end of the room. Gabrielle stood still in mute consternation. It was the first time the Baron had displayed harshness towards herself, and for the first time she began to realise that the matter would not blow over so lightly as in her gay optimism she had hitherto hoped.

A catastrophe was imminent, inevitable: thus she pondered; and only when her mother called her did she start from her reverie and hasten to the Baroness's side.

Raven watched her as she went. His lips were firmly set, as though in repressed anger or pain, and a dark thundercloud lay on his brow.

"I must know the truth," he muttered. "But, after all, what will it amount to? Mere childish folly, some travelling episode invested by both with all necessary romance, and in the course of a few weeks to be utterly forgotten. No matter, I will take care that such looks are not translated into words, and that an end is put to the affair in time."

CHAPTER VII.

The next morning broke grey and cloudy. It heralded in a wet, cold September day, which told unmistakably that summer's opulent splendour was a thing of the past, and that autumn's chill reign had commenced. A fine drizzling rain was falling: the mountains were shrouded in thick mist, and in the Castle-garden the wind was chasing the first leaves from the trees.

Baron von Raven sat alone in his study. A middle-sized room, with a lofty ceiling and one large bay-window framed in a deep recess, this study certainly did produce a gloomy impression. It was not less handsomely fitted up than the other apartments of the Castle; but here the prevailing grandeur was toned down to a style of severe simplicity. In the costly panelling of the walls, in the heavy sculptured oak furniture, and in the rich brocade of the curtains, the same subdued shades of colour were preserved; and the antique black marble chimneypiece was in harmony with the appointments of the room, from which all showy effects were rigorously excluded. The bureau, with its load of papers and parchments, the books ranged round the walls--a library wherein every branch of knowledge was represented--and the maps, plans, and drawings distributed about on the different tables, gave a fair idea of the numberless interests here claiming attention, of the vast aggregate of business constantly despatched. It was not a comfortable room to dwell in, nor one suited to rest or repose. Everything in it told of work--of grave, incessant occupation.

Raven generally got through a good deal of business in the morning hours; but to-day he set at his writing-table, resting his head on his hand, and cast not so much as a glance at the pile of letters and memorials, of reports and schedules, before him. His countenance wore the pallor born of a sleepless night, and its austerity of expression was more striking than usual; otherwise his features were as of bronze in their perfect immobility.

Immersed in sombre thought, he did not even look up as the study-door opened. A servant, whom he had sent to the Baroness's apartments to summon his ward to him, entered, and announced that the young lady would be with his Excellency immediately.

A few minutes later, Gabrielle followed the messenger, and, coming into the study, closed the door behind her. She wore a plain white morning dress, the simplicity of which became her well, and even in the grey uncertain light of that autumn day her brightness shone undimmed. Last night's ball had left no trace behind. Her elastic youth knew as yet neither languor nor lassitude. The girl's face was blooming and fresh as ever, its colour being, perhaps, at this moment a little heightened by excitement, for there was no mistaking the nature of the interview she had now to undergo. With the entrance of that slender white figure, a sunbeam had stolen into the gloomy room: all at once it seemed to grow lighter and more cheerful.

The Baron himself must have had some sense of this. He rose, and advanced a few paces to meet his visitor. At sight of her, his features relaxed from their set sternness, and his voice, though very grave, was not harsh, as he addressed her:

"I have several questions to put to you, Gabrielle. My words last night will have prepared you for them; and I shall expect to hear from you in reply the truth, and the whole truth."

He put forward a chair for her, and seated himself opposite her. The young lady's attitude bespoke confidence rather than timidity. It had, of course, become manifest to her that the tactics by which she prevailed in any dispute with her mother would not here stand her in stead; that she could not hope to carry her point by open defiance, or by a few tears; but she had resolved to avow her love boldly, and to show herself strong, heroic even, in its defence.

The Baron, she knew, doubted her firmness with an incredulity fixed, and to the full as insulting, as that professed by George; and, strangely enough, she felt a far greater satisfaction in convicting her guardian of his error, than in raising her lover's estimate of her character. At this moment the romance of the situation was uppermost in her mind, outweighing any anxiety as to the issue of the impending conflict.

"My questions concern Assessor Winterfeld," began the Baron. "Your mother tells me you met him in Switzerland. He frequently came to your house, and you probably held much free and unconstrained intercourse with him."

"Yes," said Gabrielle, somewhat disconcerted. The matter was not taking a dramatic turn at present. Her guardian spoke in the most tranquil of tones.

"Have you often seen or spoken to him, since you came to R---?"

"Twice only--the day he called on mamma, and last night at the ball."

"On no other occasion?"

"No."

The Baron drew a deep breath of relief.

"This young man evidently pays you a degree of attention which oversteps the bounds of ordinary gallantry," he continued; "and you seem not only to suffer, but to encourage it."

Gabrielle was silent.

"I expect an answer, Gabrielle."

She looked up. There was no sign of fear in her face. It spoke rather of open rebellion.

"And if that were the case?" she asked.

"It would be high time to put an end to such childish nonsense," Raven answered sharply. "You must know very well that nothing serious could ever come of it."

The young lady tossed her fair head with an offended, yet a most resolute air. Now came the decisive moment; now was the time to show her heroism, and to inspire her guardian with respect. He had no idea as yet how grave the matter in question was. He treated it as a silly, passing fancy.

"It is not mere childish nonsense," she replied, with the utmost decision. "George Winterfeld loves me."

The Baron's eye flashed fire. He rose quickly, and folded his arms on his breast, as though to compel himself to be calm; but his voice was low and menacing as he answered her:

"Oh, oh! he has told you this already? Last night, perhaps, during your waltz?"

"He told me long ago, in Switzerland, that he loved me."

Raven laughed out loud--a short, harsh laugh.

"I suspected it, I vow," he said, with bitter sarcasm. "So you two were acting through a romance under your mother's eyes, she having no faintest notion of it the while. Well, it is what one might expect from her. But it is less easy to deceive me. If you intended that, you should have guarded your looks better; they were far too eloquent yesterday evening. I can make many excuses for you, Gabrielle, on account of your youth and inexperience--a few sentimental phrases suffice to turn the head of a girl of seventeen; but this romantic trifling is too dangerous for me to permit it to go on longer. I shall remind Assessor Winterfeld of the barriers which separate him from the Baroness Harder--from my niece, and that in a way which will impress itself on his memory. Henceforward you will neither see nor speak to him. I forbid this folly, once for all."

He strove in vain to preserve his sarcastic tone; the terrible irritation which lay behind would break through at times. Gabrielle, indeed, did not remark this; she heard only the scornful derision of his words. The girl was prepared for reproaches, for an outbreak of fierce anger on the part of her guardian, for she knew how his pride would revolt against such a union; but, instead of wrathfully upbraiding her, he treated George and herself as a pair of naughty children, who must be duly punished for the fault they had committed. He spoke in the most contemptuous tone of 'trifling' and of 'sentimental phrases,' and thought that, by launching his edict, he could at one stroke destroy the happiness of two grown-up persons. This was too much. The young lady now rose in her turn, vibrating with indignation.

"You cannot do that, Uncle Arno," she said vehemently. "George has a claim on me which he will certainly vindicate. He has my word--my promise. I am betrothed to him."

She had made her confession boldly, unhesitatingly; and now she paused, waiting for the coming storm, but none came. Raven replied not a word. A grey pallor overspread his face, and his hand grasped convulsively the back of a great arm-chair that was near him, while he gazed with a strange, fixed look at Gabrielle.

She stood before him silent and confused. It was not exactly fear which possessed her, but rather a secret, inexplicable dread growing up within her beneath that gaze, a vague presentiment of coming evil, against which she struggled in vain.

After a minute's pause, the Baron spoke again:

"This matter has certainly gone further than I supposed; and you have considered you were doing right in keeping it a secret from your mother and myself?"

"We feared we should be parted if our attachment were known," answered Gabrielle, in a low voice.

"Oh! And what do you imagine will happen now?"

"I do not know; but I am determined I will keep my word to George, come what may, for I love him."

This word at length let loose the fury of the storm hitherto held in check. With a movement of rage. Raven dashed the chair aside, and strode up to the young girl.

"And you dare to say that to me?" he broke out. "You dare, without my knowledge and consent, to enter into an engagement which you know I shall decidedly oppose--to defy me openly? You

build on the indulgent kindness I have shown you up to this time. It is at an end from to-day. Do not challenge me too far, Gabrielle; you may bitterly repent it. I have means of bringing a perverse, rebellious child to reason--means I shall unsparingly use against both you and him. Winterfeld shall answer to me for this surreptitious love-making, for the sweet speeches with which he has befooled you into giving a promise--a promise which is null and void, seeing that you are not free to dispose of yourself as yet. He courts in you the presumptive heiress, and calculates that through her he shall attain to wealth and influence. He may find himself deceived. I alone have to decide as to your future, which is altogether in my hands. Your lot in life depends on me, and if I accord to you a brilliant position, I shall expect implicit obedience in return. At no time, and under no circumstances, can there be a question of such a marriage. I refuse my consent, and you must perforce bend to my will."

Gabrielle had recoiled a step before this fierce outburst, but nevertheless she met it bravely. The "child" possessed more stability, more strength of purpose, than Raven supposed. She was not to be intimidated by his imperious words or threatening looks.

"You have no rights over me, except those of a guardian, and they will expire at my majority," she replied, with most unusual energy. "My future and my position in life concern George alone. I shall accept the lot that he can offer me, whatever it may be. No calculating thought has ever entered his mind with regard to me. George's affection----"

The Baron stamped furiously.

"George, and nothing but George! I forbid you to speak so of this Winterfeld in my presence. You will never be his wife--never, I tell you--at least, while I live."

The young girl drew herself erect. She was indignant at, rather than daunted by, his extreme vehemence. "Uncle Arno, you are horribly, cruelly unjust. You----"

Suddenly she stopped. Her eyes met his, and the ardent consuming fire in them seemed to scorch her with its intense glow. It was not the blaze of hatred, nor of anger. There was suffering in that look, fierce, wild pain stimulated almost to madness. Gabrielle pressed both hands on her bosom. She felt as though breath and consciousness were forsaking her; then, vivid as lightning, with a blinding, stupefying shock, the truth flashed upon her. She grew deadly pale, and caught at the back of the chair as though for support.

This movement of hers in some measure restored the Baron to himself. He saw the great paleness which overspread her features, and attributed it in some measure to fear aroused by his violence. This man, accustomed to the severest self-control, had, probably for the first time in his life, allowed himself to be carried beyond bounds. He felt this, and by a supreme effort of his will endeavoured to master his agitation. A deep and painful silence followed; a silence which weighed on both, but which neither ventured to break. Raven had gone up to the window, and, with his fevered brow pressed against the panes, remained gazing out into the misty landscape. Gabrielle still stood motionless in her place.

"I have alarmed you with my vehemence," said the Baron at last, without turning round. "Such matters require to be discussed quietly, and we are neither of us in a fitting frame of mind just now. To-morrow, later on, perhaps----Leave me, Gabrielle."

She obeyed, walking with bowed head to the door, but there she paused. Again, as on the preceding evening, she felt, without seeing it, the look which rested on her; and again, as then, she was constrained by some mysterious attraction to meet that look. Raven had, indeed, turned, and was following her with his eyes.

"One thing more," he said--his voice was completely under control now, but it had a dull unnatural sound--"not a word, not a line to him. I will speak to him myself."

Gabrielle left the room, and returned to her mother's apartments. The Baroness, who was a late riser, had but just completed her morning toilet. On going into the breakfast-room, she missed her daughter, who was generally there before her, and was about to inquire of the servants as to the reason of her absence when the young girl herself appeared.

"Why, child, where have you been all this time? Not out of doors, I hope, in such miserable weather. You would take a dreadful cold, wandering about in that light morning dress. But you look quite pale and disturbed! Has anything happened?"

"No, mamma," said her daughter, in a low, half-stifled voice.

The Baroness looked at her with concern.

"You are not well, I am sure. You were overheated with dancing yesterday evening, when we went through those cold corridors. Take a little hot tea, dear--it will do you good."

Gabrielle declined the offered cup.

"No, thank you, mamma. I would rather go back to my room, and try and rest a little."

"But your uncle is accustomed to see you here at breakfast-time."

"Tell him I am not well. He will not miss me to-day. I *cannot* stay."

With these words she left the room. The Baroness remained alone, wondering not a little at her daughter's sudden fit of reserve, which was as strange to her as the white wan look on that blooming face. At this moment the Baron's valet entered with a message from his Excellency, who begged to be excused--he would not appear at breakfast that morning. Madame von Harder shook her head at this announcement; but she was not gifted with any special powers of combination, and moreover she knew nothing of the interview which had taken place in her brother-in-law's study. It did not occur to her, therefore, to connect the two circumstances. She thought no more of the matter, but sat down to table, a little put out at having to breakfast alone.

In the Chancellery the Governor's appearance was that day looked for in vain. It was his custom to go there early in the morning, but on this occasion he remained shut up in his study, and allowed the most necessary business to be transacted by Councillor Moser. The Councillor, who had some pressing matters to submit to his chief's notice, came back from an audience with an important mien, and the tidings that his Excellency was by no means graciously disposed that morning. This was true enough. The Baron had listened to the various communications to him with great impatience and visible absence of mind, had given the needful instructions in a hurried manner most unusual to him, and had dismissed the worthy Councillor as speedily as possible. That gentleman, who always claimed to know more than others, hinted at weighty Government despatches recently received, and all the clerks put their heads together, and indulged in endless speculations and conjectures.

Half an hour later. Assessor Winterfeld was summoned to the Governor. There was nothing remarkable in this, as he had to take in his report in the course of the morning, and the fact of his being sent for before the appointed hour could easily be explained by the numerous pressing calls on the Baron's time.

The young man, therefore, obeyed the summons with unsuspecting alacrity. He entered the cabinet, his head full of the statement he had prepared, set his papers in order, and waited for the signal to begin.

"We will leave that," said Raven. "The report can stand over for to-day. I have other matters to discuss with you."

George looked up in astonishment, and only then became aware of his chief's altered attitude. The dignified calm with which that personage was wont to receive his officials had stiffened into freezing hauteur.

He stood leaning against the bureau, and eyed the young man before him from head to foot, as though he then saw him for the first time, scanning his features with a severe, unerring scrutiny which seemed to pierce him through and through. Undisguised hostility was expressed in that steady, frowning gaze, as it was, indeed, in the Baron's whole bearing.

George saw this at a glance, and at once understood the words which had struck him as enigmatical. He understood that he alone was the object of the Baron's displeasure, and guessed what had provoked it. The long-looked-for catastrophe had come at last, and the young man braced himself to face it with quiet resolution.

"I have this morning had an interview with my ward, Baroness Harder, in which your name was mentioned," began the Governor. "No explanations are required from you. I already know what has happened, and I must call you to account for the manner in which you have misled that young lady, causing her to fail most unpardonably in the sincerity and respect she owes to her family."

George cast down his eyes. His quick sense of honour allowed the reproach as well-founded.

"I have possibly erred in remaining silent until now," he replied. "My only excuse lies in the fact that my position has not yet qualified me to prefer my suit openly."

"Indeed? I should have thought that such an obstacle in the way of your suit would also have prohibited a declaration of your sentiments."

"Had it been premeditated, certainly; but, your Excellency, that was not the case. In an unguarded moment my secret escaped me: only when it had found utterance, when my words had been accepted, did reflection regain the upper hand; and then I was forced to confess to myself that for the present I could advance no grounds entitling me to approach Baroness Harder as a suitor for her daughter's hand."

"It is well you make the admission yourself," remarked the Baron, with withering scorn. "I should otherwise have been under the necessity of making the fact clear to you. If Fräulein von Harder has made you promises, they, naturally, count for nothing, having been given without my knowledge or her mother's; and it would be simply absurd for you to build on them. Romantic notions should be left to the domain of romance. I regret that my niece should have lent an ear to such extravagant folly, but you will hardly expect me to deal with it as a matter calling for serious

consideration."

The young man's face began to flush beneath this contemptuous treatment, and the rising irritation within him betrayed itself in his voice, as he answered:

"I do not know that an earnest and pure affection, which has been tarnished by no unworthy thought, which has held its object as some high and sacred thing apart, should be met by derision only. I have kept it a secret so far, and have caused Fräulein von Harder to do so likewise, because I knew that time and much continuous labour on my part were needed to remove the obstacles that stand in my path, because I foresaw that every effort would be made to separate us. In that alone am I culpable. My conduct in that respect may deserve blame, but those who have had experience of love will not judge me too harshly. I own I was not prepared to find our mutual attachment treated as mere romantic folly."

"And what do you expect me to think of it?" asked Raven, ironically. "It seems to me you have every reason to be grateful to me for adopting this view of the case, as it alone admits of a lenient judgment. If I knew that you and Gabrielle were seriously contemplating the possibility of a union----" He paused, but the look which completed the sentence was significant enough, and fraught with evil presage.

"Would your Excellency have preferred that we should be attached without contemplating a lifelong union?" asked George, quietly.

"Mr. Winterfeld, you forget yourself," thundered the Baron. "The blame of this secret understanding lies not with my niece, but with you. That young girl was not in a position to measure its importance, or rightly to estimate the situation. You were fully able to do both, and were aware of the barriers which stood between you; it is with you, therefore, I must now reckon. You are one of my youngest clerks, without name or rank, without fortune or prospects. By what right do you venture to aspire to the hand of the young Baroness Harder, who is accustomed to all the luxuries of life, and who has a claim to move in circles widely remote from yours?"

"By the same right as that whereon Baron von Raven relied, when, under circumstances in all respects similar, he sued for the hand of the Minister's daughter, who subsequently became his wife--by right of my confidence in the future."

Raven bit his lip. "It appears to be with you a foregone conclusion that in point of success your career will resemble mine. It is rather venturesome on your part to place yourself thus boldly on a par with me. Besides, the comparison does not hold good. I was one of the Minister's most intimate friends long before I became his son-in-law. I knew that he favoured my suit, and had assured myself of his consent before I addressed his daughter. That is the only honourable course to pursue in such matters. Mark what I say, Mr. Winterfeld."

"Your Excellency, no doubt, acted more correctly, and with more deliberation; but--I loved Gabrielle!"

A furious gleam shot from the Baron's eyes, as he turned them on the audacious offender who dared to remind him that his own marriage had been one of calculation.

"I must beg of you, in my presence, to give the Baroness Harder her fitting title," said he, in his sharpest tone. "As to the disinterestedness of your affection, were you unaware of the fact that my niece is generally looked upon as my heiress?"

"No; but I supposed that any dispositions to that effect would be reversed in the event of the young Baroness's marrying without her guardian's consent."

"The supposition was correct. And you are really selfish enough to rob the girl you profess to love of all the advantages bestowed on her by birth and fortune? You would condemn her to an existence which would be nothing but one long series of sacrifices? A most noble and disinterested love, truly! Fortunately, Gabrielle Harder is not the heroine required for such an idyl; and I will take care that she does not become the victim of a youthful error, which she would expiate with swift and bitter repentance."

George was silent. That was the sore spot with him. He had often felt, as the Baron said, that Gabrielle was the last woman in the world for such abnegation as this "idyl" demanded.

"Let us make an end of this," said Raven, drawing himself up, and waving his hand imperiously. "I cannot concede to my niece a right to dispose of her future without my knowledge or consent, and I decline to enter into a discussion respecting wishes and hopes, which are, for me, simply non-existent. You know that a guardian's powers are unlimited as a father's, and you are bound to submit to my decision. I shall expect that you, as a man of honour, will abstain from any attempt to carry on this clandestine understanding, which is calculated to injure the young lady's fame, and has already disturbed her relations with her family. Open intercourse I, naturally, prohibit from this date. You will give me your word that you will in no way seek to communicate with my ward in secret."

"If I am allowed once more to see and speak to Baroness Harder, even though it be in the presence of her mother."

"No."

"Then I cannot give the required promise."

"Reflect well, Assessor. Remember who it is you are braving," warned the Baron, and there was unmistakable menace in his tone.

The young man's fine clear eyes met those of his chief fearlessly, yet the sombre fire smouldering in these latter was of a nature to make him pause and reflect. The two men stood face to face, like wrestlers, measuring each other's strength before the struggle. The younger, calm and resolute; the elder, vibrating in every nerve with terrible agitation.

"I brave only a harsh and unjust sentence," said George, taking up the last words, "Your Excellency decrees our separation, and we must yield to the sentence, having no arms wherewith to defend ourselves; but to refuse us an interview--the last, probably, for years--is, I repeat it, both harsh and unjust. I do not know how Fräulein von Harder may be worked upon, in what manner my silence and reserve may be interpreted to her. I must, at least, tell her, once for all, that I maintain my right to her hand, and that I will spare no exertion to deserve it. This I shall attempt to say by letter or by word of mouth, with or without your Excellency's leave."

He bowed and went, not waiting for the usual signal of dismissal. Raven threw himself into a chair. The interview had taken an unexpected course. His intercourse with Winterfeld had hitherto been simply official. He had always considered him to be talented and clever in his profession, without ascribing to him any very extraordinary merit--the difference of position precluded all close contact and deeper interest. To-day, for the first time, they had met, not as superior and subaltern, but as man to man; and to-day the Baron had discovered that behind that modest demeanour and that mild, clear brow, there lay concealed an energy equal to his own.

He was accustomed to break down all resistance by the sheer might of his imposing word and presence, but on this occasion that might and all the prestige of his exalted station had been summoned to his aid in vain. He had succeeded neither in abasing nor in intimidating his adversary; in more than one respect he must acknowledge him as his peer. Gabrielle had bestowed her love on no unworthy object; this was the secret trouble which gnawed at the man's heart, as he lay back brooding in his chair. He would have given much really to be able to look on this attachment as a piece of youthful folly, and to tear the two asunder in the name of reason and common sense. Now there remained to him only that miserable pretext of rank and fortune, and his own case might be cited to show how easily these obstacles are surmounted when an energetic will sets itself to break them down; though, with him, the incentive to action had been of another and a lower order.

That most beautiful and sacred privilege of youth, a spontaneous, soaring passion, heedless of hindrances, and oblivious of worldly possibilities, Arno Raven had never enjoyed, or cared to enjoy. He had put from him the dream of love and happiness, while love and happiness were the just appanage of his years; his ambitious plans left him no time to indulge in dreaming. Now, in the autumn of his life, the fair vision rose before him, golden, ethereal, spreading about him its soft, delusive shimmer, taking his best strength captive, until he suddenly awoke, and found himself in the presence of a stern, cruel reality. Youth yearns after youth, and the middle-aged man, at the very zenith of his success and greatness, looked from his lonely height on the waste desolate tract around. Perhaps in this hour he would have given his hardily-won success and all the sweets of power only to be young again.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dr. Max Brunnow learned from his friend's mouth the sentence of banishment passed on him by Councillor Moser; he treated the whole subject, however, with most unbecoming levity.

"I positively should have gone again," he said, laughing. "That excellent old gentleman, with his bureaucratic majesty of demeanour and his prodigious cravat, is a sight worth seeing, and the girl is really in want of rational medical advice; I can understand that 'the most loyal subject of his most gracious Majesty' should banish my father's son from the precincts of his home, but it is a pity my practice in R---- should be thus summarily brought to an end. It promised to be, if not remunerative, at least amusing."

Another case soon came under the young man's notice, which, though even less likely to be lucrative, provided in an unhoped-for degree the "amusement" here so ruthlessly denied him. George had begged his friend to visit the wife of a poor law-writer who occasionally copied for

the Assessor, and for whom the latter had often obtained employment in the Government bureaux. The wife had long been suffering from some wasting disease. The doctor called in to her came but seldom, declared with a shrug of the shoulders that there was not much to be done, and finally ceased his visits altogether, the family being in impoverished circumstances and quite unable to pay his fees. Max at once responded to his friend's appeal, and went next day to the cottage indicated to him as the patient's dwelling, which was situated in the suburb lying at the foot of the Castle-hill.

A little girl about ten years of age opened the door, and admitted the young surgeon to a scantily-furnished room. Two younger children ceased from their play to stare at the strange gentleman with big eyes of astonishment; the mother, wrapped in blankets and supported by pillows, sat in an old arm-chair. Max was going straight up to the invalid when he paused suddenly, seeing at her side a young lady with pale cheeks and smoothly-braided hair, attired in a dark, nun-like dress. She was reading aloud from a volume she held in her hand, its gilt edges and the cross on the cover unmistakably denoting a prayer-book. The young lady was Councillor Moser's daughter. She ceased reading, and rose in some confusion on recognising the newcomer.

"Good-morning, Fräulein," said Max, quietly. "Excuse my disturbing you, but mine is a doctor's errand to an invalid, and this time I really am the person expected, and no mistake."

The young girl crimsoned to the temples, and drew back. She made no reply. Dr. Brunnow now introduced himself to the sick woman, who was prepared for his visit. He began at once to question her as to her symptoms, in order to ascertain the precise stage the malady had reached. He went to work in no specially mild or considerate manner, not attempting consolation, or even giving any decided hope or encouragement; but his brief, clear remarks, and prompt, definite instructions, inspired confidence, and produced on his patient a remarkably soothing effect.

Meanwhile Agnes Moser had remained in the background, busying herself with the children. She seemed hardly to know whether she ought to go or stay, but at length determined on the former course. She put on her hat, and took leave of the invalid, who expressed her warm and earnest thanks for the girl's kindness. But if Agnes thought so to escape further intercourse with Dr. Brunnow, she was mistaken. With a few brief parting words he enjoined strict attention to his instructions, promised to return the following day, and then, with the utmost coolness and easy serenity, followed the girl as she went out.

"So I am not to look on you as my patient any longer, Fräulein?" he began, as soon as they were out of doors. "Your father seems to attribute to me all the blame of a misunderstanding for which I really was not responsible. He had me informed in the most unequivocal terms that he did not desire a renewal of my visit."

Agnes cast down her eyes in painful embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Brunnow; the fault was mine alone. Pray believe that it is no want of confidence in your professional skill which induces my father to decline your advice. There are, I believe, other grounds----"

"Political grounds!" interrupted Max, with undisguised irony. "Councillor Moser detests the revolutionary name I bear; he insists upon seeing in me a socialist and a demagogue. Far be it from me to impose my counsels on him or on you, but I should like to ask the fate of my prescription. You made no use of it, I suppose."

"Oh yes," replied Agnes, in a low voice. "I took the medicine."

"With any good result?"

"Yes. I feel better since I began it."

"I am glad to hear that. But how does my worthy colleague, who is now treating you, approve of your taking another doctor's advice?"

"No one is treating me just at present," confessed the young girl. "Dr. Helm, who was originally sent for, took the mistake that had occurred in very ill part. I suppose I was rather embarrassed and at a loss what to do when he called, for he withdrew at once on finding that a prescription had already been given, and he received the excuses my father has since made him very coolly indeed. As I felt better the very day after I began your medicine, I thought--well, I have just gone on following your instructions."

"Keep to that," said Max, dryly. "There can be nothing treasonable in a bottle of medicine. The Councillor himself must admit so much."

They had now reached the Castle-hill, and Agnes stopped, confidently expecting that her companion would here leave her; but he merely remarked, "You are going through the Castle-hill gardens, I suppose. That is my way too," and remained by her side, looking as though it were the most simple and natural thing in the world for him to bear her company.

The young girl glanced timidly and anxiously up at him. Her shyness would not allow her to

decline his escort, so she resigned herself to the inevitable, and they walked on together.

"As regards my present patient," the young surgeon recommenced; "her condition is precarious no doubt, but not altogether hopeless. Perhaps we may yet be able to preserve her to her family. From the poor woman's expressions of gratitude, I gather that you have already made her frequent visits."

"We heard of the family's distressed circumstances," answered Agnes. "The husband occasionally does some work for the Chancellery, and my father knows him to be industrious and deserving; so I determined I would go and see the invalid, to give her, at least, some spiritual consolation."

"Spiritual consolation is quite superfluous at present," said Max, in his rough way. "Strong beef-tea and nourishing wine would be of a great deal more use."

Fräulein Agnes seemed inclined to execute one of those rapid retreats which at their first meeting had marked her horror of his impious speeches; but on this occasion she thought better of it, and held her ground. There was even a spice of sharpness in her gentle low-toned voice, as she answered:

"I have provided for such wants as well, and will continue to do so to the extent of my ability; but it seemed to me urgently necessary that this sick woman should be prepared for the Heaven which may shortly open its gates to her."

"Rather a singular occupation for a young lady of your years," remarked Max. "At your age it is usual to prefer the things of this world, and to leave heavenly joys to take care of themselves."

Agnes was evidently offended at his jesting manner. Her accustomed gentleness forsook her for a moment, and she answered in rather an angry tone:

"I have already renounced the world, and such pious offices are only a preparation for my future vocation. In a few months I am to take the veil."

Max stopped abruptly, and looked at her in amazement.

"My dear young lady, this won't do at all!" he cried suddenly.

"Dr. Brunnow, I must beg of you----" interrupted the young girl, warningly; but Dr. Brunnow was not deterred by this protest against his unwarrantable interference.

"I tell you this won't do at all," he repeated decidedly. "You are in ill health, of a very delicate constitution, and you need the greatest care if you wish to get permanently cured. Cloister-life, with its severe regulations, its retirement, and all the fatigue and excitement of prayer and penance which make up its daily routine, is utterly unsuited to a person of your temperament. The result to you would infallibly be a pulmonary complaint--consumption--death!"

The young doctor delivered this speech with oracular solemnity, as though he in person would be called on to dispense the threatened fate, and his words did not fail in their effect, Agnes looked at him with a scared expression of countenance; then she bowed her head resignedly, and said in an almost inaudible voice:

"I did not think my illness was so serious."

"It is not serious, if you will lead a sensible and natural life," said Max, quite wrathfully; "but convent-life is the climax of all that is unnatural and absurd, and you would assuredly fall a victim to it before many years were over."

Agnes considered whether it would not become her speedily and at once to fly from this doctor, whose impiety was becoming more and more manifest; but she determined to cast one last searching glance into the depths of his depravity before going, so she asked in her turn:

"You hate all monasteries and convents?"

"It is my vocation to combat all the plagues and ills that afflict suffering humanity," replied the young surgeon, with malicious sincerity.

"And you hate religion as well?"

"Well, that depends upon what you call by that name. Convents and religion are very different things, you know."

This was too much for the nun-elect. She hastened her steps, in order to escape from so dangerous a neighbourhood; but she gained nothing by this strategy. Max immediately fell into her pace, and they continued side by side as before.

"You are of a contrary opinion, of course," he went on, no reply from her being forthcoming; "but you have been brought up in a different way of thinking, and amid different surroundings from those to which I am accustomed. As for me, I should like to see all convents----"

"Swept from the face of the earth," put in the young girl, in a tremulous voice.

"Not exactly that," said practical Max. "It would be a pity to demolish so many handsome buildings, and their inhabitants might be turned to some useful account. The nuns, for instance, one might marry off."

"Marry off the nuns!" repeated Agnes, staring at the speaker in petrified horror and amazement.

"Yes; why not?" he asked, with perfect equanimity. "I don't suppose there would be much chance of opposition on their part. It really would be a capital thing to oblige all the nuns to enter into matrimony."

Agnes must have felt some vague fear that the fate with which her future sisters in the faith were menaced might suddenly overtake herself, for now she fairly began to run--in vain, for Max ran also.

"The notion is not so dreadful as you fancy. Every sensible person gets married, and the great majority find it answer. It is really unpardonable to instil into a young girl's mind such a horror of things which come as a matter of course, and which---- Yes, Fräulein, we must stop a minute now and rest. I have no breath left. Thank God, your lungs are still as sound as a bell, or they could not have stood that rapid charge."

Agnes stopped likewise, for she too was panting for breath. Her cheeks, usually so pale, were rosy now with the exertion, and the bright colour suited her delicate little face most admirably. Dr. Brunnow perceived this, but it did not tend to soften his mood. On the contrary, he frowned reprovingly as he caught the girl's wrist, and proceeded to feel her pulse.

"Why heat yourself in this most unnecessary manner? I told you you were to be careful and to avoid fatigue. You will go home slowly now, and I must beg that when you go out for a walk you will choose some warmer covering than this thin mantle. Persevere with the medicine I prescribed for you, and, for the rest, I can only repeat my former instructions--air, exercise, cheerful occupation for the mind. Will you follow out all this punctually?"

"Yes," whispered Agnes, altogether intimidated by the tone of command assumed by the young doctor, who, despite her father's august prohibition, still played the part of family physician, and who held her little hand so firmly in his while speaking.

"I shall depend on your promise. As to my patient down yonder, we can share the treatment between us. Prepare the woman for the next world by all means, if you wish. I will do what I can to keep her in this as long as possible, and I think her husband and children will be grateful to me for it. I wish you good-morning, Fräulein."

With that he took off his hat, bowed, and, turning, struck off into the road which led to the town, while Agnes pursued her way home. Obedient to the command laid upon her, she walked slowly at the regulation pace; but, inwardly, her spirit revolted against this Dr. Brunnow. He certainly was a dreadful person, without religion, without principles of any sort, sneering at the most sacred things, and so rough and unfeeling in his manner withal! But, indeed, what could one expect from the son of a man who had wished to upset Church and State, and who had communicated to his children the same pernicious tendencies? The Councillor had related to his daughter the story of the exile's crimes, painting them in the blackest colours. She was altogether of his opinion that both Brunnows, father and son, were to be held in abhorrence; at the same time, she resolved to pay a visit to the sick woman on the morrow. It was obviously her duty to counteract, so far as in her lay, the influence of this doctor, who might, possibly, cure his patients, restoring them to bodily health, but who, while so doing, endangered their souls' salvation by declaring all spiritual consolation to be quite "superfluous."

CHAPTER IX.

Baroness Harder and the Governor were closeted in solemn conclave. In the course of their interview Raven had made his sister-in-law fully aware of the relations existing between Gabrielle and Assessor Winterfeld, and the Baroness was almost beside herself with anger and indignation on hearing the news. She had really not had the slightest suspicion of how matters stood. It had never occurred to her that the young plebeian, fortuneless Assessor could raise his eyes to her daughter, still less that the girl could encourage so misplaced an affection. Gabrielle's future had ever been associated in her mother's mind with the idea of wealth and a brilliant position. Such a

union as that now in question seemed to her as absurd as impossible, and she broke into a torrent of indignant complaint touching her daughter's giddy conduct, and the "mad presumption" of that young man, who supposed he had only to stretch out his hand to secure a Baroness Harder for himself.

Raven listened some time in sombre silence, but at length he cut short the exasperated lady's flow of words.

"Enough of these lamentations, Matilda. They will not alter the past by one jot. You, of all people, have least the right to lose your temper over this business, for the mischief occurred under your very eyes. The fact that it went so far as a declaration, that the two ever came to an understanding, argues a most unpardonable negligence on your part. Some steps must now be taken in the matter, and this is the point I wish to discuss with you."

"Ah, what a comfort it is that I have you at my side!" cried the Baroness, who, on principle and consistently, ignored her brother-in-law's attacks on herself. "I know that I have always given way too much to Gabrielle, and now she thinks she may behave to me as she likes. You, fortunately, have more authority over her. Act with firmness and severity, Arno. I myself implore it of you. Bounds must be set to the insolence of that young man; his pretensions must be checked. I will endeavour to make my daughter understand how completely she has forgotten herself and her station in life in listening to such proposals."

"There must be no reproaches," said the Baron, decidedly. "Gabrielle has already heard from me the view you and I take of the matter. Remonstrance and worry will only drive her to more and more determined resistance. Besides, this attachment of hers is not so absurd, nor the young man so wholly insignificant, as you suppose. On the contrary, I consider that the affair is very serious, and calls for immediate and energetic action. I hope it may yet be time for this to avail."

"Oh, that it certainly will--certainly!" chimed in Madame von Harder. "It is impossible that my childish, volatile Gabrielle should be so deeply, so seriously attached. She has been led away by the impressions of the moment, has had her head turned by all the romantic love-speeches she has heard. Young girls of her age are so apt to mix up the nonsense they read in novels with the affairs of real life. She will come to her senses by-and-by, and will see how foolishly she has acted."

"I hope so," said Raven; "and to bring this about, I have already taken measures to prevent any meeting between the two in future. It is for you to see that there is no interchange of letters, and I am persuaded, Matilda, that you will know how to withstand such prayers and tears as may be used to soften you, and that you will be guided solely by a regard for your daughter's future. You understand, of course, that my present intentions will not be carried into effect unless her conduct meets with my approval, unless her marriage is one that I can sanction. I am not inclined to reward an open opposition to my wishes by making a will in her favour, still less am I disposed to help Mr. Winterfeld to wealth and distinction by means of my fortune. Gabrielle is far too young and inexperienced to take such consideration into proper account. All the circumstances of the case are clearly before you, however, and therefore I feel sure of your co-operation."

The Baron was pursuing the wisest of tactics in pronouncing this most unequivocal threat. He was fully aware of Gabrielle's unlimited power over her mother, and of that lady's feebleness of character. Madame von Harder would often condemn in strong terms one day that to which on the morrow, by tears or by defiance, she would be brought to consent. His menace would prevent any weakness of this sort, and would, he felt certain, transform this foolishly indulgent mother into her daughter's most wary and vigilant guardian. The Baroness had turned quite pale at the bare mention of any possible alteration in the will.

"I shall fulfil my duty as a mother to the uttermost point," said she, solemnly. "Rest assured that I shall not allow myself to be deceived a second time."

The Baron stood up.

"And now I wish to see Gabrielle. She has kept her room since yesterday on the plea of illness, but I know that is only a pretext to avoid me. Tell her that I am waiting for her here."

The Baroness complied with her brother-in-law's request. She went, and a few minutes later returned in her daughter's company.

"May I ask you to leave us for a short time, Matilda?" said Raven.

"You wish----"

"I wish you to leave me and Gabrielle alone for a quarter of an hour."

The Baroness was hardly able to conceal her mortification. Beyond all doubt she had the first and best right to be present at the coming scene between judge and culprit, and yet the Baron, with that utter disregard for her feelings which he always showed, now sent her away, and reserved to himself alone the important decision, disrespectfully ignoring her maternal claims. If the lady had not cherished so lively a fear of her brother-in-law, she would this time have rebelled against his will; but his tone and general bearing seemed to say that to-day, even less than on

other days, would he brook contradiction; so she submitted, or rather, as she expressed it to herself, in anguish of heart she yielded to his cruel tyranny.

The Baron remained alone with Gabrielle, She lingered at the farther end of the room, and he waited in vain for her to approach.

"Gabrielle!"

She advanced now a few steps, but stopped in evident timidity and distrust. Raven went up to her.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked.

She shook her head negatively.

"Then why do you shrink from me? Why are you so shy and silent? Have I really been so harsh to you that you wish to avoid me?"

"I have really been unwell," replied Gabrielle, in a low voice.

The Baron scanned the youthful countenance before him, which was, indeed, far less rosy and fresh than usual. A shadow lay on it, a trace of some lurking trouble or anxiety very foreign to the wonted expression of that bright, sunny face.

Raven took the young girl's hand. He felt that it trembled and sought to disengage itself from his grasp; but he held it notwithstanding, held it firmly, yet without any friendly pressure, and his voice was cold and quiet as he spoke.

"I know what alarmed you at our last interview. Dissimulation would be useless, I feel; but you have nothing more to fear--it is over already. I require from you the sacrifice of a youthful inclination, and I must, first of all, show you by example how such sentiments may be overcome. I have been tempted occasionally to lose sight of the difference existing between your years and mine. You have recalled to me in time that youth willingly consorts with youth alone, and I thank you for the reminder. Forget that which was revealed to you in an unguarded moment. Nothing shall occur to alarm you again. I have fought down graver and deeper troubles, and I am accustomed to subordinate my feelings to my will. The dream is over, for I have determined that over it must be."

As he spoke, Gabrielle had raised her eyes to his face, and they still dwelt there, full of timid, doubting inquiry, but she made no answer. Her hand slid unresistingly to her side as he released it.

"And now take confidence in me again, child," continued Raven. "If I am severe to you in this matter of your love, believe that I am moved only by a sense of my duty as a guardian responsible for the welfare of an inexperienced young girl committed to his charge. Will you promise this?"

"Yes, Uncle Arno." Lingeringly, and with an accent of strange constraint, the name came from the young girl's lips. The old freedom and self-possession with which she had hitherto approached her "Uncle Arno" was gone, never to return.

"I have spoken to Assessor Winterfeld," Raven began again; "and have made known to him that I refuse, in the most decided manner, my consent to your engagement. This decision is irrevocable, for I know that such a union would, after the first fleeting illusions were dissipated, be productive of much care and bitter regret to you, and for your sake I must and will prevent it. You have been brought up with aristocratic notions, and with habits suitable to your rank; you are accustomed to wealth and luxury, and will never feel at home in another sphere. At the best, Winterfeld could only offer you the most simple domestic life and very moderate means. Such a marriage would entail on you a dreary, obscure existence, and daily, hourly privations, for you must necessarily leave behind you those comforts which have been so dear, so indispensable to you hitherto. There may be in the world characters strong enough to brave all this, boldly to enter on a course of ceaseless, unwearying self-abnegation. You are not equal to such heroism: to endure it you would need to transform your whole nature; and I have let the Assessor feel what egotism he would be guilty of, were he to require such sacrifices from you."

"He only asks me to endure them for a few years," interposed Gabrielle. "George Winterfeld is but at the beginning of his career. He will work his way up, as you yourself have done."

Raven shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be, or it may be not. He certainly is not one of those men who take fortune by storm; he will, at best, conquer, win success by persistent quiet labour. But for this long years are needed, and above all, he must be free, independent, as he is at present. Family cares, and the thousand ties and considerations with which they shackle a man, would leave him no space for the development of his talents and of his ambitious projects. He would fall into the every-day routine of one who works only to live, and, so falling, would be lost to all higher aims. In this fate you, of course, would be involved. You do not realise what it is to be dependent for your living on a sum hardly greater than that which now defrays the expenses of your toilet. I must save you

from a practical experience of that most painful of ideals--love in a cottage."

A tear glistened in Gabrielle's eye as her guardian thus, with steady, unsparing hand, drew the picture of her future lot; but she defended her position courageously.

"You have no faith left in any ideal," said she. "You told me yourself that you looked on this world, and all men in it, with contempt. We still believe in love and happiness, and therefore they may be in store for us. George never thought of proposing to me to marry him at once. He knows that is impossible; but in four years I shall be of age, and he will have attained to a higher position. Then I shall be his wife, and no one will have the right to separate us, nobody in the world."

She spoke rapidly, and with a hurried, passionate intensity very new to her; but the old obstinate defiance had died out of her voice. This was not rebellion; it was rather a half-unconscious, anxious striving against that strange sensation she had once tried to express in words, confessing to her mother that there was about the Baron some subtle, secret influence which troubled her, and against which she felt she must defend herself at all hazards. To-day she sought a refuge and a shield in her love for George, and this undefinable sense of danger it was which lent such warmth and eagerness to her words.

A bitter smile played about Raven's lips.

"You appear to have most precise knowledge as to the extent of my authority," he replied. "It has, no doubt, been sufficiently explained to you--we study law to some purpose! Well, let the matter stand over until you come of age. If you then repeat to me the words you have spoken to-day, I shall make no further attempt to stop you, though from that day forth our roads will lie apart. Until then, however, no hasty promise, no imaginary fetters, shall bind you; and to this end it is necessary that Winterfeld should be kept at a distance. Meanwhile, you are absolutely free, free to accept the suit of any one whose rank in life and personal advantages entitle him to approach you. I shall not refuse to sanction any equal match--that is what I wished to say to you."

He spoke gravely and quietly. There was no unsteadiness in his voice, not the slightest quiver about his lips, to betray how much the engagement cost him. He had determined that the dream should be over, and Arno Raven looked a man strong enough to make good his word. This disciplinarian governed himself with a dominion as despotic as that he exercised over others. Neither to his passions nor to his enemies would he make surrender.

He opened the door of the adjoining room, where the Baroness was sitting. That lady, to her great vexation, had been unable to catch a word of the interview, owing to the thickness of the *portières*, which effectually stifled every sound.

"We have done, Matilda," said the Baron. "I now give over your daughter to your charge; but, once again, no reproaches--I will not have them. Good-morning, Gabrielle."

CHAPTER X.

"Now I really am beginning to lose patience," said Max Brunnow, coming in to his friend's rooms. "I think the whole world has taken up Councillor Moser's notion that I must necessarily be a dangerous character, because I bear the name of Brunnow. I am regarded on all sides with suspicion, or with most respectful attention, according to the party feeling of those present. There is, I grieve to say, no possibility of convincing these good people that I am a peaceful follower of the healing art, that I have no thought of stirring up revolutions or upsetting governments; but am, on the contrary, largely endowed with all the qualities which go to the making of a good citizen. No one will credit this, and, by an evil chance, here I find myself, with my ominous family name, transported into the midst of this agitated, highly-wrought city of R---, which is constantly making convulsive attempts to shake off its Governor, and generally conducting itself in the most outrageously restive manner. His Excellency, however, sits firm in the saddle, and at every plunge of the rebellious steed drives his spurs more deeply into its flanks. He is a match for all of you."

Winterfeld sat leaning back in the sofa-corner. Quite contrary to his wont, he welcomed his friend neither by word nor gesture. He hardly listened to his speech, but said now, in a dull low voice:

"I am glad you have come, Max. I was just thinking of going over to you to tell you a piece of news."

Max became attentive.

"What is the matter? Has anything disagreeable happened to you?"

"Yes. I am leaving R---, probably for good."

"Leaving R---? The deuce! What is the meaning of this? Do you wish to go?"

"I do not wish, I am obliged, I have this morning received information that I am transferred to the capital, to the Ministry of the Interior."

"To the Ministry?" repeated Max. "Does that mean promotion, or---"

"No; it is a stroke of policy on the part of the Governor," broke out George, bitterly. "I am to be sent out of Gabrielle's way; any future meeting between us is to be made impossible. Raven gave me notice that he should use his power unsparingly. He has lost no time in keeping his word."

"You believe that this transfer originated with your chief?" asked the young doctor, who was as grave as his friend by this time.

"It is his work, there can be no doubt of that. He is influential enough to get me pushed into one of the vacancies there, particularly if it is done under colour of helping forward a striving young official whom he wishes to befriend. I know there has never been any question of my removal hitherto. It came upon me like a thunderclap. But I ought, indeed, to have known the Baron. He does not merely threaten, he strikes home. I have been visited with no outward mark of his displeasure since our last interview. He has rather avoided direct intercourse with me; but when it has been necessary to address a few words to me, he has always spoken in a cool, business-like tone, making no allusion to that which had passed between us.

"In just the same cool, business-like manner, he this morning announced to me my new appointment. He even added a few flattering words respecting a report drawn up by me which had been sent in to head-quarters, and which, no doubt, afforded him a pretext to bring the thing about. It is looked on as a special distinction, and my colleagues are congratulating me on the brilliant prospects opening out before me in the capital."

"They are right there," remarked Max, who, now that the first surprise was over, began, as usual, to take a practical view of the matter. "Your chief may have had personal motives for acting as he has done, but he has not rendered you such a bad service in getting you introduced to the Ministry. That is the stage whereon he made his own *début*. What should hinder you from emulating his brilliant career?"

"What good will it do me?" cried George, vehemently, springing to his feet. "What good will it do me to struggle and fight and work my way up yonder, while here I am being robbed of all that gives me hope in the future and makes life dear? I know that I shall lose Gabrielle if she remains here for years exposed to all the hostile influences which are arrayed against us. A nature such as hers cannot hold out long under circumstances so cruelly adverse; and to lose her is more than I can bear."

The young doctor had tranquilly taken possession of the sofa-corner, and was contemplating his friend with wonderment. This agitation in one usually so collected and sober-minded was a phenomenon he apparently could not understand.

"You are half distraught, old fellow," he said. "What does Fräulein von Harder say to this separation? Has she been informed of your removal?"

"I do not know. All communication is cut off between us; but, before I leave, I must see and speak to her again. I must, cost what it may. If I can find no other means, I will go straight to Baroness Harder and force her to grant me a parting interview with my betrothed."

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"No offence, George, but that is an insane idea. The Baroness is, beyond a doubt, completely under her brother-in-law's influence, and you are not likely to obtain anything from him by defiance. Let us consider the matter calmly and rationally. In the first place, when must you start?"

"In the course of a few days. They have taken good care, of course, to appoint me to a post which must be filled immediately. It is absolutely necessary that I should enter on my functions at once."

"There is no time to lose, then. By-the-bye, you were at Councillor Moser's rooms a little while ago, I think?"

"Yes; I took him over some deeds I had had here at home."

Max reflected.

"Very well; that gives you a pretext to do it a second time. Take the thickest blue-book you can

hunt up in your Chancellery, if you like; only mind you miss the august Councillor, that is the main point."

George, who had been pacing uneasily up and down the room, stopped in surprise.

"What can you possibly mean?"

"A little patience--I have a most superior plan. Fräulein Agnes Moser is acquainted with the young Baroness--the acquaintance is slight, it is true; the Councillor has presented his daughter to the ladies, and the two girls have seen and spoken to each other several times."

"But how do you know all this?" interrupted George. "You have only seen Fräulein Moser once, I believe, on the occasion of your celebrated visit."

"I beg your pardon. I see and speak to her almost every day at the cottage of the patient I am now treating by your desire. She exerts herself for the sick woman's spiritual welfare, while I devote my efforts to her bodily cure. This division of labour works admirably."

"But you have never said a syllable to me about it."

"Why should I? You are in love, and people in that condition lose all interest in rational matters."

The malicious intent of this speech escaped George, who was absorbed by the prospect of meeting Gabrielle.

"And you think this young girl, who, as I hear, has been brought up in a nunnery on the strictest conventual principles, will lend herself to be a go-between?" he asked.

"Ah, it will be a deuce of a work to bring her to it, no doubt," answered the young doctor, reflectively; "but never mind, I will make the attempt. If nothing else answers, I will allow myself to be converted in due form; then she will be so taken up with the idea of saving my soul and fitting me for heaven, that she will consent to anything. Be it made known to you, therefore, that my conversion is imminent."

George was forced to smile, in spite of his cares.

"Poor Max!" he said compassionately.

"I say, George," said Brunnow, quite gravely, "that is another of those preconceived notions which people adopt without knowing why. They fancy the process of conversion must necessarily be dismal and tedious; but, I assure you, it is a mistake. Under certain circumstances it may be agreeable enough. I tell you I positively feel a void when I don't go down to my patient's house, where the proselytising business is carried on."

"By your patient?"

"Nonsense! By Agnes Moser. Up to the present time she has considered me a hardened reprobate, and, of course, she abhors me in consequence; nevertheless we have got on together pretty fairly. The saintly mildness, for instance, which nearly drove me wild at first, has almost disappeared, thanks to my treatment. She can show quite a pretty little temper of her own now, and we frequently quarrel in the most edifying and delightful manner."

George turned a scrutinising gaze on his friend's face.

"Max," said he, abruptly, "so far as I am aware, Councillor Moser has no private fortune."

"What in the world has that to do with me?"

"Well, I was thinking of your marriage programme--'Clause No. I--Money.'"

Dr. Brunnow jumped up from his sofa-corner, and stared at his friend in astonishment.

"What can you be thinking of? Agnes Moser is going to be a nun."

"So I have heard; and a convent education would hardly go well with the easy, comfortable sort of life you hope to lead after marriage. Over-refinement in a wife would be rather in your way, and as to the practical qualities of a housewife and the robust health---

"It is not needful that I should hear all this from your sage lips. I know it well enough without being told," broke out Max, in a rage. "Really, I cannot understand how you can draw inferences so unfounded. You fancy everybody must be in love, because you and your Gabrielle are romantically attached. We are not thinking of such folly, but that is the reward one gets for trying to help a friend in need. The purest intentions are suspected. Agnes Moser and I--ridiculous!"

Winterfeld had some trouble in smoothing his friend's ruffled feathers, but succeeded at length. The doctor condescended to forget the absurd suggestion which had affronted him, and promised his help in the present emergency. Shortly after this he went away, taking his

accustomed road to his patient's house.

The sick woman found herself in excellent case, thanks to the zeal with which she was tended in two distinct ways. Her doctor's treatment met with a success on which he himself at first had hardly dared to count. A most decided change for the better had taken place in her condition. There was good reason now to hope for her complete restoration to health, and to-day the invalid had been able to enjoy the warm sunshine, sitting for half an hour in the little garden which surrounded the cottage.

In this small enclosure Dr. Brunnow and Fräulein Moser were pacing, very amicably as it appeared. A certain intimacy had sprung up between the two during the few weeks of their acquaintance, the unreserve and freedom from constraint which marked their intercourse being mainly based on the conviction entertained by both that neither cared in the least for the other. Agnes, indeed, cherished a serious intention of rescuing the young surgeon from the slough of worldliness and unbelief in which he was plunged, and the more unsuccessful her efforts to that end appeared, the more persistently did she renew them. That there might be peril for herself in this work of redemption, never occurred to her. The dangers to which her heart might possibly one day be exposed from masculine seductions had been represented to her in the guise of flattery, of polite attentions, of sweet insinuating speeches. Had she detected any approach to these, she would have taken fright, and have withdrawn in the utmost haste; but from first to last Dr. Brunnow had shown himself rough and altogether regardless of her feelings. He could even, on occasions, be absolutely rude; and it was to this trust-inspiring characteristic alone he owed it that the young girl held his company to be devoid of danger.

As regarded himself, he was certainly not in love; at least, the indignation with which he had protested against such a supposition was perfectly real and unfeigned. His marriage programme, as is known, contained many practical clauses, but no allusion to the unpractical sentimentality of love. As Agnes Moser answered to this programme neither morally nor physically, there could, of course, be no question of any inclination towards her on his part.

The young doctor had, certainly, signal good luck with the cases under his treatment, for Agnes too had revived wonderfully in the course of the last few weeks, an improvement evidently to be attributed to the conscientious manner in which she followed his medical advice. A faint tinge of pink coloured the cheeks that were so pale formerly, her eye was brighter, her carriage more erect, and she had lost much of her excessive timidity, where the doctor was concerned at least. His impiety and her proselytising zeal were so often brought into contact, and the two were so frequently immersed in discussions on the most interesting of all themes, that of necessity they grew to be on a more familiar footing. To-day, again, the young lady had discoursed long and earnestly to her companion, striving to make clear to him the error of his ways; but no traces of contrition were visible on the sinner's countenance: it beamed, on the contrary, with an expression of content such as these theological disquisitions invariably produced in him.

"Well, now I must ask you to lend your attention for a moment to the things of this earth," he said, taking advantage of a pause in the lecture. "But the matter I am about to consult you on is a secret which I must rely on you to keep discreetly, whether you grant the request I am going to make to you or not."

The girl opened wide eyes of astonishment on hearing this solemn preface. She promised silence, however, and listened eagerly for what should follow.

"You know Fräulein Gabrielle von Harder," went on Max; "and my friend, Assessor Winterfeld, is not quite a stranger to you, I believe. I have heard, indeed, from his own lips that he has had the pleasure of calling on you once at home."

"Yes, I remember. He came to see papa."

"Well, the young Baroness Harder and the Assessor are in love with each other."

"In love!" repeated Agnes, with mingled surprise and confusion. The subject of the conversation seemed to her to verge on impropriety.

"Head over ears in love," said Max, emphatically. "The young lady's guardian, Baron von Raven, and her mother, the Baroness Harder, oppose their marriage, however, on the grounds that George Winterfeld can offer his future wife neither rank nor fortune. As for me, I have from the first been the guardian angel of this attachment."

"You, Doctor?" asked the girl, surveying the "guardian angel" with a look eminently critical.

"You think there is nothing very angelic about me?" asked Max, in his turn.

"I think that, under any circumstances, it is sinful to cherish an affection of which one's parents disapprove," was the somewhat tart reply.

"You don't understand these things, Fräulein," observed Max, instructively. "People do not think of their parents when they fall in love, and the young couple in this case have right on their side. What is to be done when, from sheer prejudice and all manner of external considerations, the parents and guardians set themselves to sunder two closely wedded hearts?"

"There is but one course for them--to submit and obey," declared Agnes, with a solemnity which gave her for a moment a certain resemblance to her father.

"Those are very antiquated notions," said Max, impatiently. "On the contrary, they must rebel and get married in spite of everything."

Truly, Fräulein Agnes had made very remarkable progress during the last few weeks. She no longer opposed to the doctor's reprehensible speeches a pained and resigned silence. Having really, as he said, developed a very fair spirit of her own, she proceeded to make use of her new acquisition, and replied with some asperity:

"That is, I do not doubt, the advice you have given to your friend."

"Not at all. I have enough to do, on the contrary, to keep him within due bounds. Well, to be brief--Winterfeld is leaving R---- in a day or two, and they go so far as to refuse him a parting interview with his betrothed. He must and will see her once more to bid her farewell. Fräulein Agnes----" the speaker here made a long and most effective pause--"it is an elevating thing to be the guardian angel of a pure, true love. I ought to know. I have played the part long enough."

"What is it you really mean, Doctor?" asked the girl, some faint suspicion dawning within her; and she began to walk very fast as she spoke.

"I will explain to you what I mean," said Max, quickening his pace to suit hers.

Agnes stopped. She knew by experience that it would be futile to run away; this incorrigible doctor was swift of foot, and could keep up with any pace; so she yielded to his will, and listened.

"You told me that the young Baroness Harder had called on you once," proceeded Max. "If this were to occur again, and if, at the same time. Assessor Winterfeld were accidentally to----"

"Without Madame von Harder's knowledge?" exclaimed Agnes, indignantly. "Never!"

"But just reflect a moment----"

"Never. It would be wrong, it would be sinful. No one but you would ever have thought of such a plan; but I will not be your accomplice, that I will not!"

Fräulein Agnes was crimson with excitement and indignation; the rebuking glance she shot at Dr. Brunnow was so keen that his eyes should have quailed before it; but Max was a hardened offender. He looked at the girl with unequivocal satisfaction.

"Just see the little vixen," he said to himself. "I knew very well that all the saintly submission and lamb-like patience were only learned by rote. Get this confounded convent and its teachings once fairly into the background, and a very tolerable little specimen of nature comes to light. I must alter my tactics.--So you will not consent?" he added aloud.

"No!" declared Agnes, in a tone which conveyed twenty protests.

Max put on a look of dejected resignation.

"Then the evil must take its course. I have tried, by every means in my power, to keep my friend from any desperate step, and I hoped, by your help, I might succeed in obtaining for him, at least, a farewell meeting with his betrothed. If he is to be robbed of this last consolation, I will not answer for the consequences. It is more than likely he will take his own life."

"He will not do that," said Agnes, but there was a little secret uneasiness in her tone.

"Unfortunately I have cause to dread such a catastrophe. As for Fräulein von Harder, she will, I fear, not survive his death. The grief and anguish to which she will be exposed will kill her."

"Can people really die of grief?" asked the girl, who by this time had grown visibly anxious.

"I have seen several such cases in the course of my practice," declared the unscrupulous doctor, falsely; "and I have no doubt that a fresh one will now be added to the list. The Baroness and Herr von Raven will repent of their harshness when it is too late, and you too, Fräulein, you will regret the decision you have now taken, for it lay in your power to preserve two breaking hearts from despair."

Agnes listened with deep commiseration, but also with ever-increasing amazement. She had not believed the doctor possessed so much feeling. That gentleman now fairly launched into a strain of touching pathos, and seeing, not a little to his own surprise, the distinguished success it met with, had recourse to a bold stroke for his final effect. The suicide and the death from affliction, neither of which were at present even in contemplation, he unhesitatingly adopted in his argument as accomplished facts.

"And I must live to see this cruel consummation!" he said, with profound melancholy. "I, who had hoped to lead my friend and his bride to the altar!"

"You would hardly have done that, I think, in any case," put in the young lady. "You told me yourself that you never went to church."

"I will in future, if only this misfortune may be averted," declared Max. "Besides, weddings are exceptions."

Fräulein Agnes pricked up her ears at the first part of this speech. She was far too zealous in the work of conversion not at once to grasp the opportunity thus offered her.

"Do you mean that seriously?" she asked hastily. "Will you really go to church?"

"Will you grant my request, and for one short quarter of an hour take on yourself the *rôle* of guardian angel?"

Agnes deliberated.

It was, no doubt, grievously wrong to favour a meeting prohibited alike by mother and guardian; but, on the other hand, here was a soul to be saved, a brand to be plucked from the burning: this last consideration outweighed all minor scruples. The jesuitical principle, that the end justifies the means, was once more brought into mischievous action.

"It is Sunday to-morrow," said the girl, slowly. "If you will go to high mass in the cathedral----"

"I will go to early mass," put in Max, who had a vague idea that this was generally the shorter ceremony.

"To high mass!" said Agnes, dictatorially. She had, it seemed, taken a lesson from the doctor himself; this was just the tone in which he was in the habit of issuing his orders. The young diplomatist evidently half distrusted him; at all events, she meant to make sure of the attendance at church before pledging herself to the counter-obligation. "To the full service," she added, "sermon and all, from beginning to end."

Max heaved a deep sigh.

"If there is no help for it well, heaven's will be done--so be it!"

This pious ejaculation rejoiced Agnes's heart. She now felt confident that the sermon would fully accomplish the work she had commenced; that the seeds of the true faith would be planted in the soil she had so laboriously tilled, and prepared for its reception; and, in the effervescence of her joy at the prospect, she held out the tips of her fingers to the adversary, who had now become her ally. Of this overture she, however, quickly repented her; for, like the overreaching personage of the proverb, Max at once seized the whole hand, which he pressed and shook in the heartiest manner possible.

Next morning, as the cathedral bells were ringing, Councillor Moser, giving his arm to his daughter, walked with slow and stately steps down to the church, there to take his accustomed place. The devout old gentleman's attention was, of course, exclusively given to the sacred ritual; he therefore did not notice that Agnes, instead of sitting as usual in reverent meditation and with downcast eyes, was on this occasion restless and disturbed, glancing around half anxiously, half expectantly, as though in search of some one. She had not long to seek, for, but a few paces from her, and in close vicinity to the pulpit, stood Dr. Brunnow, also, as it seemed, expectantly on the watch.

Two pairs of eyes seeking each other so persistently must of necessity meet ere long. When this happened, and Max saw how the pale delicate face lighted up with joyful surprise, and flushed rosy-red at sight of him; when he caught the earnest grateful look of those dark eyes, which had never seemed to him so expressive as to-day, he thought neither of his programme nor of its numerous clauses--he thought only that this visit to church was not without its decided gratifications; and he sat down with a resolute air which plainly announced his intention of hearing out the whole sermon from beginning to end.

So he listened to the homily, whether with a reverent mind, or not, must remain an open question; on the other hand, it cannot be denied that his presence in the sacred edifice altogether disturbed the devotions of one of the most assiduous worshippers. It really would have been hard to decide how much was gained to the cause, or which of the two had undergone conversion.

On the afternoon of that same Sunday the projected interview between the lovers took place. Chance favoured it in an unhopèd-for degree. Councillor Moser had accepted a colleague's invitation, and was away in the town. Frau Christine had also gone out, so there was no need even to think of a pretext. A visit from Gabrielle to Agnes Moser, and Winterfeld's call at the house of his superior, who was unfortunately from home, were occurrences so natural that the coincidence between them might well pass for accidental.

"Forgive me for having recourse to these means," said George, hastily, so soon as he found himself alone with Gabrielle. "I really had no alternative, and I told the Baron plainly that, notwithstanding his prohibition, I should make an attempt to see and speak to you again. I come to say good-bye, perhaps for years."

Gabrielle turned very pale, and her eyes searched the speaker's face with an expression of alarm.

"For God's sake, tell me--what has happened?"

"There has been no action on my part that need cause you uneasiness. The hand which so inexorably sunders us is your guardian's. He yesterday announced to me my transferment to the capital, and to the Ministry, our head-quarters. You see how far his influence reaches, and how skilfully he uses it in order to part us two."

"No, no; you must not go!" cried Gabrielle, in great distress, clinging to him as though for protection. "You must not leave me now, George. Do not, do not leave me alone just now!"

"Why not now particularly?" he asked, in surprise.

"Do they worry and torment you on my account? But, indeed, I might have known it. Raven is hard and unfeeling to the verge of cruelty, when he wishes to crush down opposition. You are persecuted with reproaches, with suspicions and threats, are you not, Gabrielle? They are doing all in their power to break your resistance, is it not so? Speak, I must know the truth."

The young girl shook her head with a faint negative gesture.

"No, no; you are mistaken. There is no question of that. Since the day he made known to me his decision as final and irrevocable, my guardian has never mentioned your name; and he has obliged mamma to be silent too, to cease the storm of reproaches with which she assailed me at first; but he just overlooks me, passes me by with frigid indifference, and I.... Oh, George, is not it possible for you to stay near me?"

"I cannot," said George, with difficulty restraining his own deep emotion. "I must obey the call--it is quite impossible for me to resist it. Under other circumstances, I should have hailed this change with joy. It opens to me far brighter prospects than any I could have hoped for here in R--, where the immense ascendancy exercised on all sides by the Baron keeps down individual effort, and stifles independent thought; but I know only too well that this so-called promotion has but one end in view: to defraud me of my highest, my best possession, to rob me of your love, and to part us for ever. Your guardian has summoned to his aid two mighty allies--time and distance. Perhaps they may help him to the victory yet."

"Never!" exclaimed Gabrielle, passionately. "The victory shall never be his. I have given you a promise, and I will keep my word."

George did not notice the anxious distress which again involuntarily betrayed itself in her tone. He only heard the resolute words, the unwonted assertion of will; and, in spite of the parting now so imminent, a ray of happiness illumined his features. He had so feared he might find his love as childishly careless and indifferent to the separation as on that former occasion when she had seemed in no way to enter into or comprehend his grief. What joy to see that she too was moved by the news of his departure, that she strove earnestly, eagerly, to keep him near her! The spontaneous promise she now gave him filled him with a delight he had never before experienced. Almost mastered by his emotion, he stooped and kissed her hand.

"I thank you, my love," he said fervently; "but you are strangely changed since last we met. Where is my Gabrielle's sunny brightness, the smile which was ever ready to chase the tears from her eyes? You said to me once in jest. 'You do not know me thoroughly yet;' and, truly, I did not do you full justice then. The present moment brings that home to me."

The young girl remained silent. Her rosy lips had, indeed, lost their trick of smiling. They seemed to close firmly upon, and keep down, some secret sorrow which was not to find utterance in words.

"Forgive me, if I failed to read you aright," continued George, with ever-increasing tenderness; "I acknowledge it, I have had my doubts. I have looked forward with fear and trembling to the inevitable collision with your family. Now I see that you too can feel profoundly, now I believe in you fully and completely; I believe that you will be constant in your love, even though a Baron von Raven, armed with all his high authority, should do his best to come between us."

Gabrielle started at these last words, and raised her downcast eyes to his face. The look was one George could not decipher--a look of mingled anxiety, pain, and touching appeal; but next moment all this was drowned in a rush of tears which could no longer be withheld.

"My poor Gabrielle!" whispered the young man, bending over her; "you are so little used to care and trouble; and to think that it should be my fate, mine! to bring them on you. But we were prepared, you know, to make a fight for our love. Now the time for the struggle has come. We must endure and conquer. Perhaps Herr von Raven may one day repent having played Providence in this manner. He is sending out one more enemy into the world, and not so insignificant a one as he supposes."

Gabrielle's tears were stayed now. She drew her hand away from him.

"You are--you are enemies now?" she asked.

"I have long been Raven's opponent. Do not ask me why. I will not accuse your guardian and relative to you. The charges against him must be brought before another forum. But, believe me, he has challenged hatred and enmity in many quarters. He has so used his power that it has proved baneful to all beneath his rule, and will, assuredly, one day prove baneful to himself. It is a mistake on his part to thrust me thus, with his own hand, forth from the magic circle that surrounds his person, far from the fascination which has held me, as it holds so many others, in chains, and from which I could not escape, though I felt it crippled my strength and relaxed my will. Dr. Brunnow did not warn me in vain against the magnetic influence of that strange man. It has often beguiled me into admiring there where I should have condemned. But now the spell is broken. Yonder, in the great city, I shall be released from the ties which have hitherto bound me to the superior officer under whose immediate orders I stood."

"What do you mean?" asked Gabrielle, uneasily. "I do not understand your allusions."

"It is not meet you should," said George, firmly; "but promise me one thing. Whatever you may hear, believe that no personal enmity, no base desire for revenge, has prompted me to action. Long ago I resolved I would take up the glove against the Governor of our province, for taken up it must be; and there was no one else who ventured to enter the lists with the omnipotent Raven. I had my arms ready. Then I learned to know you. I heard that the man I was intending to fight to the death held my life's happiness in his hands--and my courage failed me. It may have been cowardly and wrong, but I should like to see the man who in my place would have acted differently, who would have had nerve, himself, at a single blow, to destroy life's fair promise, and all the bright hopes which had just blossomed for him. Now they are blighted. Your guardian, with unnecessary harshness, has refused me your hand, has refused me even a glimmer of hope in the future--he who, when he paid his court to the great Minister's daughter, had no more to offer than I have! Was it strange that we parted as open enemies? For the time to come, I will be guided by that alone which I deem duty. And now--farewell!"

Gabrielle held him back.

"George, you cannot, must not leave me so--not with these vague menaces which distress me unspeakably. What are you thinking of doing? I must and will know."

"Do not ask me to speak more openly," said the young man, in gentle but decided tones. "For your own sake, I will not make you privy to my intentions. You are not free, as I am. You must remain here under the same roof with your guardian; you are thrown into daily intercourse with him. It would be a constant burden on you, were you to share even in thought in any----"

"In any plot against him?" cried Gabrielle; and there was so strange, so vibrating a ring in her voice, that George started.

"Against Baron von Raven, you mean?" he asked slowly. "You do not suspect me of anything dishonourable?"

"No, no; but I fear ... for you ... for us all!"

"Set your mind at rest I shall fight with my visor up, and shall speak in the name of hundreds who dare not speak for themselves. The Governor of R--- may return such answer as he sees fit. He has power on his side; his voice will be heard before any other: but if I have all the danger, I have also right on mine. And now let us say good-bye. If I can possibly manage it, you shall have news of me from the capital; but, though no single line should reach you, you know that all my thoughts are given to you, that you inspire my every effort, and that I will never renounce my claim to your hand, unless I hear from your own lips that you have given me up."

He clasped her in his arms for the first time since the day on which he had made to her the avowal of his love. The parting was a bitter one. He would not prolong the painful moment--a few fervent words passionately whispered, a last pressure of the hand, then George tore himself away from her, and left the room.

Gabrielle sank on to a seat, and hid her face in her hands. Tear after tear trickled slowly through her fingers; but her low, half-suppressed weeping was not provoked by the grief of that separation alone. There was another secret, unspoken sorrow shadowing the girl's soul, a great preoccupation which threatened to efface from her memory all that had come before. George had spoken truly. He had not hitherto read Gabrielle aright; but if her deeper nature were now stirring within her, revealing itself in word and look, he was not the magician whose spell had called it forth.

CHAPTER XI.

Life at the Castle during the last few weeks had been anything but agreeable. To be sure, things had outwardly taken their usual course. The family met and talked at table, and fulfilled all their social duties; but the former easy, familiar intercourse had given place to a stiff reserve and constraint, which weighed heavily on each separate member of the party. The Baroness, shallow-minded and superficial as ever, was, perhaps, the least affected by it. She could not understand how an insignificant, fleeting love-affair, which, after all, was nothing more than a piece of childish folly, should have so deep and lasting an influence on her brother-in-law's humour. To her thinking, a complete end had been put to the matter by the Baron's decided refusal, and by Winterfeld's departure from R----. There could be no doubt that Gabrielle would now listen to reason. The mother had, as she supposed, an unfailing resource at her disposal, one which would speedily drive that romantic youthful fancy into the background. Lieutenant Wilten's admiration for the young Baroness was growing day by day more evident, and but little encouragement was needed to embolden him to press his suit openly.

Ever since the night of the ball, when Colonel Wilten had remarked how much his eldest son was taken by the appearance and manners of Gabrielle von Harder, that gentleman had held tenaciously to the idea of bringing about a marriage between the two. As Raven had shown himself impervious to the slight hints he had let fall on the subject, the Colonel had recourse to the lady of the house, whom he found far more amenable, and quite disposed to favour his wishes. There was not, indeed, much to be urged against the match, which was one to satisfy a more requiring mother than the Baroness. The Wiltens came of a good old house, and were connected by blood, or by alliance, with some of the foremost families of the land. They were not rich, certainly, but this want would be supplied by Gabrielle's dowry and future fortune, in case, as might confidently be expected, the Baron should give his consent to the marriage. Albert von Wilten was a good-looking young officer, whose uniform became him exceedingly well, and who rode and danced to perfection. He was a model partner and an agreeable companion, and he appeared to be sincerely attached to Gabrielle. In short, he possessed all the qualities which Madame von Harder desired in her future son-in-law; and the Colonel and his wife, to both of whom the presumptive heiress of Baron von Raven seemed a most desirable connection, were diligent in their attentions to mother and daughter.

The Baroness began by sounding her brother-in-law. She soon made the unpleasant discovery that Gabrielle, by her rebellious wilfulness and obstinacy, had altogether trifled away the kindly feeling which her guardian had formerly entertained towards her. This was very evident, for he listened to the proposed scheme with icy indifference; declaring, indeed, that he had no objection to offer, but that he must decline to interfere, and leave the matter entirely to the Baroness's generalship. On the other hand, that lady obtained the comforting assurance that, as Baroness Wilten, her daughter would remain in undiminished possession of all the advantages secured to her by her guardian's will. This did away with any lingering hesitation, Gabrielle herself was to know nothing of the plan. She seemed to like the young officer, but was rather cool and reserved in her manner towards him, and evidently attached no serious importance to the homage he paid her. She, therefore, readily consented to accompany her mother when the latter accepted an invitation to the Wiltens' country-house, which was situated some miles from the town, at the foot of the mountains. The Colonel's wife, whose health was delicate, generally spent the summer there. She had not yet returned to town, and as there was still a prospect of a few fine, sunny autumn days, Lieutenant Wilten never rested until he obtained from the ladies the promise of a visit. He, of course, at once applied for leave, in order to be with them during their sojourn in the country; and the Colonel, too, managed to get free of the duties of his service for a short space. The matter was thus set in train, and it was agreed that the rest should be left to the young people themselves.

The Baron, who was included in the invitation, excused himself on the plea of the pressure of business. Besides, he said, he felt it necessary to remain at his post on account of the uneasiness still prevailing in the town. So the ladies set out on their expedition alone, and Gabrielle breathed freely as the carriage rolled out from the portico of the Government-house. She, poor girl, had suffered most from the experiences of the last few weeks, yet Raven had kept his word. Not a look, not a word, had recalled to her that "unguarded moment" which she was to forget, as he seemed to have forgotten it.

George Winterfeld's name had not passed his lips since the day on which he had informed her that the Assessor had left R---- to enter on his new post in the distant capital; but since then the Baron himself had become more reserved and unapproachable than ever. He governed and ordered everything with his accustomed promptness and energy; but between him and Gabrielle a great cleft seemed to have opened, rendering all friendly communication impossible. He was frigid as ice in his behaviour to her; thus it came about that she grasped eagerly at the chance now offered her of escaping for a while from the life in common which was every day growing more unendurable. Raven, too, seemed to desire a separation, for he at once concurred in the plan, and expressed no disapproval when his sister-in-law thought fit to prolong her absence for a full fortnight.

On the last day of their *villeggiatura*, the Governor drove out to the Wiltens' country-seat to

fetch the ladies home. But the Baroness had taken cold, and, the weather being raw and inclement, could not venture to undertake so long a drive. She had decided on staying the night, and returning to town the following day with Colonel Wilten and his wife. It was arranged, however, that Gabrielle should avail herself of her guardian's escort. Raven, who had come over in the morning, wished to start again directly after dinner, and Colonel Wilten in vain sought to detain him.

"I cannot stop," said the Baron, as the two talked together, pacing the garden-room the while. "In the present state of affairs it would not do for me to leave the town for more than a few hours. Even for this short absence I had to take my precautions, leaving word that I was to be sent for should anything happen."

"Is the situation so critical, then?" asked the Colonel, who had been out of town for the last week.

"Critical?" Raven shrugged his shoulders. "There is rather more brawling and noise than usual, and every now and then we have an attempt at a riot; the good citizens, in short, are sufficiently giving me to understand the dislike entertained by them towards my person and government. I have had one or two apostles of liberty, who were decreeing my deposition in open assembly, arrested, and hold them safely under lock and key. The whole city is in a state of sedition in consequence. The burgomaster came up to me himself to demand the release of the prisoners, 'in the name of justice.' I was obliged to make known to that gentleman that my patience is at length exhausted, and that I shall now proceed with more vigour than I have hitherto cared to display."

In spite of their ironical inflection, his words betrayed deep irritation and annoyance. Wilten, too, had grown serious.

"The ferment has been going on for months," he observed. "If the outbreak, which is always threatening, has been avoided so far, we owe it to the tact and discretion of the police authorities--of the Superintendent, in particular."

"He and his officials will be powerless soon in face of this growing agitation. The Superintendent is too fond of half-measures for me to put my trust in him. No matter what orders I give, I am met with a great show of ready compliance and prompt adhesion; but when it comes to executing my orders, there are endless difficulties and delays, and we make no progress at all. I am glad you are coming back to town tomorrow; but for that, I must have asked you to shorten your leave. You are the commandant of the garrison, and there is no saying how soon strong arguments may be needed."

"Your Excellency would do well to avoid any violent measures," said the Colonel, impressively. "Once taken, they cannot be retracted, and you know my despatches----"

"Instruct you to place the troops of the garrison at my disposal."

"No; they only instruct me to lend you assistance in case of extreme necessity," replied the Colonel, a little irritated at the other's imperious tone; "and at army head-quarters it is earnestly desired that such a necessity may be avoided. It is really rather difficult to draw a line, to say where your responsibility ends and mine begins. I should hesitate to interfere in this early stage of affairs."

"That is natural," said Raven, curtly. "You are a soldier, and accustomed to submit to discipline. My position has always permitted me to retain my freedom of action and independence. Nevertheless, you may rest assured that I shall do all in my power to save you from any such dilemma."

"Let us hope that it will not come to the worst," struck in the Colonel, who had no desire to excite the other's anger. Wilten was counting a good deal just now on the Baron's friendly feeling, and, foreseeing that this topic of conversation might give rise to fresh unpleasantness, he let it drop, and passed to another which lay very near his heart.

"Well, I shall return to my post to-morrow, certainly," he began again. "Albert has been back in town for more than a week. It was hard on him to tear himself away at the call of duty. He lies bound hand and foot, a captive to the charms of a certain young lady."

Raven was silent. He stopped, accidentally, as it were, by the window which opened on to the balcony, and, turning slightly away, looked out into the garden.

"I may take it for granted, I think, that my son's wishes and hopes are no secret to you now," continued Wilten. "In these wishes my wife and I most cordially share. If we may reckon on your support in the matter----"

"Has Lieutenant Wilten declared himself as yet?" interrupted the Baron, still preserving the same attitude.

"Not yet. We fancied there was a little reserve in Fräulein von Harder's manner to him, and Albert had not the courage to speak out. He will call on you in the course of the next few days."

May he hope that you will favour his cause? A father's good word is often a powerful aid."

"A father's good word!" repeated Raven, his voice grating with harshest irony.

"Well, or his who stands in the father's place. The Baroness is of opinion also, that your counsels will have great weight with her daughter."

Raven passed his hand across his brow, and turned slowly round to face the speaker.

"When Lieutenant Wilten has communicated with me, I will acquaint Gabrielle with his proposal, and ask for her answer; but I neither can nor will attempt to influence my ward."

"Of course not, of course not," replied the Colonel; "but, next to the young lady's consent, her guardian's approval is, naturally, the first thing to be thought of. The Baroness has led my son to hope that he may count on you."

"I have already told my sister-in-law that I have no objection to offer," said the Baron, whose lips twitched, as though he were enduring an inward martyrdom, albeit his voice retained its wonted calm. "But the decision must rest solely and entirely with Gabrielle. If her mother chooses to throw her influence into the scale, she can do so. I, personally, shall not interfere."

The Colonel seemed surprised and a little offended at this very cool reception of his overtures, but he ascribed the other's ungenial manner to the annoying occurrences in the town, which had evidently ruffled his temper.

"I can well understand that your head is full of other things just now," he half apologised; "but when a hot-headed young fellow of my Albert's stamp falls in love, he does not stay to inquire whether time and circumstances are favourable to his suit; he cannot be induced to sit down soberly and wait. But to come back to where we started. Would it not be better to leave the ladies here awhile? R--- is not a very pleasant place of residence just in these difficult times, and my wife would gladly prolong her sojourn in the country if it would be any convenience to her dear visitors."

"Thanks, no," declined Raven. "It shall not be said that my relations remain absent from the town because I hold the situation to be seriously menacing. Some such reports have arisen already, and it is high time they should be refuted."

Colonel Wilten saw that this ground was untenable, so he yielded. The previous arrangements as to the journey therefore held good, and a few hours later the Baron set out in Gabrielle's company on his return to the town, leaving the remaining trio to follow at their ease.

It was a cool and rather stormy autumn day, with heavy showers of rain and glimpses of sunshine alternating. The heaviest downpour had, however, ceased about noon, and the sun, already declining to its rest, struggled still for the mastery, breaking through the dark clouds with which the sky was covered. In spite of the uninviting weather, Raven, as was his wont, had driven out in an open carriage, and the handsome horses, celebrated throughout the province for their swiftness and the beauty of their proportions, almost flew along the road with the light britzska. Its occupants were very silent during the greater part of the drive. The Baron seemed absorbed in his own thoughts, and Gabrielle sat mutely gazing out at the country through which they passed. The wind blew keenly down from the hills, and the girl drew her mantle more closely about her shoulders. Raven noticed the movement.

"You are cold," he said; "I should have remembered that you are not accustomed to drive in an open carriage in such weather. I will have the hood put up."

He would have at once given the coachman the order, but Gabrielle stopped him.

"No, thank you. I prefer even this chill keen air to a close carriage. My cloak protects me perfectly."

"As you like."

Raven stooped, drew up a rug which had slipped to their feet, and wrapped it round his companion's slender form. Then she said, in a low and almost timid voice:

"Uncle Arno, I have a request to make to you."

"I am listening," he replied laconically.

"If this close intercourse with Colonel Wilten's family is to be kept up in town, let me be dispensed from sharing in it."

"Why?"

"Because, during our stay in the country, I have discovered that mamma was following out a premeditated plan in accepting that invitation--a plan which you favour."

"I favour nothing," said Raven, coldly. "Your mother is guided by her own wishes, and acts on

her own responsibility. I take no part in the matter."

"But they will ask for your decision," returned Gabrielle. "At least, mamma hinted to me that Albert von Wilten would shortly apply to you with a request which----"

"Which will concern you," concluded Raven, as she paused. "That seems probable certainly, but you alone can decide thereupon. I shall refer him to you for an answer."

"Spare us both that," interposed the girl, hastily. "It would be as mortifying to him to take a refusal from my lips as it would be painful for me to speak it."

"You have made up your mind, then, to decline his offer?"

She looked up at him with great reproachful eyes.

"Can you ask me? You know that I have given my word to another."

"And you know that I do not recognise that promise, given in haste, as a pledge which is to bind you. 'I have given my word to another.' A little while ago it was, 'I love another!'"

The observation must have struck home, for Gabrielle's face was suffused with a deep crimson blush, and she evaded a direct reply.

"Albert von Wilten was an object of indifference to me before," she answered; "since I have found out that his suit is to be pressed upon me, I have taken a dislike to him. I will never be his wife."

The Baron drew a long deep breath which seemed to expand his chest; but he replied, in the icy tone he had maintained throughout the conversation:

"I shall neither compel nor persuade you to make a choice. If, indeed, you are firmly resolved to refuse young Wilten, it will, no doubt, be better that his proposal should not be made. I will give the Colonel to understand that there is no hope for him. It shall be done to-morrow."

Raven leaned back in his seat, and the former silence set in again. Gabrielle nestled more closely into her corner; she, who in the old days could not have sat for the space of a quarter of an hour without breaking forth into a flow of merry chatter, now showed no inclination whatever to renew the conversation. A mighty change had come over the girl, a change which could not be said exactly to date from George's departure; before that, long before, there had arisen within her an enigmatic unknown something against which she had battled from the first, and which she had so long taken for the constraint of shyness and fear. This strange new state of mind had nothing in common with the joyous, happy sensation which had warmed her heart like sunshine when George first confessed his love to her, when with all the fervour of his heart he prayed for her love in return, and she, smiling and flushing with pleasure and excitement, spoke the word he pleaded for. Often enough she recalled the memory of that hour, fleeing to it as to some protecting influence--sometimes it would happen that she called on it in vain. At such moments George's image, which she strove firmly to grasp and to retain, would recede into the background, fading gradually away. If separation and absence were alone to blame for this, why did not absence work a like effect with regard to that other figure which rose before her, grave and sombre, ever more and more distinctly in proportion as the former vision waned? During the whole of the past fortnight that face had been with Gabrielle.

Neither the flattering homage paid her by the young officer, nor the thought of her absent lover, had had power to scare away the one remembrance which by degrees was usurping absolute sway over her mind and feelings. It was as though some sorcerer's spell had cast the young girl's whole nature into bonds. The old merry light-heartedness, the wilful high spirits, the childish caprices--all these had vanished, and in their place had come dim, problematic sensations more nearly akin to pain than pleasure; a constant flux and reflux of emotions which Gabrielle did not understand, but which troubled her exceedingly. She still wrestled half unconsciously against this dread unknown; for as yet she did not divine, *would* not divine the nature of the peril which menaced her youthful attachment and George's happiness; she only felt that both were in danger, and that the danger did not come from without.

Swiftly, steadily, the carriage rolled on its way towards the town, which still lay at some considerable distance, all wreathed around in mist. The broad valley and its encircling hills were already robed in russet, for here, among the mountains, autumn entered on its dominion earlier than out in the open plain. As yet the trees and bushes stood clothed in all their wealth of leaves, but their fresh verdure had long ago disappeared. Everywhere nature had decked herself in rich and varied hues, ranging from darkest brown to brightest ochre, with here and there a flame of brilliant red or a dash of purple, deluding the eye with the semblance of flowers still blooming in among the thickets; though, in truth, there was nothing here but dying foliage sending forth one last bright gleam of colour before it fell a prey to the chill wind now rustling through the forests, and sweeping with its cutting blasts over the bare fields and pastures. The river, swollen with the late rains, rushed in mad haste on its course, its dark and turgid torrent rolling onwards with a low, sullen roar. The mountains had wrapped themselves in their veil of mist, which, tattered in places and fluttering, would now enshroud, and now reveal, the jagged peaks above. Lower down, among the wooded hills, the clouds pursued their fantastic evolutions, rising out of the

deep vaporous ravines and sinking from view again in endless unrest; while, in the west, the sun slowly declined, camped around by a dark phalanx of storm-cloud which the great orb illumined with a ruddy glow, but which even it was powerless to break.

This same landscape had once presented a very different aspect to the two who were now sitting side by side, mute and reserved as strangers. Then the valley had lain before them flooded in sunlight, bright with a golden haze, its blue mountains and glistening distances telling of a "Paradise" beyond; while from beneath the cool deep shade of the limes came the sparkle of the fountain and the mysterious rippling murmur of its waters, calling up those sweet, dangerous dream-visions! To-day the only sound heard was the low roar of the river, as they drove along its banks. The horizon was masked in thick fog; the mountains, all girt around with clouds, looked down menacingly, and the sun, bereft of its warmth and radiance, burned with a lurid fire, staining the sky a deep blood-red, as it flamed its parting greeting to the earth.

The Baron's eyes were moodily fixed on the setting sun and the great masses of cloud striving together for the mastery. At length, with a strong effort, as it seemed, he roused himself from his thoughts, and broke the long silence.

"The sky denotes a storm," he said, turning to his young companion; "but it will probably not come upon us until night, and I hope we shall be safely housed in R--- before dusk."

"They say the town is very disturbed just now," observed Gabrielle, with an anxious, inquiring look up at her companion, which, however, he did not appear to notice.

"There have been some rather noisy demonstrations of late, certainly," he replied. "But the troubles are not of a serious nature, and will soon be over. You need feel no uneasiness."

"But they say that this movement is directed principally, if not entirely, against you," continued Gabrielle, in a faltering voice.

Raven frowned.

"Who says that?"

"Colonel Wilten often lets fall hints on the subject. Is it true that you have so many enemies in the town?"

"I never have been popular in R---," explained the Baron, with perfect equanimity. "In the first days of my appointment, the duty devolved on me of stifling the germs of a revolution then in active preparation. I succeeded; but success in such matters generally breeds hostility. Well do I know what hatred to my person the measures to which I had to resort at that time provoked, and how obstinately the people still persist in regarding me as an oppressor, notwithstanding all that I have done for the city and the province. We have lived in a state of constant warfare; but so far I have always had the upper hand, and I mean to preserve it in this instance."

Gabrielle thought of George's enigmatic words, of which she had as yet found no solution. He had so resolutely evaded her urgent appeal for an explanation, and the parting had come so quickly, so unexpectedly; but a few minutes had been allowed them for their stolen leave-taking, then the young man, with a great effort of will, had torn himself away, leaving Gabrielle a prey to torturing anxiety. Conjectures as to his meaning, harassing fears and doubts, still racked her brain. Of one thing, however, she felt certain--the Baron was in some way menaced, and she resolved to warn him at all hazards.

"But you stand quite alone against a multitude," she said. "You cannot tell, cannot even guess what they may be plotting against you in secret. Suppose there should be danger in store for you!"

Raven looked at her with an expression of undisguised astonishment.

"How long have you taken an interest in such matters? They were formerly as far from your ken as night from day."

The young girl tried to smile.

"I have learned so much of late that was once beyond my ken. But I am now alluding to some very decided hints----"

"Which have reached you?"

"Yes."

The Baron started. He flashed upon her the old piercing, inquisitorial look peculiar to him, and asked abruptly:

"You are in communication with the capital?"

"I have not received a single line, not a sign of life from thence."

"No?" said Raven, more mildly. "I fancied so, because Assessor Winterfeld has entered on his new duties at the Ministry of the Interior, where he will no doubt meet with sympathisers, with many who will share in his opinion that I am a tyrant unequalled in the annals of history. I cannot take it amiss from the young man personally that he should indulge in such views, for I was forced to assume an attitude towards him which fairly entitles him to hate me and to revenge himself on me, supposing revenge to be within his power."

"He will never do anything ungenerous or base," said Gabrielle.

The Baron smiled disdainfully.

"I can assure you that I attach very little weight to Mr. Winterfeld's ill-will or opposition. I have had more powerful enemies than him, and have managed to get the better of them. But if the hints of which you speak do not emanate from the capital, I can only suppose that the silly rumours which are buzzed from mouth to mouth in R--- have found their way out to the Wiltens' country-seat. They rest on no practical foundation whatever. I do not doubt that the malcontents have every inclination to do me a hurt, but they will be too wise to proceed to deeds of violence. They know well enough that I am their match, and able to meet any attack made upon me. If the situation had really been so full of peril, I should not have allowed you and your mother to return. I must ask you to discontinue your drives for the next few days, but it will not be for any length of time, I hope; and, in any case, at the Castle, in the Governor's house, you will be safe from the popular excesses, should any such occur."

"But you will not be safe!" cried Gabrielle, her anxiety breaking down the barrier of her timidity at last. "The Colonel declares that you expose yourself recklessly to every danger, and never listen to a warning of any sort."

Raven turned his grave, dark eyes slowly upon her.

"Well, that concerns myself alone, I think, unless--unless it be that you feel anxiety on my account."

She dared not reply in words; but the answer might be read in her eyes, which met his with an imploring, beseeching look. The Baron bent down to her, and there was a thrill of breathless expectation in his voice as he repeated:

"Speak, Gabrielle; are you anxious about me?"

"Yes," came trembling from her lips. It was but a single word, yet it wrought a marvellous effect.

Again Gabrielle saw his whole face kindle as with a blaze of light, met the ardent gaze which had struck her dumb once before; and the flame of that mighty up-springing passion melted the panoply of ice in which the proud man had wrapped himself. One moment sufficed to destroy the barriers which the self-control of weeks had laboriously built up. The dream was *not* over. The sudden fire in his eyes flashed out his secret.

Close to them the river ran with a loud and angry murmur, while out yonder in the autumnal forests the wind rustled and blew with sharper, stronger blasts. The wall of cloud, which rose more and more threateningly in the west, parted, and once again the red sun shone out clear and full. For a few seconds, mountains, woods, and stream appeared bathed in a purple light; a transfiguring glory streamed over the earth, and the whole broad valley glowed in supernatural splendour. For a few seconds only--then the great disc sank out of sight, the glory died away, and there remained nothing but the darkening autumn landscape with, overhead, the heavy masses of storm-cloud, and far away in the distant horizon a lingering crimson flush. A half-melancholy, half-weird aspect came over the scene, and all Nature thrilled with a presentiment of winter and of death.

"During the last few weeks, you too have thought me a tyrant, no doubt," said Raven, in a low voice, carefully subdued, though every word vibrated with his inward agitation. "Perhaps one day you will thank me for guarding you from the fault of over-precipitation. You were ignorant of your own heart and feelings, and yet you wished to bind yourself for life. Winterfeld was the first man who approached you after you ceased to be a child, the first who ventured to speak to you words of love, and you shut your eyes and dreamed that you too loved, conjuring up the phantom of that which never existed. It was a childish illusion--nothing more."

"No, no," said Gabrielle, anxiously disclaiming the charge, and attempting to free her hand--attempting in vain, for the Baron held it as in a vice, as he answered:

"You feel the truth of what I say. Do not strive against it. A promise may be recalled, an engagement cancelled by mutual consent---"

"Never!" exclaimed the girl, passionately. "I love George, him alone, and no one else. I mean to be his wife."

Raven let her hand drop. The gleam in his eyes died out, and the old icy mask covered his features once more. There was hardness and infinite bitterness in his voice as he replied:

"Lay aside, then, in future all care and anxiety for me. I will have none of them."

They drove on in silence, no further word being exchanged between them. The evening shadows fell gradually; the mountains were altogether lost to view, and the mists hovering over the meadows grew denser and denser. Dusk had fairly set in, when at length R---- was reached; but there was still light enough to distinguish objects at some little distance.

The carriage had passed through the outlying suburb, and had turned into the broad high-road leading to the Castle. At the other extremity of this road was situated one of the largest squares, or open places, of the town. This square now seemed to be the scene of some tumult; for from thence the shouts and cries of an angry multitude were borne over, and, in spite of the growing darkness, surging crowds might be seen thronging the broad space. The Baron started as the first sounds struck on his ear. He leaned far out of the carriage, and looked keenly back in the direction whence they proceeded; then he cast a quick, uneasy glance at his companion.

"This comes inopportunistly," he muttered. "I should have done better to have left you with your mother."

"What is the matter yonder? Is there any danger?" asked Gabrielle, turning very pale.

She remembered Colonel Wilten's remarks, how he had deplored the hardihood with which the Governor would risk his safety on such occasions. Raven saw her alarm, but ascribed it to fear on her own account.

"There would seem to be a turbulent meeting yonder before the State prison," he answered. "I presumed, from general appearances, that the peace would not be broken to-day, or I should not have driven out from the town. But do not be in the least uneasy, you shall be exposed to no danger. I shall have to leave you; but----"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, stay with me!" cried Gabrielle. "Where would you go?"

"Whither my duty calls me--to the scene of action."

"And I?"

"You must go home alone. No one will molest you. Stop, Joseph."

The coachman obediently drew rein, and Raven rose from his seat.

"Joseph, you will take Fräulein von Harder home to the Castle at once, and as quickly as possible. There is no danger; the road is perfectly clear."

He opened the carriage-door, but the girl clung to his arm desperately.

"Do not leave me alone. Take me with you at least, if you must go."

"Nonsense!" said Raven, freeing his arm from her grasp. "You drive on to the Castle. I will come directly the disturbance is quelled, and the place quiet again."

He alighted, and turned to close the door; but in a moment Gabrielle had sprung out too, and now stood by him in the road.

"Gabrielle!" the Baron exclaimed, and there was impatient annoyance in his tone, mingled with real alarm.

But the girl only nestled more closely to his side.

"I will not let you go into the danger alone. I am afraid of nothing, of nothing in the world when you are with me. Let us go together."

Again Raven's eye blazed, and this time in the joyful flash there was swift, passionate triumph.

"You cannot accompany me," he said, in that strangely subdued tone which Gabrielle had heard but once from his lips--once only by the Nixies' Well. "You must understand that I cannot take you into the midst of that excited crowd, where I should have no possible means of protecting you. It is not the first time I have encountered such scenes. I know how to curb men's passions, but my wonted energy would fail me, were I to think that you were exposed to any danger. Promise me to return quietly home and to wait for me there. I ask this of you, Gabrielle. You will not make it hard for me to do my duty."

He took her in his arms, and lifted her into the carriage. Gabrielle offered no resistance. She knew full well that no woman could or should trust herself to the mercies of that wild, riotous mob--nothing but the mortal anxiety she was enduring would have suggested the thought to her. This anxiety was now so legibly stamped on her features that even Raven's firmness wavered. He felt he must tear himself away at once, if he would not yield to the mute prayer of those beseeching eyes.

"I must go," he said hastily. "Good-bye for the present. I shall not be long away."

He closed the carriage-door sharply, and signed to the coachman to drive on. Gabrielle, bending out, saw the tall figure turn and stride away with rapid steady steps in the direction of the square. Then the horses pulled with a will, and the carriage flew with redoubled speed on its way towards the Castle.

CHAPTER XII.

More than an hour had gone by, and the Governor had not yet returned. The household at the Castle was growing uneasy at his prolonged absence, for the coachman, on reaching home with the young Baroness, had reported that his master had betaken himself to the scene of the disturbances.

It was, of course, well known at the Government-house that the town was astir, but no detailed intelligence of what was going on had found its way thither; for the servants had, once for all, received instructions not to leave the Castle in the event of any such occurrence, and none of the officials who had their residence there cared to venture into the tumult. Councillor Moser alone had chanced to go down into the town that afternoon, and had, no doubt, been detained by the rioting. He had given no sign as yet, and was probably waiting until such time as order should be restored, and he could traverse the streets in safety.

The Baron's study was already lighted up. The clear flame of the lamp suspended from its ceiling illuminated every corner of the room, which yet maintained its grave and sombre aspect. One spot only, the deep recess of the great bay-window, lay in shadow; and there, half hidden by the heavy curtains, stood Gabrielle. The girl could not endure to-day to remain in her mother's apartments, which lay on the other side of the house. She had never hitherto entered her guardian's study without special permission or summons from him; but now she sought it, remembering that its window commanded a fine view of the city below. The gathering darkness soon narrowed in the range of vision; indeed, the Castle lay too far from the centre of the town for the keenest eyes, even in daylight, to observe what was going on there; but from this point the watcher could, at least, overlook some part of the lighted road which led up the Castle-hill, and could catch sight of any approaching figures in the distance--so reasoned Gabrielle, and remained steadily at her post.

Very unlike the Gabrielle Harder of the old days, truly, this pale, mute maiden, leaning against the window-frame with hands convulsively clasped, and gazing out as though her eager eyes must penetrate the growing darkness. This anxious, despairing vigil consummated the silent work of the last few weeks. It took from her, once and for ever, the old childish dream, destroyed the illusion by which she had so long deceived herself and others. In and about her all had been sunshine, until the moment when a single glance had discovered to her the depths of a passion new to her experience. In that moment the first shadow fell on her path, a shadow that had darkened it ever since. The bright "butterfly" nature which once fluttered heedlessly on its way, unmindful of care or sorrow, vanished when the sunshine faded from her life; and beneath the spell of that magic gaze a new being arose, an ardent, impassioned young creature who was to take her share of the struggle and pain which form humanity's sad heritage. As Gabrielle waited, trembling for a life she knew to be in peril, she came to understand what that life was to her--all that in this terrible hour she had at stake. It was useless longer to seek to delude herself.

The second hour was creeping by. Half of it had already passed, and still no sign, no news of the Governor, Gabrielle had opened the window, hoping to hear the sound of the carriage which, as she expected, would bring him; but the road lay solitary and deserted, and the flame of the gas-lights flickered uneasily, and sometimes almost died out beneath the fierce gusts of wind, which was rising to a hurricane.

At last the longed-for sound was heard; not the roll of carriage-wheels, certainly, but the voices and tread of several persons now becoming dimly visible through the obscurity. They came on nearer and nearer, and a half-suppressed cry of joy escaped Gabrielle's lips. She had recognised Raven's figure advancing towards the Castle in the company of some half-dozen gentlemen; and a few minutes later the party stepped into the circle of light surrounding the portico.

"I thank you, gentlemen," said the Governor, coming to a halt. "You see it was quite unnecessary to enforce your escort on me. There has been no attempt to molest us on our road. As I told you, the tumult has spent itself--for to-night."

"Yes; but nothing save your Excellency's timely appearance would have dispersed the rioters,"--this in the impressive voice of Councillor Moser, who was standing next his chief. "They were

about to storm the gaol and to set the prisoners free when you came up so unexpectedly--so providentially, I may say. I saw with admiration how your Excellency, by mere authority of word and look, tamed that rebellious mob, and reduced the rioters to order--a result which the Superintendent here, with his whole staff of police to back him, had vainly striven to obtain."

The Superintendent, who formed one of the group, seemed to take this observation in rather ill part; for he replied, with a spice of unmistakable spitefulness:

"Well, you were in a good position at your window, no doubt, to see how matters went, besides having the satisfaction of feeling yourself in perfect security, while Baron von Raven and I were in the thick of the fight."

"I saw that it would be impossible for me to reach his Excellency's side," declared the Councillor; "otherwise I should have----"

"No, no," the Baron interrupted him; "that would have been a most unnecessary venture on your part, whereas the Superintendent and I were only fulfilling our duty. Well, we have settled as to the measures to be taken. I hope they will suffice to preserve order during the night. Colonel Wilten will be back to-morrow, and I shall confer with him at once, and decide on some means of preventing any recurrence of such scenes. If, contrary to our previsions, any disturbance should occur, have the goodness to let me know. Good-evening, gentlemen."

He bowed slightly to his companions, and stepped into the hall. Gabrielle closed the window gently. She meant to leave the study at once--the Baron should not find her there--but it was too late for a retreat. He must have mounted the stairs in great haste, for already his steps might be heard in one of the adjoining rooms, and his voice asking:

"What? Fräulein von Harder is not in her apartments?"

"The Baroness is in your Excellency's study, and has been waiting there for more than an hour," a servant replied.

No comment was made to this, but the step approached at a quickened pace; the door was thrown open, and Raven appeared. His first glance fell on Gabrielle, who had come out from the window, and now stood before him, trembling in every limb. He guessed why she had chosen to wait for him there. In an instant he was at her side.

"I was going over to your rooms, when they told me you were here;" he spoke in a breathless, hurried tone. "I could not possibly send any news to tranquillise you. The riot is only just quelled. All is quiet for the moment. I came up here at once."

Gabrielle tried to answer him, but her voice forsook her. She could not force a sound from her lips. Raven looked at the fair, pale face, on which the torture of the last few hours was but too legibly written. He made a movement, as though to draw her to his side, but as yet the habit of self-mastery prevailed. The arm he had raised fell to his side, his chest heaved, and he drew a deep, deep breath.

"And now, Gabrielle, repeat to me the words you spoke a while ago in the carriage, the words with which you repelled me."

"What words?" asked Gabrielle, in painful embarrassment.

"Tell me again the untruth, by the help of which you tried to deceive both yourself and me. Look me in the face, and repeat to me that you love Winterfeld, and are determined to be his. If you can do that, you shall never again be troubled by a word from me. But say it, say it out plainly."

The girl drew back. "Oh, let me go! I--I--oh, let me go, for Heaven's sake!"

"No, I will not let you go, Gabrielle!" broke out Raven, passionately. "The tale must be told, once for all. I must now put into words that secret which you have long known, the secret which has been mine since I first looked into those sunny, childish eyes. Soon, very soon after that, I heard from your own lips that you loved another. I felt that a man thirty years your senior, with hair showing streaks of grey, would incur the terrible curse of ridicule, if he confessed to you his ardent, unreciprocated attachment, and I, by Heaven! I vowed none should ridicule me. But to-day I saw that you trembled for my safety, that you would have rushed into the danger yourself only to remain at my side--and now you do not dare repeat those words, because you feel they convey a lie which would cost us both all our future happiness. Now, at last, let things be made clear between us. I love you, Gabrielle, and I have fought against my love, calling to my aid all my strength and all my pride. The dream *should* be over, I said, and the presumptuous word has cost me dearly. When I meant forcibly to subdue and crush out the passion within me, it rose with tenfold, irresistible might, and taught me to know its power. I behaved towards you with harsh, cold reserve, wrapping myself in it as in a mantle. I sought a rescue in separation, in my work, in the battle I am ever waging with all the hostile elements arrayed against me--in vain! I had torn myself from you, but your image was ever present with me, in my dreams, as in my waking hours. It forced itself in upon me here, as I sat at work; it followed me into stirring scenes without, when all the faculties of mind and brain had need to be at full stretch; and when I faced my opponents

in the struggle, it gleamed on me like a ray of light through the stormy clouds surrounding me, and compelled my heart, my mind to turn to you--it has conquered my every feeling, every thought. You must be mine, or I must let you go from me for ever. Any third course would bring destruction on us both. Answer me, Gabrielle. Say, whom do you love? For whom did your heart beat so anxiously a little while ago, and what thought aroused the apprehension and tenderness I read in your looks? Speak; I await your decision."

He stood before her, pale and eager, as though the verdict were to be one of life or death. Gabrielle listened in a sort of stupor to this passionate outbreak, which found but too ready an echo in her own heart. Raven was faithfully describing her own experience. She, too, had fought and wrestled with her love; she, too, had sought to fly from a power so strong that no escape was possible. Before the glowing lava-stream of words which burst with one great throe of Nature from the innermost heart of this man, usually so cold and so constrained, all the fairy fabrics vanished which a young girl's fancy had built up, all her childish conceptions of love and life; and with them went the foolish dream which she had once thought would fill her whole existence. It had been but a day-dream, a dim visionary foreshadowing of that which now took form and being. Gabrielle had awakened. She looked a genuine passion full in the face, and if she felt that so volcanic a nature, with its sombre depths and smouldering fires, was calculated to destroy rather than to bless, she no longer quaked before it. The thing she had hitherto called happiness paled and disappeared like some thin phantom before the fierce incandescent glow of this man's fervour.

The young girl made one last attempt to cling valiantly to the past.

"George ... he loves me--trusts me. He will be so utterly miserable, if I forsake him!"

"Do not speak his name!" cried Raven, his eye sparkling with furious enmity. "Do not remind me that this man alone stands between me and my felicity. Ill might betide him through it. Woe to him if he should try to hold you to your hasty promise! I should free you by fair means or by foul. What is this Winterfeld to you? What can you be to him? He may love you after his own fashion, but he would drag you down to a commonplace existence, and give you a commonplace affection, nothing more. If he loses you, he will overcome the pain of it; will seek consolation in his plans for advancement, in his work, in other ties. Such passionless natures do not know what despair is--nothing brings them out of their groove; they, steadily and dutifully, keep on their way. I"--here the Baron's tone sank to a lower diapason; the look of hate died out of his face, and his stern voice grew milder and milder, until at length it melted to a great softness--"I have never loved, have never known such sweet hopes or bright illusions. In the continual striving after power and greatness, I seem to have missed all real happiness, a thirst for which has now, so late, arisen within me. Now, in the autumn of my life, the veil is rent asunder, and I can see all that I have lost, lost without once tasting it. Has all chance of it gone from me for ever? Do you fear the gap of years which intervenes between us? I cannot bring you youth, my child. That is past; but the great passion of a man's mature soul is far stronger, more intense and more enduring than the fancy of any youthful enthusiast. It dies out only with his life. Say that you will be mine, and I will encompass you with love, will make you my idol. I will accept any challenge for your sake, and will come to you victorious from every struggle. All pain and sorrow shall be averted from your head; if really a storm is threatening, it shall not touch, shall not come nigh you; my arms are strong enough to protect the woman I love. You shall be the sunbeam to brighten my life, to brighten and to beautify it I have striven hard and achieved much, but no ray of happiness has gleamed upon me; and now that I have seen it shining in my path, I cannot close my eyes and shut it out. Gabrielle, be my wife, my joy, my one delight and treasure!"

A boundless tenderness was in his words. His stormy, fiery vehemence had melted gradually into tones of pathetic pleading, and he spoke in low tremulous accents, such as surely never yet had come from Arno Raven's lips; and as he pleaded, he clasped his arm tighter and tighter round the slender form at his side, and drew her gently, but irresistibly, towards him. Gabrielle yielded passively. Again, as once before by the murmuring spring, a trance had fallen upon her--a trance half sweet, half troubling, holding her senses in thrall--and again, as then, she let herself be drawn unresistingly out of the bright sunlight, wherein she had hitherto breathed, down, down into unknown depths. It seemed to her that she had no choice but to drift deeper and deeper, and that, with him, supported by his arm, it was blessedness enough so to drift, leaving all, all behind.

A knock at the door startled Gabrielle and the Baron, and brought them back to reality. It had, no doubt, been repeated several times without obtaining a response, for it was unusually loud and sharp, and struck like a clanging dissonance on the harmony of their short-lived happiness.

"What is it?" asked Raven, with a start. "I will not be disturbed now."

"I beg pardon, your Excellency," said the servant's voice without. "A courier has just arrived from the capital. He has orders to deliver his despatches to your Excellency in person, and asks to be admitted immediately."

The Baron slowly relaxed his hold on the young girl.

"Thus am I awakened from my love-dreams!" he said bitterly. "They cannot grant me even a quarter of an hour's respite. It would seem that love and dreams are forbidden fruit to me; that the thought of them even is forbidden me.--The courier must wait a few minutes," he added

aloud. "I will send for him."

The servant retired. Raven turned to Gabrielle again, but stopped, in concern and surprise, as he caught sight of her face.

"What ails you?" he said. "You have suddenly turned so deadly pale. It is only some important message from the capital which is to fall into no hands but mine; some official matter, nothing more. It might have come at a more opportune time, truly."

Gabrielle had indeed turned very white. That knock, coming just at the moment when the decisive "yes" was hovering on her lips, thrilled her as the portent of some coming evil. She herself knew not why, at that announcement, her thoughts flew back to George and to his words at parting. He was living in the capital now. A pang shot through her. Was there some plot on foot to injure the Baron?

"I will go," she said hastily. "You must receive this courier. Let me go."

Raven clasped her in his arms again.

"And will you leave me without giving me an answer? Am I still to live on, doubting and fearing lest that other should come between us again? You shall go, but speak first the one word I long for. It will take but a second to say it. Only one word, 'yes!' I will not keep you longer."

"Give me till to-morrow," the girl besought with piteous, pathetic entreaty. "Do not ask me to decide now, do not force my consent from me. Give me till to-morrow, Arno, I implore you!"

A flash of joy lighted up the Baron's features as, for the first time, he heard her pronounce his name without the adjunct of that formal word which recalled the relation and the guardian. Quickly and fervently he pressed his lips to her brow.

"It shall be so. I will force nothing from you. I will believe the language of your eyes alone, and content myself with that. Until to-morrow, then, for one short night, farewell, my Gabrielle!"

He walked with her through the adjoining room to a door which opened on the corridor, and the young girl went hastily out. Before she had reached the end of the passage, a bell sounded in the Baron's study, the signal for the courier to appear. Truly, Arno Raven had but little leisure to devote to his love-dreams. He was inexorably, ruthlessly summoned back to the hard reality of this prosaic world.

Gabrielle shut herself in her own room. As yet, the decisive word had not been spoken, but her choice was already made. The hours she had just lived through had broken down the bridge connecting her with the past--there could be no going back now. If George himself had appeared before her to assert and to maintain his rights, it would have availed nothing; it was too late--he had lost her. Where the young lover, despite his earnestness and enthusiasm, had failed, the elder man, with his tardily-aroused, but even on that account more glowing passion, triumphantly succeeded. Arno Raven had drawn the girl's whole soul to himself; there was no room in her heart now for another. Raven alone held sway over Gabrielle's thoughts and feelings, and reigned supreme in her dreams when, long after midnight, she sank into a brief uneasy slumber. George's image never once rose before her. Even during her sleep her brain was busy with the events of the last few hours, which passed in a strange fantastic medley confusedly before her.

One single figure occupied the foreground. Interwoven with the thought of *him* came the memory of that drive through the darkening twilight of the autumn evening. She saw it all: the varied landscape with its misty outlines; overhead a sky charged with storm-cloud; and yonder on the western horizon the flaming, fiery sunset.

CHAPTER XIII.

"It is perfectly unprecedented! Such a thing was never heard of! I cannot believe my own eyes! This undermines all government, saps the foundations of all authority, shakes the very pillars of the State. It is horrible--horrible!"

Thus, in a burst of noble pathos, did the Councillor unburthen himself of his pent-up indignation, addressing the Superintendent of Police, who was just coming down the stairs from an interview with the Governor.

"Do you mean the disturbances in the town?" asked the latter, with a slight and rather scornful

smile. "Yes, it was rather noisy down there last night, certainly."

"Who is thinking of the town?" cried the Councillor. "Those disturbances go for nothing. It is the mere rioting of a mob, which can be subjugated, which will be subjugated, by military aid, if necessary. But when revolutionary ideas invade official circles--when men, whose business it is to represent and to support the Government, attack it in such a way as this, there is an end to all order. Who would have thought it of Assessor Winterfeld! A young man who has been looked on as a model to the whole Civil Service! I, indeed, have always had my suspicions of him. His questionable loyalty, his bias in favour of the Opposition, his treasonable connections, have long inspired uneasiness in my mind; and on several occasions I have expressed as much to his Excellency, but he would not listen. He had a predilection for the Assessor. Quite lately even, by getting him transferred to the capital, he opened to this favoured subaltern the most brilliant prospects; and now the traitor rewards him by the blackest ingratitude."

"Ah, you are alluding to Winterfeld's pamphlet!" said the Superintendent. "Have you had the book in your hands already? Why, it can only have reached R--- this morning."

"I got it accidentally, from a colleague who had just received it. A most abominable composition! It is open rebellion, sir--open rebellion! There are things in it addressed to his Excellency--things ... Well, I don't know how such a work came to be printed and circulated. Have you taken no steps to suppress it?"

"I have no orders and no motive for doing so," declared the Superintendent, whose coolness formed a strange contrast to Moser's indignant excitement. "The pamphlet was brought out in the capital, and there was not time, I suppose, to prevent its circulation. Besides, such unpalatable publications are no longer suppressed in a summary manner, as was the custom formerly. Times have changed. As to this brochure, I am quite of your opinion. I doubt if a more virulent attack has ever been made on a statesman holding office under the Crown."

"And it comes from a member of the Service, from one who has worked under my eyes, in my bureaux!" cried the Councillor, in despair. "But he has been seduced, led astray. I always told him that his connection with that clique of Swiss Socialists would bring him to ruin. I know who is at the bottom of the whole business--who is alone to blame for this scandal. It is that Dr. Brunnow who has been staying here for weeks, under pretext of settling some succession business, and who has not yet taken his departure."

"Because in his case there has been even more than the usual circumlocution. Endless difficulties have been raised touching this matter of his reversion. The gentlemen of the law-courts have, with rather unnecessary severity, let him feel the drawbacks under which he labours in being his father's son and, for the time being, representative. Finding this, he set upon them a little while ago, and subjected them to so drastic a treatment, that they were quite taken aback, and now really seem as if they meant to hasten on the affair. You have a prejudice against the young doctor, Councillor. He is not such a bad fellow as you think."

"This Brunnow is a most dangerous man," said the Councillor, all his wonted solemnity returning to him with this topic. "I knew it from the first day I saw him, and my instinct in such matters is infallible. Since he has been in our midst, we have had these troubles in the town, open resistance to the appointed authorities; and now comes this printed assault on his Excellency. I hold to my opinion: this man came to R--- with the intention of setting the city, the province, ay, the whole land in a blaze of insurrection."

"Why not say the whole of Europe, while you are about it!" exclaimed the Superintendent, impatiently. "You are completely mistaken. Merely on account of the name he bears, we have kept an eye on the young man, and I can assure you he has not given the slightest cause for any such suspicions. He has entered into no political relations here, and took part neither directly nor indirectly in the late disturbances; he just simply attends to his own private affairs. If I, as head of the police, can bear him this testimony, you may, I think, admit and put faith in it."

"But he is the son of an old revolutionary democrat," persisted the Councillor; "and he is an intimate friend of Assessor Winterfeld's."

"What does that prove? His father was once an intimate friend of the Governor here."

"Wh--what?" cried Moser, starting back. "His Excellency Baron von Raven and that man Rudolph Brunnow---"

"Were university chums, bosom friends even. I have it from the best source. I suppose you are not going to accuse Baron von Raven of socialist, revolutionary tendencies. But my time is limited, I must be off. Good-morning, Councillor."

So saying, the Superintendent turned his back on the worthy Councillor, who was standing dazed with surprise, and left the Government-house. On his way to the town he encountered the Burgomaster.

"You come from the Castle?" asked the latter. "Have you seen the Governor? What has he determined on doing?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"What he threatened yesterday--he will proceed with the utmost rigour. If there is any repetition of the riots, the troops will be called out. All the necessary preparations are made. Precisely as I was leaving, Colonel Wilten came in to consult with him personally on the subject, and there can be no doubt as to the result of the conference. You know the Baron. He will recoil from no measures which may effect his purpose."

"This must not be," said the Burgomaster, uneasily. "The popular exasperation is so great that any display of military force would only add fuel to the flame. There would be resistance and bloodshed. I had made up my mind not to set foot in the Castle again, unless absolutely compelled to go there; but now I think I must make one last attempt to dissuade them from any extreme course."

"I would advise you not to go," returned the Superintendent. "I can tell you beforehand, you will get nothing by it. The Baron is not in a forbearing mood to-day. He has had news which will ruffle his temper for weeks to come."

"I know," put in the other. "Assessor Winterfeld's pamphlet. I received it from the capital this morning."

"What, you have heard of it too? Well, I must say they have lost no time in circulating the book. They seem to have feared it might be suppressed, and to have done what they could to forestall the edict. I think there were no grounds for the apprehension, however. It looks very much as though in high places the intention were to let the matter take its course."

"Really; and what says Raven to all this? The attack can hardly have come upon him unawares. He must have received some hint of what was brewing."

"I am afraid he received no hint whatever. His whole manner betrays the fact that he has been taken by surprise. He wraps himself in his usual reserve, but he cannot altogether conceal that he is perturbed and frightfully irritated. My allusions to the matter in question were met so ungraciously that I thought it better to drop the subject. It is really an unprecedented attack, and an outrageously imprudent one into the bargain. When such opinions are to be disseminated among the people, they are generally given to the public in an anonymous form. The author lets the first fury of the storm wear itself out before he gives his name; he allows himself to be sought out and divined, and only emerges from his retirement when obliged or encouraged so to do. But the Assessor signs in full, and leaves no doubt to the world in general, and the Governor in particular, as to who is the assailant. I can't think how he has found courage to challenge his whilom chief in this manner. He throws down the gauntlet to him in the face of the whole country--the book is one long accusation from beginning to end."

"And from beginning to end it is one long truth," answered the Burgomaster, warmly. "This young man puts us all to shame. What he has now ventured to do, should have been done long ago. When the resistance of a whole city proves fruitless, when all appeals to the Government fail, the dispute should be brought before the forum of public opinion, and there decided. Winterfeld has been clear-sighted enough to see this, and courageous enough to speak the first word. Now that the way has been thrown open for them, all will be ready to follow him."

"Yes, but he is hazarding his position and very livelihood on the die," remarked the Superintendent. "This pamphlet of his goes too far, and brilliantly as it is written, its author will have to smart for it. Raven is not the man to allow himself to be insulted and attacked with impunity. This bold knight-errant may find himself worsted in the tourney. He may fall a victim to his own audacity."

"Or he may at a blow demolish the Governor's supremacy. But, however the affair may end, it is sure to make a tremendous sensation; and here in R---- it will be the spark to fire the powder-train."

"I am afraid so too," assented the police magnate. "It stands to reason that the Baron will go all lengths now, in order to remain master of the situation. Well, whatever he may do, will be done at his own risk and peril."

While the two gentlemen thus discoursed, going on their way together, the conference, to which allusion had been made, was being pursued between the Governor and Colonel Wilten, in the former's private study. The topic under discussion must have been one of importance, for the Colonel looked exceedingly grave. Raven was, to all appearance, unmoved; the ashy paleness of his countenance and the deep furrows of his knitted brow alone betrayed that some unusually disturbing influence had been at work. His bearing and speech were, as ever, perfectly assured and under control.

"The thing is settled," he said. "You will hold the troops in readiness for an immediate intervention, and you will proceed unsparingly, should resistance be offered. I will take the responsibility and all the possible consequences on myself."

"If it must be ... it must," replied the Colonel. "You know my scruples, and I do not disguise from you that, in case of any difficulty arising, I shall leave the responsibility of this step with

you."

"I hold myself answerable, solely and entirely. This rebellious city of R--- must be reduced to submission, be the cost what it may. It is now more than ever incumbent on me to uphold my authority. It must not be thought for a moment that the mischievous blow which has been directed against me has had power to slacken my rein."

"What blow?" asked the Colonel.

"You have not heard the latest news from the capital?"

"No; as you are aware, I have only been back in town a few hours."

Raven rose, and paced rapidly up and down the room. When he returned and stood before the Colonel, his agitation could be read in his features, in spite of all his efforts to keep it down.

"I recommend you, then, to read Assessor Winterfeld's pamphlet," he said, in a tone which was meant to be only sarcastic, but which vibrated with fierce anger. "He feels himself appointed to denounce me to the country at large as a despot who regards neither law nor justice, who has become a scourge, a pestilent source of harm, to the province committed to his charge. A long list of crimes is therein imputed to me; abuse of power, arbitrary action, illegal violence, and all the usual catchwords. It really is worth while to read the precious composition, if only to marvel at the presumption with which one of the youngest and lowliest of my subalterns ventures to arraign his chief. So far, only a chosen few have cognisance of this brochure; to-morrow, the whole town will ring with it."

"But why do you take it so quietly?" exclaimed the Colonel. "These things do not spring up in a day, of themselves. You must have been prepared for it--have had news of what was coming."

"Oh yes; the news reached me yesterday evening, just about the time that the book was being hawked about the streets of the capital, and when many copies of it were on their way hither. The same courier brought me an assurance of the Minister's 'sincere regret' that it had not been possible to prevent the publication; the matter had now gone too far for suppression."

"That is strange!" said Wilten, in surprise.

"More than strange. They are generally well informed at head-quarters as to all that is in the press, and they do not readily suffer anything to appear that is likely to prove dangerous. With the work in question, there could have been no difficulty. They had only to consider the insults offered to me as levelled at the Government, and to suppress the entire edition. But it seems that the will so to act was wanting, and as they feared that I should energetically insist on such a course being pursued, they purposely left me in complete ignorance of the matter, and only warned me when it was too late for the intimation to be of use."

The Colonel looked down meditatively.

"You have few friends in the capital and at court--I told you so months ago. There are constant intrigues on foot against you there, and no stone is left unturned to damage your credit and undermine your influence. If a fitting instrument has been found ready to hand ... Assessor Winterfeld is engaged at the Ministry now, I think?"

"Yes," said the Baron, bitterly. "I opened its doors to him. I myself sent my denunciator to the capital."

"They have got hold of the young man at once, it being known that he came direct from your Chancellery. Perhaps he only contributes his name, and the onslaught really comes from a far different quarter."

Raven shook his head moodily.

"He is no instrument in the hands of others; he acts spontaneously, and the scheme cannot have been concocted in the few weeks which have elapsed since he left R---. The book is the result of much thought and labour. It has taken months, perhaps years, to prepare. Here in my own bureaux, under my very eyes, the plan of it has been sketched out and designed. Every word shows that it has been slowly, carefully written."

"And the Assessor never betrayed himself to you or any one?" asked Wilten. "He must have had associates, confidential friends."

The Baron's lips worked, and his eyes were fixed on the window-recess from which Gabrielle had yesterday stepped forth to welcome him.

"One of his confidants I know, at least," he said; "and that one shall render account to me. As to the young man himself--well, we shall see later on. There can be but one manner of settling such a matter between us two. Just at present I have to reckon with other enemies. It is of little consequence that an Assessor Winterfeld should rise up in virtuous indignation, and declare me a tyrant and my tenure of office a public calamity--others have done this before him. But that he should venture to cry it aloud in the ears of all the world, that such a venture should be tolerated,

perhaps encouraged--this is what gives a serious colour, a certain importance, to the affair. I shall at once demand ample satisfaction from the Government, which is attacked with me and in my person; and should they show signs of refusing it, I shall know how to bring them to reason. It is not the first time I have had to set a plain alternative before these gentlemen. I have frequently found it necessary to clear the air a little by some sharp, decided action when the intrigues became too annoying to be borne in silence."

"You take too grave a view of the matter," said the Colonel, reassuringly; "and it is strange in you, who generally meet every attack with absolute, unruffled calm. Why do you now allow yourself to be irritated by mere lies and calumnies?"

The Baron drew himself up proudly.

"Who says they are lies? The animus which pervades the book is stamped on every page, but it does not contain palpable untruths, and I have no intention of calling in question one of the facts adduced against me. I am ready to answer for my acts, but only to those who are entitled to require an account from me, and not to the first man who may feel disposed to sit in judgment on me and my proceedings. To him and to his fellows, I shall give the one answer they deserve."

At this point of the conversation they were interrupted. A report was brought in to the Governor, which the Superintendent of Police had just sent over from the town. Colonel Wilten rose to depart.

"I will go and see that the measures we have agreed upon are taken at once. The Baroness arrived safely, I hope? She came with us to town, but declined our escort up to the Castle. And how is Fräulein von Harder? She must have seen something of the rioting last night."

"I do not know," said Raven shortly, almost roughly. "I have not seen her to-day, and I was too busy to receive my sister-in-law in person. I shall go over to them a little later."

He gave his hand to the Colonel, who, after a few parting words, left the room, while the Baron returned to his writing-table, on which last night's despatches still lay, and began a letter to the Minister.

Baroness Harder had reached the Castle some hours previously, and had been received by her daughter alone, a circumstance which had given umbrage to the lady. It argued, she said, great disrespect on her brother-in-law's part that he could not tear himself away from his business, for a few minutes at least, to welcome her. And to this other annoyances were added. The cold from which she had been suffering for several days past had been increased by the drive through the morning air. Madame von Harder declared herself to be very ill, and at once retired to her bedroom to get a little rest, giving orders that she was on no account to be disturbed--this to the intense relief of her daughter, who was thus again left free to pursue her troubled thoughts.

Gabrielle had, indeed, hardly been able to conceal from her mother the agitation and anxiety which were consuming her. The Baron had not shown himself all day; he had even sent in an excuse at breakfast-time. She knew that, in consequence of last night's events, he had been incessantly occupied from early morning, that special messengers had pressed on each other's heels, and that audiences and conferences without respite were being held in his study; but she knew also that, in spite of everything, he would find time, must find time, to come to her, if only for a few minutes. "Until to-morrow." The words, spoken with passionate tenderness, still rang in her ears. The morning had come; all the forenoon had passed. Raven did not appear; he sent no word, no line, and a very mountain-load of care seemed to weigh on the young girl's heart. What could have happened?

Twelve o'clock struck. Gabrielle was sitting alone in her mother's little boudoir, when at length she really heard, in the anteroom, the quick steady steps which a hundred times that morning she had heard in fancy. She drew a deep breath, and listened with a beating heart. Her cheeks, so pale a minute before, were dyed now a deep crimson. Anxiety, care, apprehension, all were forgotten in this moment, as the door opened and the Baron came in.

"I wish to speak to you," he said briefly, without any preface. "Are we alone?"

Gabrielle bent her head affirmatively. Her impulse had been to hasten towards him; but she stopped, confounded by his tone, which grated oddly, harshly on her ear. Now, looking more closely, she saw the strange change that had come over his features. This was not the Arno Raven who had yesterday held her in his arms and poured out to her the tale of his love, with an ardour and a passion which had metamorphosed the man's whole being, inspiring her with warmth and tenderness. To-day he stood before her gloomy, reserved, icily severe. The lips which had given utterance to those fervent, loving words were firmly set; in the dark, rigid countenance no trace could be seen of the play of feeling which had yesterday irradiated it, and the eyes flashed fiercely, menacingly, as they met the young girl's timid gaze.

"You expected me earlier, perhaps," went on the Baron. "I had need of some time to make myself acquainted with certain--certain communications which had reached me, and I felt that our present interview would come soon enough. It is unnecessary for me to enter into explanations, for, though not generally familiar with my official concerns, on this occasion you probably know as well as I do what has occurred."

"I? No," said Gabrielle, with failing breath. "How should I know?"

"Do you mean to deny it? But of this we will speak later. In the first place, I must ask what led you to enter on this miserable comedy, the farcical part of which was reserved for me? Beware, Gabrielle. As I told you yesterday, I have but little talent for such a *rôle*. The man who is duped and betrayed is only ridiculous while he patiently endures it. I am not inclined to do this. The sorry game you have played with me will be fraught with danger both to yourself and to another."

"But what do you mean? I do not understand you," cried the girl, whose distress was momentarily increasing.

Raven came close up to her, and fixed a keen, searching gaze on her countenance.

"What was the meaning of those warning words which you whispered to me yesterday, as we drove home? How did you know that I was in any way threatened, and why did you start and turn deadly pale when that courier from the capital was announced? Speak; I insist upon an answer."

Gabrielle listened with growing consternation. She began to suspect whither these questions tended, but was quite in the dark as to the event that had prompted them. Raven must have seen that she did not understand him, for he drew the pamphlet from his breast-pocket and threw it on the table.

"This little book will perhaps help your memory. It is the most contumelious, the most astounding attack which has ever been made upon me. You probably read it in an unfinished state; it has, no doubt, been completed, perfected in the capital, in the Ministerial bureaux. Do not look at me as though I were speaking in some foreign tongue. This name, which stands on the title-page, is, I think, not unknown to you."

Gabrielle had taken up the pamphlet mechanically. Her eye fell on the page mentioned, on the name inscribed thereon. She started: "From George? He has kept his word!"

"Kept his word?" repeated Raven, with a bitter laugh. "So you had his word for it. You were his confidante, his confederate? But, indeed, how could I doubt it for an instant? It was clear from the first--clear as the noonday sun."

The young girl was too stunned and confused to defend herself with skill or energy. The unfortunate exclamation which had escaped her could but confirm the Baron in his suspicion that she had been an accomplice.

"I had a presentiment of some coming evil," she replied, summoning up all her courage; "but I knew nothing decided. I thought----"

Raven did not let her finish. He grasped her hand, and held it tightly.

"Had you really no suspicion that there was some scheme on foot to injure me? Were the hints you let fall yesterday purely accidental and devoid of any special aim? Did it not occur to you, when those despatches were brought in upon us in hot haste, that perhaps 'some one had kept his word?' Look me in the face, and say it was not so. I will try to believe you."

Gabrielle was silent. She could not answer in the negative, and the thought that, in truth, she had known of George's intention, at least, robbed her of her presence of mind. The low words which the young man had spoken when parting from her acquired a fatal importance now; they weighed on the young girl, and seemed to crush her with a sense of guilt.

Raven's eyes had never quitted her face. His fingers slowly relaxed; he let her hand fall, and stepped back.

"So you knew it," he said; "and with that knowledge you stood quietly by and saw me wrestle with a senseless passion; saw me finally succumb to the weakness. You allowed me to believe that my affection was returned, and so pricked me on to madness, while secretly you were counting the days and hours to the time when the blow--the mortal blow, as you fancied, should strike me. Certain of a future triumph, you could yesterday let me fold you to my breast and speak to you words of love. By Heaven! it is too much, too much!"

His voice was still constrained and low, but something in it foretold the coming outbreak.

Gabrielle felt herself powerless, defenceless, against his accusations. She made an attempt, however, to meet and refute them.

"Hear me, Arno. You are mistaken. I have not deceived you, nor betrayed you. If I knew anything----"

"Say no more!" he interrupted her, with terrible vehemence. "I will hear nothing. I know enough. Your silence just now spoke more plainly than words. Justify your conduct to him, to your 'George;' confess to him that you could not keep his secret to the last moment. He will perhaps forgive you. The warning would, any way, have come too late. This I will own, I did him an injustice in declaring him to be a commonplace person, not above the ordinary run of men. Evidently he is not afraid to leave accustomed grooves, to undertake feats which no one has

ventured on before him, and which no one, I think, in future will care to emulate. He may possibly make his way with it, this young Assessor whom yesterday nobody knew, and whose name will to-morrow be in everybody's mouth, simply because he has had the audacity to whet his sword and attack me. But he will pay dearly for the notoriety, I give you my word for that. As yet I have never feared a foe, nor shrunk from a contest, and this onslaught would have moved me as little as the rest. The thought that you were in league with him, that you--*you* had betrayed me, this, and only this, it is which has procured my enemies the satisfaction and triumph of seeing me for once thrown off my balance."

His voice faltered a little as he spoke the last words. Through the man's fierce wrath at seeing himself, as he believed, wounded in his love as in his honour, came the sharp quivering pang of an exceeding bitter pain. At this tone Gabrielle forgot all else. She flew to him, laid her two hands on his arm, and would have spoken, have implored; but it was useless. With a rough, angry movement he freed himself, thrusting her from him.

"Go! I have been a fool, I own, but the illusion is dispelled now. I will not let myself be lured on a second time by those eyes, which have lied to me once with their feigned anxiety and tenderness. Tell your George he has not well reflected what it is to challenge me to single combat. He will soon make the experience. Between us two all is over, now and for ever!"

He went. The door fell to behind him with a crash, and Gabrielle remained alone. She looked down at the pamphlet lying on the table, at the name printed thereon, but saw neither. Echoing and re-echoing through her mind in dismal iteration came those last cruel words. Ah, yes; all was over now, now and for ever!

The fears entertained that fresh disturbances might break out in the town were but too speedily realised. All the military measures had been taken in the most ostensible manner possible, it being hoped that they would intimidate the population; they had, however, a contrary effect, and only served to increase the general bitter animosity against the Governor. A low ferment of discontent had been going on for months; but the popular demonstrations of ill-feeling had only assumed a serious character within the last few days. Signs of the hostile spirit prevailing throughout the city had not been wanting, but there had previously been no attempt at open insurrection. People in R---- had so long been accustomed to bow to the Governor's will, it was not easy for them to shake off the habit. Moreover, the Baron's temper was pretty accurately known. It was felt that neither weakness nor concessions were to be expected from him--so for weeks the citizens contented themselves with grumbling and murmuring their dissatisfaction. The energetic inflexible mind in authority over them exerted its wonted sway. So far, Raven had restrained the threatening elements, and held the storm in check. By his personal intervention he had quelled a riot and dispersed the rebellious masses; but, even in that hour of apparent success, it had been made evident to him that his power was on the wane.

Things now seemed to have reached a crisis. Much exasperation was felt at the arrests which had been made by the Baron's order some days before, and at the extreme harshness and rigour with which the offenders were treated. By this incident the long-smouldering fire was fanned to a flame. A tumult was raised with a view to release the captives, and when the attempt failed, and the Governor still opposed to all the popular protests and all the importunate clamouring the same unvarying resolute answer, the agitation, which had been temporarily allayed, broke out afresh with redoubled force.

Evening had come again. The Government-house was in a state of turmoil and excitement. Every door, even to the main entrance, was barred and guarded. The panic-stricken servants thronged the corridors and staircases, and outside, before the long line of windows, glittered a file of bayonets. A strong detachment of troops was stationed round the Castle-hill, the soldiers having arrived in time to secure the Governor's residence from attack. The roads leading to it had been cleared, and the crowd driven back; but the uproar in the neighbouring streets had increased proportionably, and at any moment a collision between the armed force and the populace might be expected.

The Governor's apartments were the focus of all the busy movement. Messages flowed in one upon the other; police officers and orderlies came and went. Councillor Moser had hurried to the side of his chief, who was to him a stronghold and rock of defence in every time of danger. Lieutenant Wilten, appointed to command the Castle garrison, was with the Baron, and an ambassador from the insurgent camp was also present--the worthy Burgomaster, who had come up the hill, resolved on making that last attempt which in the morning he had been induced to forego.

Raven himself stood cool and unmoved in the midst of all this hurry and commotion. He listened to the reports and gave his orders, not for an instant disturbed from his perfect equanimity; but those about him had never seen his face so hard, so rigidly set, as on this evening. The stormy passages of the last four-and-twenty hours had, no doubt, helped to grave that harsh inexorable expression on his features; but whatever internal struggles he might have fought through, whatever he might have suffered since the preceding evening, to all bystanders he was the same haughty imperturbable Baron von Raven, in whose armour there was no joint, from whom those shafts glanced innocuously which would have shattered the strength of ordinary men.

"For the last time I beg, I demand of you to abstain from these extreme measures. There is yet time--as yet no blood has been shed. In another quarter of an hour it may be too late. It is said you have given orders that no mercy is to be shown. I cannot, will not believe this."

"Am I to allow the castle to be taken by a *coup de main*?" the Baron interrupted him. "Am I to wait until the entrance is stormed and I am insulted here in my own apartments? I think I have sufficiently shown how distasteful it is to me to take precautions for my own personal safety, but I have to answer for the safety of others, and, above all, I have to guard the Government-house from any chance of attack. This is my simple duty, and I intend to perform it."

"We have here to do with a mere demonstration; there is no question of an attack," declared the Burgomaster. "But no matter; you say the Castle must be protected and the crowds driven back. Well, this has been done; the Castle-hill is lined with troops--let that suffice. The agitation down yonder is perfectly harmless, and will die out of itself, if left a free course."

"Colonel Wilten will clear the streets," said Raven, coldly. "Should resistance be offered, he will resort to arms."

"That would lead to incalculable trouble. All the outlets to the Castle road are beset by the military; the people are hedged in on every side, and could not take to flight. Do not let it come to this, your Excellency. Hundreds of lives are at stake."

"The order and safety of the town are at stake, and they may no longer remain at the mercy of this rabble." There was an uncompromising, determined ring in the Baron's voice. "I have dallied long enough, postponing this measure. Now it has been decided on, and will be carried into execution. If the streets are cleared at once, without opposition, there is no reason for uneasiness; in the opposite case, the consequences must be on the heads of the insurgents."

At this moment the door was opened, and the Superintendent of police came in.

"Well, how goes it?"

"I have withdrawn my men from the principal centres," replied the functionary addressed. "We can do no more. The excitement is increasing every minute; it seems they mean to resist. I have just had some wounded men brought up to the Castle. There was no possibility of getting them transported to the town. They must be taken in here for the present."

"How is it there are wounded already?" asked the Burgomaster. "Ten minutes ago, when I came up the hill, there had been no collision with the troops."

"These casualties occurred some time ago, before the soldiers were called out, while we were bearing the brunt alone. Two of my men got very roughly handled then, and, unfortunately, a third person was injured, one in no way concerned in the row, a doctor who had come to the rescue and applied bandages to the wounded. He had finished his work and was going off, when one of the stones, which were falling thick and fast, struck him and felled him to the earth. It is that Dr. Brunnow of whom we were speaking this morning," added the Superintendent, turning to Councillor Moser.

"Who?" asked Raven, quickly. He had caught the last words.

"A young doctor who has been staying here for the last few weeks. Max Brunnow by name. His father lives in Switzerland, whither he had to fly for political motives. He took a prominent part in the last revolution."

The Superintendent let fall these remarks in an easy and, apparently, pointless manner; but as he spoke, he kept a vigilant watch on the Baron. He alone saw the almost imperceptible change of colour, and heard the slight tremour of emotion in the question:

"Is the young man's wound serious?"

"I fear so--perhaps even mortal. He lies in a state of unconsciousness. The stone struck him on the head."

"Every attention shall be given to the wounded man;" the Baron stepped towards the door, but bethought himself, and paused. The Burgomaster's look of surprise, and the keen, observant glance of the lynx-eyed Superintendent, no doubt reminded him that this sudden show of sympathy on his part was in too glaring contrast to that indifference to the loss of human life he had hitherto manifested. "I will myself give all needful orders," he added slowly, and laid his hand on the bell.

"The major-domo has already made every arrangement, and has shown the utmost thoughtfulness. It is unnecessary that you should trouble yourself, your Excellency."

The Baron walked up to the window in silence. Why was the name of his old friend and companion recalled to his memory just at this moment? Was he to take it as a warning, a reminder that he himself, Arno Raven, had once belonged to those rebels whom he now declared himself ready to shoot down? A long pause followed, during which many critical minutes sped by.

"I will return to the town," said the Burgomaster breaking the silence at length. "Am I to take those words as your Excellency's final decision?"

The Baron turned. The shade of some inward conflict was on his face, as he replied:

"Colonel Wilten has the command in the town. I cannot interfere with his plans. The military arrangements rest with him."

"But the Colonel acts under your instructions. A word from you, and he will refrain from active intervention, at least. Speak the word. We are all waiting for it, earnestly desiring it."

Again some seconds passed. Deep furrows gathered on Raven's brow as he stood thinking. Suddenly he drew himself up and called the young officer to him.

"Lieutenant Wilten, can you leave your post here at the Castle for a quarter of an hour? I would ask you to go over to your father yourself."

He paused and listened. From the town there came a sound, distant but not to be mistaken--the crackle of firearms.

"Good God! those are shots!" cried Councillor Moser, starting up in terror, while the two men at his side hurried to the window.

The darkness prevented their seeing anything, but sight was superfluous in this case. A second, a third time came the sharp, quick, cracking sound--then all was still.

"The message would be useless now," said the young officer in a low voice, addressing the Baron. "They have opened fire already."

Raven answered not a syllable. He stood motionless, leaning with his hand on the table, his eyes directed towards the window; but, a minute later, as the other two came back from thence, he turned to the Burgomaster and said:

"You see it is too late. I cannot interfere now, if I would."

"I see," said the old man, with trenchant bitterness. "There is blood now between you and us, so all discussion is at an end. I have not a word more to say."

CHAPTER XIV.

If ever any one had cause to ruminate on the strange sport of destiny, that person surely was Councillor Moser; for wayward chance had played him as sorry a trick as could well be imagined. He, the most faithful subject of a most gracious sovereign, the incarnation of loyalty, the sworn foe of every revolutionary and democratic tendency, had lived to see the son of a traitor to King and State lodged beneath his roof, admitted to the sanctuary of his home--while, bitterest reflection of all, to the imprudent and overhasty conduct of his own daughter must he ascribe the calamity which had overtaken him.

There was no denying the fact that Agnes Moser had alone been to blame for what had happened, though, no doubt, she had been actuated by the most pious motives. Agnes had always looked on the short space of time which she was to spend in her father's house before entering on her chosen vocation, simply as an interval of preparation for the life that was to follow. The law-writer's sick wife was by no means the only person on whom she had bestowed her care and attention. Wherever comfort and consolation were needed, in the Castle itself or its immediate neighbourhood, there would be found this young girl, so rarely seen at other times, ready, in her quiet self-sacrificing way, to relieve the suffering and afflicted; and what, in another case, might have appeared singular and excited remark, was from her received as a matter of course. It was generally known that Councillor Moser's daughter was to take the veil; the sanctity of the future nun was about her, and this, added to her constant willingness to render help where help was needed, procured for her from all the dwellers in the Castle a degree of respect but seldom accorded to a maiden of seventeen. It seemed perfectly natural, therefore, that when the wounded men were brought up to the Castle, Fräulein Moser should take her part in the work of succour, and her proposal to have Dr. Brunnow, whose case was by far the worst, carried to her father's room, where she could attend to him herself, met with prompt and cordial acceptance. The Governor had given orders that every care and attention were to be shown the injured men, and more especially the young doctor, who had so nearly lost his life in the exercise of his professional duty, and surely he could be entrusted to no better hands than these. His precarious

condition would oblige him to remain at the Castle for the present, whilst the two policemen, whose injuries were of a less serious nature, might be transported to the town on the following day. The major-domo caught at the chance of fulfilling his master's instructions so precisely. He gave his warm support to the plan which the young lady's feelings of Christian charity had suggested, and he had the satisfaction of finding that the Baron, when informed of the arrangement, appeared well pleased and spoke his full approval.

But the Councillor was by no means so satisfied with the position of affairs. He worked himself into a fury on seeing this treasonable patient installed in his home, and insisted on his immediate removal. Here, however, he was met by a resistance as decided as his own. For the first time in her life the gentle, quiet Agnes displayed an unyielding obstinacy, refusing absolutely to obey her father in this matter; and as that determined person, Frau Christine, declared herself on the side of her young mistress, Moser was out-voted and vanquished. He was given to understand that a man so dangerously ill could not be moved without risk to his life, and that he who turned him out of doors would incur the guilt of manslaughter; and the Councillor at length seemed to grasp the truth of this reasoning, but it did not lessen his despair. Early the next morning he rushed over to his chief to communicate the dreadful tidings, and to protest in the most solemn manner against any supposition of complicity on his part; but, in lieu of the hoped-for decree which should free him from the presence of his unwelcome guest, he was advised to acquiesce in and sanction his daughter's proceedings, of which the Baron himself seemed thoroughly to approve. Raven promised to shield the Councillor from any doubts on the score of his loyalty, and even declared that he would send round his own physician to the patient. It was incumbent on them, he said, to show all interest in the young doctor, who had behaved with so much courage and proper feeling. The Councillor was fain to submit to this high authority, but he did so with a heavy heart. He could not forgive his daughter for allowing herself thus to be led into extremes by her charitable sentiments and her pity for her suffering fellow-creatures; and though he was powerless to alter the accomplished fact, he viewed it every day with increasing abhorrence and indignation.

On the third morning after Max Brunnow's accident, the doctor who was attending him called to pay his usual professional visit. He was a small, spare man, with flaxen hair, mild-looking eyes, and a very gentle voice. On coming in, he met the master of the house, who was on the point of leaving for his office, and a short conference took place between the two gentlemen.

"No, Councillor, I have little, I may say no, hope of saving our patient. He is in a bad way--a very bad way. We must hold ourselves prepared for the worst."

"You have not seen him to-day," said the Councillor. "My daughter tells me he has passed a very quiet night."

The little doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, weakness--coma! There was great loss of blood, and after the violent traumatic fever, extreme exhaustion was sure to follow. I tell you, in my opinion, he will not rally."

"I am sorry to hear it," said the Councillor. Before the dread shadow of Death his rancour yielded, and compassion gained the upper hand. "And my daughter will be sorry too. She has taken all the nursing on herself, and has zealously kept watch by the sick-bed. I fear, indeed, that Agnes is overtaxing her strength, for I have never seen her look so pale. I had really to insist this morning--to compel her to go and take some rest after sitting up all night."

"Yes, Fräulein Moser is an admirable nurse. She has all the zeal and devotion necessary for her future vocation, and I am persuaded that her life will be fruitful of blessing to others. In this case, however, her exertions will soon be at an end. I fear the poor fellow's hours are numbered. He will hardly last through the day."

With a melancholy shake of the head, he took his leave, and went off to see his patient. The Councillor remained behind, looking very blank and melancholy also, but from quite another cause. A fresh trouble was coming on him. There was to be a death in the house now, after these two long days of care and anxiety. And how shocking it would be to see in the papers: "The son of that Dr. Brunnow, whose name is notorious in connection with the late revolution, died on such a day in R---, at the house of Councillor Moser. His death was occasioned by injuries received in a street riot." Those wretched papers always made these announcements in a dry, matter-of-fact manner, without a word of explanation or amplification. The Councillor cast an appealing glance to Heaven. He, the most dutiful, the most conscientious of officials, to be exposed to such a fate! His head drooped dolefully over his white neckcloth as he at length set out on his way to the Chancellery.

Meanwhile the physician had betaken himself to the sick-room. He entered with the cautious, noiseless step with which it seems natural to approach the dying. Frau Christine, who had relieved her young mistress for a short time, sat by the bedside. The doctor exchanged a few words with her in a whisper, and then sent her to fetch fresh compresses. Going up to the bed, he bent over the patient, who suddenly awoke and opened his eyes, apparently in possession of full consciousness.

"How do you feel yourself, my dear sir?" asked the little doctor, in a very gentle tone.

"Pretty well, thank you," replied the sick man, whose roving eyes seemed to be seeking something. "What has been the matter with me?"

"You have been badly wounded; but make your mind easy--I will do all that can be done. You are in good hands."

Max, having searched the whole room without finding what he sought, now turned his attention to the speaker, and calmly surveyed him.

"A colleague, I presume?" said he. "Whom have I the honour----"

"My name is Berndt," replied his brother practitioner. "His Excellency the Governor, who has shown the greatest sympathy for you during your illness, would have sent his own physician. My distinguished friend, Dr. ----, is, however, unfortunately indisposed himself, so I, as his assistant, have undertaken the case. But you must not talk, nor, above all, move; answer my questions by signs if you find it difficult to speak. You are low and exhausted, and require the utmost----"

He stopped aghast, for the condemned man, having pulled himself together with a vigorous jerk, sat bolt upright, and asked, in a voice which was anything but faint:

"What has become of my nurse? She used to stay with me always."

"Fräulein Moser, do you mean? She has gone to get a little rest, after having watched by your bedside all night. You have indeed been nursed with devoted care. That young lady is an angel of mercy."

"Mercy?" repeated Max, with protracted emphasis. "Yes, as you say, a too intimate acquaintance with the pavement of your agreeable town has thrown me on the mercy of mankind. Confounded misuse of paving-stones to shy them at people's heads!"

"Do not excite yourself, my dear colleague," implored Dr. Berndt, gently. "No agitation, I beg. Quiet, rest, and the greatest caution! But now that you are yourself again, is there no wish, no desire you would like to express?"

His face said plainly that he expected nothing less than a last will or dying bequest.

Ignoring such subjects, however, the patient replied with perfect equanimity: "Certainly; I have the most pressing wish and desire for something to eat."

"To eat!" asked the doctor, in surprise. "To eat! Well, if you like, we may try a little beef-tea."

"A little won't do," said Max. "I shall want a great deal; but I think I would rather have something a trifle more substantial than beef-tea. A steak, now--in fact, I could eat two."

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed the little Esculapius, laying his fingers on the sick man's pulse, for he began to think his patient was delirious. But Max drew away his hand impatiently.

"Don't make such a fuss about that crack in my head-piece. It will be well in a week. I know my constitution."

Dr. Berndt looked with commiseration at this poor deluded creature, who had so little knowledge of his situation.

"You mistake your condition, my friend. You are very ill, notwithstanding this flicker of vitality. You have lain two whole days prostrated by a violent fever."

"That is no reason why I should not feel very well on the third, when the fever has left me. Flicker of vitality! Do you really imagine I am in danger?"

"I do not imagine it--it is a fact," said Dr. Berndt, a little piqued. "Seriously, I fear----"

"You need not fear anything at all," interrupted Max. "I have not the smallest intention of going over to the majority at present. But now, have the goodness to tell me exactly how I have been treated."

This clinging to life, so bluntly expressed by a patient on whom he had passed sentence of death without recall, seemed to disconcert the doctor extremely. He was silent, and looked flustered. It was only when the question was reiterated in a louder key, and with audible impatience, that he vouchsafed the desired details, and related, with much self-complacency, the various measures he had adopted to rescue the sick man from the jaws of death.

Max listened rather disdainfully.

"My respected colleague, you might have done better," said he, in his rough, outspoken way. "I don't approve of violent remedies. I never have recourse to them in slight cases, but let Nature act, doing what I can to assist her."

"But this was not a slight case," cried the little doctor, who, in spite of his mild temper, was

beginning to get angry. "I tell you, your condition was a most precarious one. It is so still, indeed, as you will find when this momentary excitement is over."

"And I tell you that I am doing very well," cried Max, still louder; "and that there is not the smallest prospect of any danger. I am a decided opponent of this method of treatment. I consider it useless, injurious even. You may thank God that my robust constitution has held out under these experiments, otherwise you would have had the death of a brother practitioner on your conscience."

Dr. Berndt grew purple with indignation.

"I follow the method of my friend. Dr. ----, Professor of Therapeutics, and consulting-physician to his Excellency. The professor is one of our first authorities. He holds a most important position at the University here, and his system is attended with marvellous success."

The little doctor raised his mild voice to as loud and shrill a pitch as possible, but in vain, for Max with his strong lungs quite overpowered him.

"I don't care a rap for the Professor of Therapeutics. We have far greater authorities at our University of Z----, and our success is infinitely more marvellous. But we do not cling to tradition and routine, like you gentlemen here in this patriarchal R----."

Hereupon the two medical men fell into a professional dispute, which grew so violent that Frau Christine hurried in from the next room, in alarm. But, on crossing the threshold, she stopped, petrified with astonishment at the sight which met her view. Dr. Brunnow, who, according to all rule and precedent, should have lain calmly on his death-bed, sat upright, gesticulating, and pouring forth volley after volley of argument on his colleague, raking him with the fire of his proofs and refutations; while the colleague himself, who, ten minutes before, had, as it were, stolen into the room on tiptoe, so fearful was he of disturbing the dying man, now stood before his patient in a state of violent excitement, and fought with both arms in the air, whilst he in vain sought to stem that torrent of speech and put in a word in his turn. Failing altogether in this, he seized his hat at last in a rage, and cried:

"If you know everything so much better than anyone else, treat yourself in future, if you please. I shall let the Governor know your precise state, and shall at the same time tell his Excellency that I have never yet met with such a patient--a man who yesterday lay at death's door, and who to-day flings the grossest insults at me and at the whole body of the faculty here. You are right, sir. Such a constitution as yours is unique. You put every diagnosis to shame. I wish you a good-morning."

So saying, he left the room tempestuously. Frau Christine, who had not understood a word of the business, stared after him in astonishment, and then went up to the invalid for an explanation.

"Goodness me, what is the matter? What has happened? The doctor is running away in a perfect fury, and you----"

"Let him run," said Max, leaning back composedly. "That man and brother is bent on making of me a candidate for heaven. He has very nearly killed me with his stupid proceedings. Now I will take my treatment into my own hands, and set about it at once, too. Dear Frau Christine, I do beg of you, in the most earnest and affectionate manner, bring me something to eat."

It might be about an hour later that Agnes Moser, after a short interval of rest, of which she stood but too much in need, prepared again to take her place by the bedside whence during the last few days she had hardly stirred. Meanwhile Dr. Brunnow had followed out his own prescription with an exactitude which left nothing to be desired, much to the delight of Frau Christine, who thought the doctor showed great discernment in his mode of treatment. But in vain did she preach to him to try and get a little sleep. Max declared that he did not want to sleep, and occupied himself exclusively with watching the door through which Agnes must enter. When in the short space of a quarter of an hour he presumed to ask three times where his nurse was, and what she could be doing, Christine grew somewhat irritated. She looked the patient sternly in the face, and said, without any beating about the bush:

"What's all this that is going on between you and Fräulein Agnes, Doctor? There is something underneath, something hidden; I have seen that a long while."

Max preferred to make no answer; but this availed him little. The housekeeper went on, in her blunt, straightforward way:

"Don't trouble yourself to try and impose on me. I have not been in and out of this room all these days for nothing. Do you think I have not seen how the poor child has been fretting, and the change that came over you whenever Agnes went near you? I know all about it, I assure you; you won't deceive me."

"Frau Christine, what a wonderfully wise woman you are!" said the young doctor. "You sit there and tell me things which three days ago I did not so much as guess at, and of which Fräulein Agnes is now as ignorant as I was. But, unfortunately, you are right. Nemesis has

overtaken me. I am hopelessly, head over ears, in love."

Christine nodded. "I have known that ever so long. But what is to come of it? I have not worried myself much about the matter so far, because Dr. Berndt made so sure you were going to die, and that would have ended everything; but now it seems there is no likelihood of your popping off at present----"

"No likelihood at all," interpolated the patient.

"Well, then, I should like to ask what is to become of you and my young lady?"

"What is to become of us? Why, a married couple, to be sure. What else should become of us?"

Contrary to Max's expectation, Frau Christine did not appear shocked or horrified at this answer. Though a Catholic herself, she was the widow of a Protestant, and during the course of her married life she had imbibed many heretical notions; among these figured a strong dislike to convents and the conventual system. The girl's determination to withdraw from the world had never found favour in her sight; in her opinion, a myrtle-wreath would become her young mistress far better than a nun's veil. She was far, therefore, from disapproving of the scheme so boldly proposed by Dr. Brunnow, who had taken her fancy from the first. Nevertheless, she shook her head gravely:

"There will never be any question of that. Have you forgotten that Fräulein Agnes is going into a convent?"

"Oh, that plan will come to nothing," decided Max. "She is not in yet, and I will take care she does not go in. But--this is most important--you must not tell your young lady that I am better, nor say a word to her about my discussion with the doctor, and the excellent appetite I have since developed. I will tell her all that myself."

Christine looked rather startled at receiving these instructions.

"Doctor, you will not be so unscrupulous as to go and act a part with that poor child?" she asked.

"I am horribly unscrupulous in such matters," declared the doctor, with sweet, equable frankness. "Besides, all I ask of you is to keep silence until I have spoken to Fräulein Agnes. We'll settle the rest afterwards."

The required promise could not be given, for at this juncture Agnes came in. She did, indeed, look very pale, and the anxious inquiring look she turned on Christine told her utter despondency. With a noiseless step she went up to the sick man's bed, and, bending over him, asked in a trembling voice how he felt.

That prudent youth, Dr. Brunnow, took good care not to display the fine animation which his late medical discussion had called forth in a manner surprising as it was satisfactory. He thought fit, by way of answer, feebly to hold out his hand to the young girl. Max was well aware that in his supposed danger he had a most powerful ally, and as, according to his own confession, he was horribly unscrupulous, he did not hesitate an instant to take advantage of the situation.

Frau Christine thought he was acting abominably, but she was too well disposed towards the secret design which prompted this abominable conduct to rise in open revolt against it. She merely reported, therefore, that Dr. Berndt had called, but had left no new instructions, and seized the first opportunity of hurrying from the room and leaving the young people together.

Agnes had re-assumed her functions as nurse.

"Take your medicine now," she begged. "Dr. Berndt directed me to give it regularly. He only wrote this new prescription yesterday evening."

"Dr. Berndt gives me up for lost," replied Max, "so it is quite useless for me to take his physic."

"No, no; don't think that," entreated Agnes, soothingly, her anxious face belying her words. "He only said that your illness might take a dangerous turn----"

"I spoke to him myself this morning," interrupted the young doctor, "and heard his sentence from his own lips. He believes my wounds to be mortal."

Agnes set down the medicine bottle, and hid her face in her hands. Presently he heard a half-stifled sob.

"Agnes, would it grieve you if I were to die?"

The question came in a remarkably soft and tender tone from Dr. Brunnow's lips--mildness and tenderness not being among that gentleman's ordinary characteristics. He received no answer, but the sobs grew louder, more passionate. Taking the girl's hands, he drew them gently from her face all deluged in tears, and went on:

"I think I have betrayed so much to you, that you need not hesitate to confess those tears are falling for me. It is only within the last few days, since I have been under your care, that I have known how matters really stood with me, or, may I say, with us both?"

The girl had sunk on her knees by the bedside and buried her face in the pillows. For all reply she wept more bitterly and despairingly than ever, but she offered no resistance when the sick man put his arm round her and drew her gently to him. And then followed a wonderful event--Max Brunnow, throwing overboard his programme with its many clauses, launched into a fervent, heart-stirring declaration of love, a declaration which had but one defect--in form and vivacity of expression it was such as no dying lips could have uttered.

Poor Agnes was far too agitated to think of this; and moreover Dr. Berndt had so impressed upon her the utter hopelessness of the case, that she dared not admit to herself even the possibility of recovery. She took the patient's animation for the excitement of fever, and truly believed that she was witnessing the last transient flicker of life's flame--the gleam which precedes its final extinction.

"I shall never forget you," she sobbed. "What in life I never should have owned to you, now in the presence of death I may confess--my love is endless, unspeakable; it will reach beyond the grave. It is no sin to think of a departed one, and to send messages on the wings of prayer--this I shall do daily, when the quiet convent walls have shut me in for ever."

Earnest and touching as were her accents, this confession hardly satisfied Max. He had not the smallest wish to be worshipped as a departed spirit, and communications with the other world were by no means to his taste.

"It would be so, in case of my death," he said; "but what if I should live, after all?" Agnes raised her dark, tearful eyes, with an expression of the utmost perplexity. She had evidently not thought of this. "I believe that would not quite suit you," cried Max, resentfully.

"Not suit me? Oh, how can you say so! Why," cried the young girl, with a burst of feeling, "I would willingly give my life to save yours, if that were possible!"

"You shall not be asked to give your life," declared Max, whose conscience smote him as he saw how true and deep was the poor girl's grief. "All you will have to give up is a foolish idea which would make us both miserable were you to cling to it. Agnes, you are mistaken in thinking my condition a hopeless one. I have, in fact, hardly been in danger at all; and this morning any doubt as to my recovery has altogether disappeared. If I left you in error a quarter of an hour longer than was necessary, I did so because I was determined, at any cost, to obtain from you an avowal of your affection. As a convalescent, I well knew I should sigh for it in vain, but now you have spoken your confession, and I shall hold you to your word. It will be quite useless to go back--to try and recall what you have said. You may refuse me a hundred times, it will make no difference. In spite of all and everything, you will be my wife."

Agnes started up. "Never. You must not think of that. I have given myself to a religious life. I must return to the convent very shortly."

"Not if I know it," answered the young doctor, stoutly. "The convent people have no voice in the matter. Happily, you are quite free as yet; you have taken no vows."

"I have taken vows mentally, to myself I have promised the abbess and my confessor, and this promise is as binding as an oath taken at the altar."

"I have no objection whatever to your taking an oath before the altar," remarked Max, "but I must be present on the occasion, and swear myself in at the same time, as is usual at nuptial ceremonies. If the lady abbess and our friend the confessor attempt to interfere, they will have to deal with me. I shall soon settle them. I'll make such a stir among the whole spiritual community, that---"

"For Heaven's sake, do not be so violent!" implored the girl, with deep anxiety. "This excitement may be most hurtful, may be fatal to you. Do--do compose yourself, I entreat you!"

"We two must come to a clear understanding first," declared Dr. Brunnow, in his old dictatorial way. Then he poured forth on Agnes a torrent of argument, of reasons irrefutable, such as he had lately showered on his unfortunate colleague, proving to her, clear as day, that she was his betrothed now, and that, come what might, she must one day be his wife, until the poor girl, quite bewildered and stupefied, began at last to think he was right, and the matter really stood as he put it. It would indeed have required a more energetic nature than hers to offer effectual resistance here, when this moribund, of whom a last leave had just been taken, whose memory was to have been cherished beyond the grave, and with whom spiritual communion alone was henceforth to be held, suddenly rallied, made an unexpected sortie in the shape of a most earthly offer of marriage, and fairly took by storm the fortress which refused to capitulate. Agnes still wept, it is true, and still said No, no, it could never be, she would go back to the convent; but when Max, unheeding this, took her in his arms and kissed her, she bore it with docility, and the young man himself seemed to entertain no doubt whatever of his victory, for he murmured *sotto voce*, and drawing a long breath, "Well, we have managed that business successfully, thanks to the remarkable stupidity of my worthy colleague. Blessings on the old

blockhead!"

CHAPTER XV.

Dr. Brunnow was, unfortunately, soon to learn from experience that the quality he vaunted in his colleague may, under given circumstances, lead to serious complications. The day passed by quickly enough, and, in spite of all the excitement he had gone through, the patient found himself in such excellent case that even Agnes, in whose mind grave doubt had lingered, began to believe in the fact of his safety.

Evening was drawing on apace, and it was quite dusk out of doors when Agnes came in, carrying a carefully-shaded lamp, and informed Max that an elderly gentleman, a certain Dr. Franz, had just arrived, and after inquiring minutely and with much interest as to the state of his, Dr. Brunnow's, health, had begged to be allowed to see him. He called, he said, at the request of a professional friend, and was anxious personally to convince himself of the well-being of the patient, to whom he sent a written message.

Max took the card, on which a few words were pencilled.

"Dr. Franz? I suppose my respected colleague cannot get over this morning's astounding resurrection, and means to have an official report of the case drawn up in due form. I will give the gentleman----"

Suddenly he stopped. As his eye fell on the handwriting, he started violently, and an expression of alarm came over his features, while his fingers closed convulsively on the card. Agnes, who had raised the lamp-shade to enable him to read it, was struck by the change in him.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, "Do you know this Dr. Franz?"

In spite of the convent education, they had got so far as this caressing little epithet "dear" in the course of the day.

"Yes, I have known him some time," said Max, collecting himself with an effort-try as he would, however, he could not speak with quite his wonted steadiness. "I will see him, certainly, at once; and do me a favour, Agnes. Leave us together while he is here, and take care that we are not disturbed."

Agnes looked a little puzzled. Max had hardly let her stir from his side during the day, and now he was sending her from him. Fortunately, the light was too subdued for her to notice the young man's suppressed agitation; she quieted herself with the thought that, no doubt, a medical consultation was to be held, and went away to tell the new-comer he was expected.

The stranger, a grey-haired man of meagre form and stooping gait, at once obeyed the summons. On entering, he closed the door of the sick-room quickly behind him, and hurried up to the invalid, who had raised himself in his bed, and stretched out both hands to his visitor.

"Father! For God's sake, what brought you here? How could you run such a risk?"

For all answer, Dr. Rudolph Brunnow put his arm round his son's shoulders, and scanned his features with a careful, anxious scrutiny.

"You are better? They told me so outside. Thank God!"

"But how did you hear of my accident?" questioned Max. "You were not to have been told until it was all happily over. I did not want to cause you useless anxiety."

"I received a telegram from your doctor, yesterday. He communicated to me that you were badly wounded and in a critical condition. I was to hold myself prepared for the worst. An hour later I was on the road hither, and I reached this town by the next express."

"A confounded old fool!" burst out Max, in a fury. "Is it not enough that he has tormented me and all the people about me with this rubbish, that now he must bring you here, too? If I could have guessed it, this morning, I would have taken him to book in another fashion."

Dr. Brunnow looked at his son in speechless amazement. Then he heaved a deep-drawn sigh of relief.

"Well, if you can fulminate in that manner, things cannot be so very bad, I fancy. I feared to find you in a very different state. How was the danger so speedily averted?"

"There never was any danger. A good deal of fever, a little weakness through loss of blood, that was all. But now tell me, father----"

"By-and-by. I must look at this wound first myself" interrupted his father, still visibly agitated. "I shall not be easy until I have satisfied myself with my own eyes."

He took off the bandage, and began to examine the appearance of the wound. During this investigation his brow cleared, and at length he said, with a little shake of the head:

"You are right. The wound is deep, and may have produced some serious symptoms at first, but it is not one involving danger to life, I don't understand your surgeon."

"Heaven have mercy on the patient who falls into his hands!" said Max, emphatically. "But notwithstanding that unlucky telegram, I cannot think how you could resolve on coming to this place. You know that you are under a ban--that the old sentence is still in force. Directly they recognise you, you will be arrested, and imprisoned in the citadel again."

"Do not make yourself uneasy," replied his father. "There is no fear whatever of discovery. I am staying at an inn in one of the suburbs under an assumed name; besides, I am quite a stranger to this town. No one here is personally acquainted with me except"--a cloud came over his face--"except the Governor, and it is not likely I shall meet him. We have both of us good reasons to avoid each other."

"No matter; with every hour you spend here, you are incurring fresh risk to your freedom, your life. Did not you think of all this when you undertook the journey?"

"No," returned Brunnow, his voice faltering with deep emotion. "I heard that my only son lay at death's door, and I said to myself that, as a professional man, I might possibly find a way to save him. I had no time to think of anything else."

Max clasped his father's hand tightly, and tears glistened in his eyes, as he answered:

"I did not think you set so much value on my life, father. Forgive me if I have sometimes doubted your affection for me. I have not deserved that you should sacrifice yourself in this way. I have caused you worry and care enough with my obstinacy, which has long refused to bend to any authority."

His father stopped him.

"Let that be, Max," said he, with a wave of the hand. "We will forget all that has come between us hitherto. The terrible anxiety of the last four-and-twenty hours has taught me what it would be to lose the one source of happiness, the one hope which remains to me in life. Do not accuse yourself. I, too, have been unjust. I have never been willing to understand that your nature is so differently constituted to mine, you cannot think on all points as I do. But I trust this hour will have shown you what you are to your father, in spite of any little misunderstandings. Only get strong again, then all will be well."

He stooped, and pressed his lips to his son's forehead--a mark of tenderness which had long been out of use between them. Since his childhood. Max had received no such caress from his father; he responded to it with the heartiest warmth.

"You shall not have to complain of your stubborn son, the 'realist,' again," he said in a low voice. "I shall never forget, father, all that you have risked in my behalf. But now, promise me to leave again at once. You have convinced yourself that I am in no sort of danger. A real peril, however, exists for you so long as you are on this side the border. I entreat you once again, return as quickly as possible."

"I will start to-morrow morning," declared Brunnow; "but I shall come up again early to see you before I go. No remonstrances, Max. Do not distress yourself with needless anxiety. I tell you, discovery is out of the question. But now I will leave you. You are greatly in want of rest, and have had far more excitement than is good for you in your condition."

"Bah! it won't do me any harm. I have a first-rate constitution," replied Max, reflecting that he had that day gone through a lively professional skirmish and a betrothal without detriment to his health. He preferred, however, to say nothing to his father of his love-affairs for the present, so he chose another topic.

"You must have been not a little surprised to have to come and look me up here at the Government-house?"

"That I certainly was; and the name of Councillor Moser, who, as I hear, is an official connected with the Chancellery, was quite unfamiliar to me. I suppose you have made the gentleman's acquaintance during your stay here, and have come to be on friendly terms with him."

"Well, I can't say we are exactly on friendly terms," said his son, dryly. "This Councillor is a splendid specimen of the loyal, orthodox type, the very ideal of a bureaucrat. He has a nervous attack whenever he hears the word 'revolution;' and on the first day of our acquaintance he closed his doors on me because I bear a name to which, in his opinion, the stigma of treason attaches."

"We have the more cause for gratitude that, notwithstanding his prejudices, he has received you into his house. We are both under a deep obligation to him. Unfortunately, I cannot tender him my thanks in person----"

"Don't think of such a thing, for Heaven's sake! He scents a rebel a mile off; and though he does not know you, his instinct of loyalty would infallibly warn him that a traitor was near at hand."

"Max, do not speak in such a tone of the man who has accorded to you hospitality and attention," said Brunnow, reprovingly. "You are still the same old Max, I see. But it must be owned you have a stalwart frame and a robust constitution, which would astonish more experienced people than this Esculapius of yours. Though the injury presents no actual danger, it is serious enough to deprive any ordinary patient of a fancy for conversation, and here are you indulging in quips at the expense of your host!"

Max thought to himself that he owed his welcome to that house to other influences than the generosity of its master. He did not explain this, however; but with very natural anxiety again urged his father to go, and to use every possible precaution to ensure his safety. Dr. Brunnow, who himself saw that a longer stay in the sick-room must excite surprise, yielded to his son's wish. He took a hasty but affectionate leave of the young man, and went.

Passing through the apartments occupied by the Moser family, he was met in the outer anteroom by Councillor Moser himself. That gentleman approached the stranger in his calm, solemn manner, and said inquiringly:

"Dr. Franz, I believe?"

Brunnow bowed consent.

"That is my name; and I probably have the pleasure of speaking to Councillor Moser?"

"Precisely," replied that personage, with a stiff inclination of the head. "My daughter tells me that you are a physician, and that you have called at Dr. Berndt's request. I should like to hear from you whether what the women say is correct. I am told that the patient's condition has greatly improved during the course of the day, and that there is now every hope of recovery. From what I gathered from your colleague this morning, I should say this is most unlikely--impossible, in fact."

"All danger is indeed over," said the other. "I have no doubt whatever that Dr. Brunnow's life will be spared. He owes his safety, of course, in a great measure to the prompt succour and devoted care he has received in your house. You must have been put to great inconvenience on his account during the last few days."

"Yes, indeed, to very considerable inconvenience," sighed the Councillor, who hardly knew whether to rejoice or to feel wrathful that the dreaded catastrophe had been averted, that there was to be no death in the house, after all. It would be just as bad to read in the papers: "The son of that Dr. Brunnow, whose name is so well known in connection with the late rebellion, has happily recovered from the effects of his severe injuries. He has throughout his illness been carefully tended at the house of Councillor Moser."

Brunnow, for his part, regarded with looks full of interest this old gentleman who appeared so perplexed and concerned. Knowing nothing of Agnes's independent action, he attributed the kind treatment his son had experienced to the Councillor himself; and judging by the hints Max had given of his host's character, he saw in Moser a man who, in a moment of need, had risen superior to all personal considerations, and had magnanimously come to the rescue of a political enemy.

"Dr. Brunnow," said he, speaking from the overflowing gratitude of a father's heart--"Dr. Brunnow will, I trust, soon be able himself to express to you his deep sense of your kindness; in the meantime, allow me, as his old friend, to address you in his name. I--we thank you, sir--thank you most heartily for that which you have done."

"It was a Christian duty," asserted the Councillor, agreeably flattered by these words, which so plainly betokened real and deep emotion; "a duty I should in any case have fulfilled; still, it is gratifying to find that one's good offices are appreciated by those to whom they have been tendered."

"Believe me, we appreciate them fully, thoroughly. We know all that a man in your position, and holding your opinions, must have had to combat in the exercise of your charity. You have acted with noble self-abnegation."

So saying, and carried away by his feelings, he held out his hand to the old gentleman.

Poor Councillor Moser! That instinct of loyalty so vaunted by Max played him false at this moment. No inward voice warned him of his error as he took that attainted hand, and gave it a friendly pressure. It was so pleasant to meet at length with some one who knew how properly to estimate his conduct in this fatal business. Agnes and Frau Christine behaved as though it had all been a matter of course, but this stranger took a truer view of the case, and thereby at once gained for himself the Councillor's highest esteem.

"Will you not come into the parlour for a few minutes?" he said. "I shall be glad----"

"Thank you, no," answered Brunnow, remembering, rather late, that it would not do for him to show too marked an interest, or to be too demonstrative in his gratitude. "I cannot possibly stay longer--I have another professional visit to make. But I will come round to-morrow morning early to see the patient, if you will permit me."

"With the greatest pleasure!" cried the Councillor. "I shall be delighted to see you again, sir. Pray be careful. The passage is but imperfectly lighted."

He had opened the door for his guest himself, but the latter stood irresolute.

"Must I take the stairs to the right or the left in order to reach the entrance? I came in hurriedly, and did not notice the way."

"I will accompany you," said Moser, courteously. "It is so easy to lose one's self among all these corridors and turnings when one is not well acquainted with them. I will take you as far as the main entrance."

Dr. Brunnow, who really could not have found his way alone, and for whom it was most undesirable to wander to and fro in these courts and galleries, accepted the offer, and they walked down the corridor together. This corridor connected the side wing, in which Mr. Moser's apartments were situated, with the main building, and led direct to the great hall of the Castle. Here, on either side, were doors giving ingress to the Chancellery and the various bureaux, and here was the foot of the grand staircase, which led up to the Governor's private dwelling above.

The two gentlemen had just stepped out of the dim corridor into the brightly-lighted hall, when Brunnow gave a great start and turned precipitately, almost as though he would have retraced his steps. It was too late. He and his companion stood close before the Governor.

The Baron appeared to have only just arrived. His carriage was still before the door, and he himself was talking to the Superintendent of Police, who was about to take his leave. A cloud lay on Raven's brow, but it cleared a little as he caught sight of the Councillor. Interrupting the conversation in which he was engaged, he asked of the new-comer, with evident interest:

"Is this true, Councillor, that I hear from Berndt? Young Dr. Brunnow is declared to be out of danger? Coming after the previous unfavourable reports, I must say the news surprised me very much."

"I am as much astonished as your Excellency," the Councillor assured him. "I could not believe it at first, but the statement has been confirmed to me in another quarter--by this gentleman here, Dr. Franz, a friend of the patient's, who has just left him."

Raven turned to the stranger, who was standing a little aside, and whom he had not yet observed. The full light from the great chandelier fell on the tall, bent form. For a few seconds the Baron stood motionless, rooted to the ground, while his eyes rested with a piercing gaze on the face before him. Then a sudden pallor overspread his features, and he pressed his lips tightly together, as though to keep back the exclamation which sought to escape them.

But Raven's discomposure was of short duration. Next minute his self-command had returned to him; indeed, a movement on the Superintendent's part quickly recalled to his mind the fact that he was watched. He quietly waited until the Councillor had finished what he had to say, and then addressed himself to that gentleman's companion.

"It would be a pleasure to me to hear you confirm so favourable an opinion," he said. "I had sent round my own physician to the patient, but, unfortunately, the doctor himself fell ill on the first day of the treatment, and had to abandon the case to his deputy. The bulletin I received from Dr. Berndt this morning was so vague that I think I must ask you to supplement it by a few details. Not here in the vestibule, of course. Will you come in with me for two or three minutes?"

Brunnow was less accustomed than the Baron to dissimulate his feelings; and though he succeeded in controlling his voice and features generally, his eyes glowed with a look half of pain, half of enmity, as they rested on the speaker.

"Does your Excellency take so strong an interest in this young doctor?" he returned.

"Unquestionably. Both I and the Superintendent of Police here"--Raven laid a slight but perceptible emphasis on the word, as he indicated the person named--"are under an obligation to

him. You have probably heard how this accident came about. Having hastened to the assistance of this gentleman, some of whose officers had been injured, he was wounded while rendering to them medical aid. You will understand, therefore, that some detailed account of his condition will be very acceptable to me."

Brunnow understood the hint. He saw the vigilant look in the eyes of the Superintendent, who was listening with quiet and, apparently, merely casual attention to the short dialogue, keeping a sharp watch on the Baron and himself the while. He understood all the danger of his position; still he hesitated a moment, struggling, as it were, with himself.

"I am at your service," he said at length, laconically.

"Will you come with me, then?"

Raven turned, and took leave of the other gentlemen briefly; then with the doctor he mounted the stairs which led to his own private apartments.

"Who is that gentleman, may I ask?" said the Superintendent, looking after the pair as they disappeared from view.

"A most agreeable person," replied the Councillor, with an important air; "a colleague of Dr. Brunnow's, and a very near friend, I should suppose, for he seems to take a great interest in him."

"Oh, oh, a friend of Dr. Brunnow's! I thought the young man had no friends or acquaintances here, now that Assessor Winterfeld has left. Has the gentleman--Dr. Franz, I think you said--paid frequent visits to the patient?"

"No; he came to-day for the first time, but he is to call again to-morrow. I must say he thanked me most warmly for my disinterested kindness, and alluded in very delicate terms to the embarrassments which the presence--the involuntary presence, it is true--of the young man in my house must have brought upon me. An instance of the noblest self-abnegation he styled my conduct in this matter. An exceedingly agreeable person, and a clever doctor too; I could see that at a glance. My instinct in such matters rarely deceives me."

"That I can well believe," returned the Superintendent, about whose lips there played a smile half derisive, half pitying. "This exceedingly agreeable person seems to have found as prompt favour in the Governor's eyes as in yours. It is not the Baron's way, in general, to introduce a complete stranger to his private apartments in this unceremonious manner. Perhaps he was not sorry to withdraw this Dr. Franz from my society."

"Why should he wish that?" asked the Councillor, unsuspectingly. "His Excellency merely desires to obtain some reliable information as to Dr. Brunnow's state."

"Of course; and I have no doubt such information will be amply afforded him. Good evening, Councillor. Don't push the abnegation business too far. They may be asking too much of you one of these days."

With this piece of advice the Superintendent went off, and the Councillor, to whom his words were as Greek, shook his head with dignified gravity at the other's light speech; then, secure beneath the ægis of his infallible instinct, he returned to his own dwelling. The Governor and his companion had meanwhile reached the upper story, and entered the former's apartments. Raven impatiently signed to the servants to withdraw, gave brief orders that he was on no pretext to be disturbed, and shut himself in his study with Brunnow.

As yet, no word had been exchanged between them, and even now that they were quite alone, silence still reigned for a minute or two. It almost seemed as though each shrank from speaking the first word. After an interval of more than twenty years, the former friends stood face to face. In the old days they had been adolescents, fired with all the enthusiasm, replete with the vigour of youth; now they met as men who since that time had severally lived through half a generation--the one still in the prime of strength and manhood, with the tall commanding figure and proud bearing which bespeak the habit of authority, his thick dark hair showing no silver threads, his stern rigid countenance no mark of age--and, as a contrast, the other! Barely a year his companion's senior, and yet to all appearances an old man, with the grey head and stooping form of advanced years, and a face deeply lined with the furrows of care and suffering. In the eyes alone there sparkled a gleam of the old fire, the last lingering trace of a long-bygone time.

"Rudolph!" said the Baron, at length. His tone betrayed mighty, well-nigh uncontrollable emotion, and he moved forward as though he would have approached his old friend; but the latter drew back, and asked in an icy tone:

"What may your Excellency wish of me?"

Raven frowned. "Why such words between us? Will you not recognise me? I knew you at once, by your eyes. You are still the same man, though altered in much, in almost everything." His look travelled slowly over Brunnow's face and figure as he spoke. The other smiled a smile of intense bitterness.

"I have grown old before my time. A man does not wear well in exile, when each day is spent in battling with the petty cares and miseries of life. Baron von Raven has come better through the fight. Such pitiful grievances do not attain to the height on which your Excellency stands."

"Once more I beg of you to drop this tone, Rudolph," said the Baron, earnestly. "I know all that lies between us, and I have no thought of seeking a reconciliation which I feel to be impossible. We are foes now--so be it; but it is a paltry vengeance on your part to insist with such scornful emphasis on a title to which I attach as little importance as you yourself can do. However we may stand towards each other, to you I must still be Arno Raven. Call me by the name which has been familiar to you."

Brunnow stood silent, with a moody, downcast look.

"I can divine what has brought you hither," went on Raven; "but even such a motive hardly excuses the temerity of the step. You are fully aware of the risk you run on this side the border, and your son is out of danger."

"But yesterday I believed him to be on his deathbed. My own safety could not be thought of at such a time. I felt I must hasten to him at all hazards."

The Baron made no reply to this; perhaps he told himself that in a like case he would not have acted differently.

"You understand why I insisted on your coming with me," he continued, after a pause. "There were witnesses to our meeting. The Superintendent of Police had his eye upon us. I almost think some suspicion was already dawning in his mind. It was necessary to crush this in the bud; and a lengthened interview with me will serve you as a sort of guarantee."

"No doubt; it would naturally be supposed that the Governor of R---- would at once give over any suspicious person into the hands of the police. I was prepared for that when you recognised me."

"Moderate your tone, Rudolph," said Raven, warningly; but the other went on unmoved:

"And I really do not know to what caprice I owe my rescue. But to be candid, Arno, I had a longing to meet you once more face to face, else I would rather have given myself up to that man's myrmidons than have followed you."

Raven bit his lip.

"Since our parting you have so boldly and openly proclaimed yourself my enemy that I ought to have been prepared for some such attitude on your part. You will remember, however, that in our young days I never submitted to an insult, and in the course of years my temper has not grown more enduring in this respect. So do not misuse your temporary advantages, or forget that your position bars me from seeking satisfaction. Let me, at least, feel that I may continue to address you without loss of dignity."

These words made little or no impression on Brunnow. His manner was, if possible, more hostile than before, as he replied:

"I see you have not unlearned the tone of command. I remember it of old. Even in those days the man who sought to rise in revolt against your will yielded in the end, cowed by that sovereign mien. As for me, though truly mine is no slavish nature, I gave myself up to you body and soul. I worshipped you with a blind worship; I followed whithersoever you led, for the goal before you must, I thought, be the highest and best--until one day my idol crumbled to dust, fell shattered to the ground. Do not try to exercise the old power over me. I bent to you only while I believed in you. That is over and past long ago; but you, in whom ambition has ever usurped the place of a heart, you little guess all that I lost when that faith went from me."

A long oppressive pause ensued. Raven had turned away, and stood some minutes in silence. At length he said:

"If once you loved me, you hate me now all the more intensely."

"True," was the short, energetic reply.

"I have proofs of it," continued Raven. "But a short time ago I was marvelling how one of my youngest subalterns had found courage to hurl insults at me openly, in the face of all the world. I forgot that he had been in your school. Of course! Winterfeld was staying at your house; he is your son's friend and yours. Well, he has shown himself an apt scholar. The thrusts he essays against me betray the master who instructed him."

"You are mistaken. George Winterfeld is displaying his own powers--admirable powers, certainly, which astonish myself. He kept his secret from me, as from others, and the book, which he forwarded to me two days ago, took me altogether by surprise. But I do not deny that my heart endorses every word that stands in it, and there are thousands who will agree with me. Beware, Arno! He is the first who ventures to defy the omnipotent Baron von Raven; this is the

first storm menacing your high estate. Others will follow in its wake, and they will shake and undermine the ground on which you stand, until it trembles and yawns beneath your feet, and you will sink to depths great as the height to which you have risen."

"You think so?" asked the Baron, disdainfully. "You should know me better. I may be overthrown, and in my fall mortally injure myself and crush others. To sink would in this case imply a craven surrender, and that is not in my nature. Besides, we have not reached that point yet. I know all the enmities which this attack will let loose upon me; my foes have long waited for some such occasion; but they shall not taste the triumph of seeing me abandon a position which I have so long maintained and will never voluntarily quit. Men do not readily forgive success such as I have achieved."

"It was dearly bought," said Brunnow, coldly. "You paid for it with your honour."

"Rudolph!" thundered the Baron, with terrible vehemence.

"With your honour, I repeat it. Must I remind you of the day when our association was betrayed, our papers seized, ourselves arrested and cast into prison? Must I name to you the traitor to whom we owed all this, and who was arrested with us, merely as a matter of form? I and the others were put on our trial, and sentenced to long years of captivity, from which fate a foolhardy escape alone delivered me. After a short imprisonment that traitor was set at liberty, no charge being preferred against him. Weathering the storm which cost his friends and fellow-thinkers their freedom and their means of existence, Arno Raven emerged from it as the secretary, the familiar, the future son-in-law of the Minister in power, and commenced his brilliant career in the service of the cause he had sworn to combat with all his strength. That was the end of our dreams of liberty, of all our youthful hopes and illusions."

Every drop of blood had receded from the Baron's face. His breast heaved with a short, quick, panting movement, and his hands were clenched convulsively.

"And if I tell you now that this so-called treachery was nothing more than an imprudent act, an unhappy error of judgment, for which I have bitterly, cruelly atoned? If I tell you that you yourselves, with your over-hasty condemnation, your mad mistrust, drove me into the ranks of your enemies?"

"I make answer that you have forfeited all claim to be believed."

"Do not provoke me further, Rudolph," panted Raven. "You know that I would have borne so much from no other man. I have given you my word, and you must believe me."

"No, Arno." Brunnow's voice was hard and contemptuous. "Had you at the time I was pining in prison, when I could not understand, would not understand, that you had been the traitor--had you then stepped before me and spoken as you have spoken now, your word would have had more weight with me than the testimony of the whole world--than the clearest, most convincing proofs. The two decades which lie between now and then have taught me another lesson. Baron von Raven, whose name heads the list of the enemies and persecutors of that cause to which he once consecrated his life; the Governor of R---, whose iron despotic will sets all justice, both abstract and legal, at defiance, who but a few days since shot down the people in whose ranks he once stood--this man I utterly decline to believe."

He at whom these crushing accusations were hurled stood sombre and silent, his eyes fixed on the ground, his features working with some strong emotion; but whether it were shame, anger, or grief which moved him, who should say? As Brunnow spoke the last words, however, he suddenly drew himself up to his full height, and his eyes flashed with the old haughty, unbending spirit, as he answered in a harsh tone:

"It is useless, then, to waste another word on the subject. My explanations had reference to that first catastrophe alone. You decline to hear them--well and good, there is an end of the matter. What has come since then has come by my own deliberate choice and resolution. How I may have been driven to make such a choice need not be considered now. I allege no extenuating circumstances; enough, I have acted of my own free will, and I am ready to answer for my deeds and their consequences. Since the day when that great gap opened between us, our ways have lain so far apart that it would be useless now for us to attempt to understand the current which has borne us on. What can an idealist conceive of ambition and the desire for power? Perhaps to you it may appear as the germ of a crime, for the very idea of it is based on the subjection of others. I was not created to linger out my life in exile, to console myself for all my shipwrecked hopes and wasted energies with the thought that I had remained true to my ideal. Condemn me if you will: I do not recognise you as my judge."

No reply followed. After a moment's silence, Brunnow turned to go, still without speaking. Raven stepped before him, barring the way.

"What does this mean?" asked the Doctor. "You have said it; we have done with each other; any further word between us would be superfluous. Let me go."

"Not yet; we have to think of your safety. You will start at once on your return journey?"

"I shall not leave till to-morrow. I have promised my son to see him again."

"This is a very unnecessary delay," said the Baron. "You have convinced yourself that, as regards your son's health, there is nothing now to fear; danger will continue to exist for you until you have re-crossed the frontier. An express leaves at midnight. Remain here in my house until that hour, and then you shall be taken in my carriage to the station. Whatever suspicions may be abroad, no one will, in that case, venture to molest you."

"And if, later on, it were found out that the Governor himself had helped a rebel and an escaped prisoner on his road?"

"That is my business. I shall be well able to defend myself."

"I thank you," said Brunnow, in a trenchant tone. "I shall stay to-morrow, and shall then go to the station without the cover of the Raven baronial livery. You will easily understand that I prefer even a possible risk to your protection."

"Rudolph, be reasonable," warned the Baron. "This unhappy obstinacy may cost your freedom."

"What matters it to you? We are enemies, are we not? more bitter enemies than ever from this hour. We shall hardly meet again in this life, but think of my words, Arno. As yet you stand secure on the giddy height to which you have climbed; as yet you look down disdainfully on the dangers now gathering around you. A day will come when the foundations, whereon your power rests, will rock and reel, when all the world will fail you, and then"--here Brunnow's bent form was drawn erect with a certain majesty--"then you will see that it is of some worth to have kept one's faith in one's best hopes and aspirations. The testimony of my conscience has sustained me. You will have no stay, when the glittering edifice of your ambition crashes to the ground. You have been false to yourself. Farewell."

He turned and went. Raven stood, moody and motionless, looking after him.

"False to myself!" he repeated, in a low voice. "Even so--he is right."

CHAPTER XVI.

All was quiet in the town. The "energetic measures" had produced their effect, although they had not been carried into execution with such disastrous rigour as at first appeared. Colonel Wilten knew very well that, notwithstanding the Governor's high standing and authority, some portion of the responsibility would rest with him. On the troops being called out, he gave orders, therefore, that at the word of command the first round should be fired, not among the crowds assembled, but in the air. He counted on the blind panic which would ensue when it was found that recourse would be had to arms, and he was not deceived in his reckoning. The first discharge produced boundless fear and confusion, which were still further increased by the gathering darkness. None had sufficient calm and self-possession to note what had really happened. A wild tumult arose, but there was no attempt at the resistance which had been expected and feared. For one brief moment the masses swayed to and fro without plan or method, then all turned to seek refuge in flight. The Colonel had foreseen this, and had taken his precautions that a way should be opened for the fugitives to escape. A detachment of soldiers succeeded, without any very serious difficulty, in dispersing the dense crowds, and driving them back. Once broken up, they could not re-assemble, as all the central points of the town were occupied by the troops. After some hours, order was restored, and, thanks to the prudence and moderation of the commanding officer, this happy result was attained without bloodshed. Wounds and injuries enough had been inflicted in the press and crush of that hurried flight, but there had been no actual battle, and yet the military intervention had produced the desired effect. The more turbulent party in the town was intimidated; there was no repetition of the riots, and during the ensuing days the public peace had not been disturbed. Authority had once more triumphed, and the Governor still preserved the upper hand.

On the morning following his interview with Rudolph Brunnow, the Baron paid a visit to his sister-in-law's apartments. Madame von Harder's cold had been attended with serious consequences. She was ill, or, at least, declared herself to be so, and since her return to town had hardly left her bed. The Baron sent over regularly every morning to inquire after her health. He had seen neither her nor Gabrielle during the last few days, for the young girl had taken advantage of the pretext afforded her by her mother's illness, and had refrained from appearing at table. Since that sad, stormy interview, a meeting had thus been avoided.

The Baroness was lying on the sofa in the pose of a languid invalid, when her brother-in-law entered. He took no notice of Gabrielle, who was in the room, but went straight up to her mother, and asked, in the cold indifferent tone of one who is using a mere formula, how she felt that morning.

"Oh, I have gone through so much during all these terrible days!" sighed the Baroness. "I feel very ill indeed. The excitement and horror of that dreadful evening when they threatened to storm the Castle was too much for me."

"I expressly sent you word that every precaution had been taken to ensure the safety of the Castle," said Raven, impatiently. "You never would have been in danger, in any case. The popular demonstration was aimed at me, and me alone."

"But the noise, the advance of the troops, the firing in the town!" complained the lady. "It all had the most terrible effect on my nerves. How I wish I had complied with Colonel Wilten's wish, and had remained a few days longer in the country. But, indeed, as things now stand, that would be out of the question. Gabrielle is torturing me to death with her wilfulness and obstinacy. She declares now decidedly that she will not marry young Baron Wilten, and threatens to tell him so point-blank, if I let him come to her with an offer."

Raven took a rapid survey of the young girl, who sat at some distance from them, pale and silent, leaning her head on her hand; but even now he did not address her.

"It places me in the most embarrassing predicament," went on the Baroness. "I have given the Colonel positive assurances which cannot possibly be recalled. He and his son will be furious. Gabrielle says she has already spoken to you on the subject, Arno. Do you really approve of her conduct in this matter?"

"I?" asked the Baron, coldly. "I have renounced all pretension to influence your daughter."

"Good Heavens! what has happened?" asked the Baroness, starting up in alarm. "Has Gabrielle been showing you her stubbornness and self-will? I hope--I trust---"

"Let us not talk of it," said the Baron, cutting short her effusive speech. "This affair with Wilten must be settled by me, certainly. My own position towards the Colonel demands it. He would never forgive me if I were to allow his son to incur the humiliation of a refusal, where he confidently expects to be favourably received. I must say, the fault is altogether yours, Matilda. You will remember that I have held myself aloof from your plans from the first. You should have made sure of your daughter's consent before you committed yourself to positive promises. But now this matter must be discussed and decided. I am going over to see Wilten now, and during our conference I will take an opportunity of letting him know Gabrielle's answer. But to the subject which brought me hither. You are unwell?"

"Indeed I am--very unwell!" breathed the Baroness, faintly, sinking back in her cushions with an air of utter exhaustion.

"Well, I have a proposal to make to you. The doctor talks of nervous symptoms, and recommends change of air, particularly as the autumn here with us is often rough and inclement. Besides this, in the present state of affairs, there can be no thought of receptions or any social gatherings for some time to come. I would, therefore, advise you to accept the invitation you have received from your friend, the Countess Selteneck, of which you were lately speaking to me, and with your daughter to go and spend a few weeks in the capital."

Gabrielle, who had listened to the conversation, taking no part in it, started violently at the last words, and an involuntary exclamation escaped her lips.

"Yes," said Raven, turning towards her for the first time, and speaking with caustic irony; "I know that my scheme will meet your views."

The girl made no reply; but the Baroness's languid features acquired sudden animation.

"What, you approve of this visit?" she asked. "I do not deny that a short stay in the capital would be agreeable to me--that it would be pleasant to see my old friends and acquaintances again; but my regard for your wishes, my duties as the mistress of your house---"

"Need not bind you in this case," interposed the Baron. "I repeat to you that, under the present circumstances, entertainments are out of the question. We cannot say with certainty that there will be no renewal of the disturbances; and I should be sorry to expose you a second time to the perils of so much terror and excitement. I would, therefore, beg of you to make your preparations for the journey as speedily as possible. When you return, you will find us all peaceful and settled, I hope."

"I will comply with your wishes in this as in all else," declared the Baroness, to whom, in the present case, compliance was remarkably easy. "We shall very soon be ready to start; and I hope the change may be beneficial to Gabrielle, as well as to myself. She has grown so pale and listless of late, I am really beginning to fear for her health."

Raven appeared not to hear this last remark. He rose to go.

"So that is settled. Whatever you may require for your trip is at your disposal. But now I must leave you, Matilda. The carriage is waiting for me below."

He shook hands with his sister-in-law, and went. Hardly had the door closed upon him, when Madame von Harder exclaimed, with great vivacity:

"Well, your uncle has had a sensible idea at last! I was afraid he would expect us to remain in this wretched city, where one is not sure of one's life, and where one cannot even drive out without fear of being insulted by the people. I only wonder that Arno deigns to notice my nerves or the doctor's advice at all. He is generally so hard and unfeeling in these matters; don't you think so, Gabrielle?"

"I think he is anxious to get rid of us now, at any price," replied Gabrielle, without turning her head.

"Well, yes," said the Baroness, suavely. "He must see that R--- is not a very agreeable place of sojourn just now, especially for ladies. I had something of this in my mind when I mentioned the Countess's invitation to him. I half hoped he would assent to it; but he then preserved an obstinate silence, so I did not venture to pursue the subject. How I long to see the capital again, and to renew my old connections there! Say what you will, this R--- is provincial, after all, in spite of the grand city-air which the town gives itself. But now, in the first place, we must look over what we have to wear. Come, child, and let us consider what has to be done."

"Spare me that, mamma!" prayed the young girl, in a low, weary tone. "I am not in the humour for it now. Decide what you think best. I shall be quite satisfied with anything you do."

The Baroness looked at her daughter in unmitigated astonishment; such indifference passed the bounds of all belief.

"Not in the humour for it? Gabrielle, what has come to you? I noticed the change in you some time ago, when we were staying in the country; but now, during the last few days, you have grown so strange, I really can hardly recognise my own daughter. Something must have passed between you and your uncle during that drive home, I am afraid--something you are keeping back from me. He is evidently angry with you; he scarcely looked at you just now. When will you learn to show him the necessary respect and consideration?"

"You hear, he is sending us away," said Gabrielle, with a great, bitter rush of feeling. "He wishes to be alone if a danger threatens, if a misfortune overtakes him--quite, quite alone!"

"I do not understand you," declared her mother, pettishly. "What should threaten your uncle? He has put down the attempts at revolt with a strong hand, and there will be an end of them, I fancy; but if things should come to the worst, he has the troops to protect him."

Gabrielle was silent. She had not thought of any specific danger, but, inexperienced as she was in all the serious affairs of life, she divined that an open attack, such as Winterfeld's, would not pass by without leaving its mark, and felt, as it were, a prescience of some coming storm. She and her mother were to be sheltered from it, evidently. In no plainer language could the Baron have told her that all was really over between them. Was he not sending her to the capital, where George now lived, where a meeting with him could easily be managed? The harshness and violence with which Raven had formerly opposed this union had caused the girl far less pain than this voluntary withdrawal of all resistance on his part. He was showing her that he had ceased to protest, that he left her free to act as she pleased; and she knew him too well to cherish any hope that he would soften towards and pardon the woman whom he believed to have betrayed him. Perhaps Gabrielle might have sought to convince him of his error, to show him what injustice his cruel suspicions did her; but his icy look and manner scared her from him. That look told her that her words would find no credence, and at this thought her proud spirit rose in arms. Was she again to endure the degradation of finding her defence unheard, herself repulsed, as had happened once before? Never! never!

The Baroness was very far from divining her daughter's train of thought; she did not even remember that Assessor Winterfeld was living in the metropolis, still less that he had been sent thither expressly to prevent any intercourse between him and the Governor's heiress. The lady had weightier matters to occupy her just now. Finding Gabrielle insensible to the claims of the great "toilette" question, she rang for her maid, and at once engaged with her in a long and elaborate consultation. It was notable what a vivifying effect the prospect of this journey had on the Baroness's system. Her illness and languor seemed suddenly to have disappeared. She gave the necessary instructions with an eagerness and animation which already augured the best results from the prescribed "change of air."

On leaving his sister-in-law, the Baron had himself at once driven over to Colonel Wilten's quarters. He had always been on friendly terms with the commandant of the garrison, and latterly there had been an increase of cordiality, on the Wiltens' part at least, for the family were bent on securing an alliance between the eldest hope of their house and the young Baroness Harder.

To-day, however, there was a something unusual in the Colonel's manner and reception of his visitor, a certain constraint which he did his best to conceal by talking with more fluency than was his wont. The Baron did not heed this. His mind was busy with other thoughts, and he was not disposed to attach importance to such trifles. He was about to turn the conversation to those measures of public safety which were still to some extent in the hands of the military, when Wilten forestalled him, and said rather hurriedly:

"Have you received further intelligence from the capital yet? You are, no doubt, expecting an answer relative to that Winterfeld pamphlet."

The Baron's brow clouded over very noticeably at this question, and there was a pause of some seconds before he responded.

"Yes," he said at length. "The answer reached me this morning."

"Well?" asked the Colonel, eagerly.

Raven leaned back in his chair, and replied in a tone wherein irony and bitterness were equally blended:

"Our friends in the capital appear to have lost sight of the fact that, as their representative, I have acted in their name, and that through long years they have seconded me in all my acts to the best of their ability. You were right in warning me against the intrigues at head-quarters, which were secretly undermining me. I see now how hollow is the ground on which I stand. A few months ago they would not have dared to give me such an answer."

"What: they have not tried to hint----" the Colonel stopped; he did not like to finish the phrase.

"They have hinted much--in the most courteous form, naturally, and with an unusually lavish expenditure of fair words--but the meaning remains the same. I think it would not be disagreeable to the gentlemen in office yonder, if I were to make my bow and withdraw from the scene. I am a stumbling-block in the way of several persons there, and they, of course, seek to profit by any attack upon me. At present, however, I am not inclined to make room for them."

Colonel Wilten remained silent, and studied the carpet diligently.

"The late events in this city have also given rise to serious differences of opinion," continued Raven. "There has been a constant interchange of despatches on the subject. They cannot be made to understand that the intervention of the troops was necessary, and preach to me of the heavy responsibility incurred, of the exasperated state of public feeling, and more in the same style. I reply simply that these matters cannot be judged from a distance. I am on the spot, and know what is necessary; and were the disturbances to break out afresh, I should do exactly as I have done."

Again there stole over the Colonel's features that look of constraint which had gradually disappeared during the course of the conversation.

"That would hardly be possible," he remarked. "It is true that the popular excitement is greater than we at first supposed, and I told you some time ago that the Government are anxious to avoid all military interference."

"It is not what the Government desire, but what is necessary," declared the Baron, with the curt, abrupt speech which with him was a sure sign of great irritation.

"We will hope, then, that the necessity will not recur," said Wilten; "for I am unfortunately ... I should have ... in a word, I should be compelled to refuse co-operation, your Excellency."

Raven started, and turned a flashing glance on the speaker.

"What does this mean, Colonel? You know that I have unlimited authority. I can assure you that it has been in no way restricted."

"I do not for a moment suppose it has; but my powers have been curtailed. In future I am to take my instructions from army head-quarters alone."

"You have received counter-orders?" asked the Baron, quickly.

"Yes," was the reply, given with some hesitation.

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"May I see the despatch?"

"I am sorry--it is of a private nature."

Raven turned away, and went up to the window. When he looked round, after the lapse of

several minutes, his face was almost livid in its pallor.

"This means that my hands are to be tied completely. If there is any renewal of the riots, and the police are not strong enough to suppress them, I am powerless, and the town is to be given over to the mercy of the mob."

Wilten shrugged his shoulders.

"I am a soldier, and must obey, as your Excellency knows."

"Assuredly you must obey--that I quite see."

Another uncomfortable pause followed. The Colonel seemed to be thinking how he could effect a diversion; but Raven forestalled him.

"As the matter now stands, the conference I wished to hold with you becomes superfluous," he said, with enforced calm. "No excuses, pray. I can well conceive that it is very painful to you personally, but you cannot alter the circumstances, so let us say no more on the subject. I wanted to speak to you also on a little matter of private business. You gave me to understand some time ago, that your son was likely to come to me with a request. Lieutenant Wilten has not declared himself as yet, and in these troubled, excited times it would hardly have been possible for him to do so."

"Quite impossible," assented the Colonel. "I pointed out to Albert that it would argue a want of proper feeling on his part, were he to trouble you with such matters at a time when you have so much to contend with. He admitted the justice of what I said. Besides, he is leaving us to-morrow."

"So suddenly?" asked Raven, in surprise.

"He is going to M--- on a mission connected with the service, and will probably remain there some weeks," returned the Colonel, who was growing visibly embarrassed beneath the Baron's severe scrutiny. "I had originally intended to send another officer, but I cannot dispense with his assistance now; and my son, as the youngest on my staff, can be most easily spared. So the matter we were speaking of can rest for the present. Later on, when Albert returns, we can take it up again."

There were hard, bitter lines about Raven's mouth as he answered:

"On the contrary, I wish this matter to be settled at once, and for ever. My sister-in-law regrets to find that she is not in a position to satisfy the hopes which she encouraged the young Baron to entertain. She has now convinced herself that her daughter does not possess that amount of affection for your son which would dispose her to enter into this marriage; and neither Madame von Harder nor I will exercise the slightest constraint on Gabrielle----"

"Oh! by no means. We would never consent to that," interrupted Wilten, eagerly. "No constraint, no persuasion in these matters! It will be hard for me, of course, to give up the plan I have so long cherished, and my son will be in despair. But if he may not hope that his affection will be returned, it is better he should know the truths and try to conquer his attachment. I will talk to him seriously on the subject."

"Do so," said the Baron, whom neither the other's ready zeal, nor his deep-drawn breath of relief, had escaped. "I am persuaded that you will find in him an obedient and tractable son."

He turned to go. The Colonel accompanied him politely to the door, and would have given his hand at parting as usual, but Raven passed by him with a cool, ceremonious bow, and left the room. Outside, on the stairs, he stopped a moment and glanced towards the door that had just closed, saying to himself under his breath:

"So it has come to this already! They wish to break off all connection with me. The news Wilten has received must have been strange news indeed!"

As the Governor issued from the house and was about to enter his carriage, which waited before the door, he caught sight of the Superintendent of Police, who was coming up the street, and who quickened his steps on perceiving him.

"I was just going up to see your Excellency," said he, bowing respectfully. "I thought I should find you at the Castle."

"I am now returning thither," replied Raven, pointing to the carriage. "May I ask you to accompany me?"

The Superintendent accepted the invitation, and both gentlemen entered the carriage, which started at once on its way to the Castle. The Baron listened in silence to the other's talk. He was moody and abstracted, chafing inwardly at the first humiliation openly laid upon him. So far they had left him free scope, had invested him with an unlimited authority such as no Governor before him had possessed; and now, at the present juncture, when he was more than ever in want of this authority, he suddenly found himself checked, his course of action impeded, his hands bound.

They were taking from him the support whereon he had relied, the powerful ally whom he had once called to his aid, and on whom now he was forced in some measure to depend. They were purposely leaving him alone to face the struggle with the rebellious city. Raven was not at a loss to interpret this symptom.

The Superintendent had been speaking of some unimportant incidents which had occurred the preceding day. Now he went on to say: "But I have a communication to make which will surprise your Excellency. You take an interest in young Dr. Brunnow?"

Raven grew attentive.

"Certainly. What of him?"

"Nothing personally, though I am sorry to say the matter in question touches him very nearly. You remember the gentleman who was introduced to us the other evening by Councillor Moser as Dr. Franz? You had even, I think, some lengthened conversation with him afterwards. Did nothing in his manner strike you as peculiar?"

The Baron drew himself up quickly. The allusion sufficed to show him that his suspicion had been well-founded, and that danger to Brunnow was impending. It was imperatively necessary to show a calm front, in order, if it were yet possible, to avert a catastrophe. Raven summoned up all his self-possession, and answered with a cold, imperturbable "No."

"Well, my attention was attracted to him at once," said the Superintendent. "Even during those few short minutes doubts occurred to me, doubts which were subsequently strengthened by some remarks the Councillor inadvertently let fall. So I thought it advisable to set some inquiries on foot. Now that there are so few strangers in the town, it was no difficult matter to find out where the pretended Dr. Franz had put up. He had arrived a couple of hours before at an inn in the suburbs, had displayed great solicitude in speaking of the young doctor, asking many questions about him in an agitated manner, and had then hurried off to see him. The trunk, which had been imprudently left at the inn, bore the ticket Z---- as the station of departure. There were other very suspicious circumstances in support of the evidence--in short, no doubt now exists that we have to do with Rudolph Brunnow, the father of the wounded man."

All these statements were delivered in the cool, business-like tone used by the Superintendent throughout the interview, and Raven endeavoured to preserve the same appearance of indifference as he replied:

"That is, at present, merely an assumption of yours, which will require confirmation. You cannot take any steps against this stranger on such evidence."

"We have the confirmation already," said the Superintendent. "When arrested, Dr. Brunnow admitted his name."

"When arrested!" exclaimed the Baron. "You have proceeded to arrest him without informing me of the matter--without giving me the slightest intimation?"

The police-officer stared at him in well-feigned astonishment.

"Your Excellency, I really do not understand. So far as I am aware, such measures are entirely within my competence. Had I known that you desired to be previously informed, I should, of course, have seen that a communication was made to you."

Raven clenched his right hand, crushing the glove he held in it.

"And I should certainly have dissuaded you from taking such a step. Have you thought of the excitement this arrest will produce, and of its inevitable consequences? Precisely now, when the Government is bent on adopting conciliatory measures, on creating a diversion, when everything depends on its being popular, and the Ministers are shaping their course with scrupulous care, in order to avoid a conflict--this is not the time to drag before the public old, half-forgotten reminiscences of the rebellion."

The Superintendent shrugged his shoulders.

"I have done my duty, nothing more. Dr. Brunnow was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment; this punishment he evaded by taking flight. He knew that on his return he would become amenable to the law. He came notwithstanding this, and he must take the consequences."

"I should have thought you had held your position long enough to know that the letter of the law must sometimes be sacrificed to the expediency of the moment," said Raven, with rising anger. "Why did this fugitive return? Public opinion will unmistakably side with the man who, in his anxiety for his only son, in the hope that by his medical skill he might be the means of saving that son's life, set his own danger at naught, risked everything and came; Brunnow will be raised to a martyr's pedestal, and will obtain sympathy throughout the land. Do you think this will be agreeable to us? You chose to act on a mere suspicion of your own, and you will meet with little thanks from head-quarters."

These words were spoken with a vehemence which made them almost offensive; but the Superintendent replied coolly and politely:

"Well, we must wait and see. I acted to the best of my judgment, and I regret that the course I have taken does not meet with your approbation. I was the less prepared for censure from your Excellency that you have always condemned the lukewarm attitude of the Government, and the fear they evince of provoking a conflict as weakness, whilst the line of action your Excellency is now pursuing in this town proves that you reckon on energetic and unsparing measures alone for success."

The Baron bit his lip. He felt that he had allowed himself to be carried too far. Turning the conversation, he said:

"So Dr. Brunnow at once avowed his name?"

"Yes; he seemed disconcerted at first, when his arrest was made known to him, but he soon recovered himself, and made no attempt at denial. It would indeed have been perfectly useless. I have taken care that the news of what has occurred shall not reach his son at present--at least the Councillor has promised to be silent. The poor Councillor! he almost fell down in a fainting-fit when I disclosed to him who the *soi-disant* Dr. Franz really was. After having all his life sedulously avoided anything like disloyal contact, he is now being drawn into the most questionable connections, and that without any fault of his own."

"You will at least, I hope, show your prisoner every consideration," said Raven, unheeding the last remark. "The motive that brought him here, and his son's noble conduct at the time of the riot, entitle him to some favour at your hands."

"Doubtless," assented the Superintendent. "Dr. Brunnow will have nothing to complain of. He is, as a temporary measure, confined in a room in the city prison, and I have been careful that in all the arrangements a due regard should be had to his comfort. Of course, he must be strictly guarded. There might be an attempt at evasion again--or at a rescue."

Raven's eyes were fixed full on his companion's face. The derisive smile lurking about the officer's lips told the Baron that his former relations with the prisoner were no longer a secret, and that the blow was directed less against Brunnow than against himself. To what end this hostile step had been taken, he did not then immediately divine; but the Superintendent of Police was not the man to be guilty of over-precipitation, or to do anything which would bring upon him a serious responsibility. He always knew very well what he was about.

"Evasion! rescue!" repeated Raven, scornfully. "It is too late for that, I fancy."

"I hope so too, but I will not neglect the necessary precautions. One can never know what connections these refugees may have, or how far their secret influence may extend. This was the communication I had to make; now I need not take up your Excellency's time any longer. We shall soon be passing my office. Might I ask to be set down there? I shall, as usual, find a deluge of work awaiting me, no doubt."

A few minutes later, the carriage stopped before the police-bureau, and the head of that department took a most affable leave of the Baron, who then drove on to the Castle. At length the respite of a few minutes' solitude was granted him. So many successive blows had fallen on him since the morning. First the Minister's letter, then the disclosure made by Colonel Wilten, now the news of Brunnow's arrest. More and more menacing were the signs of the times, and Rudolph's prophecy was perhaps nearer its fulfilment than he himself had imagined. The ground beneath the great man's feet began to quake and to give way; and for the first time he looked down from his vertiginous height, measuring how great the fall might perchance be--but Arno Raven was not one to quail before such thoughts. The proud, determined look on his face showed that he was not disposed to yield a step, that he was ready to confront any danger that might rise up before him. Though perils should surround him on all sides, there would be no surrender. Thus, with the undaunted spirit and strong will which had borne him through so many trials, he advanced to meet the approaching storm.

CHAPTER XVII.

There was a lonely, desolate air about the Castle in these days. Baroness Harder and her daughter had left for the capital, and if the elder lady, with her caprices, her requiring temper, and other not very amiable characteristics, was not painfully missed by the household, the

absence of the younger, who had won all hearts to herself, was sincerely deplored. With her, sunshine had come into the house. During the few short months of her stay there, she had filled the great sombre spaces with light and animation, quickening and brightening their lifeless splendour. During this period Raven himself had become so much milder of mood, so much more accessible, that at times it was difficult to recognise in him the severe, imperious master who never unbent, and whose slightest words were as law. Now Gabrielle's rooms were closed and darkened, and every one about the place, from the venerable major-domo to the lowest housemaid, felt the void she had left behind.

Baron von Raven alone seemed insensible to the change; at least, he never in any way alluded to it, and it was well known that he had little time to give to his home or family affairs. All about him were accustomed to see their master grave, taciturn, and unmoved by passing events. Thus he still appeared, and yet every soul about the house knew that a tempest was fast gathering over his head. It had long ceased to be a secret.

There had been no renewal of the disturbances in the town during the course of the last few weeks; and the Superintendent, with his staff of police, had easily put down the slight ebullitions of feeling which would now and then occur. The lower classes of the population had been intimidated; to the more enlightened reflection had come. It was felt that nothing would be achieved by violence. The Burgomaster used all his influence to prevent a recurrence of the previous scenes. Experience had taught him that in such a contest the reins would soon slip from his hands, that the rougher, more dangerous elements forcing themselves to the surface, the movement, legitimate in the outset, would degenerate into a mere common rebellion against all law and order. On either side a warning had been received, and it had borne fruit. The struggle was not abandoned; it grew, on the contrary, in force and intensity, though carried on in quieter fashion; and now the city of R--- had the satisfaction of hearing that an echo of its discontent had sounded in the capital, an echo which quickly spread throughout the land. Winterfeld's pamphlet had produced a great sensation, a far greater, indeed, than its author had ever reckoned on, for it found acceptance in influential quarters, where no one, and least of all the Assessor, would have expected it to be tolerated.

In these higher circles Raven was by no means beloved. A man who had raised himself from the more modest ranks of the middle classes to one of the highest offices of the State, he had naturally aroused against himself the envy and ill-will of those whom he had overtaken and left far behind him in the race; and his proud, imperious bearing, the merciless contempt with which he exposed and thrust aside incapacity and meanness, wheresoever placed, did not tend to increase his popularity. Among his competitors there were but too many who viewed the success he had achieved, the high position he now held, as a robbery committed on themselves, an infringement of their own peculiar privileges; who could not brook the haughty composure which never deserted him, even in the presence of the most exalted personages, and who were only waiting their opportunity to inflict on this *parvenu* the humiliations which, in their opinion, he so richly deserved. Hitherto their shafts had glanced harmlessly from the Baron's armour. The Government had warmly supported him, had loaded him with distinctions and honours, and had kept silence on the subject of his arbitrary encroachments, which were perfectly well known to every man in office. For this post of R---, the Ministers were in want of just such a representative, of one who, like Raven, would with rigid consistency and unsparing energy make his authority felt, and who would keep in check the rebellious discontent which leavened the province. The Governor had been indispensable, and this fact outweighed all other considerations, and counteracted all the influences which were at work against him.

But times had changed. During the last twelve months, especially, a revolution of opinion had come about, which threatened to overturn the present system. Some of its upholders, staunch hitherto, now tried to trim their sails, and to steer with the new current; others prepared to abdicate, and, with all outward honour and dignity, to retire from the stage where their parts were played out. They had one and all, friends and connections, who were of service to them in the crisis. Arno Raven stood perfectly alone; and the dragon of spite he had provoked now reared its head and turned its poisonous fangs against him.

At any other time, a pamphlet such as Winterfeld's would have been instantly suppressed, and its author would have paid for his audacity with the loss of his position; now the work, with its accusatory eloquence, was eagerly turned to account--made to serve as an arm against the object of their hatred; and the young official, who had furnished the welcome opportunity, was raised to hero-rank. George's name, altogether unknown but a little while before, was now in everybody's mouth. He himself was sought, made much of, admired for his courage in boldly speaking out that which, of course, every one had known. People said the brochure was really admirably written, that it evinced unusual knowledge and talent, and bore the stamp of a clear, incorruptible judgment--and, indeed, the book was completely devoid of the acrimony which would have lowered it to the level of a diatribe. The Governor's great qualities were thoroughly recognised; anything like a personal attack was carefully avoided. The entire accusation rested on facts; but these facts were demonstrated with such clearness and precision, and subjected to so incisive a criticism, that some answer to the charges must, it was thought, necessarily follow.

To the R--- province and its chief town, these printed pages had been, as the Burgomaster expressed it, as a spark in a powder-barrel; for they gave form and substance to the universal feeling, setting it forth in the most pointed and striking terms. The crippling fear, the dread of the Governor's omnipotence, was shaken: it was seen that he was assailable, vulnerable, like

other mortals; and all the bitterness, so long cherished against him, now broke out with tempestuous violence. No one gave a thought to the benefits the town and province had reaped from the Baron's vigorous administration. Not a voice was raised to recall them to mind. Hatred of the despotic yoke, beneath which the people had so long sighed, spoke loudly and alone; and, as often happens in this world, those who had been bound to the Governor by interest, and had ranked among his partisans, were, now that it could be done with impunity, the first to cast a stone at him.

Most men, so situated, would have retired, have voluntarily vacated a place it seemed now impossible to hold. A recommendation to resign was, indeed half hinted to the Baron from the capital; but his pride revolted against such a step. To yield, now that compulsion was being tried--to flee, as it were, from his enemies, routed by their denunciations and attacks, was out of the question. He knew that to go at such a moment would be to recognise his defeat. To those half-hints from the capital, he had, therefore, returned the haughty answer that he had assuredly no intention of remaining at his post for any length of time; but that, before relinquishing it, he would see the fight out, overthrow his enemies, and silence their tongues, as he had done on first coming to R---, when a similar storm had burst upon him--then he would go, and not before. Perhaps the Baron would have shown himself less obstinate, had the signal for the general onslaught been given by any other than George Winterfeld. The thought of owing his fall to the man whom of all men he most ardently hated, as standing between himself and Gabrielle, made Raven desperate, and robbed him of his wonted clearness of judgment.

It was, indeed, by no means certain, as yet, what the issue of the struggle would be. As yet, the Baron stood firm, though the ground beneath him heaved, and seemed to menace his fall. He could allege that all he had done had been done with the full authorisation and support of the Government; and the Ministers hesitated to abandon thus, at a moment's notice, the man who had so long acted in their name. The weakness and half-heartedness, which Raven had so often condemned, again came to light. The attack upon him had been tolerated, secretly favoured; but now that he unexpectedly stood his ground, they ventured neither to give him up nor heartily to espouse his cause.

Public attention was so engrossed by this all-absorbing topic, that other matters receded into the background. This was the case even with the arrest of Dr. Brunnow, who was still confined in the R--- city prison; though, on the first tidings of it, the event had been much talked of, and had created a painful impression. It was known, of course, that the law demanded the recapture of an escaped prisoner; still, people thought it hard and cruel that a father who had hurried to his son's sick-bed should atone for the step by years of captivity, especially as so long a period had intervened since the original sentence had been pronounced.

One forenoon, at rather an early hour, the Superintendent presented himself in person at the prisoner's door. There was, however, nothing official in his bearing or manner of salutation, which were simply courteous and affable, as though nothing more than a mere ordinary call were intended.

"I have come to announce to you a visit from your son, Doctor," he began. "You have, I believe, been kept regularly informed as to his state of health, and are aware that he is now well enough to undertake the short drive without incurring any risk. He will be with you about twelve o'clock. I could not refuse myself the gratification of bringing you the news."

"You are most kind," replied Brunnow, politely, but laconically and with visible reserve.

"I wished, at the same time, to assure myself that my instructions had been duly carried out," continued the Superintendent. "I trust that every alleviation has been afforded you of which a state of confinement admits. Pray say if you have any complaint to make."

"Certainly not. On the contrary, I am curious to know to whom, or to what, I owe the unwonted attention which has been paid to my comfort since the first moment of my coming hither."

"Well, principally, no doubt, to the peculiar circumstances attending your arrest. Respect is felt for a father's anxiety on his son's behalf."

"Is that the sole reason, think you?" asked the Doctor, with a keen glance at his visitor. "I know, from my previous experience of state prisons, how little such personal considerations are taken into account. My acquaintance with them has taught me another and a sadder lesson."

"Things have changed," remarked the Superintendent, suavely, not noticing the other's bitterness of tone. "Years have come and gone since the time of which you speak, years which may react favourably on your future fate."

"I knew what I risked in returning, and cherish no illusions as to my fate," Brunnow answered, almost brusquely. "You have probably come to prepare me for my removal to the citadel."

"You are mistaken. Nothing has as yet been decided with respect to a change in your quarters. That surprises you? Well, it is strange, certainly, that the decision should be so long delayed. I myself accept it as of good augury. I should not like to awaken in you any premature hopes, but it is, of course, possible that, having regard to the very peculiar circumstances of your case, a pardon may be granted."

Brunnow looked up quickly.

"You think----"

"I can advance nothing beyond my own personal impression," the other hastened to add. "But I think there is a favourable feeling towards you in high places. Perhaps all may depend on your taking suitable steps yourself. I am convinced that a petition for pardon would not be rejected, could you bring yourself to present one."

"No," said Brunnow, with the absolute decision of one whose mind is made up.

"Reflect, Doctor, your freedom may depend on it. One word from you might, perhaps, turn the scale."

"No matter, I will not sue for mercy. That word would be a confession of guilt I do not acknowledge; and for my liberty's sake even, I will not abjure the principles which have guided me through life. They may accord me a pardon or not, at their will. I will never appeal to them to show clemency."

The Superintendent inwardly cursed "the old rebel's high-flown folly and obstinacy." A petition for pardon would have smoothed the way for the concession which it was resolved should now be made to public opinion--unfortunately, he did not see his way to obtain it. Having failed in the first part of his mission, the Superintendent passed to the second division. Here, too, he naturally avoided speaking *ex officio*, but maintained the same easy tone, pursuing, as it were, a private conversation, innocent of all secret purpose.

"Well, that is a matter for your consideration alone," he returned; "but you render it harder for your friends to help you, and most unusual exertions are being made in your behalf."

"By whom?" asked the Doctor, in amazement. "I have no friends who possess the smallest influence in Ministerial circles."

"You are better off in that respect than you suppose. Were you really not aware that the Governor himself is leaving no stone unturned to secure your pardon?"

"Arno Raven--indeed?" said Brunnow, slowly.

"Yes, Baron von Raven. It was he who, on hearing of your arrest, enjoined on me that the greatest consideration should be shown you."

Brunnow was silent. The Superintendent, having waited in vain for a reply, went on after a short pause:

"And he continues to interest himself for you. It is natural that the fate of one who was his friend in early youth should touch him nearly."

The Doctor looked surprised.

"Is that known here already? His Excellency the Governor would hardly be likely to mention it."

"Not he himself, certainly. You will easily conceive that a man in the Baron's position cannot openly avow youthful connections which are strangely at variance with the tendencies and principles he has always professed."

"With the principles he has professed in later years, you mean," Brunnow's voice rang out sharp and scornful. "His earlier tendencies were more in harmony with the connections of which you speak."

"You are not prepared to assert, I suppose, that Herr von Raven knew anything of the political vagaries for which you were indicted?" asked the Superintendent, with a smile which was intended to irritate, and fulfilled its purpose. Brunnow began to grow excited.

"I do not merely assert that he knew of them, but that he shared our views to the fullest extent," he replied hastily.

"Yes, I remember, he was suspected at the time," remarked the other, with the same incredulous smile. "But that was calumny, nothing else. The Baron must have cleared himself fully and entirely, for he was set at liberty, and was even accorded, as an indemnity for the imprisonment he had wrongfully undergone, the post of secretary to the Minister then at the head of the Government."

"It was the price of his treachery," broke out the Doctor, who had no suspicion that he was being systematically goaded on to greater anger and bitterness, and who could no longer restrain himself. "It was the first rung of the ladder by which he has mounted to his present eminence. He bought his advancement with his friends' ruin, with the sacrifice of his convictions and his honour."

"Doctor, Doctor, moderate your language," counselled the police-agent, roused, apparently, to indignation. "This is a terrible accusation which you are bringing against the Governor. There must be an error here, or a misstatement of facts."

"A misstatement!" cried Brunnow, with a fiery outburst of passion. "I tell you it is the truth, sir--but you naturally believe the Baron von Raven to be incapable of such conduct. You prefer to look on me as a liar, a slanderer."

"I did not wish to suggest anything of the kind, but I must say I seriously doubt whether you would care to repeat the speech you have just made in the presence of others."

"I would, if necessary, repeat it before the whole world. I would cast it in Raven's teeth again, as I have once already----" Brunnow stopped suddenly. The over-eager expression on his listener's face struck him, and told him to reflect. He did not finish his sentence, but turned away with a wrathful, impatient movement.

"You were saying----" prompted the Superintendent.

"Nothing--nothing at all," was the stubborn reply.

"I really do not understand you. If the matter stands as you have put it, you have no reason whatever to wish to spare the Governor."

"I do not wish to spare him," said Brunnow, sternly. "But I will not turn informer against the man I once named friend. If I had desired to use those weapons against him, I could have done so long ago. My shafts would strike more surely, and with deadlier aim, than any in a Winterfeld's quiver, for mine are steeped in poison--the very reason which would prevent my using them."

"These are noble sentiments, very noble sentiments, no doubt, but I think----"

"Pray do not let us pursue the subject further!" the Doctor interrupted. "Why drag these long-forgotten matters before the light of day? Let the buried past rest in its grave."

This sudden diversion was, certainly, not to the Superintendent's taste. He would willingly have continued the conversation, but he saw that he should get nothing more out of the prisoner. After all, his main object was achieved. He knew now what he had wished to know: he therefore brought himself, without too violent an effort, to speak of other things, and after chatting a while on general topics, took his leave. Brunnow looked after him uneasily, as he went.

"Did he come here merely to induce me to send in a petition, or was I being cross-questioned on Raven's account? I almost fear so. That police-fellow's eager attention and desire to hear more looked suspicious. I wish I had not let myself be led away to speak so openly before him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was evening, but, in spite of the lateness of the hour and the chilly inclement autumn weather, the streets of the capital were yet alive with all the busy restless movement which characterises a great city. Carriages rolled hither and thither in every direction, pedestrians hustled each other on the pavement and before the brightly-lighted shops, and it was only in the more aristocratic quarter, which lay a little aside from the main streets and chief arteries of traffic, that a certain stately peace and quiet reigned supreme.

In the room which she was at present occupying in the Selteneck mansion, Gabrielle Harder sat alone, buried in one of those deep troubled reveries which so often came upon her now, and which threatened to transform the bright vivacious girl into a dreamy, pensive heroine. She was in full dress, for she was going with her party to the opera that evening; but as she lay back in her arm-chair, heedlessly crushing the dainty laces on her dress, her thoughts were evidently far from the amusements of the hour.

If anything could have diverted Gabrielle from her unwonted sadness, it would have been this visit to the capital, where she and her mother had been most graciously received. The Countess Selteneck was an old and intimate friend of the Baroness. She had been a frequent visitor at the Harders' house in the old days, and since the Baron's death had remained in constant correspondence with his widow. The pleasure felt by the ladies on meeting again was great and mutual, and the Countess, who had no children of her own, indulged and spoiled her friend's sweet daughter in every imaginable way.

The Baroness, on her arrival in town, came to hear of the attack which had been made upon Raven, but she was far too superficial to appreciate the real importance of the well-directed blow, which, in her eyes, was a mere passing annoyance, such as the rioting in R---- for instance. It never, in the remotest degree, occurred to her to suppose that the Baron's position might be imperilled by what had happened. His affairs, indeed, only interested her in so far as her own future might be involved in them. Madame von Harder did not pretend to the slightest sympathy or affection for her brother-in-law. She feared him, and that was all. Indignant she was, no doubt, at the "audacious impertinence of that Winterfeld," seeing in the young man's conduct only an act of revenge for the discomfiture he had met with, but she never for a moment doubted that the Baron would visit the rash offender with the chastisement which was his due. For the rest, she saw no reason why she should torment herself with all these tiresome, disagreeable matters, which would be set at rest long before she returned home. The autumn fashions, the evening parties, and the performances at the opera, were far more interesting, and, as she thought, better worth her attention.

That her daughter would not dream of renewing her engagement to the Assessor after the affront which the latter had put on the head of her family, this wise lady took for granted. All her care was given to preventing a meeting between the two, which was not difficult. George did not mix in the Selteneck circles; and here, amid these strange surroundings, Gabrielle was never left alone. She had, indeed, made no attempt to inform the young man of her presence in town, trembling at the very thought of a meeting with him. How could she approach George, while her heart was beating high with love for another man? Though so much had lately come between herself and Arno, she could not forget; not even his harshness and injustice could banish his image from her mind, and the knowledge that some danger threatened him served to quicken her affection. Gabrielle was better able than her mother to estimate the true bearings of the case. For weeks she had followed the course of events with feverish interest. She, who at other times never opened a paper, now sought with avidity every notice affecting the Baron, and caught at every remark made in conversation which bore on the one subject that engrossed her thoughts. Winterfeld's book, with its long list of charges, had set before the young girl's eyes Raven's true portrait, which she was forced to recognise as a faithful likeness, had displayed to her the darker side of his character--while, as opposed to it, George's figure rose before her, so pure and steadfast and nobly courageous in the sacrifice of his entire future and prospects to that which he deemed duty. But of what avail all this? Gabrielle's whole soul went back to the sombre, despotic man, who had won her to himself. In imagination she stood by his side through the fight; for his sake she grew anxious and apprehensive of the issue, while a feeling of bitterness rose up within her against George, for was it not he who had been the first to assail, to insult the man she loved?

The clock on the mantelpiece chiming the hour awoke Gabrielle from her dreams, and reminded her that it was time to prepare for the drive to the theatre. Throwing a light cloak round her shoulders, she drew on her gloves, and went down to the drawing-room, where her mother and Countess Selteneck were already awaiting her.

Countess Selteneck was of about the same age as the Baroness, but looked considerably younger, precisely, perhaps, because she gave herself far less trouble to preserve a youthful appearance. Though not beautiful, she captivated by her prepossessing manners, and a certain air of calm intelligence which inspired confidence and respect. Both ladies were in full evening dress.

"I can understand how much you must suffer from the constraint, and from the general position of affairs in your brother-in-law's house, Matilda," the Countess remarked; "but what will not a woman endure for her child's sake? Gabrielle's whole future is in his hands, and as his heiress she will one day have an almost princely fortune at her disposal. Your brother-in-law has given you decided promises on this head, I presume?"

"Oh, certainly," replied the Baroness. "He spoke to me on the subject soon after I arrived at his house, but I am afraid this unfortunate business with Assessor Winterfeld has called the whole matter in question again."

"There is something very winning and agreeable about the Assessor, I must say," observed the Countess, changing the theme. "I think I mentioned to you that I met him some weeks ago at a soirée, where, truth to tell, he was the cynosure of interest."

"Assessor Winterfeld the cynosure of interest?" asked the Baroness, half incredulous, half disdainful.

"Certainly. He has become a sort of celebrity, and enjoys special protection at the Ministry, so they tell me. He is received in the best circles, and is distinguished wherever he goes."

"Why, this is incredible!" exclaimed Madame von Harder. "They are bound in duty to punish an affront put upon the Governor of R----. They cannot possibly reward and distinguish the aggressor."

"But so it is, nevertheless; and I fear it is done purposely, out of opposition to the Baron. I really do not see, Matilda, why the Assessor's offer should have appeared so outrageous an absurdity to you and to your brother-in-law. Instead of giving him his *congé*, and thereby driving him to this desperate step, you should have held out some hope to him."

"Held out hope to him!" repeated the Baroness. "My dear Theresa, think what you are saying. He is a man of no birth."

"That is not an insuperable obstacle," declared the Countess, a worldly-wise practical woman, who took such prejudices of rank into little account, and who was evidently prepossessed by George's manner and appearance. "What were brevets of nobility invented for? Raven was a commoner himself when your sister first engaged herself to him."

"That was an exceptional case, and Assessor Winterfeld----"

"Will be every whit as successful. You need not look so astonished, Matilda; I am only expressing the general belief. After this first stroke--a bold one, certainly, which has turned the eyes of the country upon him--he need not fear being overlooked. Had he, in addition to his other advantages, married into a noble old family such as yours, the road to eminence would have been clear before him--ay, to eminence equal to that attained by the successful Baron von Raven."

Madame von Harder had grown very thoughtful. She was accustomed to rely on the judgment of this friend, who was intellectually her superior, and the Countess's words brought Winterfeld before her in quite a new light. Very little was wanting to revive the old predilection which, in the early days of their acquaintance, she had cherished for George.

The entrance of Count Selteneck here put an end to the conversation. He was to accompany the ladies to the opera, but had been out to pay a visit from which he had just returned. Some indifferent questions and replies were interchanged, then the Countess remarked that it must be time to start, and would have rung for the carriage, but her husband stopped her.

"One moment, Theresa," he said carelessly. "There is a trifling matter I want to discuss with you first. The Baroness will kindly excuse us for a few minutes?"

The Baroness begged them not to think of her, and the Count stepped into the adjoining room with his wife.

"What has happened?" asked the latter, uneasily.

"I have heard some news which will affect Madame von Harder very painfully. It concerns her brother-in-law, von Raven."

He had closed the drawing-room door; but to this smaller outer salon there was a second entrance, masked only by a heavy curtain. Close to this the speakers were standing at the very moment that Gabrielle was about to enter on her way to the drawing-room. She caught the last words and the Baron's name, and that sufficed to chain her to the spot where she stood. Hidden behind the *portière*, she listened in breathless suspense.

"The Governor has not given in his resignation, I hope?" asked the Countess.

"There is no question of that now," said Selteneck. "If it were so, he would only be sharing the fate of many high officers of State, who temporarily retire from the scene of action. The news I have just heard at my brother's is of so grave a nature that, should it be confirmed--and we had it direct from the Ministry--the Baron will, politically speaking, have lived his day."

The Countess looked up at her husband with an expression of shocked surprise. He went on in a carefully subdued tone, which, however, was quite audible to Gabrielle's ears:

"The leading journal of R--- has published an article containing a series of damning charges against the Governor. It has often been hinted vaguely that Raven himself was not quite a stranger to the last revolutionary movement; but then, how many allowed themselves to be led away at that time! These ideas are a form of youthful extravagance to which no weight is attached, so long as they remain mere intangible ideas; but in this article it is stated that Raven was a member, a leader even, of the association with which Dr. Brunnow--the same whose recapture created such a sensation lately--was connected, and as the reputed head of which that person was condemned. It is further stated that Raven betrayed his friends in the most dishonourable manner, giving up all their papers, and thus furnishing documentary proofs. His admittance to the Ministry was, they say, the price of this infamous action. The accusation is couched in terms so decided and outspoken that it is difficult to doubt its veracity. The testimony of Dr. Brunnow himself is appealed to, as corroborative evidence."

"And what is Raven's answer to all this?" interposed the Countess, hastily.

"He declares it to be absolutely and altogether a lie. The duty of self-defence requires this from him, of course; but of counter proofs there is no mention as yet. If he does not succeed in clearing up this business, and cleansing himself from all suspicion, his part is played out."

"Poor Matilda!" exclaimed the Countess.

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"Shall we keep the knowledge of what is going on from her for a time?" "No," replied the Countess, "She will learn it tomorrow from the papers. It will be best to tell her all."

The two agreed that the intended visit to the opera should be given up, and went back to the drawing-room together.

Gabrielle's face was ashy white as she left her place of concealment, and returned to her own room. She did not for a moment deceive herself as to the importance of the tidings she had just heard. The instinct of love gave her a better insight into Raven's character than the most experienced judge of human actions might have had. She knew that the Baron was equal to any contest, strong enough to bear any stroke of Fate, except that which should come in the guise of shame and humiliation, and of this nature was the blow now levelled at him by his enemies.

While Countess Selteneck was communicating to the Baroness the painful intelligence, the young girl sat down to her writing-table, and rapidly, with feverish haste, traced some lines on a sheet of letter-paper. This note, which contained but a few words, she folded, and addressed to Assessor Winterfeld at the Ministry. It would surely find him there, she knew. It contained simply the news of her presence in town, and a request that George would come and see her on the following day at the Seltenecks' house; that was all.

In the afternoon of the following day, George Winterfeld entered the Countess's drawing-room. Gabrielle came in a few minutes later, and George hastened to greet her with impetuous joy.

"Gabrielle, my darling, so we meet again at last!"

In his transport of delight he did not notice that her hand lay motionless in his, giving no pressure in return, and that all the answer he received to his tender greeting was a faint, sad smile. He went on, still joyously excited:

"But what does all this mean? I thought you were far away in R---, and only now hear that you are in town, living close by me. And what am I to think of the little note which summoned me hither? Does your mother know of the invitation?"

"No," said Gabrielle, in decided accents, that sounded strangely from her lips. "She has driven out with Countess Selteneck; but I mean to tell her when she comes back that I asked you to come, and why. She would not have given her consent to this interview, and I felt that I *must* speak to you."

George looked at her in some astonishment. It had not formerly been Gabrielle's way to proceed thus with plan and resolution.

"I, too, longed inexpressibly to see you again," he replied. "There was no possibility of sending you news of me. I cannot keep up any communication with the Governor's house, especially against his will. You know, I suppose, on what footing I stand towards him now?"

"I had to hear of it--from others. Your vague hints at parting were utterly unintelligible to me. You left me quite in the dark, and allowed the truth to break upon me unawares."

George understood the reproach.

"Forgive me," he entreated earnestly. "It was entirely on your account that I was silent. I could not make a confidante of you--could not let you share in the knowledge of a project which was to turn against your guardian and host. Are you angry with me for what I have done? You little know how fierce were the struggles I went through before I could resolve on taking that step."

"It has brought you good luck!"--there was a singular, almost a scornful inflection in the girl's voice. "It has raised you from obscurity to fame at a stroke. Your name is now in everybody's mouth."

Winterfeld's handsome face clouded over.

"It troubles me sorely that my fame, as you call it, should spring from such a cause. I certainly never counted on this species of success. You surely do not doubt the truth of what I said to you at parting? You do not doubt me when I say that no personal feeling of revenge spurred me on against the Baron, that the pamphlet, of which you have heard, was commenced before we knew each other? I was prepared for the worst consequences, for I knew the adversary I was provoking. My position, probably my whole future, was at stake, but it had become necessary to cripple the tyrannical power of a man whom none ventured to defy. I resolved to attempt it, and I was ready to accept the issue, whatever it might be. But no matter ever took a more unexpected turn than this of mine. I have been shielded and supported, and the Governor's cause has been abandoned. I had no suspicion of the mighty current of opinion that had set in against him in those very circles where most I feared opposition."

He had spoken clearly and quietly, but there was in his eyes an uneasy, pained inquiry which his lips did not frame. He could not understand his love. She stood before him so cold and strange, giving no sign of sympathy. Not a word of tenderness fell from her now, on meeting him after a separation of weeks. Instead of holding the sweet converse natural to lovers on such an occasion, they were discussing things which once lay worlds apart from Gabrielle, but which now seemed to monopolise her interest. What could have happened to change her thus?

"One more question, George," she began again. "This last attack, this shameful calumny which the newspapers have published--have you had any part in this?"

"No; the sudden disclosure took me as much by surprise as anyone, and I do not know how it originated. I do not war with anonymous communications which refer to a long-bygone past. If I had wished to make use of these facts, the Governor's fall would long ago have been assured, for I knew them some months back."

"The facts!" broke out Gabrielle. "The whole story is a lie. How can you doubt it for an instant?"

"They are facts," said the young man, gravely, "I heard them from the mouth of a man who was reluctant enough to raise his voice against his former friend--I mean Max Brunnow's father."

"Whoever says it, I tell you it is calumny!" cried Gabrielle, with flashing eyes. "Arno is incapable of a dishonourable action; he never has committed one. He declares this tale to be false, and, though the whole world should be of one voice to accuse him, I will believe his word, and his alone!"

"Arno? You will believe him, and him alone?" repeated George, slowly. "What ... what does this mean?"

"Every one is deserting him now," Gabrielle went on, with passionate vehemence. "Troubles are coming upon him from all sides. While he was great and powerful, no one ventured to raise a finger against him; but since you gave the signal for the onset, he has been persecuted and slandered by all his enemies, and hounded, as they hoped, to his ruin. But, seeing that in spite of them all he holds his ground, they have recourse now to their last resource, and seek to wound him mortally in his honour. Oh, I know only too well why he sent me away! He divined what was coming; he wished to be alone in his fall!"

George had grown deadly pale. His eyes were fixed anxiously on the girl's fair face, all glowing with excitement. Her vehemence betrayed too much, and the young man's heart thrilled with a great dread. He felt that his dream of happiness was over.

"What has taken place between you and the Baron?" he asked. "It is not so that a girl defends her guardian, her relative. You might have spoken so of me, had I been exposed to any danger. What has happened during this separation of ours, Gabrielle? No, I cannot believe it. You cannot ... cannot love this Raven?"

She made no answer, but sank on to a chair, and, hiding her face in her hands, broke into loud and passionate weeping. For some minutes a direful silence reigned, broken only by Gabrielle's sobs. George stood motionless. This discovery came upon him too abruptly, too unexpectedly.

"It is so, then," he said at length, in a very low voice. "And he ... yes, now I understand his hatred of me, his fierce anger on hearing of our engagement. This is why he parted us so inexorably; this was why he took from me all hope of ever possessing you. That he would take your love itself from me, I never, never could have believed."

Gabrielle dried her tears, and rose.

"Forgive me, George. I feel how cruel a wrong I have done you, but I cannot help it. I did not know what love was when I gave you my promise. The knowledge came to me when I met Arno, and now it would be treachery to withhold the truth from you any longer. I fought against it, so long as it was possible to fight; yesterday even I doubted and vacillated. Then this news reached me, and all my doubts were at an end. I know now where my rightful place is, and nothing shall move me from it--but, first, I had to tell you all. Release me from that promise, I implore you. I cannot keep it."

The young man stood before her, rigid and pale with the fierce conflict of emotions.

"Was it for this you called me hither--to tell me this?"

"Yes," was the answer, hardly audible.

"You are free the instant you desire it," said George, with profound bitterness. "I swore to you that no power on earth should move me to renounce my hopes until I should hear from your own lips that you gave me up. I have heard it now. Good-bye."

He turned and walked to the door. Gabrielle rushed after him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Do not go from me so, George. Say you forgive me. Do not part from me in ill-feeling and bitterness. I cannot bear that you should be angry with me."

It was the old sweet tone, which had so often worked with captivating power. It arrested the young man's steps even now, and as the lovely tear-bedewed face was raised to him with anxious pleading in the dark eyes, his wounded pride was silenced, and the deep affection of his heart welled up within him once more.

"Must I lose you?" he asked, in a voice tremulous with excessive emotion. "Think, Gabrielle, think--do not sacrifice our love, all our life's happiness so hastily. Raven's passion has misled and blinded you. He has the secret of drawing hearts to him as with a magic spell, but he would never, never make a woman happy. You, with your bright sunny temperament, would fade away by that man's side, would pine away and die. You do not know him, child; he is not worthy of your love."

Gabrielle gently freed herself from his embrace.

"Do you think it is my own happiness I am seeking? No; what I wish is to be at Arno's side when all are forsaking him, to share his fate--his disgrace, if it must be. That is the only happiness I look for, and of that, at least, no one shall deprive me!"

There was infinite, pathetic tenderness in her words. George's gaze rested sorrowfully, regretfully on the youthful creature who had so quickly learned all a woman's devotion and self-sacrifice. Thus, thus he had dreamily pictured to himself his Gabrielle, in those early days when he had set the joyous merry-hearted child on a pedestal and worshipped her as the ideal of his life! dreamily only, it must be owned, for there had been no true hope in his heart that she would ever soar to such a height. Now his ideal stood embodied before him; and now, in the self-same moment, he learned that she was lost to him for ever.

"Let us part, then," he said, calling up all his self-control. "You are right. With so absorbing a passion in your heart for another, you could not be my wife. After the avowal you have just made, I should have released you without any entreaty on your part. Do not weep, Gabrielle. I have no ill-feeling towards you; I reproach you with nothing. All my enmity is for him who has robbed me of you. You were the joy, the very life of my life. How I shall bear to live on, now that you have left me, I know not. Farewell."

He drew her to him once again, once again he pressed his lips to hers, and then hurried from the house he had entered with such high hopes, now all fatally shattered and wrecked. Gabrielle remained alone, weeping no longer, but with a dull unspeakable aching within her breast, a thrilling sense of pain and loss. She felt that, with George's love, the best and noblest part of her life had gone from her.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Well, thank God this wretched business has come to a satisfactory end at last. It made me desperate to think I was the cause of it. I congratulate you with all my heart on your release, father."

So saying, Max Brunnow warmly embraced his father, who replied with a half smile:

"It was not an altogether unexpected solution of the question. I received a pretty plain hint some time ago from the Superintendent himself."

"But the press has worked valiantly in your behalf," said Max. "All the papers clamoured for a pardon, and from the very first day the public eagerly espoused your cause."

This conversation took place in the apartments formerly inhabited by Assessor Winterfeld, which that gentleman, on his sudden departure from R---, had made over to his friend. On his recovery, Max had returned to these quarters, and had this morning brought home to them his father, whose release from imprisonment now filled him with joy. The notice of Brunnow's liberation, an act of clemency confidently expected by the nation at large, had been received with general and loudly-expressed satisfaction. In high places it had been agreed to overlook the Doctor's obstinacy, which would not stoop to a petition, would not allow him to move hand or foot in his own behalf--a full and free pardon had been vouchsafed to him. Nevertheless he had the appearance of being depressed and careworn; he was very pale, and evidently ill in mind and body.

Max, on the other hand, was absolutely his own old self. His vigorous constitution had, as he prophesied, enabled him rapidly to recover from the effects of his accident, of which the fresh scar on his forehead was now the sole reminder. One change was noticeable in him, however. The young man's manner to his father, somewhat curt, formerly, and unsympathetic, was now marked by an affectionate and respectful deference. He felt deeply the proof of devotion his father had given him, and Brunnow, for his part, had grown aware how dear his son really was to his paternal heart. That hour in the sick-room had transformed the cold and distant relations

existing between the two, had roused within them genuine affection, and brought about a thorough understanding.

"But now to other matters," said Max, changing the subject. "I have a confession to make to you. Look at me well, father. Do you remark nothing extraordinary about me?"

Brunnow inspected him from head to foot with some curiosity.

"No; only that you have got well with extraordinary promptitude. I remark nothing else."

Max drew himself up with much dignity, took a step forward, threw out his chest, and announced with complacency, "I am an engaged man."

"An engaged man? You?" repeated the Doctor, in surprise.

"Yes; I have sustained the character some weeks now. There has been too much at stake for us all of late, I could not worry you with my love-affairs. But now that you are safe and at liberty, I must ask for your approval and consent. You already know my future wife--I mean Councillor Moser's daughter."

"What, not the young girl who gave me my information as to your state of health? Impossible!"

"Why impossible? Does not Agnes please you?"

"I did not say so, but that delicate white maiden with those dreamy dark eyes cannot surely be to your taste. And then her strange nun-like dress! I took her for a sister of mercy who had been called in to nurse you."

"She wants to go into a convent, she says," declared Max. "I shall have to fight a round battle with the lady abbess, the father confessor, and half-a-dozen reverends, before we two are joined together in matrimony."

"But, Max!" interrupted his father.

"Agnes is extremely delicate, sickly even," went on Max; "but there is nothing really serious the matter with her--mere nervous excitement. I shall soon make her hearty, or what am I a doctor for? She knows nothing about housekeeping, unfortunately."

"Well, as you are carrying out your marriage programme so faithfully," put in Brunnow, in a jesting tone, "how does it stand with the first, the principal clause--with the fortune you declared to be indispensable?"

The young surgeon looked a little disconcerted.

"Bah! I have found out that is not necessary. Do you think I can't provide for my wife and my home expenses? I certainly cannot reckon on any fortune here."

"Well, I must say you go very consistently to work," exclaimed his father. "All this is in direct contradiction to the views you have hitherto expressed. What has come to you, my good fellow?"

Max heaved a deep sigh.

"I don't know; but I believe the germ of idealism is sprouting in me. You have all your life been striving in vain to convert me. Agnes managed it in a few weeks; and as you have always found me painfully deficient in sentiment, I hope you will be enchanted at the change."

The Doctor appeared anything but enchanted. He looked on his son's conversion to idealistic doctrines with evident distrust.

"But, Max," he said, shaking his head, "this won't do at all. A young girl, brought up with convent notions, inclined to religious enthusiasm, the daughter of a bureaucrat of the purest water--how can you transplant this tender plant into our midst? how can you accustom her to our ways and habits of thought? Reflect----"

"I don't mean to reflect--I mean to get married," interrupted Max. "Everything you can say in the way of objection, I have said to myself a hundred times, or more; but it has never been of any good. I must have Agnes--and have her I will, if I am driven to take all the obstacles, our papa the Councillor and his white cravat included, by storm!"

"Ah, yes, the Councillor!" interposed Brunnow. "What does he say to this business?"

"Nothing at present, because he knows nothing at all about it. As a matter of course, I could not ask him for his daughter's hand while you were incarcerated as an offender against the State. But now I shall delay my suit no longer. He will kick me out at once, or at least he will manifest the gracious intention of so doing; but it is not an easy thing to make me quit a position I desire to maintain. I can stand my ground as well as anyone. You need not look so grave, father. I assure you, when you get to know Agnes, you will admit this engagement of mine is the best piece of business I ever did in my life."

The Doctor was forced to smile, in spite of himself.

"We will wait and see; but if, as seems probable, you have to encounter any lengthened resistance from the father of your betrothed, I shall hardly see much of her on this occasion. I start for home the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, do give up that notion, I beg of you," insisted Max. "Why not wait until I can accompany you? Our law business is now happily over; but there is still much to be settled. For instance, a purchaser has come forward for our cousin's estate, and it would be far better that he should discuss the details with you personally."

"No, no," returned Brunnow, parrying the argument. "You have full authority to act, and are much better qualified to settle these practical matters than I am, I want to get away as soon as possible."

"Upon my word, father, I do not understand you," declared Max. "You have sighed so long for your native land, and now that it is open to you once again, you seem absolutely to fly from it."

Brunnow was sitting with his head wearily resting on his two hands. The look of pain in his careworn face was more striking than ever, as he replied:

"I have become a stranger in my own land. And do you think it would be agreeable to me to be called on for my testimony as to Raven's past, to which these disclosures have directed public attention? I must answer, if I were asked; and I will not be interrogated on the subject--at all events, not here."

"Why not?" asked Max. "You have always expressed yourself in the bitterest terms with regard to the Baron and his pernicious mode of government: you have spoken of his fall as a necessity of the times; and now, when, according to all appearances, this fall is imminent, you will not lend a hand to hasten it!"

"Say no more. Max," said the Doctor, sadly. "You do not know how hard a thing it is to have to aim a mortal blow at the man who was once a well-beloved friend. I hoped Winterfeld would have carried his point; but I should have known Arno Raven better. He held his ground, clever as was the adversary--held it to his own undoing. At that time it was open to him to yield, to retire; now he falls--falls disgraced and branded as a traitor! This, to a nature such as his, is to die a thousand deaths. I"--here Brunnow rose impetuously--"I will not be the one to deal out the last stroke. Let those who began the work go through with it to the bitter end. I have made up my mind to start the day after to-morrow."

Max insisted no further.

"It will be some weeks before I am able to follow you, I expect," he observed, after a pause. "I shall not leave R--- until our engagement is ratified and officially made known--until I have secured the Councillor's consent, and can feel sure that Agnes is safe from all worrying interference on the part of her spiritual guardians. But, in the first place, may I count on your support and approval?"

He held out his hand to his father, who took it in his own, and responded cordially without a moment's hesitation.

"I have only seen your affianced wife once; but the very fact that her appearance then charmed and interested me, made me think it impossible you should have been attracted towards her. Our tastes have hitherto differed so widely. Any doubt on my part springs from this alone: I see so great a difference of character and education. If you think you can overcome these difficulties, my son ... all I wish is to know that you are happy."

A warm pressure of the hand confirmed these words; and Max cried triumphantly:

"Now I will go to the Councillor, and drive that most loyal subject of a most gracious sovereign to distraction, by suggesting myself, a rampant demagogue, as a son-in-law. I may leave you alone for an hour, father? You need rest, after all the congratulations and the demonstrations of sympathy with which you have been overpowered all the morning. Good-bye for the present. I am off to run a tilt at my future father-in-law."

Unsuspecting of the coming evil, Councillor Moser sat at home in his parlour, reading the papers. They spoiled the flavour of his coffee, and disturbed his rest. The Councillor read, of course, only the Ministerial journals; but even they could no longer dissemble the terrible fact that the State was in a bad way--hopelessly drifting further and further down the steep decline of Liberalism.

And, worst of all, there stared him in the face the R--- news, which now held a permanent place in the columns of the leading papers. Moser had long noticed, with astonishment and dismay, that the whole official press, instead of energetically taking up the cudgels in behalf of the Governor of R---, adopted with regard to this affair a very lukewarm and indifferent tone; but its attitude now, in the presence of the late occurrences, passed all bounds of belief. No vigorous defence of the Baron, no indignation at the shameful calumny, no word as to a chastisement to be

inflicted on that lying journal. Mention was made of the "late incredible charges," a hope expressed that the Governor would be able successfully to rebut them; tacked to this came an insinuation that, should he not purge himself from all taint and suspicion, his dismissal would become inevitable--thus the possibility of the alleged guilt was admitted. Immediately below this article appeared the intelligence that Dr. Rudolph Brunnow, formerly convicted of treasonable proceedings, had received a full and free pardon, and would that day be restored to liberty.

The Councillor, on reading this, fell into a train of gloomy thought.

For some time past the notion of retiring on his pension had occupied his mind. He had served the State honourably for well-nigh forty years, and had thereby satisfied his sense of duty. His daughter, too, the only pledge of a marriage contracted late in life, and speedily dissolved by death, was about to leave him, to enter on her novitiate. He himself was getting on in years, and needed rest. His position, once his greatest pride, afforded him no satisfaction now. The new spirit breathing through the land invaded even the sacred places of the Chancellery. As yet the Baron's hand grasped the reins tightly; but Moser thought with affright of what would happen were that firm hand to relax its hold. He believed no single word of the lies now scattered broadcast. Raven could, and must, utter silence these malignant tongues; but, after the treatment he had met with from the Government, it was hardly likely he would consent to remain in office. The Councillor felt that he, too, had had his day, and was quite resolved to imitate his chief's example, should the latter tender his resignation.

Moser was roused from his meditations by the opening of a door.

Christine announced "Dr. Brunnow," and that gentleman quickly followed in person.

The Councillor rose and bowed to his visitor, with stiff politeness.

"I hope you have not misconstrued my conduct in remaining a whole fortnight without calling on you," began Max, when the first ceremonious words of greeting had been spoken, and he had taken the seat offered him. "It was solely out of consideration to you and your position, you understand. Now that my father----"

"I am already informed of his liberation," interrupted the Councillor, with all his usual rigid formality. "Our most gracious sovereign has been pleased to pardon."

"Yes; and so all the past is wiped out, and just as if it had never been," said Max, with deft and logical inference. "As for my father, he will certainly not make much use of the permission to remain in his native land."

"No?" asked Moser, visibly relieved by the tidings. The thought that he had bestowed a friendly pressure on the hand of that attainted man weighed upon his conscience.

"No; he returns to Switzerland, which has become to him a second home," replied the young surgeon. "We shall continue to live there; but, in the first place, I feel impelled to reiterate to you my thanks for all the kindness I received in your house. I shall never forget it."

The Councillor nodded graciously. These proffered thanks were but right and proper in his eyes.

"So you come to take leave?" he asked. "I am rejoiced to see you are completely restored to health and strength; and my daughter, too, will be delighted, I am sure, when I inform her of it."

The information was not precisely needed, for Agnes knew very well how matters stood with her former patient. Since he had left her father's roof, she had met him regularly at the house of their common *protégée*, the law-writer's wife. The latter had now in a great measure recovered from her serious illness, and was no longer in need of medical or spiritual aid; but physician and ministering friend continued their visits with a fidelity which was really touching.

"I owe your daughter most special thanks," replied Max. "To her alone, to her devoted care, I am indebted for my happy recovery. You will allow me, therefore, to address to you one request bearing special reference to Fräulein Agnes?"

Moser nodded a second time. He was inclined to grant the request; the young man would doubtless sue for permission to take leave of Agnes personally.

But Max rose from his chair, and said point-blank, without any ceremonious preface:

"I come to sue for your daughter's hand."

The Councillor, about to nod a third assent, stopped suddenly, and sat with open mouth. For the first instant he really did not understand what the other had said; then he rose in his turn, not hastily, but with slow solemnity. His gaunt figure grew taller and taller as it emerged from the depths of his armchair, seeming gradually to become more gaunt and more uncanny, until he stood at his full height, and looked down over his white neckcloth with a scathing gaze at the young surgeon.

"I--I believe I did not hear aright," said the old gentleman, at length. "You were saying----"

"I am asking for your daughter's hand in marriage," replied Max, with equanimity.

"Are you out of your senses?" asked Moser, still in bewildered amazement; for though this strange thing was repeated, his mind refused to grasp it.

"Not at all. I am in a perfectly normal condition," Max affirmed, and then went on in the same breath, without giving his listener time to collect his wits: "As for my proposal, it is based on our sincere mutual affection. I have already obtained your daughter's promise. Agnes has given me her hand and heart, conditionally, of course, on your consent, for which I now formally ask, entertaining the pleasing hope that it will not be denied me, that my betrothed's father will deign to accept me as his son. Allow me, then, my dear father-in-law----"

He advanced towards the Councillor with open arms, but by an agile rebound the latter saved himself from the intended embrace.

That terrible word "father-in-law" had roused him from his torpor. The position was evidently not to be taken on a first assault.

"You are speaking seriously of a marriage?" he cried--"of a marriage with my daughter, whose vocation for a religious life you well know. You, the son of a political offender, of a convicted rebel, dare to make such a suggestion?"

"My dear sir, I am not seeking a State appointment, but a wife," urged the young surgeon, in self-defence. "I really do not see why you should be so horrified at my offer."

"What, you ask the reason? Your father, sir, wished to overthrow the Government of his country."

"Well, I had nothing to do with it; I could not very well be implicated, as at the time of that affair I was just about four years of age. Besides, these are old stories long buried and forgotten. My father has been amnestied."

"Once a rebel, always a rebel," declared the Councillor, emphatically. "An amnesty can avert punishment. It cannot efface the past."

Max assumed a look of indignation.

"Is it possible, Councillor Moser, that I hear this from your lips? You, who have ever boasted of being our sovereign's most loyal subject, now refuse to recognise that sovereign's edict? His gracious Majesty has pardoned, you say yourself. It is his will that the past should be effaced and forgotten; but you will not accept this decision; you would abrogate the royal prerogative; you rise up in revolt against the authority of the reigning prince! Why, this is opposition, rebellion--to put it plainly, treason itself."

This wonderful chain of argument was developed with so much fluency and assurance that the Councillor had no time to put in a word, or to reflect on its intrinsic value. He was flustered and disconcerted. Casting a hopeless glance at the speaker, he said at length, in rather a small voice:

"Do you really think so?"

"It is my unalterable conviction. But to return to my offer of marriage."

"Not a word more on the subject," interrupted Moser. "To speak of it is an insult. My daughter is the betrothed of Heaven."

"I beg your pardon, she is my betrothed," asserted Max, manfully. "Heaven can wait, I can't. After fifty years of conjugal happiness, I have no objection to surrender Agnes to a higher lot. Until then, I claim her as mine, and mine alone."

"Do you mean to turn my child's sacred vocation into ridicule?" exclaimed the old gentleman, kindling to fresh wrath. "I have long known you to be an infidel, an atheist, a----" his voice forsook him, he panted for breath, and grasped at his neckcloth with both hands.

"Do not excite yourself in this manner," said the young doctor, warningly. "These violent fits of emotion are most dangerous at your age, and to a man of your temperament. They are calculated to produce congestion--apoplexy!"

Moser's long, meagre frame seemed to give the direct lie to this assumption, but Dr. Brunnow did not stick at such trifles. He went on calmly:

"Let me add that, to one of your peculiar constitution, it would be an incalculable benefit to have a doctor for a son-in-law, one who would watch over his father-in-law's health with the utmost care. As I said before, you must not excite yourself."

"It is you who excite me!" cried the Councillor, stung to distraction by this repeated mention of the objectionable relationship. "It is you who will bring on me an apoplectic attack with your detestable suggestions. I feel quite ill now; the blood is all mounting to my head. I want air."

So saying, he sank back in his arm-chair, and clutched at his cravat again. Max kindly came to his assistance, and loosened the knot.

"We will take off this white monstrosity," said he, "you'll feel easier then. I have an infallible remedy against congestions, and I will prescribe it for you at once. These seizures are serious; we must be careful."

Moser gave a melancholy glance at his beloved white cravat, now in the sacrilegious hands of the doctor, who folded it neatly together before laying it on the table. With that "white monstrosity" all the old gentleman's vehemence seemed to have gone from him; the allusion to apoplexy had made him anxious. He looked on quietly while his tormentor went up to the writing-table, wrote a prescription for a harmless composing draught, and then returned to him, holding the paper.

"Six drops in a glass of water," he said impressively.

"How often?" growled the Councillor.

"Three times a day."

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it, pray."

The Councillor hoped and expected that this irrepressible suitor would now deliver him from his presence; but he was soon undeceived. Instead of taking his leave, the young man drew forward a chair, and sat down opposite him.

"So I may reckon on your consent to my marriage with your daughter?" Max began again.

Moser would have blazed forth anew, but he thought of the tendency to apoplexy and the necessity of avoiding all excitement, and therefore replied with all the calm he could command:

"No; a thousand times no! I do not believe that Agnes can so far forget herself as to entertain an affection for you. She has, of her own free will, chosen a religious life. She is an obedient daughter, a pious Catholic."

"And will, I am sure, make an excellent wife," wound up Max. "Besides, after all, I am a Catholic myself."

Moser folded his hands.

"Ah, what sort of one?" he groaned.

"I only mean that the religion need not be an obstacle. My position, I must confess, is rather a modest one at present; but it may satisfy a wife who has not very soaring pretensions. As for my character and habits, my father-in-law----"

"For Heaven's sake, let me have no more of your father-in-law. I will not endure it. You are an impertinent, a most obnoxious person."

"You will get used to me in time," said the young surgeon, consolingly. "I may come again to-morrow, may I not, to see my betrothed?"

The old gentleman made no reply, fearing to prolong the interview. His one object was to rid the house of this tormenting nuisance. To-morrow he would shut himself in, and see his doors well bolted. Max himself seemed to understand that he had gone far enough for one day, for he now moved to take his departure, turning to fire a parting shot as he reached the door.

"Councillor Moser!"

"Well, what more do you want?" asked the old gentleman, despairingly.

"When you talk over this business with Agnes, be sure and avoid all undue excitement. You know the danger of it. Six drops of the medicine in a glass of water three times a day, and, above all things, quiet and composure. I should be miserable if any accident were to happen to so near and dear a relation."

Then he really went. The Councillor sank back in his arm-chair, utterly spent. Now only, on being left alone, did he fully comprehend the glaring nature of the affront put upon him, and he could not even allow free vent to his just and righteous anger; he must be on his guard against violent emotions and apoplectic fits.

Dr. Brunnow had not left the house so promptly as its master supposed. He was at this moment standing outside in the anteroom with his arm round Agnes's waist, quite as a thing of course, and as though he had received official recognition as her future husband. The girl was anxiously questioning him, wishing to hear exactly what course the interview had taken, and what answer her father had made.

"Well, he says 'no,' so far," Max had to confess; "but set your mind perfectly at rest--he will say 'yes' before he has done. I did not expect the fortress would capitulate all at once. It must be invested, besieged in due form. On the whole, I am satisfied with the result of this first attack. Breaches have been made in the fortifications, and to-morrow I shall advance my posts."

"Ah, Max," whispered Agnes, with her eyes full of tears, "what troubles we have before us! My courage fails me when I think of all the difficulties. I shall never overcome them."

"No more you need. To overcome them is my business," said Max, encouragingly. "I shall stay here until it is all settled and the wedding-day fixed. Your father must be allowed time now to grow accustomed to the idea; meanwhile, I shall, in the most humble and deferential terms, signify the fact of our engagement to the lady abbess and his reverence the confessor, the two of whom you stand in such great awe."

Agnes shuddered.

"Some portion of the storm you will have to meet," continued Max; "but the chief brunt of it I will take on myself. Steady, little Agnes--show a brave front. I give you my word that your father will voluntarily and cordially give us his blessing."

With these words and a kiss, he took leave of his betrothed.

CHAPTER XX.

On the morning of the following day, Baron von Raven sat, as usual, busily occupied in his study, when it was announced to him that the Superintendent of Police requested an audience. This functionary came but rarely to the Castle in these days. For one thing, order being now completely re-established in the town, there was no longer any necessity for perpetual messages to, and conferences with, the Governor; moreover, since the affair of Brunnow's arrest. Raven had received him with such marked coldness, that the police officer avoided as much as possible all meetings with his Excellency. Now, however, it had become necessary to discuss some official regulations. He therefore repaired to the Government-house, was admitted to Raven's presence, and at once laid before him the matter in hand, which was despatched by both gentlemen as briefly, and in as business-like a tone, as possible.

The Superintendent preserved his accustomed suavity of manner, though, taking his cue from the Governor, he assumed a certain degree of reserve. No allusion to recent events did this wary individual permit to himself. The Baron's attitude was loftier, haughtier than ever; but there was something in the proud man's look that suggested a strange parallel, that recalled the hunted stag, which, feeling its strength exhausted and its end approaching, gathers together its last remaining energies, and turns at bay to face the pursuers. The undaunted spirit still visible in his every feature was perhaps no longer the sign of conscious power, but only the outcome of despair.

One part of the conversation had been brought to a conclusion. Speaking of the measures which it had lately fallen to his province to carry out, the Superintendent alluded to the release of Dr. Brunnow. The Baron interrupted him, asking:

"When was Brunnow set at liberty?"

"Yesterday at noon."

"Indeed?" remarked Raven, laconically.

"I hear the Doctor intends to leave this city tomorrow," went on the Superintendent. "He will return at once to Switzerland, where he intends to spend the remaining years of his life."

"He is right," said the Baron. "A man who has lived so many years in exile can seldom or never feel at home again in his native land. The adopted country generally prevails over the old."

He spoke indifferently, as though his remarks applied to some stranger, of whose pardon he had accidentally heard. The Superintendent was not duped by this assumed composure, but, in spite of his keen powers of observation, he had not succeeded in piercing the ramparts with which this guarded and taciturn nature had fenced itself around, or to discover what position the Baron meant to take up with regard to the accusations lately brought against him.

A servant came in, bringing to the Governor a despatch which had just arrived from the

capital--a great official document. Raven signed to the man to withdraw, and broke the seal, saying carelessly:

"You will excuse me for a minute?"

"Pray do not let me be any restraint, your Excellency," replied the Superintendent, politely; but, as he spoke, his eyes travelled with a peculiar curious gaze from the letter to its recipient.

Raven unfolded the despatch. Hardly had he cast a glance at its contents when he started violently. His face grew livid, and his right hand, closing on the paper, crushed it convulsively. A quiver of rage, or of pain, shook his mighty frame, and for a moment it seemed as though his emotion would master him.

"I hope you have received no unpleasant news," asked the police officer, with a well-feigned accent of sympathy.

The Baron looked up. He fixed his stern, searching eyes on the face of the man before him, whose *rôle*, since the circumstances of Brunnow's arrest, he had perfectly divined, and on whose features he now detected a slight derisive flicker, which showed his visitor was already acquainted with the contents of the document. That restored his strength, and brought back his composure.

"Surprising news, to say the least," he answered, laying the despatch aside. "But there will be time to attend to that later on. Pray proceed with what you were saying."

The other hesitated. This wonderful self-command produced a certain effect on him. He had seen with his own eyes that the blow had struck home, but all further satisfaction was denied him. The wound should not bleed in his presence. The injured man pressed his hand on the spot, and stood erect as before. Was the haughty, stubborn spirit, the arrogance of this Raven, never to be broken?

"We have discussed the principal topics under notice," replied the Superintendent, with a certain embarrassment. "If you have other claims on your time, I will not detain you."

"Go on, I beg!" The Baron's voice was low, but very steady.

The Superintendent saw that any show of forbearance would be looked on as an insult. He therefore took up the thread of their former conversation. The remarks made by Raven, as he concluded his report, were perfectly apt and to the point, but they were spoken mechanically, and his manner, too, was mechanical as he rose from his chair when the Superintendent prepared to depart.

"Your Excellency has no other recommendations to make to me?"

"No; I can only recommend you to follow out your instructions as punctually as hitherto. In that case, some recognition of your services will surely follow."

The other thought fit to feign bewilderment.

"I do not understand your Excellency. To what instructions do you allude?"

"To those you received before leaving the capital, when, together with the official duties of your service, a special surveillance was committed to you."

"Ah! the surveillance of the town, you mean? I think, in that respect, I have done my duty. Besides, the troubles are over now, and all that is at an end."

"Exactly," replied Raven, with a contemptuous smile; "and all relations between us at an end, too, as you will readily understand."

Without wasting another word on him, he turned his back on his visitor, and walked up to the window. This might well have been construed into an insult, but it did not suit the Superintendent's policy to take offence; that might lead to unpleasant consequences. He took leave, therefore, with a courteous bow, which was not returned, and left the room.

Once outside, he drew a breath of relief. It had been disagreeable to him to find that the Baron saw through him and accurately judged his line of conduct, the more disagreeable that he had no cause to look on the Governor as a personal enemy. He had merely acted in the discharge of "his mission" in ferreting out all that related to Raven's past, and in securing the living key to that past, Dr. Brunnow, so that the secret unearthed at last might safely be published to the world. With such sophistical arguments he easily consoled himself for the equivocal part he had played towards the Baron from first to last, the more easily that his acting had been successful and altogether achieved its aim.

Raven was left alone. He stood before his writing-table, and once again read through the fatal despatch. It signified to him his dismissal from office, and was worded in curt, almost offensive terms. No explanation, no defence was required from this man against whom such heavy charges had been brought. Time, indeed, had not been allowed him to explain or to vindicate himself. He

was condemned unheard. It was not even left open to him to resign, the usual expedient in such cases. He was dismissed summarily, in a manner which could leave no doubt in the public mind that the Government took the side of the accusers, and considered that the case had been proved against their representative. The Baron dashed the paper from him, and paced the room in a fierce, mute conflict of emotions. His lips twitched, and a fiery light gleamed in his eyes.

All at once he stopped, as though a sudden thought had flashed upon him, and went slowly up to a side-table on which stood a box of small dimensions. A slight pressure on the spring caused the lid to fly open, and displayed a brace of elaborately-chased pistols. The Baron took one out and examined it carefully, to convince himself that it was in perfect order. For some minutes he held the pistol in his hand, gazing down at it lost in moody thought; then he laid it back in its place again, and drew himself up quickly.

"No," he said, under his breath; "that would pass for cowardice, for an avowal of guilt. Some other way must be found. They shall, at least, not have that triumph."

He threw down the lid of the box, and turning away, began again the silent, restless pacing to and fro, the sombre brooding search for a plan at all points suitable. A solution must be found.

Meanwhile Dr. Brunnow, in his son's rooms, was busily preparing for his departure, now irrevocably fixed for the morrow. Max had left him to prosecute the "siege" he had commenced on the preceding day. He was again a visitor at Councillor Moser's dwelling, and again employing all his batteries of argument to prove to the old gentleman what a distinguished, and in all respects desirable, son-in-law the latter would obtain in Dr. Max Brunnow. Neither locks nor bolts could avail against the persistency of this undaunted suitor.

His father let him take his way. He knew Max well, and felt sure that the young man would eventually be victorious. Had he followed his own wishes, he would have started on his return journey that same day, but the promise he had given his son bound him to remain twenty-four hours longer. The ground he walked on seemed to scorch his feet; he longed to be away, and all the congratulations, the marks of sympathy lavished on him on his release, seemed but to make his stay still more distasteful to him.

Brunnow had just finished a letter, telling of his speedy return home, and was about to ring and confide it to the maid to post, when the latter came running in unsummoned, and announced breathlessly:

"Doctor, Doctor, his Excellency the Governor!"

"Who?" asked Brunnow, absently, closing the envelope.

"His Excellency, sir, the Governor."

Brunnow turned quickly. His look fell on the Baron, who had followed the servant and was standing in the anteroom. Raven entered now, and said ceremoniously:

"May I ask for a few minutes' conversation with you, Dr. Brunnow?"

"I am at your Excellency's service," replied Brunnow, warned by the amazement on the maid's face that he must show no signs of perturbation. He gave the girl his letter, and sent her away. When they were left together. Raven dropped his assumed formality of tone.

"My coming surprises you. Are we alone?"

"Yes; my son is out."

"I am glad to hear it, for this present interview of ours brooks no witnesses. Will you have the kindness to close the door securely, so that we may not be interrupted?"

The Doctor silently complied. He drew the bolt on the entrance door, and then returned to the inner room. His uneasy glance seemed to ask the import of this singular, this most unlooked-for visit. The two men stood a few seconds face to face, silent, but with hostility in the attitude of each, as at their first meeting.

The Baron spoke first.

"You hardly expected to see me here?"

"I really do not know what errand can bring the Governor of R--- beneath this roof," was the answer.

"I am Governor no longer," said Raven, coldly.

Brunnow turned on him a quick, scrutinising gaze.

"You have given in your resignation?" he asked.

"I am leaving my post," the other answered, in an agitated voice. "Before I quit the town,

however, I wish to obtain some information as to that article in the newspaper which refers so minutely to events in my past life. You are, I think, the person most likely to afford me this information, and therefore I come to you."

The Doctor turned away. "That article did not emanate from me," he said, after a short pause.

"That may be, but, in any case, you prompted it. We two are now the last survivors of those who were implicated in that catastrophe. The others are dead, or have been altogether lost sight of. You alone were in a position to make those disclosures."

Brunnow was silent. He remembered but too well the inconsiderate words which the Superintendent's wily manœuvre had wrested from him, and which had since been published throughout the length and breadth of the land.

"I only wonder that you did not turn your knowledge of these occurrences to account sooner," went on Raven; "you, or the others who shared it."

"You can answer that question yourself," said Brunnow. "We lacked evidence. If we ourselves were profoundly convinced of your guilt, that was our affair alone. The world requires proofs, tangible proofs, and these we could not produce. Why no voice has been raised against you before this, you ask? No one knows better than you that, in those arbitrary times, which, it is to be hoped, are now for ever past and gone, every inconvenient voice was hushed and stifled. Then Arno Raven rapidly acquired influence, became the friend and favourite of the Minister, whom he was shortly to call father. Later on, as Baron von Raven, he was the most powerful stay and support of the Government, to whom he had become indispensable. No accusation against such a man would have been admitted; it would at once have been stigmatised as a lie, a calumnious lie, and suppressed as such. We all knew this, and the knowledge kept the others silent, I was not withheld by these considerations alone. I ... had no desire to accuse you, and have none now. Some admissions made by me during my confinement--admissions which were, I fear, purposely extracted from me--may have served as a basis for the present revelations. The Superintendent of Police has certainly had to do with the business. He is your enemy."

"No, he is simply a spy," said Raven, contemptuously; "and, therefore, I do not think of calling him to account. It was no duty of his, moreover, to keep back information which you had communicated to him. The information came from you, and to you I look for satisfaction."

Brunnow started back. "Satisfaction? From me? What do you mean?"

"What can I mean? It seems to me no explanation is necessary. There is but one way of wiping out an insult such as you have offered me. You will not refuse me this atonement, I suppose?"

Not a syllable escaped the Doctor's lips.

"On our first meeting after a lapse of years," pursued the other, "you spoke to me words which made my blood boil in my veins. You were then a proscribed man, who had hastened to his son's sick-bed; every hour you spent here was fraught with danger. That was no fitting moment to demand an explanation. Now you are free--so name your time and arms."

"A duel between us!" exclaimed Brunnow. "No, Arno, you cannot exact this!"

"I insist on it. You will accept my challenge?"

"No."

"Rudolph, I tell you, you will accept it."

"And, once again, I say no. Any other man I will fight, if necessary, but not you."

A deep furrow gathered between the Baron's knitted brows; but he knew this friend of his youth, knew that, in spite of those grey hairs, the man before him was still the old Hotspur whose fiery temper, once thoroughly aroused, would silence reflection and overleap all bounds. All that was needed was to find the vulnerable spot.

"I did not think you had turned coward since we parted," said Raven, with simulated scorn.

That told. The Doctor started up in anger, and his eye sparkled ominously.

"Unsay that word!" he cried. "You know well that I am no coward. I have no need to prove that to you now."

"I unsay nothing," declared Raven. "You have brought a disgraceful charge against me, have repeated it in the presence of a stranger, who, as you were well aware, would give it publicity, and now you seek to escape the consequences of your act. Call it what you like--I call it cowardice."

Brunnow's self-command went from him altogether, as the fateful word was thus hurled at him a second time.

"Stop, Arno," he panted; "I will not bear this."

The Baron remained quite unmoved. Not a muscle of his face quivered. He stood, inflexible in his icy calm, goading his adversary on, step by step, to the requisite pitch of madness.

"This, then, is your revenge?" he continued, in a contemptuous tone. "For twenty years you have stayed your hand. While I was great and powerful, you did not venture to strike; but a man nearing his fall is a safer, an easier target. Winterfeld, at least, was an honourable foe. He attacked me, certainly, but it was in open combat; he met me face to face. You prefer to shoot from under ambush, calling strangers to help you in the work. You had no hesitation in supplying the police and the newspapers with weapons against me, but when it comes to facing me and the arm which shall avenge the dishonour done me, your courage fails you. Verily, Rudolph, I should not have believed you capable of such mean and pitiful conduct!"

"Enough!" Brunnow interposed, in a half-stifled voice. "Not a word more--I accept your challenge." His breast heaved with a quick convulsive movement. He had grown deadly pale, and his whole frame shook with emotion. He leaned for support against the back of the chair nearest him. Something like compassion gleamed in the Baron's eye, pity for the man he had wrought up to such extreme agitation, before whom he had placed so terrible an alternative; but there was no trace of any such weakness in his voice, as he replied:

"Good. I will request Colonel Wilten, the commandant of the garrison here, to act as my second. He will arrange the necessary preliminaries with any gentleman you may name as yours."

Brunnow merely bowed his head in assent. The Baron took his hat from the table, and then went up to the Doctor again.

"One thing more, Rudolph," he said, slowly. "This is to me a matter of deadly earnest. As you will feel, seeing the injury you have done me, this duel must be to the death between us. I shall expect that it be not turned into a comedy. It might seem good to you to fire in the air. Do not compel me to repeat before our seconds that which I have said to you here. I give you my word I shall take that course, should your aim be purposely misdirected."

Brunnow drew himself up, and his eyes blazed with fierce, passionate hatred.

"Do not fear," he said. "The words you have spoken to-day have been as the death-knell to our past. Any lingering reminiscences of youth are buried from henceforth. You are right. A duel between us two must be to the death. I, too, know how to avenge an imputation on my honour."

"To-morrow, then, we meet. I will go now and seek the Colonel."

He drew back the bolt from the door, and left the room, drawing a deep, deep breath, as though a load had fallen from him. Then, with a rapid, steady step, he walked away in the direction of Colonel Wilten's house.

CHAPTER XXI.

Late autumn is wont to be a rough, inclement season in the neighbourhood of mountains, and this year, in and about R---, it had not belied its character; but now, at its close. Nature seemed by a supreme effort to rouse all her dying energies. The past days had been unusually clear and mild, so that the months appeared to have travelled back in their course. The earth fell to dreaming one last brief dream of sunshine and summer breezes, before it surrendered itself to grim Winter's icy chains.

It was afternoon now. Baron von Raven sat at his writing-table, engaged in looking through his papers. For some time past, his testamentary arrangements had been made; but there was still much to set in order. Colonel Wilten had promptly responded to the call made upon him. Though he no longer considered an alliance with Raven's family desirable for his son, the constraint and coolness which had lately, since their explanation, existed between himself and the Baron, had been annoying and painful to him; and he seized with alacrity this occasion of rendering the latter a service. He promised to settle all the necessary details, and to come round himself, and report as to what had been agreed upon regarding the duel, which was, if possible, to take place early on the following morning.

Raven had just finished a letter, which he folded and addressed to "Doctor Rudolph Brunnow." The lines on his gloomy brow grew deeper still, as with sure and steady strokes he traced the name on the paper.

"Would that I could have spared you, Rudolph!" he muttered. "The remembrance of this fatal hour will be with you to your dying day. I know it--but there was no alternative."

He laid the letter aside, and again took up the pen; but this time it was less obedient to the hand that wielded it. Some minutes elapsed before he wrote the first few lines; then he stopped suddenly--began anew--hesitated once more, and finally tore up the sheet. Why leave a farewell, every word of which must be barbed with bitterness? The letter would only be a standing reproach to her for whom it was intended.

The Baron threw down his pen, and rested his head on his hand. Not without reason had he dreaded the moment when the one great passion of his life, which had betrayed him into a passing weakness, but which he had resolutely driven from him far into the background, should break the restraining dykes, and rush in upon him again with its swift, strong current. He had maintained a perfectly calm demeanour during the last few hours--though hatred, indignation, and deeply mortified pride were at their fierce work with him; he had gone into the minutiae of his affairs, arranging everything with his customary exactitude; but now all was in order--all was finished, except ... Lo! with a rush, the tide of long pent-up passion returned upon him with all its old irresistible force, and before it the strong man's composure gave way.

It was no soft or tender emotion which filled his breast. Arno Raven was not one easily to give up what he desired, or lightly to forgive where he believed himself wronged. He, of his own free will, had decreed the separation--had sent Gabrielle from him; and he did not repent it. No half-measures suited him. "Let it be this, or that," had been his motto through life; so now he would have absolute and undivided possession of his love, or he preferred to lose her altogether. Well, he had lost her--given her over to another who could rally to his aid the mighty influences of youth and a first love.

The Baron never doubted that the connection with Winterfeld had been renewed in the capital. The tyrannical guardian, who had so long stood between the young people, separating them, had now stepped back, leaving them free to draw together again; and the Baroness was far too weak, too wanting in character, to oppose any lasting resistance to her daughter's wishes, when no longer fettered by fear of her brother-in-law. Besides, Winterfeld's position had changed. He had risen in a most unexpected manner, and would surely rise further--thus the great barrier to the marriage was withdrawn. All was going the natural, appointed course, which he, in his madness, had sought to check and stay. How, indeed, could such a young creature as Gabrielle understand, far less return, a passion so profound, so all-absorbing as his? It had dazzled her, perhaps, had flattered her vanity, to find herself the object of his love; but there could be no question of any deeper feeling on her part--and, a choice being offered her, the blooming maiden, standing on the threshold of life, naturally turned to him who could bring youth as his dowry, who could set before her a long vista of happy years. That gay, sunny being had neither part nor lot in his destiny. The thought of her was altogether out of keeping with this dark hour of defeat, when a man's shattered honour lay in ruins about him, a man's life hung upon a thread.

The fine, but short, autumn day was fast declining, and the rays of the setting sun sought and found their way into the study. Through the deep bay window came a broad, golden stream of light, filling the sombre room with a strange transfiguring gleam. Raven's look rested moodily on the brilliant flood. So had the sunbeam glanced across his life, gilding, glorifying all for a brief space, to disappear suddenly, leaving him again to loneliness and darkness. In vain he tried to free himself from the remembrance, to stifle it by bitter reasoning--in vain! by every road his thoughts travelled back to Gabrielle; every object about him seemed to suggest her name--his mind was full of her. He had resolved to have done with the past, with the world, with life; but this wild, overpowering longing for the only being he had ever loved, chained him to the existence he was preparing to quit. A sigh, so deep as to be almost a groan, burst from his labouring breast. He was alone now, and needed not the mask of proud impassible calm. To have preserved it longer would have exceeded all human strength. He pressed his hand to his burning brow, and closed his eyes.

Some time went by, and he still sat on, absorbed in his gloomy brooding; then the door opened gently, almost inaudibly, and as gently closed again. Raven did not notice it, and did not stir, until the rustle of a woman's dress close at hand startled him. He turned, and a great spasm passed across his face; but the exclamation he would have uttered died on his lips, and he gazed with speechless amazement, almost with awe, at the vision before him, which could only be a creation of his disordered fancy. Opposite him, in the full stream of light, stood Gabrielle, motionless, surrounded by an aureole of golden rays, as though in verity she were but an apparition called up by the earnest, passionate craving of a despairing heart, a phantom which would next minute vanish mysteriously as it had come.

The Baron had risen.

"Can it--can it be you?" he asked at length, and his breath came short and quick. "I thought you were far away."

"I left town this morning," replied the young girl, in a low voice. "I have only just arrived. They told me you were here in your room."

Raven did not answer. His eyes were still riveted on the fair tender face, as though even yet he could not believe in the reality of her presence. Yes, she was there indeed! how, wherefore, he did not at present think of inquiring. Gabrielle seemed to misinterpret his silence. She stood in the same spot, timid and anxious, not venturing to approach him. At last she took courage, and drew slowly nearer.

"Will you repulse me again now, Arno, when I tell you that you were wrong in suspecting me? I should have spoken long ago, but you put me from you so roughly, so harshly. You would not even hear me--that roused my pride. I would not beg for the confidence you refused me. I"--she stood close by his side now, and looked pleadingly into his face--"I knew nothing of that attack upon you. Only, when he was going away, George told me there would soon be open war between you and him. I pressed in vain for some explanation. He would give me none, and a few minutes later we had to part. Since that day, not a word, not a syllable on the subject reached me, until you yourself held up the book before my eyes. If I had had the slightest suspicion of what was coming, you would have heard of it. I never betrayed you, Arno, believe me."

Truth rang in those accents, shone in her face. Raven caught her hand with a quick movement. Still with the same expression of eager, intense anxiety, he drew her to him, and, without uttering a word, looked into her eyes, which, through their glistening dew, met his fearlessly. This silent, piercing scrutiny lasted some seconds; then the Baron stooped suddenly, and pressed his lips to the girl's brow.

"No, you are true," he said, with a deep long breath. "I believe you."

His hand clasped hers more firmly. He now remarked that Gabrielle was still in her travelling dress; she had merely thrown off her hat and cloak before coming in to him. As yet, however, he was far from divining how matters really stood. His next question proved this.

"Where is your mother, and what has caused this speedy return? I did not expect you for several weeks."

A deep crimson blush slowly mantled to the girl's cheeks.

"Mamma stayed behind. I could hardly make her consent to my coming. She only yielded when she saw there was no possibility of keeping me away, I came by myself, with only our old servant as escort."

Raven followed her words with breathless eagerness. A dim presentiment of boundless, inexpressible happiness stole over him; but at the same moment the old shadow crept between them.

"And Winterfeld?" he asked, in a keen, incisive tone.

Gabrielle's eyes fell, and her voice trembled as she answered:

"I have been forced to give him great pain, to cut him to the heart," she answered; "but it was right he should learn the truth before I left to come to you. George knows it all now; he knows to whom my love, my whole love, is given. He has released me--I am free---"

She could not finish. Arno had drawn her close, close to his breast. She felt his arms round her, felt the pressure of his lips on hers, and everything else, even to the remembrance of George's pain, melted away, drowned in the exceeding sweetness of that moment. At length Raven raised his head, and, still holding her to him, said:

"But what brought you to me at this precise time? Why did you hasten? You do not, cannot know what has happened."

Smiling through her tears, Gabrielle looked up at him.

"I only heard that fresh trouble was menacing, and I wanted to be with you."

"I wanted to be with you!" the words were simply, naturally spoken, but Raven understood the entire, the infinite devotion they expressed. He gazed down in silence on the young creature, whom but a short time before he had so bitterly accused, whom he had denounced as fickle and unstable of purpose, but who now resolutely tore asunder all restraining ties, to hasten to his side and share his fate. Through the deep night which encompassed him, irradiating all the gloom, came a flash of ineffable joy and triumph at finding himself so loved.

The golden stream of light faded gradually as the sun sank lower and lower. A few solitary rays still strayed into the room; but, little by little, these too vanished, and the space was filled with a faint rosy shimmer, a reflection from the gorgeous evening sky without. Arno and Gabrielle paid no heed to it. He had drawn her to his side, and was speaking in low, earnest tones, but not of downfall or of danger. For them such things existed not; they gave them not a thought. For the first time their hearts frankly met, no shadow, no misunderstanding interposing between them; for the first time they could be all in all to each other. Past and future were dissolved in this one consciousness; they loved, and in their love were infinitely blest.

"Colonel Wilten waits on your Excellency." A servant, coming in, made this dry, formal announcement.

Raven looked up as though he had been roused from a dream. He passed his hand across his brow.

"Colonel Wilten?" he repeated slowly. "Ah, true. I had forgotten that."

Gabrielle's attention was at once aroused.

"Must you see the Colonel to-night?" she asked, seized, as it were, by some vague foreboding. "The reception-hours were over long ago."

The Baron stood up. The radiant expression which had illumined his face was gone now.

"I expected him. There are matters it is necessary for us to discuss. Ask the Colonel to have the kindness to wait for me in the drawing-room. I will be with him directly."

The servant withdrew.

"I must leave you, Gabrielle. You little know what it costs me to part from you, even for a moment," he said, in an agitated voice; "but the affair which brings Wilten to the Castle must be settled at once, if I wish to have my evening free. Then we shall be alone together, and no one shall disturb us. Come, I will take you to your room."

He passed her arm through his, and led her through the library and across the corridor over to the opposite wing. A few minutes later he entered the drawing-room where the Colonel awaited him. Their interview was of short duration. Scarcely a quarter of an hour later Wilten left the Castle, and the Baron returned to his study, sitting down once more to his writing-table. He had said truly. It cost him a cruel pang to lose sight of Gabrielle, even for a few minutes, and yet he now remained absent from her a full hour. She could not be there at his side while he wrote to her that farewell letter.

The unexpected arrival of the young Baroness had caused some surprise at the Castle, especially as she came without her mother; but the old retainer, who had accompanied her, soon vouchsafed the necessary information. His Excellency had, by letter, summoned his ward and sister-in-law to him. Unfortunately, the latter had had a slight return of her illness, and was still too unwell to undertake the journey, so she sent the young lady on first, and would follow herself in the course of a few days. The Baroness, finding it impossible to detain her daughter, had imagined this pretext to give colour to the strange proceeding. She herself was really unwell; the news she had heard from Countess Selteneck had brought on one of her nervous attacks. This precluded any thought of her travelling, to the intense relief of Gabrielle, who well knew how unwelcome her mother would be to Raven at such a time. She accepted the pretext with all docility, and this simple, natural explanation found credence both at the house she was leaving and at the Castle.

Evening had now fully closed in. Gabrielle was still alone in her room, counting the minutes until Arno's return. Colonel Wilten's visit awakened no special surprise in her mind, for, before her departure, conferences between him and the Baron had been of very frequent occurrence. She had opened the window, and was leaning dreamily forward, looking out, when at length the longed-for step sounded at her door. She flew to meet her visitor, and he clasped her to him as though that brief hour had been as a separation of years.

"Now I am free," said the Baron, coming in; "altogether free, my Gabrielle. Now I am yours, and yours alone."

Gabrielle looked up at him. His countenance was paler than usual, but it wore an expression of grave, deep calm.

"The Colonel brought you no bad news?" she asked apprehensively.

"No: only some necessary information," replied Raven, very quietly, but withdrawing at once from the circle illumined by the lamp, and going up to the young girl at the window.

The air without was cool, but mild as on a spring evening, and the country around lay bathed in bright moonlight.

"I opened the window," said Gabrielle; "the room seemed so close, and it is such a beautiful evening."

"Yes, most beautiful," repeated the Baron, gazing out, apparently lost in thought. Then, turning suddenly to his young companion: "You are right," he said; "there is a stifling, oppressive feeling indoors to-day. I myself feel a longing for the open air, where one can breathe more freely. Shall we go down into the garden?"

Gabrielle at once assented. The Baron took a shawl which was lying on the sofa, and wrapped it carefully about her slender figure. Then they left the room together.

The Castle-garden was still and solitary as ever, but its summer glory had long departed from it. The thick canopy of leaves, which had enclosed it in deep shade, was fast thinning. The mighty limes stood half bare, stripped of their foliage, and the moonlight fell full and clear on the stretch of greensward at their feet. The Nixies' Well babbled and rippled on; the fountain splashed and threw aloft its white veil of spray; and the two, to whom the voice of its waters had whispered so fateful a message, stood once again by its brink, within reach of its glittering shower.

Raven looked down at his companion with mingled tenderness and melancholy.

"The nixies' vengeance has overtaken me, after all," he said, in a low tone. "Why did I venture to jest at them and their magic spell? I have not visited the place since that day; but to-night I seemed drawn to it irresistibly. I felt I must see the fountain once again."

Gabrielle started at his last words.

"Once again? What do you mean, Arno? Why do you say that?"

Her words were eager, prompted by a quick, anxious misgiving.

Arno smiled, and passed his hand caressingly over the girl's fair hair.

"You must not be so timorous. I only mean that shortly, in the course of a few days, I shall leave the Castle and this town. The blow you believed to be impending has fallen on me, my child. This morning I ceased to be Governor of the province."

"So they have driven you to the last extremity," said Gabrielle, sadly. "You have resigned?"

"No; I am dismissed."

The Baron's lips twitched, but he could bring himself now to speak the word which was fraught with such profound humiliation.

"Dismissed!" repeated Gabrielle, "without your seeking it? Why, that is----"

"An insult," concluded Raven, as she hesitated. "Or a condemnation, as you like to take it. It is usual, if only for appearance's sake, to allow a fallen man the faculty of retiring; but even this favour has been denied me."

"And what will you do now?" asked Gabrielle, after a pause.

"Nothing," replied the Baron, coldly. "My public career is at an end. I shall go to one of my estates in the country, and there--live on."

"Will that be possible to you, Arno? You once told me that to work and to rule were as the necessary conditions of your being, that you could not endure an aimless existence, the monotonous round of an every-day life."

"I shall learn to endure them perhaps. One has so much to learn in this world. At all events, I must try."

"And I shall go with you," whispered Gabrielle, with the fervour of a great love. "I shall stay with you, always and always."

"Yes, always."

Again Raven smiled, but he avoided meeting Gabrielle's eye. He put his arm round her gently, and drew her to the seat near the fountain. Over this seat the tallest of the limes, still decked in half its wealth of leaves, cast its shadow; here the tale-telling moonlight would not reveal every varying expression of feature. The Baron could no longer meet those anxious, watchful eyes. They were dangerous--keen with the instinct of love, they might pierce through any mask; and yet there was a something which must yet, for a short season, be masked and hidden from them.

Arno sat for a while silent by Gabrielle's side. The great peace surrounding him soothed his weary spirit after all the tempests, all the din of the last few months. In his heart, too, the storm had spent itself. So long as it had been possible to fight, and to defend himself, he had remained in the arena, steady, strong, and to all appearance unmoved. How it had really been with him during that terrible time, when the two ruling passions of his life, pride and ambition, had been daily wounded, racked by a thousand mortifications, he alone knew. Now the battle and the strife were over, and the calm of a final, irrevocable resolve took from the remembrance of the past its deepest sting.

"Gabrielle, you have asked me nothing yet as to the cause of my overthrow," the Baron said, at length; "and yet you know the charges brought against me. Do you believe them?"

"Why should I ask? Of course, I knew at once the tale was false--a false and wicked calumny."

"So you, at least, believe in me," said Raven, with a deep breath of relief.

"I have never for an instant doubted you. But why do you bear the accusation in silence? Why do you not meet and utterly crush it? Even for your own sake you are bound to repel so foul a charge."

"I have publicly declared the statement which has been given to the world to be absolutely devoid of truth. You see how my word has been believed. I can no more bring forward proofs than they can who accuse me. One man, and only one, could have cleared me entirely, and he has long been in his grave. That man was your grandfather."

"My grandfather!" said Gabrielle, in surprise. "He died when I was quite a child, but I have always heard from my parents that you were his favourite and his confidential friend."

Raven mused awhile in silence. Then he went on:

"His was an exceptional nature. Perhaps that was why we understood each other so well, for I myself have never accepted common prejudices for the rule and guidance of my life. He, indeed, was born to the eminence I had laboriously to attain. An aristocrat through and through, he yet possessed sufficient impartiality to recognise talent and force of character wherever he found them, or however they might be employed. I, above all, have cause to know this. It was no small thing for the proud and wealthy nobleman, for the all-powerful Minister to accord his daughter's hand to a young middle-class official who had yet to win for himself a name and a position. Your grandfather was well aware, indeed, that I should not fail to win these, and to no other man of my social status would he have given his daughter in marriage. To him I owe all my subsequent success. To the day of his death he was to me a father and a true friend, and yet I would that he had let me go my own way, that his hand had not forcibly diverted the course of my life. It led me upwards to the dreamed-of height, but the price I had to pay for its help was too onerous, too great."

He paused, and gazed away into the misty distance. Gabrielle laid her hand on his arm entreatingly.

"Arno, I have long felt that there is some bitter memory in your life, and I know it has come through some misfortune, and no fault. Will you not open your heart to me now? I think I have a right to hear the tale."

"You have a right," said Raven, gravely, "and you shall hear it."

He put his arm round her shoulder, and drew her nearer to him.

"You know that I come of plain burgher stock. The early death of my parents taught me betimes to think and act for myself. I entered the service of the State, and had to work my way up from the lowest grade. When the whole land was swept by a storm of revolution, and the capital itself was in a state of armed insurrection, of open rebellion against the Government, I was chained to my desk in a remote provincial town, and so prevented from taking part in a movement with which my convictions led me to sympathise. The very next year, as chance would have it, I was transferred to the capital; I was thus brought into closer contact with my chief, who had lately come into office, and was about to inaugurate that period of reaction which has since followed. He must have perceived that I was not to be weighed in the same scale with his other officials, for he showed a decided preference for me, and I felt that I and my work were being watched with special attention. As yet, however, no opportunity of distinguishing myself occurred. In the capital I fell in again with Rudolph Brunnow, my old and intimate university friend. Though the revolutionary movement itself had been quelled, the land was still in a state of ferment; and as the factious elements, now kept down with a strong hand, could no longer agitate their designs openly, they met and pursued their work in secret. I was drawn into these circles, to which my political convictions had long inclined me, by Brunnow, who was an enthusiastic reformer. He was at the head of a secret association of which I now became a member. We believed in Utopias, impossibilities, and chimeras, which could have no lasting existence in real life; but, foolish as was our creed, we would have died rather than abandon it."

Raven paused a moment. These recollections seemed to move him greatly.

"Then came the catastrophe," he went on, speaking now with more animation. "We were suspected and watched, though we ourselves had no idea of it, until the Minister himself took action against us. He must have supposed that I was in some way connected with the band, for one day he sent for me, and called me to account, though by no means as an offender whom he was anxious to convict. He talked to me in a kind, almost a paternal manner, and that disarmed me. At that time I was not well enough acquainted with him to be aware how inexorable, irreconcilable an opponent of the revolution he was at heart. Like many others, I allowed myself to be deceived by the moderation he displayed at the outset. I was so far carried away as to avow my political views, and to defend them--to defend them to him!

"It was a grave error, and one that has cost me dear. No word fell from my lips regarding the secret I was bound to keep; the Minister, indeed, made no attempt to extract a confession of it from me. He knew me, and was well aware that neither threat nor promise could induce me to act a perfidious part; but my ardent enthusiasm, my imprudent championship of Liberal ideas, were enough to put the experienced statesman on the right track. He dismissed me with

apparent friendliness, but I had hardly reached my home when I was arrested, my papers were seized, and every chance of communicating with my comrades was cut off from me. Rudolph, who was known as my intimate friend, was the next victim. At his lodgings was found the correspondence relating to our association, and in it a key was had to the whole business. Four others of our band shared our fate. The blow fell so unexpectedly that none had time to escape.

"The charge against us was one of high treason, and we might hold ourselves prepared for any fate. After a short interval I was again conducted to the Minister's presence. He informed me that I was released from confinement. He had, he said, convinced himself that I had been led astray, that I had merely been the dupe of Brunnow and his confederates, and offered to overlook what had passed, if I would give him my word of honour to break once for all with the revolutionary party. I stared at my chief in stunned amazement. Did he really not know how I stood towards this secret society, or was he intentionally ignoring the offence? My name, it was true, had nowhere figured in its records. Rudolph was esteemed our leader, but so keen-sighted and discerning a man as the Minister must be conscious that the passive, subordinate part of a lowly recruit was foreign to my whole character. I did not then divine that he purposely shut his eyes, in order to pardon. I decidedly refused to give the promise required of me, declaring that I would not abjure my principles, and was ready to share the fate of my friends.

"The Minister preserved his imperturbable calm, and repeated the offer he had made.

"'I will give you a month for reflection,' he said. 'I have too good an opinion of you, I am too hopeful as regards your future, to allow you to ruin yourself with these wild Socialist intrigues. Your head can render better service to the State than by weaving endless, fruitless conspiracies in prison or in exile. You are not the first man who has recognised his error, and become in after-times the zealous opponent of the cause he once defended, and the very pertinacity and defiance with which you now put from you the proffered means of rescue, prove to me that I may take on myself the responsibility of readmitting you to the service, if you make up your mind to come back as one of ours. As yet no one has accused you, and it depends entirely upon yourself whether the charge against you shall be withdrawn. The few documents which might be compromising to you are in my hands, and will be destroyed directly I have your word. I shall expect to hear your decision in a month from this time. For the present, you are free, and have the choice between an honourable, possibly a brilliant, career, and ruin."

"And you chose----?" asked Gabrielle.

"No," replied Raven, bitterly. "In reality, no choice was left me. They had taken care I should be spared the pain of making one. My first endeavour was to find out how much was really lost to our cause, and how much might yet be saved. I sought out my friends, and met with a reception for which I was utterly unprepared. 'Treason,' they cried, on seeing me. 'Treason,' saluted my ears, wherever I showed myself. Hate, indignation, abhorrence--the whole gamut was run through. At first, I did not understand the meaning of it all--too soon it was made intelligible to me. In their eyes I was the traitor who had brought about the discovery. My official position, the evident favour shown me by my chief, had already given rise to some distrust--now it was clear as day. I had been the Minister's tool and spy. I had disclosed, had sold to him the secrets of our society. My own arrest, they concluded, was nothing but a blind, a concerted plan by which I was to be withdrawn from the vengeance of those whom I had betrayed, and my prompt liberation showed beyond a doubt that I was in league with the enemy, I now found that my chief's magnanimity had not been so complete as I had supposed. He had taken his precautions before setting me at liberty, and had thus definitively shut me out from the ranks of the 'wild reformers.'

"At first I stood bewildered by the terrible accusation, then with indignant vehemence I made my protest. Openly avowing my imprudence, the only crime of which I had been guilty, I gave a circumstantial account of my interview with the Minister--in vain, my words were received as so many mere evasive shifts. I was judged, and against their sentence there was no appeal. One man alone would perhaps have believed me--Rudolph Brunnow. He was the principal sufferer, the one on whom the blow had fallen most heavily; and yet, had I been able to confront him, to look him in the face, and say: 'It is a lie, Rudolph. I am no traitor!' he would have given me his hand, and together we should have fought down the calumny. But he was in prison--beyond my reach. I gave the others my word of honour. They answered that I had no honour to lose, and even refused me all satisfaction for the gross insult. These men, baited, persecuted, irritated to madness, were not capable of forming an unbiased judgment, and I fear that their suspicions were purposely directed against me. This, indeed, I have never learned for a fact; but the pardon, which was soon afterwards granted me, set the seal on my supposed ignominy and my disgrace.

"A month later I was with the Minister again. I had tried every means in my power to clear myself from the shameful suspicion, and had failed. I was still shunned, proscribed by the members of my own party, thrust out from their midst--and now I resolved in my turn to cast them from me. Up to this time I had been blameless. A last resource was still left to me. I could have quitted my native land, and have begun a new life elsewhere, accepting exile, in order to remain true to my principles--as Rudolph did later on, when he regained his freedom. Such a course would in time have vindicated my character, though years might have elapsed first; but I never had any great sympathy with the heroism which seeks a martyr's fate. On the one hand, I saw exile with all its bitterness and privations; on the other I was promised a career which was likely to satisfy, and more than satisfy, my ambition. The late events had destroyed my illusions. I now knew exactly what would be demanded of me, were I to accept my chief's proposal; but my

whole soul rose in arms against those who had condemned me without a hearing. The insults I had endured, the injustice of my former friends, drove me straight into the enemy's camp. I knew that the price of my new position would be the renunciation of my principles--yet I broke with my past, and gave the required promise."

The Baron's voice vibrated strangely; his quick, short breathing betrayed the emotion these painful reminiscences aroused within him. Gabrielle hung on his words in a great tension of suspense; but she did not venture to interrupt the story. He had withdrawn his arm from her now; and when he spoke again, it was in a dull, hollow tone.

"From that time forth my career is known to you and to the world. I became the Minister's secretary, became his confidential friend, and, finally, his son-in-law. His potent influence overcame all the obstacles which stand in the path of a nameless commoner struggling upwards, and when once the road was clear before me, I had only to exert the natural powers I possessed. That in this new life I had to bury and disown my past was a thing of course. I had known that it would be so, and it is not in my nature to make half-resolves, or lamely to perform that which I have decided on. Moreover, by temperament I was inclined to despotic action. Power and authority had ever possessed for me a singular fascination. Now I tasted both, and the brilliant, the almost unexampled success of my career, helped me to vanquish old memories more easily than I had expected. The constant influence of my father-in-law, whom I sincerely revered, that of the circle in which I lived, did the rest. I must go onwards, without looking back--and onwards I went. The way was steep, and led over the ruins of former shrines, but I reached the goal. I have lived great and honoured--to end in this way!"

"But it is only a lie, a wicked calumny which has brought about your fall!" broke in Gabrielle, "This must and shall be clearly shown."

Raven shook his head gloomily.

"Can I compel that belief which the world does not willingly accord me? I have already heard from Rudolph Brunnow's mouth that I have forfeited all claim to confidence. He, indeed, can meet any charge with an unruffled brow; no defence set up by him would pass unnoticed, for his past, his whole life testifies for him--mine condemns me. The man who has abjured his convictions may also have betrayed his friends. The curse of that fatal hour, wherein I proved untrue to myself, weighs on me now, and makes me powerless to refute the calumny which works my fall."

"And who are they who turn against you?" cried Gabrielle, with a burst of indignation. "The very men for whom you have toiled, for whom you have sacrificed all. Oh, the base ingratitude!"

"Ingratitude! Have I the right to look for gratitude at their hands?" asked Raven, with quiet, bitter meaning. "No bond of confidence has existed between us. They had need of me to work out their plans, and I had need of them as stepping-stones by which to mount. It has been one continual state of warfare, a perpetual balancing of our respective strength. I have often let them feel the power of the hated *parvenu*; now that the power is in their hands, they overturn me--I could expect nothing else; but I feel now that Rudolph was right. It is worth something to have kept one's faith in one's self, in the better, higher part of one's nature. The man who stands and falls by his principles can endure reverses; but he who has given the best energies of his life to a cause which was never his at heart, which in his inmost soul he must condemn and despise, has no anchor, no stay in the hour of misfortune."

"And I?" asked Gabrielle, reproachfully. "Am I nothing?"

"Ah yes, you, my darling!" cried the Baron, with passionate tenderness. "Your love is the one thing left to me. But for you, I could not have endured this fate."

"Will you be able to endure it?" asked the young girl, apprehensively. "Ah, Arno, I feel as though it will hardly be in my power to reconcile you to a lot which will lack all that really constitutes your life. You will pine and waste away in solitude, even though I share it with you."

"Let us talk no more of this now," said Raven, gently parrying her question. "We will speak of it later on. I have drawn the veil from my past; it was right that you should know both it and me thoroughly. But now we have had enough of these gloomy recollections. They shall no longer come between us and the happiness of this hour."

He drew himself up quickly, as though by an effort he would cast all troubling thoughts from him for awhile. And truly it was very beautiful, this quiet hour in the moonlit garden. The half-stripped trees, the widowed earth, bereft of flowers and perfumes, seemed to win back their long-lost charm in the mystic light which spread its mild glamour over the scene, veiling the ravages caused by the late storms, and investing it with a calm, transcendent beauty.

Dreamily still lay the Castle-garden, and the broad landscape out beyond it. The prospect, indeed, no longer stretched, beaming and definite, in the radiant clearness of a summer day. Now the valley slept half hidden in its shimmering depths. At the foot of the Castle-hill the city lamps burned steadily, and its roofs and towers rose, white and glittering, aloft into the pure night air. The foremost mountain summits stood forth plainly discernible, their jagged peaks detached, as it were, from the dark masses beneath; farther off, the lines grew hazier, softer, and the remoter

heights were altogether lost in the blueish nebulous distance. Infinite peace rested on all the woods, the hills, the valleys around, as they lay bathed in the silvery flood. Below in the valleys, on the meadows, through the fields, the rolling mists furled and unfurled themselves, a sparkling gleam here and there betokening a bend in the river. High overhead arched the great vault of heaven in all its starry splendour, while everywhere, over earth and sky, was drawn a thin transparent film, a tissue of mist and moonbeam, toning down the picture, lending to it a soft dream-like enchantment. It was a scene of wondrous beauty, of deep, unutterable calm.

Up here too, in the garden, the curling mists crept over the grass, and here too the fitful moonbeams wove their fantastic imagery. Under their influence the grey moss-grown figures about the Nixies' Well seemed to grow into life, to move to and fro behind their humid screen of falling water. The fountain, struck in full by the chaste stream of light from above, rose and sank again in shining sheets of silver rain. Intermingled with its splash and murmur came those voices which are heard only in the stillness of the night, strange, unfamiliar voices, mysterious as the night itself. The wind was hushed. No faintest breeze stirred the air, and yet from time to time a low whisper arose, and was wafted on and on, until, like a breath from spirit-land, it swept by and was gone.

The evening was so mild and clear, one might have dreamed that spring had come again; and, truly, the dream that was now filling Raven's mind was gracious as any May-morning--a late-timed, short-lived dream, no doubt, but concentrating in its brief space all the blessedness which earth can give; so, in passionate heart-stirring words, he swore to the fair young creature he held in his arms, to the woman who had taught him to know both love and happiness. Had any unseen, unsuspected spectator looked on Raven, listened to his impassioned accents, such an one would have understood that this man, despite his years, despite his sternness and reserve, despite all the darker side of his nature, must surely carry off the palm, must win the day against all others where his intenser feelings were engaged, where his heart was set on victory. All the long pent-up ardour and tenderness flamed up in him anew; every word, every look, told of a passion which, in its power and depth, could have fired no youthful breast, a passion such as only a strong man in his maturity could conceive. This Gabrielle felt, as, closely nestling to his side, her head resting on his shoulder, she looked up at him with a happy smile. Those gloomy, distressing forebodings of an hour ago could not hold good before the magic of his voice and presence; and through the music of his words, distinctly audible, came the rippling of the spring, singing on the sweet, monotonous melody to which they had listened in the birth-hour of their love. That land of Eden, which once seemed to lie far off in the glistening distance, away beyond the blue mountains, was not there, but here around them. Paradise had opened, and received them within its gates. It was an hour of pure and perfect bliss, such as comes but once in a life-time, but then outweighs all the joys and sorrows which fill the years from the cradle to the grave.

Slowly the clocks in the town below chimed the hour of eleven. The Baron shuddered slightly at this warning. Then he rose quickly, as by a strong and resolute effort.

"We must go back to the Castle," he said. "The night air is growing cool, and you need rest after your rapid and fatiguing journey. Come, Gabrielle."

She made no opposition, but, passing her hand through his arm, moved away with him. They went by the Nixies' Well, and left the garden. The door closed upon them, shutting out the moonlight and the peace. That happy hour had run its sands; the bright May-dream was over.

They entered the Castle. Upstairs in the corridor, which led to Madame von Harder's apartment, the Baron suddenly halted. Could it be that his iron strength of will was failing him at last? His being was torn and shaken to its very depths by the great agony of that parting, but Gabrielle's questions, full of a vague foreboding, had not fallen on his ears in vain. He knew that the least imprudence on his part would betray all, and would bring on her unnecessary anguish and suspense. The blow must fall--better it should strike her unawares.

"Good-night," said Gabrielle, all unsuspectingly, giving him her hand. "We shall meet again tomorrow."

"To-morrow!" repeated Raven, with profound significance. "Ay ... surely."

He raised the young girl's head gently, so that the light from the hanging lamps fell full upon it, and looked into the fair face now again brightened by the rosy flush of happiness, into the clear, sunny eyes--looked long and deeply, as though he would grave the image on his brain for ever. Then he bent down, and kissed her.

"Good-bye, my Gabrielle--good-night!"

Gabrielle softly freed herself from his arms, and left him. On the threshold of her room she stopped, and waved him a last farewell; then she closed the door behind her. Arno stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the door through which the "sunbeam" of his life had vanished. His voice quivered, as he said, in a low tone:

"Poor child, what an awakening is in store for you!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The next morning broke dull and gloomy, clouded by the thick fog which late autumn often brings in its train. It was still very early, and only just light without, when Colonel Wilten entered the Castle. He came on foot, and was at once shown into the Baron's private study by a servant who had previously received his instructions. Raven appeared immediately. He was quite ready, but his features bore no trace of a past vigil, or a restless night. He had, indeed, slept profoundly up to the moment when his servant had called him. On coming in, he advanced to greet the Colonel with his usual self-possession and quiet gravity. Some few observations were exchanged having reference to the fog, the drive before them, the place and hour of meeting--then Raven drew out the key of his writing-table, and gave it to the Colonel.

"I must ask you, in case of my death, to take on yourself the first and most necessary arrangements," he said. "My papers will be found in order. There, in that compartment, lies my will, with a few personal memoranda which I yesterday noted down. There you will also find a letter which I beg you to forward without delay to its address. It is directed to Dr. Rudolph Brunnow."

"To your adversary of to-day?" asked the Colonel, in astonishment.

"Yes. It contains an explanation which I owe him, but which cannot be given before the duel. He will find it there in writing--but now, one thing more." The Baron paused a moment, and then slowly drew a second letter from his breast pocket. "These lines are destined for my ward, Gabrielle von Harder. I should wish, however, that she might be in some measure prepared before receiving them, or the news of any ... accident ... the shock to her would be terrible. I will ask you, therefore, to place this letter in her hands yourself; but to go to work with prudence, with extreme prudence. A tender young creature like Gabrielle needs care. If the intelligence were imparted to her too brusquely, too suddenly, it might kill her."

Wilten had some difficulty in concealing his surprise at this speech, which was a half-confession. He began to understand why his son's suit had not been more warmly countenanced.

"I have your promise?" asked the Baron.

"In case of your death, the young Baroness Harder shall receive the letter from my own hands, and I myself will break the news to her with every precaution in my power. I give you my word."

"I thank you," said Raven, visibly relieved. "And now it is time we should set out. My carriage is waiting below. May I ask you to drive round alone to the back of the Castle-hill, where I will join you? I wish to avoid drawing attention to this unusually early journey, and prefer not to go out by the principal entrance. I will come through the Castle-garden."

This arrangement struck Wilten as odd, but he assented to it in silence. Raven rang for his hat and coat, and when his valet had brought both, the two gentlemen left the room together, separating below at the foot of the staircase.

As the Baron crossed the Castle-yard, he met Councillor Moser, who was just coming out of his dwelling, and who appeared much surprised at seeing his chief abroad at this unwonted hour. Raven stopped.

"What, Councillor? On foot so early?"

"I was only looking out at the weather, your Excellency," explained the Councillor. "I am in the habit of taking a constitutional in the morning, but when I see this cold, damp fog I prefer to remain at home."

"You do well," rejoined the Baron. "The weather is not inviting."

"And yet your Excellency is going out?" hazarded Moser.

"On a necessary errand which cannot be delayed. Good-morning, and good-bye."

So saying, the Baron held out his hand, which the old gentleman took reverentially, but in some confusion. He had often received marks of the kindly feeling entertained towards him by his chief, but had never been honoured by any such approach to familiarity. This unwonted friendliness encouraged the Councillor to speak words he had long pondered in his heart.

"If I may be allowed a question," he began timidly. "They are saying ... there was a report in the town yesterday evening that your Excellency is intending to retire from office. Is it true? Are

you really leaving?"

"Yes, I am going," said Raven, with quiet decision; "and going very shortly."

The Councillor's head drooped sorrowfully.

"In that case, I shall not remain here myself," he replied in a low voice. "I have long thought of asking to be relieved from my duties."

The Baron looked at him in silence. The old man's fidelity touched him. Moser alone had stood by him, true and staunch to the last; he alone had held to his allegiance, unshaken by the attacks, refusing to be misled by all the calumnies.

"Go back into the house, my dear sir," said Raven, kindly. "You will take cold out here in the chill morning air, lightly clad as you are. Once more, adieu."

Again he took the old man's hand, pressing it this time with a quick, warm pressure; then he went on his way.

The Councillor stood looking after him. He, who habitually had such a horror of taking cold, forgot now that he was bare-headed and without an overcoat. That shake of the hand had bewildered him, and the "adieu" sounded so strangely in his ears. He felt as if he must hurry after his chief and put another question to him, just to look in his face and hear his voice once more, and the thought of the impropriety he should be committing alone prevented him. Not until the Baron had passed out of sight did he return to his dwelling; a deep sigh escaped his breast as he mounted the stairs. It had come, then! The Governor had actually tendered his resignation!

Meanwhile Raven walked with slow steps through the Castle-garden. He had not been able to resist the desire he felt to enter it once again, and the visit involved little or no delay. A small door in the wall gave direct communication with the Castle-hill, a footpath leading down thence towards the town. The Governor had always used this mode of egress when he wished that his appearance at any particular place should be a surprise, and so preferred not to quit the Castle by the principal entrance, and to pass the sentry-posts. He would in all probability arrive below simultaneously with the carriage, which had to make a considerable round by the high-road.

At the Nixies' Well the Baron lingered a few minutes. What had become of the bright moonlit Eden of yesterday evening? All was now closely wrapped in the morning mist. The grass, slightly frosted over, glistened white with rime. The mighty limes, with their sparse foliage, loomed, weird and dark, through the screen of vapour, and the drooping branches strewed the ground with their wet and faded leaves. The nixies' fountain still murmured on, but its shining shower was now transformed into a mere dismal, colourless rain, which dripped incessantly over the grey weather-beaten statues at the base; there was something unspeakably sad in its constant, weary monotony. The transfiguring light, which had glorified all with its splendour, had disappeared, and stern reality stood revealed--autumn in its dreariest aspect, autumn cheerless and desolate.

Raven drew his cloak more closely about him; the morning wind pierced with an icy chill. He turned to the parapet whence the broad prospect could generally best be seen. So recently as yesterday the valley had lain there, dim, but mysteriously lovely in the magic moonlight sheen; now the vast space was filled with seething masses of grey mist. Here and there one of the city towers emerged vaguely, piercing the dense clouds; but the valley, the mountains and distant horizon were altogether shrouded from view. The Baron's gaze wandered over the city, which had so long obeyed his rule, to lose itself in the surging sea of fog at his feet. What was its secret? What lay hidden beyond? A golden sunlit morrow, or grey cycles of endless gloom?

One last look up at the Castle--but a fleeting glance, for Gabrielle's room was on the other side of the building, and her windows could not be seen from hence--then Raven opened the small door in the garden-wall and stepped out into the open country. He arrived at the foot of the hill just as the carriage reached that spot. A minute later he was seated at Colonel Wilten's side, and soon the town and Castle lay far behind them.

Swiftly they travelled on, past the steaming meadows, by the bank of the brawling, fast-flowing river, onwards towards the mountains. In half an hour the goal was reached; they arrived at the skirt of the forests which covered the hill-sides. Here the Baron and his companion alighted, and pursued their way on foot to the appointed place of meeting. The adversary's party was already on the ground. It consisted of Dr. Brunnow, his second, and his son, who, it had been agreed, was to render any medical assistance which might be required. A silent greeting was exchanged, a short parley followed between the seconds, then those gentlemen proceeded to make the necessary preparations.

Max stood by his father, whose pale face and haggard eyes told of a sleepless night, and who in vain strove to hide his feverish agitation. His lips were tightly set, and the hand his son held twitched every now and then with a nervous quiver.

"Compose yourself, father," Max whispered; "your hand is so unsteady, you will hardly be able to press the trigger."

"No fear, I shall be able," replied the Doctor, in the same subdued voice, glancing at the pistols, which were at that moment being loaded by the seconds.

"Colonel Wilten's attention is already attracted this way," said Max, significantly. "Will you let him think that you are thus agitated by fear of a bullet?"

Brunnow gave an angry start.

"True," he said. "The strangers present cannot guess what is passing within me. They shall not, at least, take me for a coward."

He made an effort to collect himself, and succeeded in assuming a calmer demeanour; but he avoided glancing towards the spot where the Baron stood. In his usual haughty attitude, with a look of cold determination on his features, Raven, quite unmoved, awaited the coming event.

The mists began gradually to disperse; already the mountain summits and the villages on the higher lands came in sight. The sun must just have risen, for the whole eastern horizon was suffused with a red glow; as yet, however, the rays were not intense enough to fight a way through the thick vapour. The town still lay shrouded in its moist white veil; but the Castle on the heights was visible now, shadowy, indeed, and in a sort of mirage, but growing every minute more clear and definite. There Gabrielle slept in peaceful ignorance, dreaming of the morrow and the felicity to come; while here the momentous die was cast which was to decide her fate.

Colonel Wilten now declared that all was ready, and the combatants stepped on to the ground. Raven stood well erect, his eye clear and full, the hand which held his pistol absolutely steady, as though certain of its aim. Brunnow's composure was evidently forced, and sustained by a great effort. Though the approach of the decisive moment, and the fear of misinterpretation, in some measure restored firmness to his bearing, his hand shook visibly as he levelled the deadly weapon at the breast of the friend he had once so ardently loved.

Wilten gave the signal. The two shots crashed forth together; and, for a moment, both adversaries stood upright, facing each other. Then one man dropped his weapon, pressed his hand to his breast, took a step back, and fell, without uttering a sound.

Arno Raven lay stretched on the ground, and the white rime on the grass around him grew dark with a deep-red stain.

Max hastily assured himself that his father was unhurt, and then hurried to the side of the wounded man, whom the Colonel was already endeavouring to succour. Brunnow stood motionless, clutching his pistol, and gazing over with fixed, vacant eyes at the group opposite him. The gentleman who had acted as his second came up to him and spoke.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, in a low voice. "Was it not the Baron who challenged you? He fired in the air."

The word seemed to dispel the torpor which paralysed Brunnow. He threw down his pistol, and rushed over to the others.

"Arno!" he cried, with an exceeding bitter cry of despair. Max was attempting to staunch the blood; but his father thrust him violently aside, as though he alone had a right to that place, tore from him the handkerchief, and pressed it to the wound. The young man withdrew in silence, signing to the Colonel and his father's second, who were looking on at the scene in surprise and concern, to step aside with him.

"Can you give the Baron no assistance?" asked the Colonel, in a half-whisper.

"There is none to be given," replied Max. "My first glance at the wound showed me it was mortal. It is only a question of a few minutes, and my father will do what is necessary. I beg of you to leave him alone with the dying man."

"Of the two shots, one only could have proved fatal," said Brunnow's second, meaningly.

The Colonel nodded.

"I saw it too. Raven averted his pistol at the last moment. Strange!"

The three men looked at each other in silence. They began to divine for what reasons this duel had been provoked; but none gave utterance to his thoughts. They felt that at yonder spot, where the adversary knelt by the side of his fallen foe, a scene was being enacted which had nothing in common with the ordinary circumstances of a duel; and, respecting the young doctor's request, they remained reverentially at a distance.

Brunnow had passed one arm round the wounded man, whose head lay on his breast, and supported him, while with the other hand he pressed the handkerchief to the bleeding part. Whether it were the pain of this touch, or the bitter cry "Arno!" which brought him back to consciousness, Raven opened his eyes and made a faint, deprecatory gesture.

"Let that be," he said. "You aimed well. I was sure of it."

"Arno, why have you done this thing to me?" groaned Brunnow. "Must it be my hand, none but mine? Oh! I see now, I understand why you drove me to it."

There was such anguish in his tone that it affected even the dying man. He tried to hold out his hand to the speaker.

"Forgive me, Rudolph," he said, but half audibly. "Do not reproach yourself. I thank you."

His voice forsook him, but with a supreme effort he raised himself, and his roving eyes seemed to search for something in the distance, Brunnow supported him, striving with mortal anxiety to stem the flow of blood, the red life-stream which his own hand had let loose; yet his science told him that here no exertions could avail to succour or to save.

Suddenly the sun broke through the veil of mist. Yonder, on the heights, stood the Castle, illuminated by the morning splendour. Its walls and towers gleamed in the rosy flood, and its windows flashed swift lightning greetings over to the valley beneath. Arno's eyes were fixed intently on one spot; his last look was for the "sunbeam" which even now sent a bright message to him from thence. In another moment the picture paled, the shining vision receded farther and farther from view. Dark shadows gathered about the dying man. Before his dimmed eyes came as the eddy of cool water closing in upon him, and he was drawn down, down into mysterious, glimmering depths where all earthly sounds were hushed, where all the striving and the strife, the happiness and sorrow of life, died away into one long continuous dream; while, intermingling with this dream, there ran ever an unvarying far-off murmur, the low spirit-singing of a spring borne faintly below from some immeasurable distance.

Brunnow laid the dead man gently down. He himself would have risen, but his strength abandoned him, and he sank unconscious to the ground beside the lifeless body of the comrade, the friend of his youth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A new era had dawned upon the land. The last four years had wrought many changes, and had left but little remaining of the old régime. The once persecuted and oppressed Liberal party now stood at the head of affairs, and with this complete reversal of the situation a revolution of opinion had come about in every sphere of official activity.

Tendencies which had once been combated and repressed were now free to develop themselves in the broad light of day, and these altered circumstances had naturally introduced a new set of men into the arena.

Among those whom the political current of the day had swiftly raised to a prominent position was George Winterfeld. As Ministerial Councillor he already filled a post of unusual importance for a man of his years. The Governor who now administered the affairs of the R--- province was, in all respects, the opposite of his predecessor. Liberal in his opinions, mild and forbearing in action, innocent of any leaning to that despotism which had once ruled the land with a rod of iron, he was, it must be added, quite incapable of resolute, energetic action, the need of which would at times still make itself felt.

Immediately after the catastrophe recorded in the last chapter, Brunnow had left the town, yielding to his son's earnest solicitations. Max implored him not to run the risk of a fresh imprisonment, to which his share in the late duel had rendered him liable, and which, to a man of his advanced years, broken by recent events, might probably prove fatal.

The Doctor had, as is known, previously resolved on leaving his native land for ever; so, before the news of the duel was bruited in the town, he quietly departed, returning to his haven in Switzerland. Thence he published to the world a statement, emphatically worded, clearing the memory of his late friend. In this statement he declared that for years he had lived under an erroneous impression which Raven's last disclosures had completely dispelled. Those accusations, so pregnant of disaster, had been untrue, and had done the dead man a cruel wrong. This testimony from the antagonist by whose hand the Baron had fallen, naturally carried great weight, though the matter was no more susceptible of proof now than it had been previously. Death took up the pleading for the defence, and, as is usual in such cases, won the day. That credence which would have been refused the living man, was accorded to the dead; and it was currently reported that with his dying breath the Governor of R--- had declared the shameful charge against him to be a calumny and a lie.

Raven had provided largely for his servants; with the exception, however, of their ample legacies, his whole fortune was bequeathed to his ward, the young Baroness Harder. After Arno's death, Gabrielle had been prostrated by a long and terrible illness, from which she but very slowly recovered. Since that time she had been living with her mother in the capital, where the rich heiress was, of course, besieged by suitors, to none of whom she inclined a willing ear. She seemed, indeed, to put the idea of marriage far from her, to the despair of the Baroness, who would often exhaust all her powers of eloquence in the vain hope of bringing her daughter round to her views. Gabrielle had lately come of age, and was now absolute mistress of her property. It was, therefore, in her mother's opinion, high time that she should make a choice.

Councillor Moser had retired from his post four years ago. The death of his chief had been a great blow to him, and had gone far towards inducing him to carry out his long-cherished project. Another motive, however, combined with this. A man could not, he felt, with dignified consistency, remain in the service of the State when an alliance had been contracted between a member of his family and the son of a reactionary demagogue. This misfortune had really overtaken the unhappy Councillor. He had struggled against it long and manfully, but to no purpose. Max Brunnow gave him no peace until he yielded. That irrepressible wooer appeared regularly, day after day, always ready to assure his dear father-in-law of the delight he felt at their future connection, and of his profound conviction that no better son-in-law than himself was to be found the wide world over. If the old gentleman flew into a rage, this unscrupulous doctor menaced him with apoplexy, and prescribed a composing draught. If he forbade his unwelcome guest the house. Max declared that he could not live without seeing his betrothed, and came next day an hour earlier. At length the Councillor resigned himself to his fate. He was one of those, who, if a thing be constantly repeated to them, come in the end to believe in it. Forced now to hear, day by day, that this son-in-law was excellent as he was unavoidable, he at last allowed himself to be converted, and accepted both propositions as conveying incontrovertible facts.

The "spiritual guardians" were rather more difficult to deal with. They naturally refused to recognise the betrothal, and invoked heaven and the powers of darkness to their aid in opposing it. They menaced the bridegroom-elect with the pains of eternal punishment; he, in his turn, menaced them with the press, and declared he would take the whole town into his confidence, and relate in all the papers how they were trying to tear his bride from him, in order to incarcerate her in a convent against her will. This caused them to reflect. The Governor's fall had plainly shown the power of newspaper articles.

It was judged prudent to yield. The enemy retreated, and Max, triumphant, remained master of the field. He was wise enough to hasten on the wedding as much as possible, and a month or two later he carried his young wife off to Switzerland. Brunnow, now possessed of independent means, thanks to the property he had recently inherited, insisted that his son and daughter-in-law should make his house their home for the present, as Max, absorbed by the strategy of his rapid campaign, had not found time to establish a practice of his own before marriage. The young man set himself diligently to work to regain lost time, and met with much success in his profession; nevertheless, the family remained domiciled under one common roof.

The relations between father and son had undergone a complete change since that scene by the latter's sick-bed; and if ever any little difference threatened to arise, Agnes stepped in, and soon made all straight by her gentle mediation, the young wife having very speedily won her father-in-law's whole heart to herself. The Councillor still lived on in R---, under the sceptre of Christine; but this state of things seemed to suit him, and he travelled southwards regularly once a year to pay his daughter a visit.

Summer had come round again. The lake and the town on its shores lay bathed in bright sunshine; the mountains, wreathed around in thin mist, rose half shadowy in the distance. Rudolph Brunnow's house, once so small and unpretending, was much more handsome of aspect now. The garden had been nearly doubled in size by purchase of the adjacent lots of ground, and the dwelling-house itself had been rebuilt and considerably enlarged, room now being required in it for two families. Young Dr. Brunnow was in the habit of going his rounds in the morning, but on this particular day his patients looked for him in vain. Max stood idly in the garden, talking to a guest who had arrived half an hour before.

"Come with me now, George, that I may have you to myself a little," said he, urgently. "If my father gets hold of you, he will not let you out of his hands again, and I consider your visit is to me in the first place. It was a surprise! I had no idea you were in Switzerland."

"I came on an official errand," replied George; "a mission to our embassy at B----. My business there was settled more quickly than I expected, and I could not refuse myself the pleasure of looking in upon you on my return journey."

The last four years had wrought but little change in Winterfeld. He had grown somewhat more manly, more matured, and his carriage, always calm and assured, had gained in dignity. The former transparent pallor of his complexion had long since yielded to the brighter tint of health; but his brow, once so clear, was clouded by a shadow, and the beautiful blue eyes, which in the old days had been grave only, were sombre now, gloomy even, in their expression. This man of two-and-thirty, so fortunate in his position and prospects, seemed to carry about with him some secret care which took all zest from life. Max Brunnow's appearance, on the other hand, completely bore out his assertion that he found himself very comfortable in this good-for-nothing

world, and amply testified to the fact that Agnes had quickly learned to excel in all matronly virtues.

"I say, George," asked Max, in the course of their conversation, "how long is it to be before you are Minister?"

George laughed.

"A good many years, probably. As a preliminary, I am now Ministerial Councillor."

"And the right hand of the men in office, the soul of the present administration. Oh, we are well up here as to all that is going on in the capital. My father-in-law keeps me exactly informed on the subject. The good city of R---- still does a little in the opposition line, the result, probably, of long habit. The new Governor is Liberal to the backbone, and tolerance itself. They cannot find any real fault with him, and this, of course, is aggravating to them."

"They miss the mighty personal influence which Raven exercised, and which compelled admiration even from his enemies," said George. "The present Governor is honest and well-meaning, but he is not a man of extraordinary mark, and is, perhaps, hardly equal to so important and responsible a post. So the Councillor still lives on in R----. I thought he would migrate at last, in order to be near his daughter."

"The bare notion was an insult," laughed Max, "You imagined that my father-in-law, the very quintessence of loyalty, would accord to a pitiful republic the honour of possessing him as a citizen? No, he will live and die under the wing of his most gracious sovereign. To tell the truth, I doubt whether things would always go smoothly, were the old gentleman and my father to be constantly in presence. They are too strongly in contrast ever to agree thoroughly."

Winterfeld glanced back at the house.

"Max, it struck me that your father was looking very worn and aged."

Max shook his head.

"He cannot get over Raven's death. I thought time would assuage his grief--but no! As a medical man, I may not conceal from myself the fact that he is going from us. I know the symptoms well."

He spoke sadly, and George's face too wore a troubled look.

"He cannot put from him the memory of one he loved so well," said the latter. "The remembrance is wearing him away. I can understand that."

"Yes, you appear to me to be on that road yourself," exclaimed the young doctor. "Last time we met, I was not allowed to say a word on the subject, but now you look even more melancholy and gloomily interesting than then. So out with it--confess."

George shook his head.

"Spare me, Max. You know I am incorrigible; moreover, on this point I think you hardly understand me."

"How should I? A hardened realist like myself cannot be admitted into the sanctuary of your inmost feelings!"

Winterfeld frowned, and turned away, but Max went on, quite undisturbed:

"This anxious hesitation and avoidance of a happiness which by a bold stroke you might yet secure, this overstrained delicacy of feeling, these doubts and scruples, will last until you find yourself forestalled by another less delicate than yourself, and then for a second time you will wear the willow. Yes, I see my words offend you, but I tell you this--whereas, and seeing that, you cannot get the better of this unreasonable love of yours, you must marry. The thing is as clear as day."

"Your experience would naturally lead you to suggest such a course," said George, with a forced smile. "You have made trial of the remedy with the happiest result. Your wife is a charming creature."

"Yes, she does honour to my treatment, does she not?"

Chatting thus, they had completed the round of the garden, and now again approached the house. In the veranda sat Dr. Brunnow and his daughter-in-law, who was reading the newspaper to him. The Doctor was certainly much aged, and it was not difficult to see that he was ill both in body and mind. His former irritability had vanished, and had given place to a sort of dull apathy which but rarely kindled with a gleam of the old passionate fire. Agnes, on the other hand, had developed into a blooming young woman, uniting with all her own gentleness of aspect a certain new dignity of look and bearing. A boy of about two years was playing at his mother's feet. Directly he caught sight of the gentlemen, he rose to his feet, and, still with a rather tottering

gait, ran forward to meet his father. Max cleared the steps at a bound, and threw the child high in the air.

"Look at this young man," he cried, with paternal pride, holding the sturdy, rosy-cheeked youngster towards his friend. Then he turned to his wife, "George will stay with us to-day, dear," he said. "He must set out on his journey again to-morrow, I am sorry to say--but until then he will be our guest. Will you see that all is made ready for him?"

The young wife was indeed charming in her manner, as she turned, and in gracious words expressed to her husband's friend the pleasure his visit gave her. Then she rose, wishing, she said, to make sure that the spare room was in perfect order.

"I will take the boy with me," she observed. "He is accustomed to have an hour's nap at noon. You will carry him up to his bedroom for me, Max, will you not?"

"I must stay with George," replied her husband. "The young one must learn to get upstairs by himself. He is big enough."

"As you like, dear," said Agnes, with sweet and ready acquiescence; "but Rudolph is so used to be carried by you. He will cry, if you won't do as he wants."

"He has that from his mother," said Max.

With unruffled serenity the young wife stooped and took the child in her arms. He was a strong, vigorous boy, but no very great weight. His mother, however, seemed to find him too heavy for her, for she had to stop at the door to take breath, casting a rather reproachful glance behind her, as she did so. In a second Max was at her side.

"How often have I told you not to over-exert yourself in this manner?" said he, in the old dictatorial tone. "Give me the child. I will take him upstairs."

So saying, he relieved her of the boy, and actually carried him up to the first floor, which was reserved for the young couple's use. Agnes mildly bent her head and followed, submitting, as was her wont, to her husband's will in all things.

George looked after them, a faint, derisive smile hovering about his lips.

"Take warning by my son, and draw out no programme with reference to your future marriage," said the elder Brunnow. "A woman upsets all your plans and all your reckoning with a breath."

The words were intended playfully, but the speaker's eyes were fixed with an earnest scrutiny on the young man he addressed.

George shook his head.

"My future marriage?" he repeated. "I shall never marry. You know my resolve full well."

"Yes, but I have always combated it. At your age, one cannot bid a final adieu to happiness, and you especially are not made to stand alone. Ambition will never fill your life. You need family, domestic ties."

Winterfeld made no reply. He leaned forward on the veranda railings, and looked out at the lake. The doctor laid his hand on his shoulder.

"George, does the old wound still bleed?"

George turned round. In the sorrowful eyes which met his, he recognised a kindred spirit.

"There are wounds which never close," he replied. "I cannot, perhaps, make such passionate demonstration of my feelings as some, but when I once give myself heart and soul, my attachment knows no change. I could not put it from me, even if I would."

"Have you seen Gabrielle lately?" asked Brunnow, after a pause.

"Yes, too often for my peace. I am now constantly thrown into the society which she frequents, and in the capital unexpected meetings are almost inevitable. I come upon her sometimes in the midst of a brilliant assembly, and we are both forced calmly to face the situation, though we would gladly fly from each other, were it possible. It would have been better for me, had I never seen her since the day I lost her. These constant meetings stir up the memories of the past within me, and rob me of my composure and self-command. I suffer horribly under it, I assure you."

"So it was chance alone that directed your steps here? It is as I suspected."

Winterfeld looked at the Doctor in astonishment.

"I have explained to you that I came to Switzerland on an official mission, and wished to take you and Max by surprise."

"Max has not told you then that the ladies von Harder are here?"

"Who is here?" ejaculated George. "Gabrielle?"

"With her mother. They have been living in that villa yonder for the last few weeks. The Baroness is somewhat out of health, and has put herself in the hands of one of our most celebrated physicians. There has, of course, been no sort of communication between us and the two ladies. I need not tell you what memories would restrain Gabrielle from setting foot in the house in which I dwell."

"It is well that I leave to-morrow," said George, in an agitated tone. "Perhaps I might not have been spared the pain of a meeting even here, and here, in this place where the few happy days of my love were spent, I really could not have borne it."

"Will you not make some attempt to end this estrangement? Think, George, the happiness of your whole life is at stake. In your place, I would accept this strange coincidence as a hint from Destiny, and once again put the decisive question. Your position and, still more, the future which lies before you, guarantee you against any mortification, though the girl to whom you proffer your suit be a rich heiress. You had less to lay in the balance formerly, when you boldly declared your love to the Baroness Harder."

"I was loved then in return," cried George, with a rush of bitterness; "or, at least, I fancied so. Now we have between us that hour of parting in which my foolish dream was dispelled for ever. Gabrielle, certainly, would not wish to call it up again. I have often seen by her shy, anxious avoidance of me how she feared I might seek to approach her."

"That very fear should have encouraged you," interposed Brunnow. "Those who are quite indifferent to us, we pass by coldly and without remark. If you really will not venture----"

"Never," George interrupted him, with some vehemence. "Shall I come before her to hear from her mouth a second time that her heart is given to another, that even beyond the grave that other preserves his rights, that she knows, loves none but him? I have borne it once, and that is enough. Let us speak now of other matters. Dr. Brunnow. You see I am not calm enough to pursue this subject."

Brunnow was silent. The conversation was here put an end to, for Max came in and laid forcible hands on his friend again. The Doctor left the two alone, and retired to his study. For a good quarter of an hour, he there paced in silence up and down, lost in meditation; then he took up his hat, and, passing out, left the house.

The villa now inhabited by Madame von Harder and her daughter was much handsomer in appearance, and more sumptuously furnished, than the modest chalet which had served them as a residence on the occasion of their former visit.

The Baroness now thought it imperatively necessary to live at all times in a style befitting their rank; she clung to this satisfaction which she had once so painfully missed, and Gabrielle yielded to her entirely as regarded external things. Carriages and servants had therefore, of course, followed in their train, and Madame von Harder had just driven out on an excursion to the town, leaving her daughter at home alone.

Gabrielle stood on the terrace which fronted the lake. Yes, that was she, that slender figure with fair hair, clad in a light summer dress. The fresh sweet face had lost nothing of its fascinating charm, but the charm itself was changed. The old happy buoyancy, the radiant brightness had vanished, gone with the saucy, childish merriment which once laughed in those sunny brown eyes--but, in lieu of them, the face had gained the one thing which had been wanting to it: intensity of expression. Whether it lay in the sorrowful lines about her mouth, which not even a smile could altogether chase away, or in the shadow hiding in those deep dark eyes--small matter, it was there, and the soul, which spoke in it, idealised, perfected her whole being.

Leaning slightly forward against the balustrade, Gabrielle gazed out at the landscape, dreamily absorbed in thought. She turned half impatiently, as a servant appeared, and presented a card.

Hardly had she glanced at it when she grew very pale, and the card trembled in her hands.

"The gentleman begs that he may be allowed to see the Baroness on an urgent matter of business," reported the servant.

"Show the gentleman in," she answered, and left the terrace to receive her visitor.

In another minute Dr. Brunnow entered the drawing-room.

For a few seconds the two stood silently face to face. They met now for the first time, and yet each knew as much of the other as if they had been intimately acquainted for years. The bent, elderly man and the blooming young maiden, strangers to each other personally, were united by one common tie; a name, a dead man's name, formed an invisible link between them.

The Doctor bowed, and stepped nearer. Gabrielle involuntarily shrank from him. He saw it, and stopped.

"You hardly expected that I should ever approach you, Fräulein von Harder," he began. "I do so at the risk of being repulsed. My name must, I know, have an ominous sound in your ears."

Gabrielle stood before him, by a great effort compelling herself to be calm. The colour had not yet returned to her cheeks, and her voice shook audibly as she replied:

"Your coming certainly takes me by surprise, Dr. Brunnow. I did not think my presence would ever be sought by the man who----"

"At whose hand Arno Raven met his death," completed Brunnow. "You are right to recoil from him who caused that death, but, believe me, my dear young lady, I would rather have turned the deadly weapon against my own breast than have seen him fall."

"He forced the duel on you?" asked the girl, in a low voice. "I have long suspected it."

"Yes, forced it on me in a way which left me no alternative. Had I known ... but his pistol was so steadily levelled at me, how could I guess that at the decisive moment he would avert its aim? My hand shook, and sought so to direct its shot as only to wound. This very agitation proved fatal--my bullet pierced the heart of my former friend!"

Gabrielle shivered, but the weary, concentrated pain in his voice disarmed her.

"Arno bore you no ill-will," she replied. "But a few hours before his death, he related to me all his past; and then I learned what you had really been to him--as much, perhaps, as he to you."

"And yet he could require that of me!" said Brunnow, with mournful bitterness. "He desired to die; but why should he choose my hand to do the deed? Was I not the friend of old days--the friend of his youth? That was hard--harder even than my distrust of him had deserved. He must have known what a load he was laying on me for the rest of my life--ay, a crushing load! And, I tell you, it is killing me!"

Gabrielle looked into the old man's pale face, deeply lined and furrowed by grief; which said more plainly than any words what he had suffered, and was still suffering. She felt how profoundly her lost Arno was mourned--how fervently he had been loved, and this broke down all the barriers between them. Trembling with emotion, she stretched out both hands to the old man.

"I knew that here I should be understood," he said, taking her hands in his. "Arno loved you; that was enough for me."

His eyes rested on the girl's fair features, as though he were searching in them for some trace of the past.

"I come with a request," he began, after a short silence--"with a petition which perhaps no one else could address to you without wounding your feelings. I have let you see what Arno was to me; you will not, therefore, misconstrue the motives which brought me here, I will tell them to you briefly. My son has a friend----"

Gabrielle started. She drew away her hands.

"A friend whom you know--to whom you were once attached. That first love yielded before a more ardent, mightier passion. To my mind, this needs neither to be explained nor justified. Better than anyone do I know how irresistibly Arno could draw to himself those whom he wished to enchain. But now he is dead--and you are free. Does no voice within you speak a word for the early love of your youth?"

"My heart has never ceased to speak for him. It grieved when we were torn apart; yet I sacrificed him and his happiness--I had no choice, indeed, but to sacrifice them, for another voice spoke more loudly within me. I cannot forget Arno."

"Forget!" repeated Brunnow, with emphasis. "No, you cannot forget him; and no other man can you love as you have loved him. I believe that fully."

"No other," said Gabrielle, firmly; "and that is why I never can be George's wife."

"Must we always think of our own happiness?" asked Brunnow, sadly. "Is it not a great thing to make others happy? Winterfeld is at my son's house. Chance has brought him to us; he had no idea of your being here until I told him of it. Then his silence and reserve gave way, and I had a glimpse into the depths of his love, which is still ardent and faithful as ever. He will never find consolation in other ties. I know him--he will go through life a lonely man; and, amid all the success that awaits him, will feel only the emptiness, the void which that cruel parting from you left with him. You are young still, Gabrielle--you have your whole life before you. Devote that life to him--he is worthy of it."

She turned from him hastily.

"No more!" she said. "Spare me these recollections. If you speak in George's name----"

"He knows nothing of my being here," interrupted the Doctor. "On the contrary, he would have held me back. Do not suppose that George will ever again come to you with his suit spontaneously; he rejects such an idea with vehemence--and he is right. You once sent him away. It is for you to call him back."

Greatly agitated, torn by conflicting emotions, Gabrielle pressed both hands on her bosom, as though forcibly to keep down some rising feeling. "I cannot--cannot. And George would not accept the poor affection I have now to offer him."

"He will accept it, for he is one of those unselfish beings who give more than they receive."

Gabrielle raised her eyes to the speaker. They were full of a grave, sad reproach.

"And you can speak these words to me? You, Arno's friend, can wish to put another in his place?"

"No, by Heaven, not that!" cried Brunnow, with a flash of the old fire. "His place shall remain to him. No Winterfeld can rob him of that. These noble spotless characters, who quietly pursue their path through life, to whom no shadow of blame attaches, we admire and set on high. Natures such as Arno's are not created to dispense happiness. They cast over all they love a shade from the cloud which covers them; yet it is better worth to suffer with and for them--to share their fate, than to be serenely happy at the ideally good man's side. You yourself have felt something of this, Gabrielle--have you not?"

The old glow suddenly flamed from the ashes. Brunnow's bent form was drawn erect as he spoke these words with passionate warmth, and for a moment the bright enthusiasm of youth kindled in his eyes again. Gabrielle leaned her head on his shoulder, and wept--wept as though her heart would break.

"And now, do not let me go from you without an answer," said the Doctor, after a pause. "I have so seldom in my life brought happiness to those about me, that I would fain do so once before I depart hence, and my time here is growing short. May I give George any hope? Will you see him again?"

"I will try," she said faintly.

The proceedings of the Brunnow family that afternoon were decidedly peculiar. In the first place, the Doctor called his son into his study, and a strictly private conference took place between them. The subject discussed seemed to produce a most exhilarating effect on Max, for he caught his father in his arms and gave him a vigorous hug, such as he had once threatened to bestow on his papa-in-law, the Councillor. Directly after this the young surgeon held a parley, likewise strictly private, with his wife in their own sitting-room, and from this interview the pair came back somewhat fluttered and excited. Then Madame Agnes disappeared, and was lost to sight for some time, during which interval Max took possession of his friend, not stirring from his side an inch. Under other circumstances, George would have perceived that something unusual was going on; but the news he had heard that morning had greatly disturbed him, and he had some difficulty in preserving his usual outward composure. Unfortunately, Max showed no sympathy whatever with his friend's interesting melancholy, though he was well aware of its cause. On the contrary, he tormented the unhappy lover with all sorts of questions and suggestions, and dragged him out at last under some crudely imagined pretext into the garden again.

"But what should I go to the summer-house now for?" asked George, almost impatiently. "I was in there this morning, admiring the prospect."

"Well, there is an arrangement of my father's you have got to admire now, an arrangement made simply and entirely in your honour. My father has shown himself practical for once in a way. Come along with me, you'll be surprised."

The summer-house, a small pavilion perched on the edge of the lake, certainly offered a glorious prospect.

"There are ladies inside," said Winterfeld, as they approached the tiny building.

"Some callers on my wife, I suppose," replied Max, indifferently. "Ah! there is Agnes."

Madame Agnes did, indeed, at this juncture appear on the scene, and exchanged a look of intelligence with her husband, who at once executed a manœuvre simple as it was adroit. He let his unsuspecting friend walk on before him, then, without more ado, gave him a sudden push over the threshold and pulled the door to behind him. Then he turned to his wife in triumph.

"There they are in the trap, and if George does not come out of that an affianced husband, may the Lord have mercy on him. Now the great point is to prevent their being disturbed. It is highly derogatory for a married man and the head of a family to stand sentinel while a love-declaration is in progress, but, in consideration of the very peculiar circumstances, I will once more

condescend to the task. Go into the house, Agnes, and tell my father it has succeeded magnificently."

While Agnes went off to discharge her commission, a brief but most comprehensive scene was being enacted in the pavilion.

"Gabrielle!" cried George, and moved hastily forwards, as though he would have rushed up to her; then, bethinking himself, he stopped short. "Baroness Harder!"

"George!" said Gabrielle, with gentle reproach in her tone.

"Forgive me; I did not know--could not guess--- What brought you here?"

Gabrielle cast down her eyes without speaking; but in her silence there was an encouragement, and George understood it.

"What brought you to this place?" he repeated, with passionate insistence. "Gabrielle, speak. Did you know I was here?"

"Yes," was the low, but steady answer.

George stood by her now, but as yet he did not even take her hand.

"How am I to interpret that?" he asked, all the old tenderness surging up within him as he searched her face eagerly for his answer. "This is not our first meeting since the day that we became strangers to each other, but I have always read in your eyes that strangers we were to remain. May I, dare I, hope at length to read another verdict in them?"

Yes, those eyes told another tale, as she raised them to him now with frank, sweet entreaty.

"George," said Gabrielle, earnestly, "I gave you great pain once. You know what divided us, what has held us apart for years. I then destroyed all your hopes of happiness. You made no complaint, had no word of reproach for me, and yet it was a hard trial, and you suffered cruelly. I would fain give back some of the lost brightness to your life. Tell me, have I still the power?"

Ah, could she ask? The fervour with which George clasped his beloved to his heart spoke the reply before his lips could frame it. Again his arms were round her; again she listened to his words of love, as she had listened years before. In those early days she had, indeed, known nothing of the keen, surpassing joy she had since tasted, when, folded to Arno's breast, she had, as it were, been lifted to the very pinnacle of human bliss--when, in a few short hours, she had lived through a life-time of felicity--alas! quickly to be plunged into a very abyss of woe, and taught the lesson of life's misery.

Bitter had been the trial through which she had passed; but once again a warm, cheering ray fell on her path, like sunshine. Gabrielle would have been no true woman if it had not gladdened her heart to find herself thus truly, faithfully loved, and it is a well-established truth that happiness bestowed on another brings its reward to the giver!

Without, the landscape lay flooded in sunlight--the broad gleaming lake, the blue mountains in the distance, all sparkling in the noonday beams. Even so before the plighted pair the unclouded future stretched rich in hope and fair in promise, a long series of gladsome, happy days. All around was so sunny and bright and clear--and yet in this hour of her betrothal a shade fell on Gabrielle. Was there magic in the air about her? Faint rumours reached her ears, whispered messages telling of a moonlight night, and borne over from a distance, there came to her the even sound of flowing water, the low rippling murmur of a spring.

For a moment all the golden sunshine vanished, blotted out by a tear.

Gabrielle felt that life and love were given back to her, but, remembering the price paid, she felt too that love, life, and happiness were dearly bought!

THE END.

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