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SAINT MICHAEL

A ROMANCE

**TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
OF**

E. WERNER

BY
MRS. A. L. WISTER

PHILADELPHIA
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SAINT MICHAEL.

Easter had come; the season of light and refreshment for universal nature! Winter, as he departed, had shrouded himself in a veil of gloomy mist, and spring followed close after fleeing abysmal clouds. She had sent forth the blasts, her messengers, to arouse the earth from its slumber; they roared above meadow and plain, waved their wings around the mighty summits of the mountain ranges, and stirred the sea to its depths. There was a savage conflict and turmoil in the air, whence issued, nevertheless, a note as of victory. The blasts were those of spring, and were instinct with life,--they heralded a resurrection.

The mountains were still half buried in snow, and the ancient stronghold that looked down from their heights upon the valley towered above snow-laden pines. It was one of those gray, rock-crowning castles that were formerly the terror of the surrounding country, and are now for the most part deserted and forgotten, with naught but ruins to tell of ancient splendour. This, however, was not the case in this instance: the Counts von Steinrück carefully preserved the cradle of their race from decay, although otherwise they cared very little for the old pile, secluded as it was from the world in the depths of the mountains. In the hunting season only, when there was usually an arrival of guests, life and bustle awoke the echoes within its ancient walls.

This year was an exceptional one, however. Guests, it is true, were assembled here in the early spring, but upon a very solemn occasion. The castle's lord was to be borne to the grave, and with him the younger branch of the family was extinct in the male succession, for he left behind him only his widow and a little daughter. Count Steinrück had died at one of his other estates, his usual dwelling-place, and there the grand obsequies had been held, before the corpse had been brought hither to be interred in the family vault very quietly and in presence of none save the nearest of kin.

It was one of those stormy days in March when the entire valley is filled with masses of gray clouds. The dim afternoon light penetrated to the apartment which the dead Count had been

wont to occupy during his short autumnal visits to the castle. It was a long, rather low room, with a single large bow-window, and its arrangement dated from the time of the castle's magnificence. The dark wainscoting, the huge oaken doors, and the gigantic chimney-piece supporting the Steinrück escutcheon, and sustained by pillars, had remained unchanged for centuries, while the heavy antique furniture, and the old family portraits on the walls, alike belonged to a long-vanished period of time. The fire smouldering on the hearth could scarcely give an air of comfort to the gloomy room, which, nevertheless, represented a bit of history,—the history of an influential family whose fortunes had long been closely allied with those of its country.

The door opened, and two gentlemen entered, evidently relatives of the house, for the uniform of the one and the civilian's dress of the other showed each conventional signs of mourning. In fact, they had just returned from the funeral, and the face of the elder man had not yet lost the solemnity of expression befitting the occasion.

"The will is to be opened to-morrow," he said, "but it will be a mere form, as I am perfectly aware of its dispositions. To the Countess is left a large income with Castle Berkheim, where she has always resided; all the other estates go to Hertha, whose guardian I am to be. Then come a series of legacies, and Steinrück is bequeathed to me as the head of the elder branch."

At the last words the younger man shrugged his shoulders. "That child inherits an enormous property," he said. "Your inheritance is not exactly brilliant, papa; I imagine this old castle with the forests belonging to it costs almost as much as it yields."

"No matter for that; it is the ancestral stronghold of our family which thus comes into our possession. My cousin could have left me nothing more valuable, and I am duly grateful to him. Shall you return tomorrow, Albrecht?"

"I had arranged to stay from home for a few days only, but if you desire----"

"No, there is no necessity for your staying. I shall, of course, apply for an extension of my leave. There is much to be attended to, and the Countess seems so entirely dependent that I shall be compelled to stay and assist her for a while."

He went to the bow-window and looked out upon the veiled landscape. The Count had already passed the prime of life, but there was about him no sign of failing vigour; his figure was fine, his carriage commanding. He must have once been extremely handsome, and, indeed, might still have been called so even at his age; his abundant, slightly-grizzled hair, his quick, energetic movements, and his full, deep voice, as well as the fire of his eye, gave him a decided air of youth.

His son was his opposite in all these characteristics; his figure was slender, and he looked delicate in health. His pale face and thin features gave the impression of timidity, and yet those features certainly resembled his father's. Striking as was the contrast they presented, the family likeness between father and son was unmistakable.

"The Countess seems to be an utterly dependent creature," he said; "this trial finds her perfectly helpless."

"It is very hard for her, losing her husband thus after so short an illness and in the prime of life,—sensitive natures are sure to be crushed by such a blow."

"Still, some women would have borne it better. Louise would have resigned herself with fortitude to the inevitable."

"Hush, hush!" the Count interrupted him sternly as he turned away.

"Forgive me, sir; I know you do not like to be reminded, but to-day such reminiscences will thrust themselves before me. Of right Louise should now be the mourner here. She would hardly have been left with only a large income. Steinrück would have made her sole mistress of all that he possessed; he used to submit to her in everything. How, how could she reject him? And to sacrifice everything, name, home, family, to become the wife of an adventurer who dragged her down to ruin! It is enough to revive faith in the old legends of love-philtres; such things can hardly be accounted for by natural means."

"Folly!" the Count said, coldly. "Our fate lies in our own hands. Louise turned aside to an abyss, and it engulfed her."

"And yet you might, perhaps, have received the outcast again if she had returned repentant."

"Never!" The word was uttered with uncompromising severity. "And, besides, she never would have returned. She could go to destruction in the disgrace and misery which she had brought upon herself, but Louise never could have pleaded for mercy with the father who had thrust her forth. She was my own child, in spite of all!"

"And your favourite," Albrecht concluded, with an outbreak of bitterness. "I know it well; I have been told often enough that in no quality do I resemble you. Louise alone inherited your characteristics. Beautiful, intellectual, energetic, she was the child of your affections, your pride, your delight. Well, we have lived to see whither this energy led; we know how, at that man's side,

she sank lower and lower, until at last----"

"Your sister is dead," the Count interrupted him, sternly. "Let the dead rest!"

Albrecht was silent, but the bitterness did not pass from his look; he evidently could not forgive his sister for what she had brought upon her family. There was no further conversation, however, for a servant appeared and announced "His reverence the pastor of Saint Michael."

This arrival seemed to have been expected, for the servant, without awaiting permission, ushered in the priest.

He was a man about fifty years of age, with perfectly gray hair, a face expressing grave serenity, and dark-blue eyes, while his carriage and manner bespoke the repose and gentleness befitting his calling.

Count Steinrück advanced several steps to receive him, and greeted him courteously but formally. The elder branch of the family was Protestant, and as such had no especial consideration for a Catholic priest. "I desire to express my thanks to your reverence," he began, motioning the pastor to a seat. "It was the special wish of the widowed Countess that you should conduct the funeral services, and on this mournful day you have given her such loyal support that we are all grateful to you."

"I only fulfilled my duty as a pastor," the ecclesiastic replied, calmly, "and deserve no gratitude. But I come to you now, Count, to make an appeal upon another subject, where my interference is uncalled for and perhaps, in your eyes, unjustifiable; yet, since the late melancholy event has brought you unexpectedly to our mountains, I could not but request this interview with you."

"Let me repeat that I am at your service, Herr Pastor Valentin. If the matter is of a private nature, my son will leave----"

"I pray the Count to remain," Valentin interposed. "He is aware of the matter that brings me hither; it concerns the foster-son of the forester Wolfram."

He paused as if awaiting an answer, but none was forthcoming. The Count sat still, with an unmoved countenance, and Albrecht, although he suddenly became attentive, was silent; therefore the priest was compelled to proceed.

"You will remember, Herr Count, that it was through me that you received intelligence of the boy's place of abode, coupled with the request that you would befriend him."

"A request with which I immediately complied Wolfram took charge of the child by my desire, as I informed you."

"True; I should indeed have much preferred to see the child in other hands, although such was your disposition of him. Now, however, the boy has grown older, and cannot possibly be left among such surroundings. I am convinced that you could not desire it."

"And why not?" rejoined Steinrück, coldly. "I know Wolfram to be thoroughly trustworthy, and I had my reasons for choosing him. Do you know anything to his discredit?"

"No; the man is honest, after his fashion, but rude and half savage in his solitude. Since his wife's death he scarcely comes in contact with mankind, and his household differs in no wise from that of a common peasant. Such a one can scarcely be a good home for a growing boy, least of all for the grandson of Count Steinrück."

Albrecht, standing behind his father's chair, stirred uneasily; the old Count frowned, and rejoined, sharply, "I have but one grandchild, my son's boy, and I pray your reverence to keep this fact in mind in your allusion to the matter under discussion."

The priest's gentle gaze fell grave and reproachful upon the speaker. "Pardon me, Herr Count, but your daughter's legitimate child has a just claim to be entitled your grandson."

"Nevertheless he is not such; that marriage had no existence for me or for my family."

"And yet you acceded to my request when Michael----"

The Count started. "Michael?" he repeated, slowly.

"The boy's name. Did you not know it?"

"No; I did not see the child when it was given to Wolfram to educate."

"There could be no question of education with a man of Wolfram's lack of culture, and yet much might have been effected by it. Michael had been neglected and allowed to run wild in the uncertain life led by his parents. I have done what I could for him, and have given him all the instruction that I could, considering the seclusion of the forester's lodge."

"Have you really done this?" There was displeased surprise in the tone of the question.

"Certainly; no other instruction was possible in that seclusion, and I could not for a moment suppose that the boy was to be intentionally degraded and intellectually starved in that solitude. Such a punishment for his parent's fault would have been too hard."

There was stern reproof in the simple words, and they must have hit the mark, for an angry gleam flashed in Steinrück's eyes. "Whatever your reverence may have learned of our family affairs, your judgment with regard to them must be that of a stranger, and as such some things may seem incomprehensible to you. It is my duty, as the head of the family, to preserve its honour intact, and whoever assails and attaints that honour will be thrust forth from my heart and home, though such assault proceed from my own child. I did what I was forced to do, and in case of a like terrible necessity I should act similarly."

The words were uttered with iron determination, and Valentin was silent for a moment, probably feeling that no priestly admonition could affect such a nature. "The Countess Louise has found rest in the grave," he said at last, and his voice trembled slightly as he uttered the name, "and with her also the man to whom she was wedded. Her son is alone and unprotected, and I come to ask for the boy what you would not refuse to any orphaned stranger commended to your care,—an education which will enable him in future to confront life and the world. If he remains in Wolfram's charge he is entirely excluded from anything of the kind, and will be condemned to a half-savage existence in some lonely mountain forest lodge, a life no higher in aim than that of the merest peasant. If you, Herr Count, can answer to yourself for this----"

"Enough!" the Count angrily interrupted him, rising from his chair. "I will take the matter into consideration and decide definitively with regard to your *protégé*. Upon this your reverence may rely."

The pastor arose on the instant; he perceived that the interview was at an end, and he had no desire to prolong it. "My *protégé*?" he repeated; "may he be yours also, Herr Count,—he surely has a right to be so." And with a brief, grave inclination of his head to each of the gentlemen, he left the room.

"A most extraordinary visit!" said Albrecht, who had hitherto been silent. "What right has this priest to meddle in our family affairs?"

Steinrück shrugged his shoulders. "He was formerly our cousin's father confessor, and now occupies a confidential position with his family, although he lives high up in a lonely Alpine village. He and no other must attend Steinrück's body to the grave. I shall make him understand, however, that I am inaccessible to priestly influence. I could not quite deny myself to him, since it was he who some time ago asked my aid for the orphan boy, any more than I could refuse the aid he asked."

"Yes, the boy had to be cared for, and it has been done," Albrecht coolly assented. "You attended to the matter yourself, sir. This Wolfram—I have an indistinct remembrance of the name—was once a gamekeeper of yours, was he not?"

"Yes; my recommendation procured him his position as forester with my cousin. He is taciturn and trustworthy, troubling himself little concerning matters beyond his ken. He never asked what my relations with the boy intrusted to him were, but did as he was bidden, and took him home."

"Where he belongs, of course. You do not contemplate making any change?"

"That remains to be decided. I must see him."

Albrecht started, and his features betrayed surprise and annoyance. "Wherefore? Why have any personal contact with him? One keeps as far as possible out of the way of such disagreeable matters."

"That is your fashion," the Count said, sharply. "Mine is to confront such evils, and contend with them, if necessary, face to face." He stamped his foot in a sudden outburst of anger. "'*Intentionally* degraded and intellectually starved as a punishment for his parent's fault!' That this priest should say it to my face!"

"Yes, it only remained for him to undertake the defence of the parents," Albrecht interposed, disdainfully. "And they called their boy Michael. They presumed to give him your name,—the ancient traditional name of our family. The insult is apparent."

"It may have been the result of repentance," Steinrück said, gloomily. "Your son is called Raoul."

"Not at all; he was christened by your name, which he bears."

"In the church register! He is called Raoul; your wife has seen to that."

"It is the name of Hortense's father, and she clings to it with filial devotion. You know this, and you have never found any fault with it."

"If it were the name alone! But it is not the only thing foreign to me in my grandson. There is no trace of the Steinrück in Raoul, either in face or in character; he resembles his mother."

"I should not reckon that against him. Hortense has always been considered a beauty. You have no idea how many conquests she still makes."

The words were uttered in seeming jest, but they met with no response in the manner of the old Count, who remained grave and cold. "That probably accounts for her attachment to the scene of such triumphs. You spend more time in France with her relatives than you do at home. Your visits there are more frequent and more prolonged as time goes on, and there is some talk now, I hear, of your being attached to our embassy in Paris. Then Hortense will have attained her desire."

"I must go wherever I am sent," Albrecht said in self-exculpation, "and if they select me----"

"What? playing your diplomatic game with me?" his father interrupted him harshly. "I know well enough what secret wires are pulled, and the position is but an insignificant one. I expected better things of your career, Albrecht. There were paths enough open to you whereby to attain eminence, but to do so needed ambition and energy, neither of which qualities have you ever possessed. Now you are applying for a position which you will owe entirely to your name, and which you may occupy for a decade without advancing a step,--and all in obedience to the wishes of your wife."

Albrecht bit his lip at this reproof, uttered as it was with almost brutal frankness.

"In this respect, papa, you have always been unjust; you never regarded my marriage with any favour. I thought myself secure of your approval of my choice, and you have all but reproached me for bringing home to you a beautiful, talented daughter from one of the most distinguished---

"Who has never been other than a stranger to us," Steinrück interrupted his son. "She has never yet perceived that she belongs to us, not you to her. I could wish you had brought home to me the daughter of the simplest country nobleman instead of this Hortense de Montigny. It is not good, the mixture of hot French blood in our ancient German race, and Raoul shows far too much of it. Stern military discipline will be of use to him."

"Yes,--you insist that he shall enter the army," said Albrecht, with hesitation. "Hortense is afraid--and I fear also--that our child is not equal to much hardship. He is a delicate boy; he will not be able to endure such iron discipline."

"He must learn to endure it. Your delicate health has always excluded you from the service; but Raoul is healthy, and it is high time to withdraw him from the effeminating effect of pampering and petting. The army is the best school for him. My grandson must not be a weakling; he must do honour to our name; I'll take care of that."

Albrecht was silent; he knew his father's inflexible will. It still gave him the law, husband and father though he were, and Count Michael Steinrück was the man to see that his laws were obeyed.

"I can't help it, your reverence; the fellow is a trial. He knows nothing, he understands nothing; he wanders about the mountains from morning to night, and grows stupider every day. He'll never make a decent forester; 'tis all trouble lost."

The words were spoken by a man whose appearance betrayed his forester's calling. He was provided with gun and hunting-pouch, and was sturdy and powerful of frame, with broad shoulders and coarse features. His hair and beard were neglected, his dress--a mixture of hunting and peasant's costume--was careless in the extreme, and his speech was as rude as his exterior; thus he confronted the priest. The pair were in the parsonage of Saint Michael, a small hamlet high up among the mountains, and a place of pilgrimage. The priest, seated at his writing-table, shook his gray head disapprovingly.

"As I have often told you, Wolfram, you do not understand how to treat Michael. You can never do anything with him by threats and abuse; you only make him shyer, and he is already shy enough in his intercourse with human kind."

"That all comes from his stupidity," the forester explained. "The boy does not see daylight clearly; he has to be shaken hard to rouse him, since I made your reverence a promise not to beat him again."

"And I hope you have kept your word. The child has been much sinned against; you and your wife maltreated him daily before I came here."

"It did him good. All boys need the stick, and Michael always needed a double portion. Well, he got it. When I stopped, my wife began; but it never did any good,--it never made him any the cleverer."

"No; but he would have been ruined by your rough treatment if I had not interfered."

Wolfram laughed aloud. "Ruined? Michael? Not a bit of it. He could have borne ten times as much; he's as strong as a bear. It's a perfect shame; the fellow could tear up trees by the roots, and he lets himself be teased by the village children without ever stirring a finger. I know right well why he wouldn't come along with me to-day, but chose to follow me. He won't come through the village; he chooses to come the longer way, through the forest, as he always does when he comes to you, the cowardly fellow!"

"Michael is no coward," said the pastor, gravely. "You ought to know that, Wolfram; you have told me yourself that there is no controlling him when he once gets angry."

"Yes, he's right crazy then, and must be let alone. If I didn't know that he's not all right here"--he touched his forehead--"I'd take him in hand, but it's a terrible cross. It's strange, too, that he shoots so well, when he sees the game, though that's not often. He stares up into the trees and the sky, and a stag will run away right under his nose. I'm not curious, but, indeed, I'd like to know where the moon-calf comes from."

Valentin looked pained at these words, but he replied, calmly, "That can hardly interest you. Do not put such ideas into Michael's head, or he might ask you questions which you cannot answer."

"He's too stupid for that," asserted the forester, with whom his foster-son's stupidity seemed to be an indisputable article of faith. "I don't believe he knows that he was ever even born. But Tyras is barking,--he must see Michael."

In fact, the dog was barking joyously, the sound of approaching footsteps was heard, and in the next instant Michael entered the room.

The new-comer was a lad of about eighteen, but his tall, powerful figure, with its awkward movements, showed nothing of the grace and freshness of youth. The face, plain and irregular in all its lines, had a half-shy, half-dreamy expression that was hardly attractive. The thick, fair curls were matted around the temples and brow, below which looked out a pair of eyes deep blue in colour, but as vacant as if no soul enlightened their depths. His dress was as sordid and neglected as the forester's, and in his entire appearance there was absolutely nothing to attract.

"Well, have you come at last?" was his foster-father's gruff reception of him. "You must have gone to sleep on the way, or you would have been here long ago."

"I came through the forest," replied Michael, going up to the priest, who kindly held out his hand to him.

Wolfram laughed scornfully. "Didn't I tell your reverence? He didn't dare to go through the village,--I knew it."

Michael paid not the slightest heed to the apparently well-grounded accusation, being well used to such treatment from his foster-father, who now took his hat and made ready to go.

"I must go up to the fenced forest," he said; "it looks badly there: more than a dozen of the tallest trees are torn down; the Wild Huntsman has made terrible work there lately."

"You mean the storms of the last week, Wolfram?"

"No, it was the Wild Huntsman, your reverence. He is abroad every night this spring. The day before yesterday, as we came through the wood at dusk, the whole mad crew swept by not a hundred yards away. They raged and howled and stormed as though all hell had broken loose, and I suppose a bit of it had done so. Michael, stupid fool, would have rushed into the thick of it, but I caught his arm in time and held him fast."

"I wanted to see the demon at close quarters," said Michael, quietly.

The forester shrugged his shoulders. "There, your reverence, you see what the fellow is! He runs away from human creatures and such like, but he wants to be right in the midst of things which make every Christian shudder, and cross himself! I really believe he would have joined the phantoms if I had not held him back, and then he would now have been lying dead in the forest, for he who joins the Wild Huntsman's chase is lost."

"Will you never be rid of this sinful superstition, Wolfram?" said the priest. "You pretend to be a Christian, and are nothing better than a heathen. And you have infected Michael, too; his head is full of heathenish legends."

"It may be sinful, but it's true for all that," Wolfram insisted. "I don't suppose you see anything of it. You are a holy man, a consecrated priest, and the ghostly rabble that haunt the forest at night is afraid of you, but the like of us see and hear more of it than is agreeable. Then Michael is to stay here?"

"Of course. I will send him back in the afternoon."

"Good--by, then," said the forester, tightening the strap of his gun. He bowed to the priest, and departed without taking further notice of his foster-son.

Michael, who seemed to be perfectly at home in the parsonage, now fetched various books and papers from a cupboard and arranged them on the writing-table. Evidently the wanted instruction was about to begin, but before it could do so the sound of a sleigh was heard outside. Valentin looked up in surprise; the rare visits that he received were almost exclusively from the pastors of secluded Alpine villages, and pilgrims were scarcely to be looked for at this time of year. Saint Michael was not one of those large and famous places of pilgrimage whither the faithful resort in crowds at all seasons. Only the poor dwellers on the Alps brought their vows and supplications to the secluded hamlet, and only upon church festivals was there any great gathering there.

Meanwhile, the sleigh had drawn up before the parsonage. A gentleman in a fur coat got out, inquired of the maid who met him at the door whether the Herr Pastor was at home, and forthwith made his way to the study.

Valentin started at the sound of the voice, and then rose with delighted surprise in every feature. "Hans! Is it you?"

"You know me still, then? It would be no wonder if each of us failed to recognize the other," said the stranger, offering his hand, which was warmly grasped by the priest.

"Welcome, welcome! Have you really found me out?"

"Yes, it certainly was a proof of affection, the getting up to you here," said the guest. "We have been working our way for hours through the snow; sometimes fallen hemlocks lay directly across the road, sometimes we had to cross a mountain torrent, and for a change we had small avalanches from the rocks. And yet my coachman obstinately insisted that it was the high-road. I should like, then, to see your foot-paths; they must be practicable for chamois only."

Valentin smiled. "You are the same old fellow,--always sneering and criticising. Leave us, Michael, and tell the gentleman's coachman to put up his horses."

Michael left the room, but not before the stranger had turned and glanced at him. "Have you set up a famulus? Who is that dreamer?"

"My pupil, whom I teach."

"You must have hard work to get anything inside that head! That fellow's talent would seem to lie solely in his fists."

As he spoke the guest had taken off his furs, and was seen to be a man about five or six years younger than the pastor, of hardly medium height, but with a very distinguished head, which, with its broad brow and intellectual features, riveted attention at the first glance. The clear, keen eyes seemed used to probe everything to the core, and in the man's whole bearing there was evident the sense of superiority which comes of being regarded as an authority in one's own circle.

He looked keenly about him, investigating the pastor's study and adjoining room, both of which displayed a monastic simplicity; and as he turned his eyes from one object to another in the small apartment, he said, without a trace of sarcasm, but with some bitterness, "And here you have cast anchor! I never imagined your solitude so desolate and world-forsaken. Poor Valentin! You have to pay for the assault that my investigations make so inexorably upon your dogmas, and for my works being down in the 'Index.'"

The pastor repudiated this charge by a gentle gesture. "What an idea! There are frequent changes in ecclesiastical appointments, and I came to Saint Michael----"

"Because you had Hans Wehlau for a brother," the other completed the sentence. "If you would publicly have cut loose from me, and thundered from your pulpit against my atheism, you would have been in a more comfortable parsonage, I can tell you. It is well known that there has been no breach between us, although we have not seen each other for years, and you must pay for it. Why did you not condemn me publicly? I never should have taken it ill of you, since I know that you absolutely repudiate my teachings."

"I condemn no one," the pastor said, softly; "certainly not you, Hans, although it grieves me sorely to see you so greatly astray."

"Yes; you never had any talent for fanaticism, but always a very great one for martyrdom. It often vexes me horribly, though, that I am the one to help you to it. I have taken good care, however, that my visit to-day should not be known; I am here *incognito*. I could not resist the temptation to see you again on my removal to Northern Germany."

"What! you are going to leave the university?"

"Next month. I have been called to the capital, and I accepted immediately, since I know it to

be the sphere suited to me and to my work. I wanted to bid you good-by; but I nearly missed you, for, as I hear, you were at Steinrück yesterday at the Count's funeral."

"By the Countess's express desire I officiated."

"I thought so! They summoned me by telegraph to Berkheim to the death-bed."

"And you went?"

"Of course, although I gave up practice long ago for the professorial chair. This was an exceptional case. I can never forget how the Steinrücks befriended me, employing me when I was a young, obscure physician, upon your recommendation, to be sure, but they placed every confidence in me. I could, indeed, do nothing for the Count except to make death easier, but my presence was a satisfaction for the family."

Michael's entrance interrupted the conversation. He came to say that the sacristan wished to speak for a moment with his reverence, and was waiting outside.

"I will come back immediately," said Valentin. "Put away your books, Michael; there will be no lessons to-day."

He left the room, and Michael began to gather up the books and papers. The Professor watched him, and said, casually, "And so the Herr Pastor teaches you?"

Michael nodded and went on with his occupation.

"It's just like him," murmured Wehlau. "Here he is tormenting himself with teaching this stupid fellow to read and write, probably because there is no school in the neighbourhood. Let me look at that."

And he took up one of the copy-books, nearly dropping it on the instant in his surprise. "What! Latin? How is this?"

Michael did not comprehend his surprise; it seemed to him quite natural to understand Latin, and he answered, quietly, "Those are my exercises."

The Professor looked at the lad, whose dress proclaimed him a mere peasant, scanned him from head to foot, and then turning over the leaves of the book, read several lines and shook his head.

"You seem to be an excellent Latin scholar. Where do you come from?"

"From the forester's, a couple of miles away."

"And what is your name?"

"Michael."

"Your name is that of the hamlet. Were you named after it?"

"I don't know,--I think I was named after the archangel Michael." He uttered the name with a certain solemnity, and Wehlau, noticing it, asked, with a sarcastic smile, "You hold the angels in great respect?"

Michael threw back his head. "No, they only pray and sing through all eternity, and I don't care for that; but I like Saint Michael. At least he does something: he thrusts down Satan."

There must have been something unusual either in his words or in his expression, for the Professor started and riveted his keen eyes upon the face of the lad, who stood close to him, full in the sunlight that entered by the low window. "Strange," he murmured again. "The face is utterly changed. What is there in the features----?"

At this moment Valentin reappeared, and, seeing the book in his brother's hand, asked, "Have you been examining Michael? He is a good Latin scholar is he not?"

"He is, indeed; but what good is Latin to do him in a lonely forest lodge? I suppose his father is too poor to send him to school?"

"But I hope to do something for him in some other way," said the pastor; and as Michael took his books to the cupboard he went on, in a low tone, "If the poor fellow were only not so ugly and awkward! Everything depends upon the impression that he makes in a certain quarter, and I fear it will be very unfavourable."

"Ugly?--yes, he certainly is that; and yet a moment ago, when he made quite an intelligent remark, something flashed into his features like lightning, reminding me of--yes, now I have it--of Count Steinrück."

"Of Count Steinrück?" Valentin repeated, in surprise.

"I don't mean the man who has just died, but his cousin, the head of the elder branch. He was in Berkheim the other day, and I became acquainted with him there. He would consider my idea an insult, and he would not be far wrong. To compare Steinrück, dignified and handsome as he is, with that moonstruck lad! They have not a feature in common. I cannot tell why the thought came into my head, but it did when I saw the fellow's eyes flash."

The pastor made no reply to this last observation, but said, as if to change the subject, "Yes, Michael is certainly a dreamer. Sometimes in his apathy and indifference he seems to me like a somnambulist."

"Well, that would not be very dreadful," said his brother. "Somnambulists can be awakened if they are called in the right way, and when that lad wakes up he may be worth something. His exercises are very good."

"And yet learning has been made so hard for him! How often he has had to contend with storm and wind rather than lose a lesson, and he has never missed one!"

"Rather different from my Hans," the Professor said, dryly. "He employs his school-hours in drawing caricatures of his teachers; my personal interference has been necessary at times. He is too audacious, because he has been such a lucky sort of fellow. Whatever he tries succeeds; wherever he knocks doors and hearts fly open to receive him, and consequently he imagines that life is all play,--nothing but amusement from beginning to end. Well, I'll show him another side of the picture when once he begins to study natural science."

"Has he shown any inclination for such study?"

"Most certainly not. His only inclination is for scrawling and daubing; there's no doing anything with him if he scents a painted canvas, but I'll cure him of all that."

"But if he has a talent for----" the pastor interposed.

His brother angrily interrupted him: "That's the worst of it,--a talent! His drawing-masters stuff his head with all sorts of nonsense; and awhile ago a painter fellow, a friend of the family, made a tragic appeal to me,--Could I answer it to myself to deprive the world of such a gift? I was positively rude to him; I couldn't help it."

Valentin shook his head half disapprovingly. "But why do you not allow your son to follow his inclination?"

"Can you ask? Because an intellectual inheritance is his by right. My name stands high in the scientific world, and must open all doors for Hans while he lives. If he follows in my footsteps he is sure of success; he is his father's son. But God have mercy on him if he takes it into his head to be what they call a genius!"

Meanwhile, Michael had put away his books, and now advanced to take his leave. Since there was to be no lesson, there was no excuse for his remaining any longer at the parsonage. His face again showed the same vacant, dreamy expression peculiar to it; and as he left the room Wehlau said in an undertone to his brother, "You are right; he is too ugly, poor devil!"

The Counts of Steinrück belonged to an ancient and formerly very powerful family, dating back centuries. Its two branches owned a common lineage, but were now only distantly connected, and there had been times when there had been no intercourse between them, so widely had they been sundered by diversity of religious belief.

The elder and Protestant branch, belonging to Northern Germany, possessed entailed estates yielding a moderate income; the South-German cousins, on the contrary, were owners of a very large property, consisting chiefly of estates in fee, and were among the wealthiest in the land. This wealth was at present owned by a child eight years of age, the daughter whom the late Count had constituted his sole heiress. Conscious of the hopeless nature of his malady, he had summoned his cousin, and had made him the executor of his will and his daughter's guardian. Thus had been adjusted an estrangement that had existed for years, and that had its rise in an alliance once contracted, only to be suddenly dissolved.

Besides his son, the present Count Steinrück had had another child,--a beautiful, richly-endowed daughter, the favourite of her father, whom she resembled in character and in mind. She was to have married her relative, the Count now deceased; the union had long been agreed upon in the family, and the young Countess had consequently spent many weeks at a time beneath the roof of her future parents-in-law.

But before there had been any formal betrothal between the young people, there intervened with the girl of eighteen one of those passions which lead,--which must lead--to ruin, not because of difference of rank and social standing, not because of the consequent estrangement of families, but because they lack the only thing that can confer upon a union a blessing and endurance,--true, genuine affection. It was an intoxication sure to be followed by remorse and repentance when, alas, it was too late.

Louise became acquainted with a man who, although of bourgeois parentage, had worked his way into aristocratic circles. Brilliantly handsome, endowed with various accomplishments and a winning grace of manner, he succeeded in gaining entrance everywhere; but he was one of those restless, unsteady beings who can never adjust themselves for long to any environments. Possessed by a positive greed for the luxuries and splendours of existence, he had no capacity for attaining them by his own energy; he was an adventurer in the truest sense of the word. He may have loved the young Countess sincerely, he may have only hoped to achieve social position through her means; at all events, he contrived so to ensnare her that she resolved, in spite of the certain opposition of her father and of her entire family, to become his wife.

When the Count learned how matters stood, he took them in hand with an energy that was indeed ominous. He believed that by commands and threats he could bend his daughter to his will, but he only aroused in her the obstinacy which she had inherited from himself. She utterly refused to yield him obedience, opposed resolutely all effort to carry out her betrothal to her cousin, and, in spite of every precaution, contrived to hold communication with her lover. Suddenly she disappeared, and a few days afterwards news was received that she had become the wife of Rodenberg.

The marriage was perfectly valid, in spite of the haste and secrecy with which it was contracted; Rodenberg had arranged and prepared everything. He reckoned upon Count Steinrück's final acknowledgment of his daughter's husband: he would not surely cast them off; he trusted to the father's affection for his favourite child, but he did not know the Count's iron nature. Steinrück replied to the announcement of the marriage by an utter repudiation of his daughter; he forbade her ever again to appear in his presence: for him she was dead.

He persisted inexorably in this course until his daughter's death, and even after it had taken place. At first Rodenberg made several attempts to induce his wife's father to grant him an interview, but he soon perceived the uselessness of any such attempt; the Count was neither to be persuaded nor coerced, and since all sources of aid were thus cut off, the man plunged with his wife and child into a Bohemian mode of life harmonizing with his lawless nature.

What followed was the inevitable result,—misery and want, a gradual sinking into ruin; the lot of the wife beside the husband for whom she had sacrificed name, home, and family, when all hopes founded upon her and upon her wealth had vanished, can easily be imagined. She was true to her nature, and clung to the man whom she had married, without one attempt to obtain help from her father, knowing that even her death would be powerless to effect a reconciliation. She and her husband had now been dead for many years, and the wretched family tragedy was buried with them.

An entire week had passed since the funeral at Steinrück. Count Michael, who occupied the rooms that had been his cousin's, was sitting in the bow-windowed apartment, when he was told that Wolfram the forester had arrived in obedience to his desire. The Count was in full uniform, being about to ride to a neighbouring town, where the sovereign's brother had instituted a memorial celebration. Of course every one of consequence in the country around had been invited to take part in the ceremonial, and the lord of Steinrück could not refuse to be present on the occasion, although, in view of the family bereavement, he was to withdraw before the subsequent festivities. The hour for his departure was at hand, but there was still time for his interview with the forester.

As he sat at his writing-table he took from one of its drawers the star of an order set with large brilliants. As he was about to fasten it on his breast he saw that the ribbon was loose, and as Wolfram entered at the moment, he laid it in the open case on the table.

The forester was in full dress to-day, and really looked well. His hair and beard were carefully arranged, and great pains had been bestowed upon his hunting-suit; nor did he seem to have forgotten the demeanor required in presence of his former master, for, with a respectful bow, he paused at the door until the Count motioned to him to approach.

"Ah, here you are, Wolfram," he said, kindly; "I have not seen you for a long time. Is all going well with you?"

"Pretty well, Herr Count," the forester replied, standing as straight and stiff as a ramrod. "I earn my wages, and the late Count was satisfied with me. I never have a chance to leave the forest year out and year in, but we get used to that and don't mind the loneliness."

"You were married, I think; is your wife still living?"

"No; she died five years ago, God rest her soul, and we never had any children. Some people advised me to marry again, but I didn't want to. Once is enough for me."

"Was your marriage not a happy one, then?" asked Steinrück, with a fleeting smile at the forester's last remark.

"That depends on one's way of looking at things," the forester replied, indifferently. "We got along pretty well together; to be sure, we quarrelled every day, but that's to be expected; and then if Michael interfered we both fell upon him and made up with each other."

The Count suddenly lifted his head. "Whom did you fall upon?"

"Eh?--yes, that was stupid," Wolfram muttered in confusion.

"Do you mean the boy who was given in charge to you?"

The forester cast down his eyes before the Count's angry glance and meekly defended himself. "It did not hurt him, and it didn't last long either, for the reverend father at St. Michael forbade us to beat the boy, and we obeyed. And the fellow deserved what he got, besides."

Steinrück did not reply; he knew that he had given the boy into rude keeping, but this glimpse of the realities of the situation rather startled him, and after a minute's pause he asked, sternly, "Did you bring your foster-son with you?"

"Yes, Herr Count, I have done as you bade me."

"Then let him come in."

Wolfram went to call Michael, who was waiting in the antechamber, and the Count looked eagerly and anxiously towards the door by which in another moment his grandson would enter, the child of the outcast daughter whom he had so sternly thrown off, and yet whom he had once loved so tenderly. Perhaps the boy would be the image of his mother, at all events he would resemble her in some feature, and Steinrück did not know whether he most feared or longed for such resemblance.

The door opened, and Michael entered with his foster-father. He too had bestowed greater care than usual upon his dress in view of this interview, but it had availed him little. His Sunday coat fitted him no better than his week-day garb, and, moreover, although new, was rustic in cut and material. His thick, matted curls refused to be smoothed, and were tossed more wildly than usual above his brow, while the shyness and embarrassment which he felt in such a presence made his face more vacant of expression than usual, and his awkward carriage and movements still more heavy and clumsy.

The Count cast one sharp, rapid glance at him, and but one; then he compressed his lips in an expression of bitter disappointment. This, then, this was Louise's son!

"Here is Michael, Herr Count," said Wolfram, as he roughly pushed the lad forward. "Make your bow, Michael, and thank the kind gentleman who has befriended such a poor orphan. It is the first time you have seen your benefactor."

But Michael neither bowed nor uttered a word of thanks. He gazed as if spell-bound at the Count, who was indeed an imposing figure in his uniform, and seemed to forget all else.

"Well, can't you speak?" asked Wolfram, impatiently. "You must excuse him, Herr Count, it's only his stupidity. He hardly ever opens his mouth at home, and whenever he sees anything new and strange like all this he loses the little wit he has."

It was with an expression of positive dislike that the Count at last turned to the boy, and his voice sounded cold and imperious as he asked, "Is your name Michael?"

"Yes," was the reply, uttered mechanically as it were, while the young fellow's eyes never stirred from the tall figure, and the commanding countenance turned so haughtily towards him. Steinrück did not perceive the boundless admiration in those eyes,--all that he saw was their dreamy, vague expression, a curious stare that irritated him.

"How old are you?" he asked, in the same tone.

"Eighteen."

"And what do you know? what can you do?"

This question seemed to embarrass Michael extremely; he did not speak, but looked at the forester, who answered for him. "He does not do much of anything, Herr Count, although he runs about the forest all day long, and he does not know much either. I have no time to look after him; at first we sent him to the village school, and later on his reverence took him in hand and taught him. But he couldn't do much with him, Michael can't understand well."

"But he must adopt some calling. What is he fit for? what does he want to be?"

"Nothing at all,--and he is fit for nothing," said the forester, laconically.

"This is a fine account of you," said the Count, contemptuously. "To run about the forest all day long is not much to do, and can be done with but little instruction; it is a disgrace for a strong young fellow like you to be fit for nothing else."

Michael looked surprised at these harsh words, and a dark flush began to mount into his cheeks, but the forester assented with, "Yes, I think so too; but there is nothing to be done with Michael. Just look at him, Herr Count; no one can ever make a decent forester of him."

It seemed to cost the Count an effort to continue an interview so repugnant to him, but he controlled himself, and said, sternly and authoritatively, "Come here!"

Michael never stirred; he stood as if he had not heard the command.

"Have you not even learned obedience?" Steinrück asked, in a menacing tone. "Come here, I say!"

But Michael still stood motionless, until the forester, feeling himself called upon to come to the rescue of what was probably stupidity, seized him roughly by the shoulder, encountering, however, decided resistance on the part of his foster-son, who shook him off angrily. There was only defiance in the movement, but it looked like a desire for flight, and as such the Count understood it. "A coward, too!" he murmured. "There has been quite enough of this!"

He rang the bell and ordered the servant to have the carriage brought round immediately. Then he turned to the forester, and said, "I have a word or two to say to you; follow me," as, opening the door of a small adjoining room, he preceded him into it.

Wolfram attempted, as he followed, to excuse his foster-son's conduct: "He is afraid of you, Herr Count; the fellow has not a spark of courage."

"So I see," Steinrück rejoined, with infinite contempt; he could forgive almost anything save cowardice,—that was inexcusable in his eyes. "Never mind, Wolfram, I know you cannot help it; but you must keep the fellow for a while yet; there is nothing for him but this mountain forestry; he may dream away his life here for all I care, since he is good for nothing else."

He went on talking to the forester without bestowing another glance upon Michael, who stood motionless. The dark flush had not faded from his face, which was no longer expressionless. Gloomily, with compressed lips, he gazed after the man who had just passed so pitiless a verdict upon himself and his future. He had often heard such words before from the forester without their producing any effect upon him, but they had a different sound when issuing from those haughty lips, and the contemptuous glance of those eyes pierced him to the very soul. For the first time he felt the treatment to which he had been accustomed from childhood as a burning disgrace, crushing him to the earth.

He was alone in the room. Through the bow-window the sunlight streamed in, and fell full upon the writing-table, where the diamonds in the star of the order glittered and sparkled in every colour of the rainbow. Even on the dark wainscoting bright gleams were playing, and they mingled with the glow of the fire upon the hearth, which was sinking away to embers.

"What are you doing here?" a child's voice suddenly asked.

Michael turned round; upon the threshold of the adjoining room, the door of which had been left open, stood a child about eight years of age, looking in amazement at the stranger, who now answered, laconically, "I am waiting."

The little girl, the daughter of the deceased Count, approached and gazed curiously at the lad, then, probably arriving at the conclusion that this coarsely-dressed young man could not possibly be a visitor in the castle, turned up her little nose, although, since he was waiting for somebody, she could not object to his presence. She turned to the hearth, where she amused herself by blowing into the embers and watching the sparks.

She was a graceful little creature, slender and delicate as a fairy, undeniably pretty, in spite, many would have said, of the red hue of the hair that fell in long thick curls over her shoulders and down upon the black crape of her dress, giving a strange charm to the childish figure. A pair of large eyes, undeterminable in colour, looked out of the rosy little face; they shone like stars, but there was an odd gleam in them,—they were not innocent, childish eyes.

Before long she grew tired of watching the sparks, and looking about for some other amusement her glance fell again upon Michael, whom she now honoured with a longer inspection. "Where did you come from?" she asked, standing directly in front of him.

"From the forest," he replied, as laconically as before.

"Is it far from here?"

"Very far."

"And do you like our castle?"

"No."

Hertha gazed at him with surprise in her bright eyes; she had asked the question with much condescension, and this strange man had dared to declare briefly and dryly that he did not like a Count's castle. As she was apparently considering whether or not to be displeased, her glance fell upon Michael's hat, which he held in his hand, and which was adorned with a bunch of magnificent Alpine roses. "Oh, what beautiful flowers!" she exclaimed. "Give them to me." And she had possessed herself of the hat and pulled out the flowers before Michael could say a word.

He looked rather amazed to see this appropriation of his property, but made no attempt to prevent it.

The child seated herself in an arm-chair beside the hearth, seeming delighted with her flowers, and began to talk easily and familiarly. She told about the big castle where she had been accustomed to live with her mother and father, and where it was all much prettier than here, of her pony upon which she had learned to ride, and which had unfortunately been left there, of her mother, and of much else besides. The apparent dulness of her hearer seemed to amuse her mightily; she tried to make him talk, and actually did extort from him that he was the forester's son, and lived high up in the mountains in the forest lodge, a fact that interested her much.

There was something bewitching in the sweet, beguiling childish voice, and in the fairy-like little figure nestling gracefully among the cushions of the arm-chair, where the hair glistened against the dark background. Michael slowly drew near, and gradually began to reply more easily; this beguiling talk and laughter cast about him a spell the power of which he vaguely felt, although he did not understand it, and could not shake it off.

As she talked, Hertha continued to play with the flowers, which she separated, arranged, and rearranged, but at last wearying of them she began to pull to pieces the nosegay she had so ardently coveted. Her little hands pitilessly destroyed the white blossoms, throwing them heedlessly on the ground. Michael frowned, and in a tone of remonstrance, but still more of entreaty, said, "Do not pull them to pieces! Those flowers were hard to find."

"But I don't like them any more," declared the child, and she continued her work of destruction. Without further ado Michael seized her by the arm and held her fast.

"Let me go!" exclaimed the little girl, angrily trying to escape from his grasp. "I don't like your flowers any more; and I don't like you, either, any more. Go away!"

There was more than mere childish waywardness in these words. The "I don't like you, either, any more," sounded haughty and contemptuous, and meanwhile the strange gleam appeared in the eyes that made them so unchildlike. Michael suddenly loosened his grasp of her arm, but at the same moment snatched the flowers from her.

Hertha slipped down from the arm-chair, and her lips quivered as if she were about to burst into tears, but her eyes flashed with anger. "My flowers! give me back my flowers!" she screamed, stamping her little feet with rage.

Just then Wolfram reappeared. His interview with the Count must have been highly satisfactory, for he looked extremely contented. "Come, Michael, we are going," he said, beckoning to his foster-son.

Hertha knew the forester, who had been at the castle in the hunting season as one of her father's servants, and instantly surmising that he would help her to obtain what she wanted, she ran up to him. "I want my flowers back!" she exclaimed, with all the petulance of a spoiled, wayward child. "They are mine; make him give them back to me!"

"What flowers?" said Wolfram. "Those Alpine roses? Give them to her, Michael. She is our master's daughter."

The child shook her curls triumphantly, and stretched out her hand for the roses; but Michael was upon his guard, and held the nosegay so high that she could not reach it.

"Come, do you hear?" the forester said, impatiently. "Don't you understand? You must give the little Countess the flowers this instant."

"This instant!" Hertha repeated, the childish voice that had been so sweet now sounding shrill and authoritative. Michael looked down at the small despot for one or two moments and then suddenly tossed the flowers into the fireplace.

"Go and get them, then!" he said, roughly; and, turning his back upon her, he left the room.

"Upon my word, the fellow does me credit to-day! Only wait until I get him home," muttered Wolfram, with suppressed rage, as he followed the lad.

Hertha was left alone; she stood motionless, looking wide-eyed after the pair, but in another instant she bethought herself and ran hastily to the fireplace. The flickering flame was devouring its prey; the delicate white blossoms glowed red for an instant like fairy flowers, and then curled up and sank to ashes.

The little girl folded her hands and looked on, her face still angry and defiant, but gradually her eyes filled with tears, and when the last of the flowers had perished in its fiery bed, she suddenly burst into loud sobs.

When Count Steinrück, after a few minutes, returned to his study, he found no one there. A glance at the clock showed him that it was time he were gone, and he hurriedly went to the writing-table to get the order that was to complete his uniform. The case was still where he had

left it, but it was empty; probably the servant had seen what was wrong with the ribbon and had taken it away to arrange it. Steinrück rang the bell. "My order," he said, hurriedly, to the man who appeared in answer to the ring. "Is the carriage there?"

"Yes, Herr Count; but the order,--it is usually in the Herr Count's own possession."

"Of course; I took it out to-day,--the large star of diamonds. Did you not observe that the ribbon was loose?"

The servant shook his head. "I did not see the star. I was only in the room a moment to receive the Herr Count's order about the carriage."

Steinrück looked in extreme astonishment at the empty case. "Have you not been in the room since?"

"No, Herr Count."

"Has no one else been here?"

"The forester's son was here when I left the room, and, I think, was here alone for some time."

There was suspicion more than hinted at in these words, but the Count shook his head decidedly. "Nonsense! that's impossible. Has no one else been here? Bethink yourself."

"No, Herr Count; no one has even been in the corridor."

"But the bedroom on that side,--it is a thoroughfare."

"Only from the sleeping apartment of the Frau Countess by the tapestried door."

Steinrück turned pale, and involuntarily he clinched his hand, but he still combated the dawning suspicion. "Look for it," he said. "The star must be found; perhaps I mislaid it among the books and papers."

And without waiting for the man's assistance he began to look for the jewel himself. He knew perfectly well that he had laid the star in the case, which he had left open; nevertheless, he lifted every book and paper, and searched every drawer, but to no purpose the thing was not to be found.

"It is not here," the servant said at last, in a low tone. "If it was lying here in the open case, there is but one explanation."

Steinrück made no reply. He himself doubted no longer. "A thief, then! A common thief!" The measure of his contempt and aversion was filled to the brim.

There was silence for a few minutes; the servant stood waiting for orders, startled by the expression on his master's face.

"Is Wolfram still in the castle?" the Count asked at last.

"I think he is. He wanted to see the major-domo."

"Then send his son to me! But not a word of what has happened!--not even to the forester; send the boy here."

The man left the room, and for a moment Steinrück covered his eyes with his hand. This was terrible! And yet was it unnatural in the son of such a father? The lad's whole appearance showed that he had inherited not a drop of his mother's blood, and that other that filled his veins, did it not proclaim itself what it was, and was it not a duty to disclaim it and thrust it forth? Away with it!

The Count stood erect, resolute as ever, when Michael entered, unwillingly to be sure, but with no idea of what this new summons betokened.

"Close the door," said Steinrück, "and come here!"

This time no second command was necessary; Michael obeyed without hesitation. He stood before the Count, who, looking him directly in the eye, held out to him the empty case. "Do you know what this is?" he asked, with apparent composure.

The young man shook his head; he did not comprehend the strange question.

"It was lying here on the writing-table," Steinrück continued, "but it was not empty as it is now. It contained a star of sparkling stones. Did you not see it?"

Michael reflected. That, then, must have been the glittering object that sparkled so in the sunlight, but of which he had taken little heed.

"Well, I am waiting for an answer," said the Count, still keeping his eye fixed on Michael's.

"Where is the star?"

"How should I know?" asked Michael, more and more surprised at this strange examination.

The Count's lips quivered. "You do not know, then? You are hardly so stupid as you pretend to be. You act a farce extremely well. Where is the star? I must know, and that instantly."

The threatening tone of the last words revealed the truth to the lad, and he stood as if paralyzed, so horrified, so dismayed, that for the moment he was utterly incapable of exculpating himself. His aspect deprived Steinrück of all shadow of doubt. He saw in it the consciousness of guilt.

"Confess, fellow!" he said in an undertone, but with terrible emphasis. "Give up what you have stolen, and thank God that I let you go scot-free. Do you hear? Give up your booty!"

Michael shrank as if he had received a stab, but in an instant he burst forth, "I a thief? I take---"

"Hush!" interrupted Steinrück, angrily. "I will have no noise, no commotion, but you do not stir from the spot until you have confessed. Confess!"

He seized the young fellow by the arm, and his grasp was like iron, but with a single wrench Michael freed himself. "Let go of me!" he gasped. "Never say that again! Never again, or----"

"What! you would threaten besides?" cried the Count, who took this outburst for the height of insolence. "Take care, boy; one word more, and I shall forget to spare you."

"I am no thief!" shouted Michael; "and whoever dares call me so I'll fell him to the earth!"

In an instant he had seized a heavy silver candelabrum from the table and swung it like a weapon towards the Count, who recoiled a step,--not from the menaced blow, but from the face confronting him. Was that the same young man that had stood there a few moments before with the vacant, dreamy countenance, the timid, sheepish air? He reared his head now like a wounded lion ready to rush upon the stronger foe, rage and savage hatred informing every feature. And Steinrück's eyes, flashing annihilation, encountered two other eyes, dark blue like his own, and gleaming with the same fire. There was one breathless moment. No coward, no thief, ever looked like that.

The door flew open,--the loud, menacing voice must have been heard in the anteroom,--and the forester appeared on the threshold, the frightened face of the servant looking over his shoulder.

"Boy, are you mad?" shouted Wolfram, hastening to his master's aid, and seizing Michael by the shoulder. But the lad shook himself free as a wounded stag shakes off the murderous pack, then dashed the candelabrum on the ground, and rushed to the door. But here he was intercepted by the servant. "Hold him!" the man cried out to the forester. "He must not escape! He has robbed the Herr Count!"

Wolfram, who was about to secure his foster-son, paused in horror. "Michael,--a thief?"

A cry burst from the lips of the tortured boy, a cry so desperate that Steinrück interfered hurriedly, and would have ordered both men to refrain, but it was too late. The servant staggered aside beneath the blow of Michael's powerful young fist, and the lad rushed past him and away, as if goaded to madness by those terrible words.

When Wolfram the forester made his appearance at St. Michael's parsonage, he seemed to be expected, for his reverence came to meet him in the hall.

"Well, Wolfram, any tidings yet?"

"No, your reverence, not a trace of the fellow; but I come from the castle; and I have something from there to tell you."

Valentin opened the door of his study and beckoned the forester to follow him, but he was evidently not as much interested in news from the castle as in the question which he repeated with anxiety. "Then Michael has not been at home yet?"

"No, your reverence, not yet."

"This is the third day, and we have no trace of him. I trust he has come to no harm."

"He couldn't come to harm," the forester said, with a harsh laugh. "He's wandering about, not daring to come home, because he knows what he'll get when he does come; but he'll have to show himself at last, and then--God have mercy on him!"

"What do you mean to do, Wolfram? Remember your promise."

"I kept it as long as there was anything to be done with the fellow, but that's over now. If he

thinks that he can knock down and run over everybody he shall learn that there is one man at least who is a match for him. I'll make him feel that, so long as I can lift a finger."

"You will not touch Michael until I have had a talk with him," said the priest, gravely. "You say you come from the castle. How are they there? Has the missing order been found at last?"

"Yes, the very day it was lost. Little Countess Hertha had taken away the glittering thing to play with, and after a while she ran with it to her mother, and so the whole matter was explained."

"All because of a child's carelessness, then," Valentin said, bitterly, "a degrading, shameful suspicion fell upon Michael, who----"

He broke off suddenly, and the forester grumbled, "Why did he not open his lips and defend himself? I should have told them they were wrong, but Michael stood stock-still, I suppose, until they tried to seize him, and then behaved like a wounded bear. And to attack the Herr Count! You can hardly believe it, but I saw him myself, standing with the lifted candlestick. And I have to pay for the fellow's cursed behaviour. The Herr Count was very cross to-day, he would hardly speak a word to me, but he gave me a letter to bring to your reverence."

He took an envelope from his pouch and handed it to the priest. "Very well, Wolfram. Now go, and if Michael shows himself at the lodge, send him directly to me. I forbid you to maltreat him in any way until I have talked with him."

The forester left, grumbling at being obliged to postpone his punishment of the 'cursed boy,' but vowing that it should take place for all that. When Valentin was alone he opened the letter from the Count. It was brief enough:

"I wish to inform your reverence that the missing article has been found, and of course the charge of theft is proved unfounded. With regard to your *protégé's* conduct in behaving like a madman, even daring to make an assault upon myself, instead of defending himself and helping to explain the affair, you have doubtless heard all particulars from Wolfram, and will comprehend why I must decline all compliance with your wishes. This rude, unbridled fellow, with his savage disposition, belongs to the sphere in which he has passed his life. Wolfram is just the man to control him, and he will remain in his charge. All education would be wasted upon such a nature, and I am convinced that after what has occurred you will agree with me.

"MICHAEL, COUNT STEINRÜCK."

The priest dropped the letter and sat lost in sad thought. "Not a single word of regret for the shameful suspicion that fell upon an innocent fellow-being; nothing but contempt and condemnation. And yet the boy is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh."

"Your reverence!" The words came from the half-opened door, and were spoken in a suppressed voice. Valentin started up and breathed a sigh of relief. "Michael! Are you here at last? Thank God!"

"I thought--you, too, would turn me off," Michael said, gently.

"I want to talk with you. Why do you keep at the door there? Come in."

The young man slowly approached. He wore the same Sunday suit which he had worn on that eventful day, but it had evidently been exposed to the wind and rain.

"I have been anxious about you," Valentin said, reproachfully. "No trace of you for forty-eight hours! Where have you been?"

"In the forest."

"And where did you pass the nights?"

"In the empty herdsman's-hut on the mountain."

"In all the storm? Why did you not go home?"

"I knew that Wolfram would attempt to beat me, and I do not mean to be beaten again. I wished to spare both him and myself what would have happened."

His answers sounded monotonous, but the old indifference had gone; there was something in Michael's whole air and bearing strange, gloomy, decided. He was very different from his former self. The priest looked at him with anxiety.

"Then you ought to have come to me. I expected you."

"I have come to your reverence, and what they have told you of me is not true. I am no thief."

"I know it. I never for an instant believed that you were, and now no suspicion rests upon you. The missing star has been found; little Countess Hertha carried it off for a plaything."

Michael stroked aside the damp curls from his brow, and his face wore a strange, hard expression. "Ah, the child with the red-gold hair and the beautiful evil eyes. It is she that I have to thank, is it?"

"The little girl is not to blame; she simply, after the fashion of spoiled children, carried off from her uncle's room what she supposed to be a plaything, and took it to her mother. You were the one at fault; you ought to have exculpated yourself calmly and sensibly, and the affair would have been immediately explained, instead of which--Michael, can it be true that you lifted your hand against Count Steinrück?"

"He called me a thief!" Michael gasped. "Oh, if you knew how he treated me! I was to confess--to return what I had not stolen. He never asked whether I were guilty or not. He would have liked to kick me out of the castle."

There was a degree of savage bitterness in the lad's words, and Valentin could understand it; he saw that his pupil had been irritated to madness. "They did you wrong," he said, "grievous wrong, but you ought not to have given way to furious passion, and the consequences of your anger will recoil heavily upon yourself. The Count is naturally indignant at what has occurred. You need no longer reckon upon his aid, he will hear nothing more of you."

"Will he not? But he shall hear *from* me! Once more at least."

"What do you mean? You do not propose to----?"

"Go to him! Yes, your reverence. Now that he knows to what unmerited disgrace he subjected me, he shall take it all back!"

"You propose to call Count Steinrück to account?" the priest exclaimed in dismay. "What an insane idea! You must give this up."

"No!" said Michael, in a hard, cold tone.

"Michael!"

"No, your reverence, I will not, even although you forbid my going. I choose to ask him why he called me thief."

All his thoughts revolved about this one point, the disgrace which had been heaped upon him, and which burned into his soul like red-hot iron. Valentin was at his wit's end; he saw that here his remonstrances could avail nothing, and the savage desire for revenge that was plain in this intent of the lad's filled him with dread. If Michael really carried out his plan of taking the Count to task, and if the Count should undertake to chastise the 'rough, unbridled fellow,' some terrible misfortune might ensue; it must be prevented at all hazards.

"I never thought that my words would avail so little with you," he said, sorrowfully. "Well, then, something else must appeal to you. Whether the Count has wronged you or not, it would be a crime for you to lift a finger against him; you must never--heed what I say--never confront him as a foe; he stands nearer to you than you dream."

"To me? Count Steinrück?"

"Yes. I meant to have told you hereafter of what I now reveal to you, but your insane behaviour forces me to speak. You would else be in danger of making a second assault upon--your grandfather!"

Michael started, and stood staring wide-eyed at the speaker. "My grandfather! He is----?"

"Your mother's father. But you must cherish no hopes from the tie; your mother was disinherited and cast off. Her marriage separated her forever from her family, and was her ruin."

He paused and looked at Michael, who for the moment said not a word, although it was evident that the revelation had agitated him terribly. His features worked, and his chest rose and fell as though he were labouring for breath; at last after a long pause he said, gloomily, "Go on,--is there no more to tell?"

"No, my son, no more for the present. It is a sad story, ending in grief and misery; a tissue of crime and misfortune that you could hardly understand. Hereafter, when you are older and more mature, you shall hear everything; for the present let the bare facts content you: I vouch for their truth. You see now that the person of Count Steinrück should be sacred to you."

"Sacred? When he hounded me like a thief from his door?" Michael suddenly burst forth. "He knew that he was my grandfather, and yet could treat me so! Like a dog! Ah, your reverence, you ought not to bid me hold him sacred. I hated the Count because he was so hard and pitiless to a

stranger, but now,--I should like to----"

He clinched his fist with so terrible a look that Valentin involuntarily recoiled. "For the love of all the saints you would not----?"

"Touch him,--no! I know now that I must not lift my hand against him, but if I could call him to account otherwise, I would give my life for a chance to do so."

Valentin stood speechless, dismayed, though this savage outbreak was not alone what dismayed him. He too saw now what had so surprised his brother, that strange gleam that flashed out suddenly like lightning to vanish as instantly. The rugged, undeveloped features were the same, but the dreamy face had gone; as if a veil had been raised all at once there were revealed other eyes, another brow, and the movement with which Michael turned to leave the room was full of savage resolve.

"Where are you going?" the priest asked, hastily. "To the forest lodge?"

"No; I have nothing to do there now. Farewell, your reverence."

"Stay! Where, then, are you going?"

"I do not know,--away,--out into the world."

"Alone? Without means? Utterly ignorant of the world and of life? What will you do?"

"Go to ruin like my mother," the lad replied, roughly.

"No, by heaven, that you shall not!" exclaimed the priest, rising with unwonted determination. "If my vows tie my hands,--if I cannot take care of you,--I can intrust you to another. It was a special providence that brought my brother here; he will not refuse to help me: I can rely upon him."

Michael shook his head in dissent. "Better let me go, your reverence; I am accustomed to be maltreated and turned out everywhere; I do not want to be a burden upon a stranger. I can scarcely be worse off out in the world than I was with my parents. I can remember it from my earliest childhood. Neither my mother nor I ever had a kind word from my father, and he often used to beat us both; it was not very different from the life at the lodge, except that I was not starved at the forester's."

Valentin shuddered; he could not help it at the thought of the woman whom he had formerly seen in all the pride of her beauty and rank. This, then, had been the end of it all. A terrible glimpse into the depths of human misery.

"You *must* not go, Michael," he said, gently but decidedly. "There can be no question of your return to the lodge. Here you will stay until I hear from my brother,--I know beforehand what he will say,--and until then I take charge of you."

Michael did not gainsay this, and made no further attempt to depart. He turned darkly away to the window, and stood there with folded arms looking out, the same sullen determination in his look that had characterized it when he would have rushed away. Yes, the somnambulist had wakened when his name had been called, out the call had been rude, and the awakening bitter.

A golden autumnal day had arisen from the dim morning mists; the mountains were unveiled and the valleys were filled with sunshine.

The little mountain-town, which lay about a league from Castle Steinrück, nestling most picturesquely at the entrance of the valley, was harbouring a distinguished guest. Professor Hans Wehlau, of worldwide reputation as a light of science, was paying a visit to his brother-in-law, the burgomaster of the little town. For ten years the Professor had now been living in the capital of Northern Germany, where he occupied a prominent position in the university. Since the death of his wife he had rather withdrawn from society, from which his two sons were also secluded by the duties of their several occupations; the younger was completing at another university the studies in natural science which he had begun under his father's tuition, and the elder, an adopted son, the child of a friend who had died, having embraced a military career, was stationed with his regiment in a provincial town. All, however, were to share in this excursion to relatives among the mountains. The Professor had been here for some weeks, and his sons had arrived on the previous day.

The burgomaster's fine spacious house looked out upon the market square, and the upper rooms, usually unoccupied, had been placed at the disposal of the guests. The Frau Burgomeisterin did all that she could to make the stay beneath her roof of her dead sister's husband agreeable to him, and her efforts in this direction were all the more praiseworthy since she was always upon a war-footing with him. She was perpetually vacillating between respect for his reputation, very flattering to her vanity in so near a relative, and detestation for the 'godless' scientific doctrines to which he owed his fame, and it was a great trial to her that her nephew, whom, in the absence of any children of her own, she loved like a son, should have been

compelled by his father's command to pursue the path of science.

It was early in the morning, and the Professor was standing at the window of his room looking out upon the quiet market square. Wehlau had changed but little in the last ten years. He had the same intellectual face, with its sarcastic expression and piercing eyes; the hair, however, had grown gray. Beside him stood the Frau Burgomeisterin, an imposing figure, of whom the evil-disposed in Tannberg affirmed that she ruled the ruler, and was the autocrat of her household.

"And our boys are here at last!" said the Professor, in apparently high good humour. "You'll have noise and confusion enough now, for Hans will turn the house upside down. You know him of old. They both look very well: Michael, especially, has a very manly air."

"Hans is much the handsomer and more attractive," the lady rejoined, very decidedly. "Michael has neither of these qualities."

"Granted, in the eyes of you ladies, that is! On the other hand, he has an earnestness and solidity of character by which our harum-scarum Hans might well take example. It is no small distinction for so young an officer to be ordered for service on the general's staff. He surprised me yesterday with this piece of information, while Hans will have some difficulty in getting his diploma."

"That's not the poor boy's fault," his sister-in-law declared. "He has never had more than a half-hearted interest in the profession that has been forced upon him. It cost my poor sister many a secret tear to have you insist so inexorably upon his burying his talent."

"And you whole rivers of them," the Professor added, with a sneer. "You all made my life wretched combining with the boy against me, until I issued my mandate, which he was forced to obey."

"With despair in his heart. In destroying his hope of an artistic career you deprived him of his ideal,—of all the poesy of his young life."

"Don't mention Poesy, I entreat," Wehlau interrupted her. "I am on the worst of terms with that lady for all the mischief she does and the heads she turns. I set my son straight, I rejoice to say, in time. I have not noticed any despair about him. Moreover, he has not a particle of talent for it."

"Good-morning, papa!" called a gay young voice, and the subject of the conversation appeared in the door-way.

Hans Wehlau junior was a slender and very handsome young fellow of twenty-four, with nothing in his exterior to suggest the dignity of the future professor. His straw hat, before he removed it, sat jauntily upon his thick, light brown hair, and his very becoming summer suit, with a 'turn-down' shirt collar, had an artistic, rather than a learned, air. His fresh, youthful face was lit up by a pair of laughing blue eyes, and altogether there was something so attractive and endearing about him that the Professor's evident paternal pride was very easy to understand.

"Well, Head-over-heels, here you are!" he said, gayly. "I have been preparing your aunt for the turmoil that you carry with you wherever you go."

"On the contrary, sir, I have grown monstrously sedate," Hans declared, illustrating his assertion by putting his arm around the waist of his aunt, who had just innocently set down her basket of keys, and waltzing with her around the room in spite of her struggles.

"Let me alone, you unmannerly boy!" she said, out of breath, when at last he released her with a profound bow.

"Forgive me, aunt, but it was the suitable preface to my errand. The kitchen department urgently requires your presence; and, as I like to make myself useful in a house, I offered to inform you of it."

Her nephew's zeal in this respect seemed rather suspicious to the mistress of the house, who asked, "What were you doing in the kitchen?"

"Good heavens! I was only paying my respects to old Gretel."

"Indeed? And young Leni was not there?"

"Oh, I had her presented to me, as I had not seen her before. It was my duty as one of the family. My tastes are very domestic."

"My dear Hans," the Frau Burgomeisterin said, with decision, "I take no interest in your domestic tastes, and if I find them leading you into the kitchen, the doors will be locked in your face; remember that." She nodded to her brother-in-law, and sailed majestically out of the room.

"Take care, take care!" said the Professor. "Favourite as you are with your aunt, there are certain points upon which she will have no jesting; and she is right. At all events, her mind must now be set at rest with regard to your despair, as she calls it. She clings obstinately to the idea

that you are unhappy in your profession."

"No, sir, I am not at all unhappy," the young man asserted, seating himself astride of a chair and looking cheerfully about him.

"I never supposed you were. Such youthful nonsense is sure to vanish of itself as soon as one is occupied with graver matters."

"Of course, papa," Hans assented, occupying himself for the time with rocking his chair to and fro, a proceeding which appeared to afford him great gratification.

"And these graver matters are comprised in science," Wehlau continued, with emphasis. "Unfortunately, I have of late--those chairs are not made to ride upon, Hans; such school-boy tricks are very unbecoming in a future doctor--I have of late had too little time to examine you thoroughly in your studies. The voluminous work which I have just completed has, as you know, absorbed all my attention. But now I am free, and we can make up for our delay."

"Of course, papa," said Hans, who had taken the paternal admonition to heart, and had left the chair, but was now seated on the corner of a table, swinging his feet.

Fortunately, the Professor, whose back was turned to him, did not see this, so the father continued to arrange some papers upon his study-table, and went on calmly: "Your student days are past, and I hope they have carried with them all your nonsense. I depend upon greater seriousness, now that we are to begin scientific study in earnest. Be diligent, Hans; you will be grateful to me one of these days when you succeed me as professor."

"Of course, papa," the obedient son observed for the third time; but as at the moment his father turned and cast an irritated glance at him, he jumped lightly from the table.

"Will you never have done with these school-boy pranks? Pray try to take example by Michael; you never see him conduct himself so."

"No, indeed," Hans laughed merrily. "The Herr Lieutenant is the embodiment of military discipline at all times. Always in position, his coat buttoned up to the throat. Who would have thought it when he came to us first, a shy, awkward boy, staring about him at the world and mankind as at something monstrous? I had to take him under my wing perpetually."

"I imagine he very soon outgrew any wing of yours," the Professor said, sarcastically.

"More's the pity. The case is reversed now, and he orders me about. But confess, papa, that at first you despaired of making a human being of Michael."

"As far as conventionalities are concerned, I certainly did. He had learned more, far more, than I had supposed. My brother had been an excellent teacher to him, and when he was once aroused, he applied himself with such unwearied diligence and interest that I often wondered at the strength of character shown in divesting himself of all his childish, dreamy ways."

"Yes, Michael was always your favourite," Hans said, discontentedly. "You never put any force upon him, but agreed instantly to his desire to be a soldier, while I---"

"It was a very different thing," his father interrupted him. "As matters stand, Michael was forced to shape his future and his mode of life himself, and with his temperament he is best fitted for a soldier. The reckless dash at a goal without a glance either to the right or to the left, the stern law of duty, the despotic subduing of antagonistic qualities beneath the iron yoke of discipline, all accord perfectly with his character, and he will inevitably rise in the army. You, on the other hand, must reap what I have sown, and therefore abide in my domain; your life is conveniently arranged for you."

The young man's air betrayed but a small degree of satisfaction with this arrangement; but he suddenly started up and exclaimed, gayly, "Here comes Michael!"

Ten years are a long time in a human existence, and they seem doubly long when they occur at the season when a man develops most rapidly; in Michael's case the change wrought by the years bordered on the marvellous. The former foster-son of Wolfram the forester and the young officer were two different individuals, who had not a characteristic in common.

Handsome, Michael Rodenberg certainly was not,--in that respect he was far behind Hans Wehlau,--but he was one who could never pass unnoticed. His tall, muscular figure seemed created to wear a uniform and to gird on a sword. It had exchanged all the awkwardness of the boy for the erect carriage of the soldier. His fair, close curls had lost none of their luxuriance, but they were carefully arranged, and the bearded face, if it could lay no claim to beauty, was interesting enough without it. All that was boyish in it had vanished, the strong, resolute head was that of ripe manhood,--a manhood too early ripened, perchance, for the countenance expressed at times a degree of gravity which was almost sternness, and which does not belong to youth.

In the eyes, too, there was none of the old dreamy look; their gaze had grown keen and firm,

but they never had learned to sparkle with the joyous inspiration of youth. There was something chilling in them, as indeed in the whole air of the young man, which only at intervals, in conversation, was animated by a genial glow. Yet, as he stood there, erect, firm, resolute, he was the ideal of a soldier from head to heel.

"In uniform?" asked the Professor, surprised, as Michael bade him good-morning. "Have you an official visit to pay here?"

"After a fashion, yes; I must go over to Elmsdorf. The former chief of my regiment, Colonel von Reval, since he resigned, has always spent the summer and autumn at his country-seat there. He probably thinks that I have been here some time, for I found upon my arrival yesterday a few lines from him inviting me to Elmsdorf. My aunt will, I hope, excuse me; the colonel has been very kind to me."

"You were always his special favourite," Hans remarked. "When he returned at the close of the Danish war, he came to see papa to congratulate him upon having so distinguished a son. I was furious at the time, for as I had heard nothing for weeks except songs of praise in your honour, with animadversions upon my insignificance, your doughty deeds were deeply annoying to me."

"Most certainly no one ever congratulated me upon possessing *you*, at least during your university course," Wehlau observed, sharply. "Moreover, we expected you here last week; why did you come so late?"

"On Michael's account; he could not get leave until he had accompanied his regiment into quarters after being on special duty. When I went to his quarters to find him, I had a piece of luck----"

"As usual!" the Professor interjected.

"Yes. I had made up my mind to spend a week in that dull provincial town, but on my arrival I heard that Michael was three miles away, in a gay little watering-place, near which his regiment was exercising. Of course I hurried after him, with a blessing upon the wisdom of the military authorities. The Herr Lieutenant was indeed head over ears in strict attention to duty, and quite deaf and blind to all else, even to an acquaintance for which every other officer of his corps envied him, and of which he would not take the least advantage. No one else could gain admission at Countess Steinrück's; she was very much of an invalid."

The Professor was evidently struck by the name, and cast a keen glance at Michael. "Countess Steinrück?"

"Of Berkheim. You know her, papa; for, as she herself told me, you were often at her father-in-law's when you were a young physician, and at her request you went to her when her husband was dying. She is very grateful yet to you for doing so."

"Of course I know her; but how did you make her acquaintance, Michael?"

"By accident," was the laconic reply.

"It was certainly by no fault of his," Hans said, in a mocking tone that plainly betrayed his ignorance of the part played in Michael's life by the name of Steinrück. "I must tell you the story in detail, papa; it begins very romantically. Well, Michael was sitting in the forest,--that is, he was in command of his men there and ordering them to fire,--when a carriage came driving along a road in the distance. The horses were frightened by the firing and ran away; the coachman lost his reins, and the danger was imminent, when from the dim forest near by a gallant knight rushed to the rescue, stopped the horses, tore open the carriage door, and lifted out the fainting ladies----"

"Stick to the truth, Hans," the young officer interposed, with some irritation. "Neither the danger nor the heroism was as great as you describe. I merely saw that the horses were frightened, and ran up to avert an accident; but the brutes stopped as soon as I caught hold of their bridles, and the ladies sat still in the carriage. No need of any poetical exaggeration."

"Nor of such prosaic treatment of facts," Hans retorted. "I heard the story from the Countess herself, and she persists quite as obstinately in saying that you saved her life as you persist in denying having done so."

Michael shrugged his shoulders and turned to the Professor. "In fact, the Countess did thus persist, and as the house where I was staying was near her villa I could not avoid frequent meetings with her. But I was very much occupied with the service, and had but little time at my disposal."

"Yes, yes, that eternal 'service!'" exclaimed Hans, indignantly. "At last he was never to be seen. It was with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded him to find time to introduce me, and when he had done so he went off, and left me to explain and apologize for his extraordinary behaviour. The ladies made him the most amiable advances, but he was a perfect icicle."

"Michael probably has his own reasons for his conduct," said Wehlau; "and if he thought best

to maintain a degree of reserve, you would have done well to follow his example."

"Ah, no; that was simply out of the question. The young Countess was too beautiful,--a perfect princess in a fairy-tale: superb golden hair and eyes that shine like stars. They can beguile, those eyes of hers."

"And can scorn," Michael added, in a tone the coldness of which contrasted strongly with his friend's enthusiasm. "Beware of them, Hans; it is a sad fate to be first beguiled and then scorned."

"You say that because the Countess Hertha is thought very haughty. I too believe that any man who could not reckon up ten generations of ancestors at least would have but a poor chance if he were audacious enough to woo her. Since, however, I do not covet that honour, nothing hinders my admiration. And if I should really allow myself to be beguiled by those eyes----"

"Come, come; let all that alone," his father cut short his son's sentence. "You have no business with fairy princesses or starry eyes; I bar all such nonsense. All that you have to think about is your coming thesis."

The two young men exchanged a hasty, significant glance, and Michael said, lightly, "Do not be troubled, uncle. If Hans is a little scorched, it will do him no harm; he is used to it."

"Yes, he has been childish and silly enough, but now he will have the kindness to adopt a graver tone. I have an unoccupied morning to-day, Hans, and we will have an exhaustive talk about your studies. The sketch of them that you gave me in the holidays was very slight. I want now to know all about them."

Again the young men exchanged a glance that seemed to betoken a secret understanding, as the Professor arose and said, casually, "I only want to tell Leni that she must be careful to-day about sending my letters to the post. I shall be back immediately," with which he left the room.

Hans looked after him, folded his arms, and said, in an undertone, "Now for the bursting of the bomb!"

"Do not take the matter so easily," Michael admonished him. "You certainly have a hard battle to fight; my uncle will be furious."

"I know it; that's why I am all armed and equipped. You're not going; I can't spare you. When the fight grows too hot I shall summon you as my *corps de r serve*. Do stay and help me."

"I am glad, at all events, that there is to be no more secrecy," said the young officer, discontentedly, as he withdrew into the recess of a window. "I promised you to be silent, but it was very hard for me; harder than for you."

"Bah! I did not know what else to do. And you soldiers admit that all's fair in war. Hush! here he comes! Now for the assault!"

The Professor re-entered the room, and took his seat comfortably in an arm-chair, beckoning his son to take his place beside him. "You certainly have been in good hands," he began. "My colleague, Bauer, is an authority in his specialty, and shares my views entirely. That was the reason why I yielded to your earnest entreaty and sent you for two years to B----. I was afraid that the chief attraction for you lay in the gay student life there, but I nevertheless judged it best that you should pursue your studies under other guidance than my own, after I had laid the foundation for them. Now let me hear."

The young man was evidently made very uncomfortable by this prelude; he twirled his handsome moustache, and stammered somewhat as he replied, "Yes,--Professor Bauer; I attended his lectures--very regularly."

"Of course; I recommended you to him particularly."

"But I did not learn anything from him."

Wehlau frowned, and said, reprovingly, "Hans, it is very unbecoming so to criticise a worthy man of science. His delivery, to be sure, leaves much to be desired, but his treatises are admirable."

"Good heavens, I am not speaking of the Herr Professor's treatises, but of my own, and they were unfortunately far from admirable. I felt that myself, and accordingly I made a slight change in my course of study."

"Against my express directions. I laid out your course precisely for you. To whom did you go, then?"

Hans hesitated to reply, and glanced towards the window where his 'reserves' were stationed, before he said, in a rather constrained voice, "To--to Professor Walter."

"Walter? Who is he? I do not know the name."

"Oh, papa, you surely must have heard of Friedrich Walter. He has a world-wide reputation as an artist."

"As a what?" the Professor asked, not crediting his ears.

"As an artist, and that was the reason why I wanted to go to B----. Master Walter lives there, and did me the honour of receiving me into his atelier. In fact, I have not applied myself to the study of natural science; I have become a painter!"

It was out at last. Wehlau sprang to his feet, and stared speechless at his son.

"Boy, are you mad?" he cried; but Hans, who knew well that his only hope lay in not allowing his father to speak, rattled on very quickly, "I have been very diligent all these two years, extremely diligent. My teacher will tell you so; he thinks I may safely be left to myself now, and when I came away he said to me, 'It will surely delight your father to see the progress you have made; refer any one to me.'"

All this was uttered with extreme volubility; the words fell like honey from his lips, but it did him no good any longer; at last the Professor understood that there was no jest about the 'slight change' of studies, and he burst forth, "And you dare to brave me thus! You dare secretly, behind my back, to play such a farce; to defy my command, to laugh my wishes to scorn; and now you imagine that I shall yield in the matter, and say 'yes,' and 'amen'? You will find yourself vastly mistaken."

Hans hung his head and looked crushed. "Do not be so hard upon me, papa! Art is my ideal, the poesy of my life, and if you knew how my conscience has pricked me for my disobedience!"

"You look as if your conscience pricked you," the Professor stormed, still more furious. "Ideal,-- Poesy,--the same cursed old trash! The shibboleth to hide all the folly that men perpetrate. Never imagine that such nonsense will go down with me. Whatever pranks you may have played hitherto, now you are coming home, and I shall take you in hand. You will shortly pass the examination for your degree! Do you hear? I order you to do so."

"But I have not learned anything," Hans declared, with positive exultation. "While the lectures were going on I sketched or caricatured either the professors or the audience, as the case might be, and all that you taught me I forgot long ago; I could not write an essay a page long, and you cannot send me to the university again."

"You are actually boasting of your ignorance," said Wehlau, sternly; "and the inconceivable deception you have practised upon me you perhaps consider another piece of heroism to be proud of."

"No; only as a necessary weapon, when all other means failed. How I formerly implored and entreated you to yield to my desires, and all in vain! You would have had me sacrifice my talent, my entire future, to a profession for which I was not fitted, and in which I never could have excelled. You denied me the means for my artistic education and thought thereby to force my inclination. When I said to you, 'I want to be a painter,' you met me with an inexorable 'no.' Now I say to you, 'I am a painter,' and you will have to say 'yes.'"

"That remains to be seen," Wehlau burst forth afresh. "I will see whether I cannot govern my own son. I am master in my own house, and I'll have no rebellion there; those who oppose me will have to leave it."

The young man's cheek paled at this threat; he stepped up close to his father, and his voice sounded imploring, but gravely in earnest. "Father, do not let matters go too far between you and me. I am not made as you are. I have always had a horror of your cold lofty science that makes life so clear and so--desolate. You do not comprehend that there is another world, and that there is a temperament to which this other world is as necessary as the air to the lungs. You wring from nature her secrets; everything that lives and moves must be adjusted to your rules and theories; you know the origin and end of every created being. But you do not know your own son, whom you cannot fit to your theories. He has clasped close his morsel of poesy and ideality, and has pursued his own path, in which he will never disgrace you."

With this he turned and walked towards the door; but the Professor, who was in no wise disposed to end the interview thus, called angrily after him, "Stay, Hans! Come back this instant!"

But Hans thought fit not to hear the call, he saw that his *corps de réserve* was advancing, and he left it to Michael to cover his retreat as best he might.

"Let him go, uncle," said Michael, who had come forward some minutes before, and now attempted to soothe the angry man. "You are too irritated; you must be calmer before you speak to him again."

The admonition was vain. Wehlau had no idea of becoming calmer, and since his disobedient son was no longer present, he turned upon his advocate. "And you too have been in the plot; you knew it all; do not deny it. Hans tells you everything; why did you keep silence?"

"Because I had given my word, and could not break it, however I might dislike secrecy."

"Then you ought to have taken the boy in hand yourself and brought him to reason."

"That I could not do, for he is right."

"What! Are you beginning too?" shouted the Professor, shaking a menacing finger; but Michael held his ground and repeated firmly, "Yes, uncle, perfectly right. I never would have allowed myself to be forced to adopt a calling which I disliked and for which I was not fit. I should, it is true, have waged more open and therefore sterner warfare than Hans has done; he has simply avoided a struggle. From the day when you forced him to the course of study you approved, and to which he ostensibly applied himself, he began to make a preliminary study of painting, but he finally perceived the impossibility of completing his artistic education beneath your eyes, and therefore he went to B----. He must have done extremely well there, for if a man like Professor Walter testifies to his artistic ability, it is indubitable, you may be sure."

"Silence!" growled the Professor. "I will not hear another word. I say no, and no again,--and--- Are you coming to triumph too? I suppose you also were in the plot."

The last words were spoken to his sister-in-law, who came innocently into the room to get her basket of keys which she had left behind her, and who looked amazed at this angry reception.

"What is the matter?" asked she. "What has happened?"

"Happened? Nothing has happened! Only a very slight change in my son's studies, as he is pleased to express it. But woe to the boy if he appears before me again! He shall find out who and what I am."

With these words Wehlau strode into the next room, slamming the door behind him, while his sister-in-law gazed at Michael in dismay. "Tell me, in heavens' name, what has occurred?"

"A catastrophe. Hans has made a confession, which he could no longer suppress, to his father. He did not pursue his studies at the university, but used his time there in studying art with Professor Walter. But excuse me, aunt, I must go and find him. He had really better avoid meeting his father for the present."

So saying, Michael hastily left the room, where the Frau Burgomeisterin stood motionless for a few minutes; but at last her face broke into a beaming smile, and with an expression of supreme satisfaction she said, "And so he's played a trick upon the infallible Herr Professor, and such a trick! Darling boy!"

Elmsdorf, the estate of Herr von Reval, was situated at no great distance from the town. It was no old mountain stronghold, with an historic past, like Steinrück, but a pleasant modern country-seat which its situation made a very desirable summer residence. The house, a spacious villa with balconies and terraces, was surrounded by a park, not very extensive indeed, but charmingly laid out, and the interior of the mansion, without being magnificent, gave evidence of the taste and wealth of its possessors.

Colonel Reval had sent in his resignation from the army three years previous to our present date in consequence of wounds received in the last war. Since then he, with his wife, had spent the winters in the capital and the summers at Elmsdorf, which he had converted from a very simple abode into a charming country-seat.

Michael Rodenberg, who had served in the colonel's regiment, and afterwards had been his adjutant, had always enjoyed the special favour of his chief, who even after he had quitted the service continued to give proofs of his regard for the young officer.

Elmsdorf to-day was holding high festival, celebrating the birthday of its mistress, and, as the hospitable mansion was very popular in the country around, the company assembled was very numerous. Michael was present, of course, and Professor Wehlau and his son had also received invitations. Unfortunately, there was no hope of seeing the distinguished man of science among the guests. He excused his absence on the plea of indisposition, but in truth he was averse to all society at present, since his son's obstinate disobedience filled him with indignation and controlled his mood to a great degree. Both the young men, however, had driven over to Elmsdorf.

Herr and Frau von Reval received their guests with all the hospitable grace that made their house a social centre in all the country round about. Hans Wehlau on this occasion justified his father's assertion that he was fortune's favourite, to whom without any effort of his own all hearts and homes were flung wide open. He had scarcely been presented to the mistress of the house before she showed him special marks of favour, every one thought him charming, and he moved among all these strangers as if he had been intimate in the household from boyhood.

All the more of a stranger did Michael feel himself to be. He possessed neither the inclination nor the capacity for so swift and easy an adaptation of himself to his surroundings. With the exception of the colonel and his wife he knew no one of the company, and the few words possible

upon a casual introduction interested him but little. This brilliant assemblage, in the midst of which Hans swam like a fish in its native element, won but a passing regard from his grave, unsocial friend, who was a looker-on, not a sharer in its gayeties. Wandering through the rooms, Michael came at last to the conservatory, a quiet spot shut off from the suite of reception-rooms; with its palms, laurel-trees, and flowers, it invited to rest. Here all was cool and secluded, and the young man felt no inclination to return to the heated rooms where he could not be missed. He passed slowly from one group of plants to another, until he was interrupted by the entrance of Colonel Reval.

"Still unsocial, Lieutenant Rodenberg?" he said, in a tone half of jest, half of reproach. "You are but a poor guest at our *fête*. What are you doing here in this lonely conservatory?"

"I have just found my way hither," Michael began; "and, moreover, I am a stranger in society--"

"Only an additional reason for frequenting it. Take pattern by your young friend, who is already at home there. I missed you some time ago from the drawing-room, where I wanted to present you to Count Steinrück. You do not know him?"

"The general in command? No!"

"He came only awhile ago, and you will shortly have to report yourself to him officially. The general is extremely influential, but greatly feared because of his inflexible severity in military matters. He spares no one, least of all, indeed, himself; although he is over seventy, his age never seems to enter his mind."

Michael listened in silence; he had known that the Count was at Steinrück, and that he must be prepared for a meeting which had hitherto been spared him, but which would be unavoidable in future, since he must in time report himself to the general in command.

"We hoped to see the young Count too," Reval continued, "but we have just heard that he does not arrive until to-morrow evening. It is a pity; he would have been an interesting acquaintance for you."

"You mean the general's son, colonel?"

"No, the son died some years ago; I mean his grand son, Count Raoul. He certainly is one of the handsomest fellows I have ever seen; always foremost in youthful follies, full of talent, and with a disposition so charming that he takes everybody by storm. Indeed, he is a gifted creature, but such a madcap that he will give his grandfather no end of trouble if he does not succeed in controlling him betimes."

"Apparently, Count Steinrück is the very man to do so," Michael remarked.

"So it seems to me. Count Raoul, who fears neither man nor devil, has nevertheless a very wholesome dread of his grandfather, and when His Excellency issues an ukase, which, between ourselves, is not infrequently necessary, the young fellow is ready to obey."

A low rustle, as of silken robes, was heard behind the gentlemen, whose backs were towards the entrance; they turned, and at that instant the young officer stepped back so suddenly that the colonel looked at him in surprise.

Two ladies had entered; the elder, in dark velvet, pale, delicate, an evident invalid, seemed desirous of reaching a long low seat beneath a group of palms, where she could rest; the younger stood at the head of the flight of steps leading into the conservatory, her figure full in the light of the chandelier hanging above her head.

Hans Wehlau had described her well; she was like the princess in a fairy-tale, tall and slender, with a face of bewitching beauty, and large eyes that shone like stars, the colour of which it was impossible to define for at times they looked deeply dark, and then again brilliantly light. The red curls that had formerly fallen upon the child's shoulders had vanished; there was now only a slight reddish tinge upon the thick golden braids, contrasting with the pale lustre of the pearls twined among them; and yet, as she stood bathed in the light from above her head, her hair gleamed like the 'red gold' of fairy treasure-chambers. Over her blue silk gown a cloud of delicate lace was looped with single flowers, with here and there a diamond dew-drop on their petals. She looked a creature woven out of sun and air.

"Ah, Countess Steinrück!" exclaimed the colonel, as he hastened to offer his arm to the elder lady, so evidently fatigued. "It was too warm in the ballroom; I am afraid you have given us the pleasure of seeing you at too great a sacrifice."

"It is only fatigue, nothing more," the Countess assured him, as he conducted her to a seat. "Why, there is Lieutenant Rodenberg!"

Michael bowed; the blue silk rustled down the steps, and Countess Hertha stood beside her mother. "Mamma is not very well," she said, "and so we left the ball-room. She will soon feel better here where it is so cool and quiet."

"It would be better then----" Michael glanced towards the colonel, and turned to leave the conservatory, but the Countess interposed with gracious courtesy,--

"Oh, do not go! It is only that the heat and noise are too much for me. I am so glad to see you again, Lieutenant Rodenberg."

The colonel seemed surprised that the young officer was acquainted with the ladies, and the Countess was pleased to tell him how the acquaintance had been made. She insisted that Michael by his prompt interference had saved her daughter's life and her own. He protested against such a statement.

Countess Hertha took no part in the conversation, which soon became animated, but turned her entire attention to the flowers. She walked slowly through the conservatory, which was but dimly lighted; there was infinite grace in her movements, but there was nothing about her of the half-shyness, half self-consciousness of girlhood. At nineteen she displayed all the *aplomb* of a woman of the world, of the wealthy heiress who doubtless knew perfectly well that she was beautiful. She paused before a group of exotic plants, and asked in an easy tone, turning her head towards Michael, "Do you know this flower, Herr Lieutenant? It is a strange, foreign-looking blossom, and I confess my botany is at fault."

Michael was forced to cross the conservatory to where she stood; he did so very deliberately, but he was a shade paler as he gave her the desired information: "It seems to be a *Dionea*, one of those murderous blossoms that close upon an insect alighting upon them, and kill their prisoner."

A half-compassionate, half-contemptuous smile played about the young girl's lips. "Poor thing! And yet it must be lovely to die in such intoxicating fragrance. Do you not think so?"

"No! Death is lovely only in freedom. No intoxication can atone for imprisonment."

The answer sounded almost rude, and Hertha bit her lip for an instant, and then changed the subject, saying, with some sarcasm, "I am glad to see that you are not so entirely monopolized by 'the service' here as you were in F---; I never met you in society there."

"We were exercising there; here I am on leave."

"Staying with Colonel Reval?"

"No, with relatives."

The tip of the little satin slipper tapped the floor impatiently: "Their name appears to be a state secret, since you so persistently suppress it."

"Not at all; there is no reason why I should do so. I am staying in Tannberg, as the guest of the brother-in-law of Professor Wehlau."

Hertha seemed surprised; she went on playing with a rose that she had plucked, while her eyes scanned the young man's face. "Oh, the little mountain town near Steinrück. We are thinking of passing several weeks at the castle."

A sudden gleam lit up Michael's face for an instant; the next moment it had vanished, and he rejoined, coolly, "Autumn is certainly very beautiful in the mountains."

This time the young Countess was not impatient; perhaps that sudden gleam had not escaped her, for she smiled, as she continued to toy with her rose: "We shall hardly meet, in spite of our being such near neighbours, for I suspect that 'the service' will make demands upon you even there."

"You are pleased to jest, Countess Steinrück."

"I am perfectly serious. We first heard of your presence here to-night from Herr Wehlau. Of course you had instantly rendered yourself invisible, and were presumably deep in a strategic discussion with the colonel, when we appeared here. We regret having interrupted it: it was evident that our intrusion annoyed you."

"You are quite mistaken; I was very glad to see you both again."

"And yet you started when you first observed us."

Michael looked up, and the glance that fell upon the young girl was stern, almost menacing, but his voice was perfectly calm as he replied, "I was surprised, as I knew that the Countess intended to return directly to Berkheim from the baths."

"We changed our plans, by special desire of my uncle Steinrück, and, moreover, the physician recommended several weeks of invigorating mountain air. Shall we not see you at the castle? My mother would be so glad, and--so should I."

Her voice was low and beguilingly sweet as she uttered the last words, standing close beside him, half in shadow, and still lovelier than when in the bright light, while from the cups of the

flowers a fragrant incense arose around her. Her dress made a soft silken rustle, and the delicate lace almost brushed the arm of the young officer, who was still a little pale. He paused for a second, as if gaining self-possession, then bowed low and formally, and said, "I shall be most happy."

In spite of his words there must have been something in the tone in which they were spoken that told the young Countess that he did not mean to come, for there appeared in her eyes the strange gleam that for the moment robbed them of their beauty. She inclined her head and turned to join her mother. As she did so the rose dropped, quite by accident, from her hand, and lay upon the ground without being perceived by her.

Michael remained standing in the same spot, but a covetous glance fell upon the flower that had but now been in her hand. The delicate half-opened bud lay at his feet, rosy and fragrant, and just before him shimmered the blossoms of the Dionea, that kill their prisoners in intoxicating perfume.

The young officer's hand involuntarily sought the earth, and a hasty glance was cast at the group across the conservatory to discover whether he were observed. He encountered the gaze of a pair of eyes riveted upon him, expectant, exultant; he must bow. In an instant he stood erect, and as he stepped aside he trod upon the rose, and the delicate flower died beneath his heel.

Countess Hertha fanned herself violently, as if the heat had suddenly grown stifling, but Colonel Reval, who had just finished his conversation, said, "We really must leave the Countess to entire repose for a while. Come, my dear Rodenberg."

They took leave of the ladies and returned to the crowded rooms, went from the quiet, cool, fragrant conservatory, with its soft, dim light, into the heat and brilliancy, the hum and stir of society. And yet Michael breathed more freely, as if issuing from a stifling atmosphere into the open air.

Hans Wehlau, gliding upon the stream of social life, no sooner espied his friend than he took his arm and drew him aside to ask, "Have you seen the Countesses Steinrück, our watering-place acquaintances? They are here."

"I know it," Michael replied, laconically. "I spoke to them just now."

"Really? Where have you been hiding yourself? You're bored again, as usual, in society. I am enjoying myself extremely, and I have been presented to everybody."

"Also as usual. You must represent your father to-day; every one wishes to know the son of the distinguished scientist, since he himself----"

"Are you at it too?" Hans interrupted him, petulantly. "At least twenty times to-day I have been introduced and questioned as celebrity number two, since celebrity number one is not present. They have goaded me with my father's distinction until I am desperate."

"Hans, if your father could hear you!" Michael said, reproachfully.

"I can't help it. Every other man has at least an individuality of his own, something subjective. I am 'the son of our distinguished,' and so forth, and I am nothing more. As such I am introduced, flattered, distinguished if you choose; but it's terrible to run about forever as only something relative."

The young officer smiled. "Well, you are on the way to change it all. Probably in future it will be 'the distinguished artist, Hans Wehlau, whose father has rendered such service,' and so forth."

"In that case, I will assuredly forgive my father his fame. And so you have spoken to the Steinrück ladies. What a surprise it was to find them here when we thought them in Berkheim! The Countess mother very kindly invited me, or rather both of us, to the castle, and I accepted, of course. We will call at Steinrück together, eh?"

"No; I shall not go there," Michael replied.

"But why not, in heaven's name?"

"Because I have no inducement, and feel no desire to make one of the Steinrück circle. The tone that prevails there is notorious. Every one without a title must be constantly under arms if he would maintain his position there."

"Well, since the science of war is your profession, it would afford you a good opportunity for study. For my part, I find it very tiresome to be forever under arms like you and my father, who always feels obliged to vindicate his principles in his intercourse with the aristocracy. I amuse myself without principles of any kind, and always ground arms before the ladies. Be reasonable, Michael, and come with me."

"No!"

"Very well; let it alone, then! There is nothing to be done with you when once you take a

notion into that obstinate head of yours, as I found out long ago; but I shall certainly not throw away my opportunity for seeing again that golden-haired fairy, the Countess Hertha. I suppose you never even noticed how captivating, how bewitching she is to-night in that cloud of silk and lace; the very embodiment of all loveliness."

"I certainly think the Countess beautiful, but----"

"You only think her so?" Hans interrupted him, indignantly. "Indeed? And you begin to criticise her with your 'but.' Let me tell you, Michael, that I have unbounded respect for you; in fact, you have been so long held up to me by my father as a model in every sense, that your superiority has become a thorn in my flesh. But when there is any question of women and women's loveliness, please hold your tongue; you know nothing about them or it, and are no better than what you once were,--a blockhead!"

With these words, uttered half in jest, half indignantly, he left his friend and joined a group of young people at a distance. Michael wandered in an opposite direction, looking stern and gloomy enough.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the room, Colonel Reval was talking with Count Steinrück. They had withdrawn into a small bow-window shut off from the room by a half-drawn *portière*, and Reval was saying, "I should like to call your Excellency's attention to this young officer. You will soon admit him to be in every way worthy your regard."

"I am sure of it, since you recommend him so warmly," replied Steinrück. "You are usually chary of such praise. Did he serve in your regiment from the beginning?"

"Yes. I noticed him first in the Danish war. Although the youngest lieutenant in the regiment, he contrived with a handful of men to capture a position which had until then resisted all attack, and which was of the greatest importance, and the way in which he performed this feat showed as much energy as presence of mind. In the last campaign he was my adjutant, and now he has just been ordered upon the general's staff in consequence of an admirable treatise; you may have seen it, your Excellency, since it discusses a point upon which you lately expressed yourself very emphatically, and it was signed with the writer's name."

"Lieutenant Rodenberg; I remember," the general said, thoughtfully. The name always affected him painfully, but did not arrest his attention, since it was a frequent one in the army. There was a Colonel Rodenberg who had three sons in the service, and the Count had so fully made up his mind that the young officer in question was one of these that he judged it superfluous to make any inquiries about him.

"I know the treatise," he continued. "It betokens an unusual degree of talent, and would have secured my regard for its author, even without your warm recommendation; and, since you bear such brilliant testimony to his capacity in other respects----"

"Rodenberg is every way trustworthy; he maintains, it is true, rather an isolated position among his comrades; his unsocial disposition and his reserve make him but few friends, but he is universally respected."

"That suffices," declared Steinrück, who listened with evident interest. "He who is ambitious and has a high aim in view rarely finds time to be popular. I like natures which rely entirely upon themselves. I understand them; in my youth I resembled them."

"Here he is! His Excellency wishes to make your acquaintance, my dear Rodenberg," said the colonel, beckoning Michael to approach. He introduced him in due form, and then mingled with his other guests, leaving his favourite to complete the impression already made upon the general by the late conversation.

Michael confronted the man whom he had seen but once, and that ten years before, but whose image had remained ineffaceably impressed upon his memory, connected as it was with the bitterest experience of his life.

Count Michael Steinrück had already passed his seventieth year, but he was one of those whom time seems afraid to attack, and the years which are wont to bring decay found him still erect and strong as in the prime of life. His hair and beard were silvered, but that was the only change wrought by the last ten years. There was scarcely an added wrinkle upon the proud, resolute features, the eyes were still keen and fiery, and the carriage was as imposing as ever, betraying in every gesture the habit of command.

His iron constitution, strengthened and hardened as it had been by every kind of physical and mental exercise, maintained in old age a youthful vigour which many a young man might have envied.

The general scanned the young officer keenly, and the result of his examination was evidently a favourable one. He liked this strong, manly carriage, this grave repose of expression betokening mental discipline, and he opened the conversation with more geniality than was his wont. "Colonel Reval has recommended you to me very warmly, Lieutenant Rodenberg, and I value his judgment highly. You have been his adjutant?"

"I have, your Excellency."

Steinrück's attention was aroused, there was something familiar in that tone of voice, he seemed to have heard it before, and yet the young man was an utter stranger to him. He began to talk of military matters, putting frequent questions upon various topics, but Michael underwent excellently well this rigid examination in a conversational form. His replies, to be sure, were monosyllabic, not a word was uttered that was not absolutely necessary, but they were clear and to the point, perfectly in accordance with the taste of the general, who became more and more convinced that the colonel had not said too much. Count Steinrück was, indeed, feared on account of his severity, but he was strictly just whenever he met with merit or talent, and he even condescended to praise this young officer who was evidently most deserving.

"A great career is open to you," he said, at the close of the interview. "You stand on the first step of the ladder, and the ascent lies with yourself. I hear that you distinguished yourself in the field while still very young, and your latest work proves that you can do more than merely slash about with a sword. I shall be glad to see you fulfil the promise you give; we have need of such vigorous young natures. I shall remember you, Lieutenant Rodenberg. What is your first name?"

"Michael."

The general started at this rather uncommon name; a strange suspicion flashed upon his mind, only, however, to be banished instantly; but again he scanned keenly the features of the man before him. "You are a son of Colonel Rodenberg, commanding officer in W----?"

"No, your Excellency."

"Related to him, probably?"

"No, your Excellency, I am not acquainted either with the colonel or with his family."

"What is your father's profession?"

"My father has been dead for many years."

"And your mother?"

"Dead also."

A pause of a few seconds ensued: the Count's eyes were riveted upon the young officer's face; at last he asked, slowly, "And where,--where did you pass your early youth?"

"In a forest lodge in the neighbourhood of Saint Michael."

The general recoiled; the revelation, which during the last few moments he had indeed divined, came upon him like a blow.

"It is you? Impossible!" he fairly gasped.

"What was your Excellency pleased to observe?" Michael asked, in an icy tone. He stood motionless in a strictly respectful attitude, but his eyes flashed, and now Steinrück recognized those eyes. He had seen them once before flashing just as fiercely when he had heaped unmerited disgrace upon the boy; they had just the same expression now as then.

But Count Steinrück did not lose his self-possession even at such a moment. He had collected himself in an instant, and said in the old imperious tone, "No matter! Let the past be past. I see Lieutenant Rodenberg to-day for the first time. I recall neither the praise which I bestowed upon you, nor the hopes that I expressed with regard to your future. You may count now, as before, upon my good will."

"I thank your Excellency," Michael rejoined, as coldly as possible. "It suffices me to hear from your own lips that I am, at least, fit for something in the world. I have made my way *alone*, and shall pursue it alone."

The general's brow grew dark. He had been willing to forget magnanimously, and had thought to achieve great things by this reluctant acknowledgment, and now his advances were rejected in the bluntest manner. "Haughty enough!" he said, in a tone that was almost menacing. "You would do well to bridle this untamed pride. Injustice was once done you, and that may excuse your reply. I will forget that I have heard it. You will surely come to a better state of mind."

"Has your Excellency any further commands for me?"

"No!"

An angry glance was cast at the young officer who dared to leave his general's presence without awaiting his dismissal, but Michael appeared to consider as such that 'no,' and with a salute he turned and walked away.

The general, stern and mute, looked after him. He could scarcely believe his eyes. He had,

indeed, been informed that the 'good-for-nothing boy' had run away from his foster-father, and had never returned, doubtless from fear of punishment. He had not thought it worth the trouble to institute a search for the fugitive. If the fellow had vanished, so much the better; they were rid of him, and with him of the last reminder of the family tragedy that must be buried forever; he would always have been in the way. Sometimes, indeed, there was a shadow of dread in his mind lest the fellow should some day emerge from disgrace and misery and make use of his connection with the family, which could not be denied, to extort money; but they had got rid of the father when he had tried that game, and they could likewise get rid of the son. Count Michael was not the man to be afraid of shadows.

And now the vanished boy had indeed emerged again, but in the very sphere to which the Count's family belonged. He was pronounced one of those who are sure to rise without foreign aid by their own talent and energy, and he had dared to reject the patronage offered him, grudgingly enough, but still offered. Why, it almost looked as if *he* now wished to disown his mother's family.

The Count's brow was still dark when he rejoined the other guests. Hertha and her mother had just returned to the drawing-room, and the young lady instantly became the centre of attraction. All crowded round her to do her homage. Hans Wehlau actually swept like a comet through the rooms to get near her, and even Steinrück's gloomy brow cleared as his glance rested upon his lovely ward.

Lieutenant Rodenberg alone appeared not to observe the entrance of the ladies. He stood apart, conversing with an old gentleman who discoursed freely upon the disagreeable summer that had passed, and the delightful autumn that had begun, and in whose remarks Michael appeared to take a deep interest. But now, and then he cast at the circle, which he forbore to approach, a glance as filled with longing as had been that with which he had looked at the rose at his feet in the conservatory; and when the garrulous old gentleman at last left him, he muttered to himself, "Blockhead!" I wish I had remained one!"

Count Michael Steinrück occupied a very influential position in the capital. Raised to the rank of general at the beginning of the last campaign, he had proved himself one of the most capable of commanders, and his voice had great weight in military affairs.

Six years previously he had lost his only son, who was attached to the German embassy in Paris, and since then his daughter-in-law and his grandson had lived beneath his roof. The latter had originally, by his grandfather's desire, or rather command, been destined for the army. Count Michael had been resolved to carry out his plan in opposition to the wishes of the boy's parents, but he had been unable to do so. Raoul, who was in fact a delicate boy, sickened just at the time when a final decision with regard to his future career was absolutely necessary, and the physicians declared unanimously that he was unequal to the duties of the military profession. They referred to the father's already incipient consumption of the lungs, the germ of which might develop in the son unless great care were taken, and this son was the last and sole scion of an ancient line. These considerations at last prevailed with Count Michael, but he had never yet overcome his regret at the disappointment of his dearest hopes, especially since Raoul, when once the critical period was past, had bloomed out in perfect health and strength. After completing his studies at a German university he had entered the service of the government, and was at present in the Foreign Office, where, indeed, on account of his youth, he occupied a subordinate position.

The general, who had now been in possession of Steinrück for ten years, was still faithful to his deceased cousin's traditions, and regularly spent some weeks there during the hunting season, his military duties allowing him no more extended leave. His daughter-in-law and his grandson usually accompanied him upon these visits, when the castle was thrown open, guests were received, hunts were instituted, and the desolate old mountain castle resounded with life and gayety for a short time, after which it relapsed into its usual silence and solitude.

It was the morning after Count Raoul's arrival. He was in his mother's room, and the pair were engaged in an earnest conversation, the subject of which, however, appeared to be far from pleasant, for both mother and son looked annoyed.

Countess Hortense Steinrück had been a distinguished beauty, and, mother though she were of a grown son, she was still a very lovely woman. She perfectly understood how to heighten her beauty by the art of dress, which did much to conceal her years. There was a charm beyond that of youth in her intelligent face, with its dark, lively eyes, and her matronly figure was still extremely graceful.

Raoul was exceedingly like his mother, whose beauty he had inherited; in his slender youthful figure there was nothing to remind one of his father or his grandfather, or of the race of Steinrücks. He had a fine head, crowned with dark curls, a broad brow, and dark, eloquent eyes, but the fire lying hidden in their depths could leap up in an instant like a consuming flame, and even in moments of quiet conversation there was sometimes a hot devouring glow in them. Unquestionable as was the young Count's beauty, there was something veiled and demonic about it, which, however, only made it more attractive.

"Then he sent for you yesterday evening?" Hortense said, in a tone of displeasure. "I knew that a storm was brewing and tried to avert it, but I did not suppose that it would burst forth on your first evening."

"Yes, my grandfather was extremely ungracious," said Raoul, also in high displeasure. "He took me to task about my follies as if they had been state offences. I had confessed all to you, mamma, and hoped for your advocacy."

"My advocacy?" the Countess repeated, bitterly. "You ought to know how powerless I am when you are under discussion. What can maternal love and maternal right avail with a man who is accustomed ruthlessly to subdue everything to his will, and to break what will not bend? I have suffered intensely from your father's being so absolutely dependent that I continue to be so after his death. I have no property of my own, and this dependence constitutes a fetter that is often galling enough."

"You are wrong, mamma," Raoul interposed. "My grandfather does not control me through our pecuniary dependence upon him, but by his personal characteristics. There is something in his eye, in his voice, that I cannot defy. I can set myself in opposition to all the world, but not to him."

"Yes, he has schooled you admirably. This is the result of an education designed to rob me of all influence with you, and to attach you solely to himself. You are impressed by his tone of command, his imperious air, while to me they merely represent the tyranny to which I have been forced to submit ever since my marriage. But it cannot last forever."

She breathed a sigh of relief as she uttered the last words. Raoul made no reply; he leaned his head on his hand and looked down.

"I wrote you that you would find Hertha and her mother here," the Countess began again. "I was quite surprised by the change in Hertha; since we saw her years ago she has developed into a beauty of the first class. Do you not think so?"

"Yes, she is very beautiful, and thoroughly spoiled,--full of caprices. I found that out yesterday."

Hortense slightly shrugged her shoulders. "She is conscious of being a wealthy heiress, and, moreover, she is the only child of a very weak mother, who has no will of her own. You have a will, however, Raoul, and will know how to treat your future wife, I do not doubt. Upon this point I find myself, strangely enough, absolutely in harmony with your grandfather, who wishes to see you in possession of all the Steinrück estates. The income of the elder line is not very large, and little more was left to your grandfather than a hunting castle, while Hertha, on the other hand, is heiress to all the other property, and must one day inherit her mother's very large jointure. Moreover, you and she are the two last scions of the Steinrück race, and a union between you two is every way desirable."

"Yes, if family considerations alone were in question. You took good care to impress this upon us when we were but children," Raoul said, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone that did not escape his mother, who looked at him in surprise.

"I should suppose that you would have every reason to be satisfied with this family arrangement. It contents even me, and my aspirations for you are lofty. You were always seemingly in favor of it. What is it that clouds your brow to-day? Have you been so displeased by a mere caprice of Hertha's? I grant that she did not give you a very amiable reception yesterday, but that should not cause you to hesitate about entering upon the possession of a lovely wife and, with her, of a large fortune, which would make you the envy of thousands."

"It is not that, but I dislike resigning my freedom so soon."

"Freedom!" Hortense laughed bitterly. "Do you really dare to utter that word beneath this roof? Are you not weary of being treated at twenty-five like a boy for whom every step is prescribed? Of being scolded if your conduct does not please? Of having to entreat for the fulfilment of every reasonable desire, and of being obliged to submit humbly to an autocrat's refusal? Can you hesitate a moment to grasp the independence offered to you? Next year, according to the will, your grandfather's guardianship of Hertha is at an end, and she, and her husband with her, will enter into full possession of what is hers by right. Liberate yourself, Raoul, and me!"

"Mamma!" said the young Count, with a warning glance towards the door, but the excited woman went on, more passionately,--

"Yes, and me. For what is my life in this house but a perpetual struggle, and a perpetual defeat? Hitherto you have had no power to protect me from the thousand mortifications to which I have been subjected day after day; now you will have it,--it rests with yourself. I shall take refuge with you as soon as you are master of your own house."

Raoul arose with an angry gesture. His mother's passionate eloquence was not without its effect; it was plain that the picture which she drew of freedom and independence was very alluring to the young man, who had just suffered so keenly from his grandfather's severity.

Nevertheless he hesitated to reply, and a struggle was evidently going on within him.

"You are right, mamma," he said at last, "perfectly right. I do not object at all, but if the affair is to be precipitated, as would seem at present----"

"You have every reason to rejoice. I do not understand you, Raoul. I cannot imagine---- You are not entangled elsewhere?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the young Count, hastily, "nothing of the kind, I assure you, mamma."

His mother seemed but little relieved by this assertion, and was about to question him further, when the door was noiselessly opened, and the Countess's maid said, in an undertone,--

"His Excellency the general."

She had scarcely time to retire when the general appeared. He paused on the threshold for an instant, and looked inquiringly from mother to son. "Since when have the laws of etiquette been so strictly observed in our house?" he asked. "I am to be announced, I see, Hortense."

"I do not know why Marion announced you; she knows that such formality is quite superfluous."

"Certainly, if it were not ordered; her voice sounded as if raised in warning."

With these words Steinrück sat down beside his daughter-in-law, acknowledging by only a slight nod his grandson's 'good-morning.' Mother and son had hitherto spoken in French, but now they instantly had recourse to German; and the general continued: "I came to ask for an explanation, Hortense. I have just heard that two rooms in the castle have been prepared for guests by your orders. I thought our relatives were to be our only guests this year. Whom have you invited?"

"It is only for a brief visit, papa," the Countess explained. "Some acquaintances of ours have been staying at Wildbad, and on their way home wish to spend two or three days with us. I heard of their coming only this morning, or I should have told you."

"Indeed! I should like to know whom you expect."

"Henri de Clermont and his sister."

"I am sorry that I was not consulted about this invitation,--I should not have allowed it."

"It was given for Raoul's sake, at his particular request."

"No matter for that. I do not wish the Clermonts admitted to our circle."

Raoul started at this decided expression of disapproval, and his face flushed darkly. "Excuse me, sir, but Henri and his sister were at our house several times last winter."

"To see your mother. I have nothing to say with regard to those whom she personally receives, but this visit to Steinrück, when we are here a family party, would betoken a degree of intimacy which I do not desire, and therefore it must not take place."

"Impossible!" Hortense rejoined, with nervous irritability. "I have sent the invitation now, and it cannot be recalled."

"Why not? You can write simply that you are not well, and feel quite unequal to the duties of a hostess."

"That would make us perfectly ridiculous!" exclaimed Raoul. "The pretext would be seen through immediately; it would be an insult to Henri and his sister."

"I think so too," Hortense added.

"There I must differ from both of you," the general said, with emphasis; "and in this case I am the only one to be consulted. It is for you to recall the invitation as seems to you best. Recalled it must be, for I will not receive the Clermonts in my castle."

This was said in the commanding tone that always provoked the passionate woman. She arose angrily. "Am I to be compelled to insult my son's friends? To be sure they belong to my country, to my people, and that excludes them from this house. My Love for my home has always been cast up to me as a reproach, and Raoul's preference for it is regarded as a crime. Since his father's death he has never been allowed to visit France; his associates are selected for him as if he were a school-boy; he hardly dares to correspond with my relatives. But I am weary of this slavery; at last I will----"

"Raoul, leave the room," Steinrück interrupted her. He had not risen from his seat, and he had preserved an unmoved countenance, but a frown was gathering on his brow.

"Stay, Raoul!" Hortense cried, passionately, "stay with your mother!"

The young Count certainly seemed inclined to espouse his mother's cause. He walked to her side as if to protect her and to defy his grandfather, but at this instant the general also arose, and his eyes flashed. "You heard what I said! Go!"

There was such command in his tone that it put an end to Raoul's resistance. He found it absolutely impossible to disobey those eyes and that voice; he hesitated for an instant, but at an imperious gesture from his grandfather he complied and left the room.

"I do not desire that Raoul should be a witness to these scenes, which are unfortunately so frequent between us," Steinrück said, coldly, turning to his daughter-in-law. "Now we are alone, what have you to say?"

If anything could irritate the angry woman still more, it was this cold, grave manner which impressed her as contempt. She was beside herself with indignation. "I will maintain my rights!" she exclaimed. "I will rebel against the tyranny that oppresses both my son and myself. It is an insult to me to compel me to recall my invitation to the Clermonts, and it shall not be done, let the worst come to the worst!"

"I advise you, Hortense, not to go so far; you might repent it," the Count rejoined, and he was no longer self-possessed; his voice sounded stern and menacing. "If you want the plain truth you shall have it. Yes, it is of the first importance that Raoul should be withdrawn from influences and associations which I disapprove for my grandson. I relied upon Albrecht's repeated solemn assurance that the boy should have a German education. Upon your brief infrequent visits I could not satisfy myself upon this point, and unfortunately the lad was schooled for those visits. Not until after my son's death did I discover that he had blindly acceded to your will in this matter, and had intentionally deceived me."

"Would you reproach my husband in his grave?"

"Even there I cannot spare him the reproach with which I should have heaped him living. He yielded when he never should have yielded. Raoul was a stranger in his native land, ignorant of its history, of its customs, of everything that ought to have been dear and sacred to him. He was rooted deep in foreign soil. The revelation made to me when you returned with him to my house forced me to interfere, and with energy. It was high time, if it were not too late."

"I assuredly did not return to your house voluntarily." The Countess's voice was sharp and bitter. "I would have gone to my brother, but you laid claim to Raoul, you took him from me by virtue of your guardianship, and I could not be separated from my child. If I could have taken him with me----"

"And have made a thorough Montigny of him," Steinrück completed her sentence. "It would not have been difficult; there is in him only too much of you and of yours. I look in vain to find traces of my blood in the boy, but disown this blood he never shall. You know me in this regard, and Raoul will learn to know me. Woe be to him if he ever forgets the name he bears or that he belongs to a German race!"

He spoke in an undertone, but there was so terrible a menace in his voice that Hortense shuddered. She knew he was in terrible earnest, and, conscious that she was again defeated in the old conflict, she took refuge in tears, and burst into a passionate fit of sobbing.

The general was too accustomed to such a termination to a stormy interview to be surprised; he merely shrugged his shoulders and left the room. In the next apartment he found Raoul pacing restlessly to and fro. He paused and stood still upon his grandfather's entrance.

"Go to your mother!" his Excellency said, bitterly. "Let her repeat to you that I am a tyrant,--a despot who delights in tormenting her and you. You hear it daily; you are regularly taught to suspect and dislike me; such teaching bore fruit long since."

Harsh as the words sounded, there was suppressed pain in them,--a pain reflected in the Count's features. Raoul probably perceived it, for he cast down his eyes and rejoined in a low tone, "You do me injustice, grandfather."

"Prove it to me. For once repose in me frank and entire confidence; you will not repent it. I scolded and threatened yesterday; you have lately often forced me to do so, but nevertheless you are dear to me, Raoul, very dear."

The voice, usually so stern and commanding, sounded kindly, nay, even tender, and was not without its effect upon the young man. Affection for the grandfather from whom he had been estranged from boyhood stirred within him. He had always feared him, but at this moment he felt no fear. "And you too are dear to me, grandfather," he exclaimed.

"Come," said Steinrück, with a warmth rarely manifested by him, "let us have a pleasant hour together for once, with no adverse influence to interfere. Come, Raoul."

He put his arm around his grandson's shoulder, and was drawing him away with him, when the door was hastily flung open and Marion appeared. "For heaven's sake, Herr Count, come to

the Frau Countess! She is very unwell, and is asking for you."

Raoul turned in dismay to hasten to his mother, but paused suddenly upon encountering his grandfather's grave look of entreaty. "Your mother has one of her nervous attacks," he said, quietly. "You know them as well as I do, and that there is no cause for anxiety. Come with me, Raoul."

He still had his arm about the young man, and Raoul seemed to hesitate for a few moments, then he tried to extricate himself. "Pardon me, grandfather; my mother is suffering, and asking for me. I cannot leave her alone now."

"Then go!" Steinrück exclaimed, harshly, almost thrusting the young man from him. "I will not keep you from your filial duty. Go to your mother!"

And, without even another look towards Raoul, he turned and left the room.

Saint Michael was one of the highest inhabited spots of the mountain-range. The quiet little Alpine village would have been utterly secluded had it not possessed a certain significance as a place of pilgrimage. The single dwellings lay scattered upon the pasture-lands and mountain-meadows, with the village church and the parsonage in their midst. Everything was contracted, plain, even shabby; the special church alone, which was the resort of pilgrims, and which stood upon a solitary height at a little distance from the village, had an imposing aspect. It had been founded by the Counts von Steinrück who had built this church, now old and gray, on the site of the ancient Saint Michael's chapel that had once stood here, and they had since often bestowed gifts upon it and had endowed it. Saint Michael was still the patron saint of the family to which he had so often given a first name. Its founder had been called Michael, and the name had been handed down from generation to generation ever since. Even the Protestant branch of the family, who had years previously left their ancestral home and settled in Northern Germany, preserved this ancient tradition, which, if it had no religious significance for them, still possessed an historic importance. Thus, the present head of the house was a Count Michael, and his son and grandson had been christened after him, although each bore another name by which he was commonly called. The interior of the church was not very remarkable; it showed the usual adornment of pictures and gayly-painted statues of the saint, often very imperfectly executed. But the high altar was an exception; it was very richly and artistically carved, and the two figures of angels on the sides of the steps with outspread wings and hands held aloft in prayer, as if guarding the sacred place, were exquisite examples of sculpture in wood. They with the altar were a gift from the Steinrücks, as were the three gothic windows in the altar recess, the costly stained glass of which glowed in gorgeous colour. The picture above the altar, however, a large painting, dated from a period of great simplicity in art. It had grown very dark with age, and was worn in spots, but its details were still distinctly to be discerned. Saint Michael, in a long blue robe and flowing mantle, the nimbus around his head, was distinguished as the warlike angel by a short coat of mail, but was otherwise of peaceful aspect. His sword of flame in his right hand and the scales in his left, he was enthroned upon a cloud, and at his feet crouched Satan, a horned monster with distorted features, and a body ending in a serpent's tail. Blood-red flames flashed upwards from the abyss, and a circle of cherubs looked down from above. The picture was entirely without artistic merit.

"And that is meant to betoken conflict and victory," said Hans Wehlau, as he stood gazing at the picture. "Saint Michael looks so solemnly comfortable on his cloud, and quite as if the Evil One below him were of no consequence; if Satan were wise he would snatch that sword just above the tip of his nose; that's no way to hold a sword! The saint ought to swoop from above like an angel, and seize and destroy Satan like a mighty blast, but he'd better not try flying in that long gown; and as for his wings, they are quite too small to support him."

"You show a godless want of respect in criticising pictures of saints," said Michael, who stood beside him. "You are your father's own son there."

"Very likely. Do you know I should like to paint a picture of that?--Saint Michael and the devil, the conflict of light with darkness. Something might be made of it if a fellow really set himself to work, and I have a model close at hand."

He turned suddenly, and looked his friend full in the face, in a way that provoked Michael to say, "What are you thinking of? I surely have----"

"Nothing angelic about you! No, most certainly not; and among the heavenly host, hovering in ether in white robes and palm branches, you would cut a comical figure. But to swoop down upon your enemy with a flaming sword and put him to rout like your holy namesake would suit you exactly. Of course you would have to be idealized, for you're far from handsome, Michael, but you have just what is needed for such a figure, especially when you are in a rage. At all events, you would make a much better archangel than that one up there."

"Nonsense!" said Michael, turning to go. "Moreover, you must come now, Hans, if you mean to walk back to Tannberg. It is four good leagues away."

"By that tiresome road, which I shall not take. I am going through the forest; it is nearer."

"Then you will lose your way! You do not know this country as I do."

"Then I will find it again," said Hans, as they walked out of the church into the open air. "At least I shall not be received in Tannberg by an angry face. I am glad my father has gone, and I think the whole household breathes more easily. At the last he hung over us all like a thunder-cloud; we always had to be prepared for thunder and lightning."

"It was certainly better for him to shorten his stay and go home," Michael rejoined, gravely. "Irritable and angry as he was, there was always danger of a decided breach, which should be avoided at all hazards. I advised him to return home."

"Yes, you protected me to the best of your ability. You and my aunt stood beside me like two angels of peace and shielded me with your wings, but it did not do much good after all, my father was too angry. You were the only one who could get along with him."

"And so you regularly sent me into action when there was anything to be done."

"Of course; you risked nothing in the engagement. My father always treats you with respect, even when you disagree with him. It's odd,--he never had any respect for me."

"Hans, be sensible; do stop jesting for a while. I should suppose you had reason enough to be grave."

"Good heavens! what am I to do? I never had the slightest talent for the part of a grovelling sinner. At least you have contrived to extort a gracious permission that I should remain in Tannberg while your leave lasts, and when we go home the storm will have somewhat blown over. But here is the path; my love to my uncle Valentin. I have, as my father's son, 'compromised' him again by my visit, but he would have it. *Au revoir*, Michael."

He waved his hand to his friend and struck into a side-path leading down the mountain. Michael looked after him until he vanished among the hemlocks, and then took his way back to the village.

He had been at Saint Michael for several days, and on the previous day Hans had paid a short visit. It had been a rare and much-desired gratification for the pastor, who regretted keenly that his nearest relatives should hold themselves aloof from him. Any intercourse with his brother, who was a declared opponent of Romanism, was made a reproach to the priest. The two met only at intervals of years, when the Professor visited his relatives in Tannberg; and in the fact of their correspondence might perhaps be found the reason why Valentin Wehlau was left in a lonely secluded Alpine village, and--forgotten.

Michael, however, had of late years frequently visited his old friend and teacher, but Lieutenant Rodenberg was an entire new-comer for the inhabitants of Saint Michael, who scarcely remembered the shy, awkward boy from the forest lodge,--indeed, they had seldom seen him. He had been looked upon as a relative of Wolfram's, bearing the forester's name, and the lodge had long since passed into other hands. Count Steinrück had found a better and more profitable situation for his former huntsman upon one of his ward's estates, perhaps as a reward for rendered service, perhaps because, upon his visits to his castle, he did not wish to be reminded by Wolfram's presence of the past. At all events, the forester had left this part of the country nearly ten years previously.

When Michael re-entered the parsonage, which he had left half an hour before in its usual solitude and quiet, he found it in a state of unusual turmoil. The old servant was bustling about in her kitchen, among her pots and pans, as if some festival were in preparation. Two young peasant girls from a neighbouring farm were running to and fro; the upper rooms were being aired and arranged; the peaceful household seemed to be turned topsy-turvy, and as Michael entered the study the sacristan was taking a hurried leave of the priest, with much importance of mien.

Nothing was changed in the little room; the same monastic simplicity reigned within it; the whitewashed walls, the huge tiled stove, the carved crucifix in the corner, even the old pine furniture, were all the same; time had left them unchanged. Not so their owner.

The pastor had grown much older. Whilst his brother, who was in fact several years his junior, still preserved his youthful freshness and vigour, the priest produced the impression of old age. His form was bent, his face furrowed with wrinkles, his hair white, but the same mild lustre shone in the eyes which at times made one forget the weariness and age evident in the man.

"What is the matter, your reverence?" asked Michael, surprised. "The whole house is astir, and old Katrin is so agitated that she ran away without answering me."

"We are to have an unexpected visit," replied Valentin,--"a distinguished guest for whom some preparation is necessary. Scarcely had you and Hans departed when a messenger arrived with a note from Countess Steinrück,--she will be here in a couple of hours."

The young man, who was just about to take a seat, paused in amazement. "Countess Steinrück? What can she want here in Saint Michael?"

"To visit the church. The Countess is very pious, and never fails to do so when she is at the castle. Moreover, our church was endowed by her family, and owes much to her personally. She visits her husband's grave almost every year, and always comes here when she does so."

"Is she coming alone?" The question was asked in an agitated tone, in strong contrast to the priest's quiet reply.

"No; her daughter is coming too, and the necessary attendants. You must resign the guest-chamber for to-day, Michael. The double drive over the mountains would be too fatiguing for the ladies; they will stay overnight, and accept the simple hospitality of the parsonage. I spoke with the sacristan about a room for you; he will have one ready for you to occupy until to-morrow."

Michael at first made no reply; he walked to the window and stood with folded arms looking out. At last, after a long pause, he said, in an undertone, "I wish I had gone home."

"Why? Because these ladies bear the name of Steinrück, and you have chosen to outlaw, to put beyond the pale of your sympathy, all of that name? How often have I entreated you to rid yourself of this unchristian hatred!"

"Hatred, do you call it?" the young man asked, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"What else is it? When you told me the other day of your meeting with your grandfather, I saw how stubborn and implacable you still were, and now you extend your ill feeling to the Count's innocent relatives, who have shown you nothing but kindness. You, to be sure, told me nothing of your acquaintance with them, but Hans was more communicative. He is most enthusiastic about the young Countess."

"For as long as he can see her. As soon as we return to town he will forget all about her. It is his fashion."

The words sounded contemptuous, and so bitter, that Valentin shook his head disapprovingly. "It is fortunate in this case that it is so," he rejoined. "It would be sad for Hans to be in earnest, for, apart from the difference of rank, the hand of the Countess Hertha was disposed of long ago."

"Disposed of? To whom?" Michael asked, hastily, turning from the window.

"To Count Raoul Steinrück, her relative. In their sphere marriages are usually contracted for family reasons, and this one was thus arranged years ago. There has been no betrothal as yet, because the Countess could not bring herself to part with her daughter, but it is to take place shortly."

The priest had formerly been the Countess's confessor, and was still perfectly aware of all the family affairs; he mentioned them now as matters of course, and went on speaking of them in detail, not observing that his listener seemed thunderstruck. Michael had turned to the window again, and stood with his face pressed against the pane, never stirring until Valentin had finished speaking.

"There will be a great deal of disturbance in your house to-day, your reverence," he said at last, "and I should be sorry to inconvenience the sacristan. It would be better for me to go to the lodge, and stay there until to-morrow."

"What are you thinking of?" Valentin exclaimed, in displeasure. "I can understand the reserve of which Hans accuses you, but this is going too far."

"The Countess knows nothing of my being here, and if you say nothing about it----"

"She will learn it through Katrin or the sacristan. A guest is so rare in my lonely home that it is always discussed by my people; and how am I to excuse your flight to the Countess?"

"Flight?" the young officer said, angrily.

"She cannot regard it as anything else, since she knows nothing of your relations with the family."

"You are right," said Michael, drawing a deep breath. "It would be flight and cowardice. I will stay."

"Yes, you are quite inaccessible to good sense," said Valentin, with a fleeting smile, "but as soon as flight is mentioned the soldier in you is astir, forcing you to stand your ground. But I must see after Katrin; she is quite upset, and will need my aid and counsel."

Michael was left alone. He had tried to go, he had been forced to stay, and his eyes were bright as they sought the road winding up from the valley. Flight! The young warrior had indignantly repudiated the word, and yet for weeks he had been fleeing from a power to which he would not bow, and which nevertheless threatened to master him. As if it were in league with the fiend, it made constant assaults, now amid brilliant social scenes, now here in a lonely Alpine village; just when he thought it farthest away it suddenly appeared. Again he was to stand face to

face with it, and Michael well knew what that meant; but as he stood erect, stern, and resolute, prepared for conflict, he did not look like defeat.

The expected guests arrived in due time, the Countess in a little mountain wagon intended for such excursions, her daughter having preferred to travel the road on horseback. A lady's-maid also came in the wagon, and a mounted servant accompanied the party, which was originally to have comprised the Countess Hortense, but she was suffering from one of her nervous attacks, and the mountain drive would have been too exhausting for her.

Immediately upon their arrival the ladies performed their devotions in the church, and a solemn mass was appointed for the next morning.

In the afternoon the pastor, with his two younger guests, sauntered through the village. The Countess, who felt fatigued, remained in the parsonage, and Michael had been compelled to walk with the priest and the Countess Hertha, since the young lady, accustomed to rule those about her with sovereign sway, had required him to do so in a tone that was not to be gainsaid. It was in the middle of September, but the day had been unusually warm. The heat made itself felt even at this altitude: the temperature was sultry and oppressive. The pasture-lands around Saint Michael were bathed in the sunlight, and the skies were still clear, but mists hovered restlessly about the mountain-ranges, and dark clouds began to gather above their summits, now darkly veiled, and anon gleaming clear and distinct.

"I fear we are going to have a storm this evening," said Valentin. "This has been like a day in midsummer."

"Yes, we felt it so as we were coming up the mountain," said Hertha. "Do you think that we ought to be arranging for our return?"

"No," replied Michael, scanning the mountains, "when the clouds gather, as now, over there above the Eagle ridge, they will hang for hours about the rocks before the storm comes, and then it is apt to take its course down the valley and leave us untouched. But there will be a storm. Saint Michael's flaming sword is flashing there."

He pointed to the Eagle ridge, where in fact it was lightening, faintly and in the distance, but still unmistakably.

"Saint Michael's flaming sword?" Hertha repeated, inquiringly.

"Certainly; do you not know the popular superstition so wide-spread in these mountains?"

"No; I have never been here except for a few weeks at a time, and know nothing of the people."

"Their belief is that the lightning is the sword of the avenging archangel flashing from the skies, and that the storms, which often enough do mischief in the valleys, are punishments wrought by him."

"Saint Michael loves storm and flame," said Hertha, smiling. "I have always felt very proud that the leader of the heavenly host, the mighty angel of war and battle, is the patron saint of our family. You bear his name, too; it is my uncle Steinrück's."

Valentin cast an anxious glance at his former pupil, but Michael looked quite unmoved, and replied, composedly, "Yes--by chance."

"The saint's day is close at hand," the young Countess observed to the priest. "The church will be thronged then, will it not, your reverence?"

"The inhabitants of all the surrounding villages visit the church on that day; but our chief church festival comes in May, upon the day when the saint's appearance took place. Then the entire population of these mountains flocks hither from the most distant heights and the most secluded valleys, so that church and village can scarcely contain the crowds. The legend is that on that day Saint Michael, although invisible, descends from the Eagle ridge and ploughs the earth with his flaming sword as he did visibly centuries ago, when his shrine was founded here."

As he uttered the last words they paused before a wayside crucifix rising solitary from the green meadow and facing towards the Eagle ridge. A wild rosebush wreathed about the base of the cross, almost concealing the wood-work, and its thick, luxuriant shoots were woven about the sacred image like a living frame; its time for blooming had long since passed, but the warm, sunny autumn days had lured forth a few late buds, not fragrant and rich in colour like their sisters of the plain, but pale, wild mountain-roses, which, blooming to-day, are torn by the wind to-morrow, and yet they gleamed pink amid the dark green like a last greeting from departing summer.

A peasant lad approached, hat in hand and rather timidly; he had a message for his reverence, whom he had been seeking in the village. His mother was very sick, and was fain to see his reverence; the house was very near, hardly two hundred paces distant, and if his reverence could

spare a few minutes the sick woman would be very grateful and much comforted.

"I must go with Hies," said Valentin. "I leave the Countess in your charge, Michael; if she wishes to return to the parsonage----"

"No, your reverence, we will await you here," Hertha interrupted him. "This view of the Eagle ridge is so magnificent!"

"I shall be back again shortly," the priest rejoined, inclining his head courteously, as he turned away with Hies, and walked to a small house near by, within the door of which he vanished.

The unexpected *tête-à-tête*-the first they had ever had since they had known each other--seemed to embarrass the pair thus left alone, for their animated conversation was suddenly arrested.

Saint Michael, as it lay before Hertha and her companion, looked like the most secluded of highland valleys, so embedded was it in the green Alps that surrounded it. There was but one distant view, and it might well vie with all others--that of the Eagle ridge. The mighty range of rocks rising there in gloomy majesty commanded the landscape, and towered above all the surrounding summits; dark pine forests clothed its sides, and its depths hid savage abysses, down which mountain-torrents tumbled with a roar faintly audible in the clear air. The summit of the ridge indeed, with its naked, jagged peaks and its sheer precipices, seemed inaccessible for mortal man; those peaks soared to dizzy heights, and the highest of them all, the Eagle's head, wore a crown of glaciers that glittered in icy splendour, its giant wings, on each side, seeming to shelter the little hamlet of Saint Michael lying at its feet. The ridge was rightly named; it did, indeed, bear a resemblance to an eagle with outstretched wings.

The silence lasted some time, and was at last broken by Hertha. "According to the legend, then, the archangel descends from that peak."

"With the first ray of the morning sun," replied Michael. "The sun rises there above the ridge. The people cling with unswerving fidelity to their time-hallowed beliefs, and will not relinquish their spring festivals and their worship of the sun. He is the ancient god of light, who either blesses or curses mankind; who mutters in the thunder, and then again ploughs the earth with his flaming sword that the spring may bring forth fresh life and beauty; the Church has clothed him in the shining mail of the archangel."

"That sounds very heretical," the young Countess said, reproachfully. "Do not let his reverence or my mother hear you. It is easy to see that you were brought up beneath Professor Wehlau's roof. Was he an early friend of your father's?"

Michael bowed his head as if in assent. The Professor had insisted upon this concession from him from the first, as it put a stop to all annoying conjecture, and had quite satisfied even Hans himself.

"You lost your father very early?"

"Yes, very early."

"And your mother too?"

"And my mother too."

There was evident distress in his tone, and Hertha, perceiving that she had unconsciously touched some sore spot, hastened to remove the impression by saying, "I, too, was a mere child when my father died. I have but a dim remembrance of him, and of the love and tenderness which he lavished upon me. Where did you live with your parents?"

The young man's lip quivered, and there was bitterness in his heart as he remembered his childhood, with its lack of love and tenderness. The disgrace and misery which he had but half understood had nevertheless stamped themselves upon the boy's memory, and were still vividly present with the man after the lapse of twenty years. "My childhood was far from happy," he said, evasively. "There was so little in it that could possibly interest you that I should be sorry to annoy you with an account of it."

"But it does interest me," Hertha said, eagerly. "I do not mean, however, to be importunate; and if my sympathy annoys you----"

"Your sympathy! with me?" Michael suddenly broke forth, and then paused as suddenly; but what his lips did not utter his eyes said clearly, as he gazed as if spell-bound at the young Countess, whose beauty was certainly not dependent upon dress. She had been bewitchingly lovely in silk and lace, in the brilliant light of the chandeliers, and to-day, in her simple, close-fitting, dark-blue riding-habit, she was even lovelier. Beneath the little hat, with its blue veil, the golden braids gleamed through the thin tissue, and the eyes beamed brightly. There was something unusual in her air to-day; she seemed released from the petty conventional code of the brilliant circle in which she was wont to move, and as if breathed upon by the mighty mountain world around her, and this lent her a new and dangerous charm.

"Well?" she said, smiling, without noticing Michael's sudden pause. "I am waiting."

"For what?"

"For the account of your childhood, which you have not yet given me."

"Nor can I give it you, for I can relate nothing of home or of parental affection. I have grown up among strangers, I owe everything to strangers, and, kindly and generously as it was bestowed, I still feel it as a debt which would crush me to the earth had I not vowed to myself to pay it by my entire future. At last I have taken the helm into my own hands, and can steer out into the open sea."

"And can you trust that sea, with its winds and waves?"

"Yes. Trust the sea and it will carry you safely. Of one thing I am sure, however: I shall never drift ashore on a half-shattered wreck, thankful to escape with mere life. No, I will either steer my vessel into port or go to the bottom with it."

He stood erect as he uttered the last words with resolute emphasis. Hertha looked at him in surprise, and suddenly said, "Strange,--how like you are at this moment to my uncle Steinrück."

"I? to the general?"

"Extremely like him."

"That must be an illusion," Michael rejoined, coldly. "I regret having to disclaim the honour of a resemblance to his Excellency, but none can possibly exist."

"Certainly not; you have not a feature in common; the likeness lies in the expression, and now it has vanished again. But at that moment you had the general's eyes, his air, even his voice. It really startled me."

Her eyes still rested upon his countenance, as if she were expecting a reply; but Michael turned somewhat aside, and said, changing the conversation, "The prospect is growing more and more veiled; we shall soon be surrounded by clouds."

The weather did, in fact, look more threatening; the sun had begun to set, but his rays were struggling with the mists floating up everywhere, as if some leader of a mighty host had sounded his trumpet-call, heard of the whole vast mountain world, and the cloud-phantoms were rising on all sides to obey the summons, some with slow majesty, some in desperate haste. Up from the deeps and abysses soared the mist unceasingly, like a white veil, noiseless and ghost-like, sweeping up over the forests, leaving a fluttering pennon here and there amidst the tops of the pines, and then soaring aloft again. From each side across the gray Alps single clouds came trooping, followed by huge masses, all rolling towards the Eagle ridge, where they gathered ever darker and more threatening.

The meadows upon which lay Saint Michael soon looked like an island in the midst of a billowy, swelling sea, the waves of which rose higher each minute. There it gleamed white, like the foam of dashing, leaping breakers, and there it lay gray and formless as in shade, while high above on the peaks of the ridge, still lit by the sunlight, golden, shimmering mists were sailing, shot by strange, quivering rays. A gleaming magic veil was woven about the rocky head and the glacier crown; they stood half veiled, half revealed in the golden atmosphere.

But at their feet the storm was gathering thick, and now the first dull thunder rolled, seeming to come from the very depths of the mountains, and dying rumbling in the distance.

The air had hitherto been quiet; now the wind began to rise. The young Countess's veil fluttered aloft and caught in a hanging branch of the wild-rose bush, from which she vainly tried to extricate it. The thorns held their prey fast, and Rodenberg, who came to her aid, must have been rather awkward, for the band of her hat slipped and the hat fell off. Michael, who was stooping to disentangle the delicate tissue, shrank suddenly and dropped his hand, for close before his eyes gleamed uncovered the thick braids, the 'red fairy gold.'

"Have you scratched your hand?" asked Hertha, noticing his start.

"No!" He plunged his hand into the thorny tangle and pulled away both hat and veil; but the thorns revenged themselves: the veil was torn, and a few drops of blood trickled from the young man's hand.

"Thank you," said Hertha, taking her hat from him; "but you are a rash assistant. How wrong to plunge your hand in among the thorns! It is bleeding."

There was real commiseration in her tone, but the reply was all the colder. "It is not worth mentioning; it is the merest scratch."

He took out his handkerchief and pressed it upon the tiny wounds as he glanced impatiently towards the little house, where the priest yet lingered. His visit there seemed to be endless, and the rack here must be tasted to the last.

The young girl perhaps suspected his agony, but she did not feel called upon to abbreviate it. The spoiled, petted beauty felt it as an offence that this man should dare to defy a power which she had so often exerted over others. He had recognized its might, as she had long since perceived; he had not approached her with impunity, and yet here he stood with that impregnable reserve, that haughty brow, which would not bow. He must be punished!

"I should like to ask you a question, Lieutenant Rodenberg," she began again. "My mother reproached you awhile ago--I heard her--with never having accepted her invitation."

"I have already apologized to Madame the Countess. We have been quite absorbed lately by a family matter, which was indeed the cause of the Professor's departure. When I return from Saint Michael---"

"You will find some other excuse," Hertha interposed. "You do not *wish* to come."

Michael's face flushed, but he avoided meeting the eyes that sought his; he looked across to the Eagle ridge. "You take that for granted with a strange degree of certainty, Countess Steinrück, and, nevertheless, you wish me to come."

"I only wish for an explanation of what keeps you away from us. You have saved my own and my mother's life, and you reject our gratitude in a way that is inexplicable to us if we refuse to consider it insulting. With a stranger we should never waste a word upon the subject. To one to whom we owe so much we may well put the question, 'What is there between us? What have we done to you?'"

The words had a gentle, half-veiled sound, but several seconds passed before the reply came. Michael's gaze was still riveted upon the rocky summits; he knew that storm-clouds were gathering around them, but he saw only the golden mist, the gleaming magic veil; he heard the roll of the thunder that sounded nearer and nearer, but he heeded only that low, reproachful 'What have we done to you?'

"You shame me," he said at last, with a final attempt to preserve a tone of cool courtesy. "The slight service that I did you required no gratitude; you have always overrated it."

"Again you evade me; you are a master of the art," the young girl exclaimed, with an expression of extreme impatience. "But I will not release you from replying; I must know the truth at last."

"And what if I should not comply with your command, for such it certainly seems to be?"

"It rests with you, of course, to refuse to do so; but it was no command, only a request, which I now repeat: 'What have we done to you? Why do you avoid us?'"

A smile played about her lips, the enchanting smile usually so irresistible, but now without effect. Rodenberg looked her full in the face, and said, harshly, "You know why, Countess Steinrück,--you have long known."

"I?"

"Yes, you, Hertha; you know your power only too well; and now you drive me to extremes, and leave me no means of escape. So be it,--I am at your disposal!"

Amazed, almost dismayed, Hertha looked up at him; she was quite unprepared for this turn of affairs; she had pictured her moment of triumph very differently. "I do not understand you, Lieutenant Rodenberg," said she. "What does this strange language mean,--something it would seem allied to hatred?"

"Hatred?" he broke forth. "Would you add sarcasm to your trifling? You have never for an instant been ignorant that I love you."

It sounded strange enough, this confession of love, uttered in a voice in which indignation and passion strove for the mastery, and with eyes in which there was no tenderness, but a menacing gleam: the emotion did, indeed, seem allied to hatred.

"And is this the way in which to woo?--to seek a woman's love?" asked Hertha, indignantly, while a secret dread, hitherto unknown to her, stirred in her heart.

"Woo?" he repeated, with extreme bitterness. "No, it is not; such wooing would hardly be allowed me,--a young, insignificant officer with a bourgeois name, owning nothing save himself and perhaps some hope for the future. It would soon be made clear to me, and that after a ruthless fashion, that I must not dare to lift my eyes to the Countess Steinrück; that her hand has long been promised to another who, like herself, wears a coronet."

Hertha bit her lip; the reproof went home,--such assuredly would have been the conclusion of the affair. It had never occurred to the young Countess Steinrück to do more than trifle with the bourgeois officer, but yet she felt disgraced by the discovery that she had been seen through from the beginning.

"You do not seem to perceive how insulting your words are," she said, haughtily, "nor how offensive is this confession----"

"Which, nevertheless, you insisted upon hearing," he interrupted her. "Listen, then! I will not deny to you what cannot, indeed, be denied. I will confront my fate, for it has come upon me like a fate. Yes, I have loved you, Hertha, from the first moment of seeing you, and if I could have hoped for your love in return the coronet of the Steinrücks would not have deterred me for an instant. If my bliss were as far above me and as unattainable as the Eagle ridge there, I would scale the heights though every step threatened ruin. I would snatch it to my arms in spite of all the world! But I was warned, warned by a child, who once cozened from me my Alpine roses, to play with them for a while and then to pluck them wantonly to pieces. Those are the same golden curls, the same beautiful, evil eyes.--I knew them the first moment that we met,--but never again shall those lips say to me with contempt, 'Go away, I do not like you any more! I am tired of playing.' Those words have rung in my ears through all the bewitching music of your voice. The boy chose to have his flowers perish in the flames rather than leave them in your grasp, and the man will crush and annihilate his love, even though a part of his life dies with it,--it never shall be a plaything in your hands!"

Hertha had grown deadly pale; no one had ever before dared thus to insult her, to hurl the truth so recklessly and unsparingly in her face; but what did this man whom she had driven to extremity care whether she were offended or not? The tempest which she herself had evoked raged about her; she could no longer restrain its fury. She saw this clearly as Michael stood before her all aflame and overwhelmed her with this strange mixture of love and hatred. His every fibre vibrated with intense passion, and yet he struggled against it with a force that would not succumb. He was conquered, not subdued.

"You will please release me, Lieutenant Rodenberg, from listening further to such words as these," the young Countess said at last, summoning up all her self-possession. "I will go and meet his reverence."

"No need to do so. I am going," said Michael; his voice was low but firm. "I am aware that hereafter we can have nothing to say to each other. Farewell, Countess Steinrück."

He bowed and went. Hertha did not see which way he turned, nor did she perceive that the priest was approaching. She stood motionless.

The wind was rising; the sprays of the wild rosebush waved and fluttered above her head, the sea of clouds swelled and rolled nearer and nearer, while the misty breakers seemed ready to descend in floods upon the pastures. The transfiguring glow above the Eagle ridge had faded, the golden phantoms had vanished: heavy gray masses of mist were swimming there now; they sank lower and lower, and joined the dark clouds below that were suddenly torn asunder, and with a quivering, jagged flash it leaped forth,--the flaming sword of Saint Michael!

The storm passed down into the valleys in full force, and there, after the lightning had flashed and the thunder had rolled for an hour, it ended in a pouring rain.

Through the dripping forest strode a young man whom the tempest had overtaken. If Hans Wehlau had followed his friend's advice and pursued the tiresome mountain-road, he would long since have reached Tannberg, but he lost his way in the romantic forest, and struck into a path that led him far away from his goal. A projecting rock afforded him some shelter, but now, when it was growing dark and the rain was still pouring, he had no choice save either to pass the night in the wet forest, or to march on in hopes of finding a charcoal-burner's hut or some other shelter for the night, and he decided upon the latter course.

At last the thick, close forest came to an end, and the young man, as he emerged upon a clearing, saw at some distance a feeble ray of light. The darkness and mist did not allow of his discovering what kind of structure it was that lay before him upon a wooded height and projecting only here and there from among the trees, but there certainly were human beings living there, and thither, accordingly, the young man directed his steps.

The path leading up the height seemed to be in a very neglected condition. Hans stuck fast several times in the swampy soil, and had to cross first a brook that ran directly across the path, and then a ruinous wooden bridge, and at last to pass through a gateway, where only the stone pillars on either side were standing, the gate itself being lacking. An apparently extensive building with walls and towers, but in a ruinous condition, lay before the young man, but it had now become very dark, so that it was with difficulty that, guided by the ray of light he had first seen, he found a little closed door directly beneath the lighted window.

He knocked, at first gently, then louder and more persistently; after the lapse of a few minutes the window above was opened, and a hoarse voice asked who was there.

"A stranger who has lost his way and begs for shelter for the night."

"I have no shelter for vagabonds and tramps. Be off immediately!"

"This is an amiable reception," exclaimed Hans, indignantly. "I am neither a vagabond nor a

tramp, but a respectable man, and quite ready to pay for my night's lodging."

"Pay? In the Ebersburg!" came from above just as indignantly. "This is no tavern; go to where you came from."

"That I shall certainly not do, for I came out of a rain-spout, and have utterly lost my way in the forest. How can you leave a man standing outside in such a storm and refuse to let him in? Open the door!"

"No!" said the hoarse voice, evidently provoked. "Stay outside!"

"Deuce take it, my patience is exhausted!" cried the young man, angrily, as a fresh fall of rain wetted him to the skin. "Open the door, or I will break it down and take the old barracks by storm."

And he began to beat at the door with his fists. What he had been unable to procure by courteous means this change of manner effected; his violence evidently impressed the invisible guardian of the place, for after a few seconds his voice spoke in a much gentler tone, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I am at present a thoroughly drenched individual, and I want only to be dried. Moreover, I am qualified to give the most satisfactory explanations, if desired, with regard to my station, name, age, origin, home, family, and so forth."

"You are a man of family, then?"

"Of course I am. Every man must have a family."

"I mean noble family."

"Of course. Now open the door."

"Wait; I'll come," sounded encouragingly from above, and instantly the window was closed and the ray of light vanished.

"One has to be examined as to his pedigree before he is admitted here, it seems," said Hans to himself, crowding up against the door to escape the rain. "No matter. I should not mind in the least appropriating a coronet if it would procure me a dry lodging for the night. Thank God, they are opening the door at last!"

In fact, a key was turned and a bolt drawn on the inside; the door then opened, and an old man appeared, leaning upon a cane with his right hand, and holding a lamp high in his left.

His figure was lean and bent, but it must once have been tall and well formed. The parchment-coloured skin, with its thousand lines and wrinkles, made the face almost that of a mummy; the eyes were dim, and from beneath a black cap a few straggling white locks stole forth. His short walk seemed to have fatigued the old Herr, for he leaned more heavily upon his cane, and coughed, while he lighted his guest into the house.

"I beg pardon for my rude persistence, but I was really almost drowned," said Hans, with a bow, that sent the drops flying in all directions. "Have I the honour of seeing the master of the house?"

"Udo, Freiherr of Eberstein-Ortenau upon the Ebersburg," was the reply, delivered with great solemnity. "And you, sir?"

"Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg upon the Forschungstein," was the equally solemn rejoinder.

The name seemed to please the old gentleman; he inclined his head and said, with dignity, "You are welcome, Herr Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg. Follow me."

He carefully closed and locked the door again, and then preceded his guest to show him the way. They first passed through a hall, the roof of which seemed to be defective, for the rain had left traces everywhere on the floor. Then they ascended a narrow, steep staircase, the stone steps of which were much worn, then traversed a seemingly endless passage, where their footsteps on the tiles echoed loudly, and in which the lamp carried by the lord of the castle was the only light. At last he opened a door and entered with Hans. "Make use of this apartment," he said, putting the lamp upon a table. "The storm has disarranged your dress, I see. I will leave you while you change it, and shall expect you at supper; until then, farewell, Herr von Wehlau Wehlenberg."

He waved his hand with an air of knightly courtesy and was gone. Hans looked about him: the room was small, dark, and very scantily furnished. The large canopied bed in one corner seemed the sole relic of former grandeur, but its fine carving was shabby and worn, the silken hangings were frayed, and the sheets were of the coarsest linen.

"The best thing to do would be to go to bed as quickly as possible," said Hans to himself, as he made arrangements for drying his clothes near the stove; "but since this Freiherr von Eberstein-

Ortenau has invited me to supper, I must put in an appearance. Where shall I get dry clothes? Perhaps I may find here somewhere an old suit of armour or a mediæval mantle that I can don. I think it would produce an impression if I should walk into the ancestral hall clad in mail. Let me see."

He began to search, and soon found a cupboard in the wall, unlocked, which seemed to contain the entire modest wardrobe of the lord of the castle. Hans took possession, without compunction, of the best articles in it, and had scarcely finished dressing when an old woman with a kerchief tied round her head appeared, and in the broadest mountain patois summoned 'the Herr Baron' to supper.

"Only baron! I ought to have made myself a count at least," said Hans to himself, as he obeyed the summons, following the old servant, who conducted him to a room which seemed to be drawing-room and dining-room combined.

At the first glance it presented a stately aspect, but it was a strange mixture of former splendour and present decay. The walls were covered with fine wainscoting, but the ceiling was rudely whitewashed, and the tiled stove was of a very common description. The same contrast appeared in the furniture: high-backed oaken chairs stood around a coarse pine table, articles of the meanest earthenware were ranged upon a richly-carved corner cupboard, and the fine old pointed arched window, the same whence had issued the ray of light seen by the wanderer, was curtained with flowered chintz.

"I must ask forgiveness for my presumption," said Hans, addressing the master of the castle, who was seated in an arm-chair. "My dress was in so disordered a state that, relying upon your kindness, I appropriated this coat."

He certainly did look oddly enough in the old-fashioned garb, but withal so handsome, with his cheeks reddened by the keen mountain air, and his curls still wet with the rain, that a smile hovered upon the old Freiherr's thin lips, and he replied, kindly, "I am glad you found what you wanted in my wardrobe. Sit down; I wish to ask you a question."

"Now comes the examination as to pedigree," thought Hans, and he was not mistaken; his host went straight to the point.

"Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg; that sounds well," he continued. "But the name of your estate is rather uncommon. Where is the Forschungstein situated?"

"In Northern Germany, Herr Baron," replied Hans, without the quiver of an eyelash.

"I thought so, since I do not know it. I am thoroughly acquainted with all the Southern German families of rank and their estates. My own family is one of the most ancient. It dates from the tenth century, according to historic proof, and is probably much older. I suppose there are no families so old as that in Northern Germany?"

He was evidently about to question his guest as to his genealogical tree; but Hans, with great skill, frustrated his intent by asking a question himself. "Pray, whom does this picture represent? It struck me as soon as I entered." And he pointed to a painting upon the opposite wall. It was the half-length portrait of a man of about forty, with dark hair, brilliant dark eyes, and nobly-formed regular features, which did not, however, express any high degree of intelligence. The dress, apparently a uniform, was partly concealed by a cloak, and the portrait was certainly modern. As the lord of the castle turned to look at it he seemed utterly to forget pedigrees and centuries, and asked, eagerly, "Do you like the picture?"

"Extremely! What a handsome head! and admirably painted too. An Eberstein of course?"

The old gentleman looked half flattered, half displeased, as he replied, slowly, "Yes, an Eberstein. You do not recognize him, then?"

Hans started; he glanced first at the portrait, and then at the shrunken figure before him, with its wrinkled features and weary eyes. "It cannot--is it your own portrait, Herr Baron?"

"It is mine, and thirty years ago it was said to be extremely like. I take no offence at your not recognizing it; I am but an old ruin, like my Ebersburg."

The words sounded so infinitely sad that Hans made haste to try to console the old man. "But I distinctly recognize the features now," he said. "There was something familiar to me in them from the first, but I took the picture for a likeness of one of your sons."

"I have no sons," Eberstein rejoined, sadly; "my race perishes with me, for my first marriage was childless, and my second brought me only a daughter. I cannot imagine where Gerlinda is. I must call her." He thereupon arose with difficulty, and hobbled to the closed door of the next apartment.

"Gerlinda von Eberstein,--ugh!" Hans said to himself. "It sounds like a drawbridge and portcullis. A mediæval châtelaine, I suppose; and as the father is over seventy the daughter must be at least forty; at all events I need not be shy about presenting myself before her in this

costume."

He looked towards the door, although with a very moderate degree of curiosity, but he suddenly arose as if electrified, for what appeared upon the threshold in no wise answered his expectations.

There stood before him a very young girl in a plain, gray stuff gown, her dark hair simply parted, and braided at the back of her head. The child-like face was rather pale, but, if not regularly beautiful, was exquisitely lovely. The eyes were cast down, and were veiled by dark, drooping lashes. The Freiherr must have married for the second time very late in life, for his daughter was at the most but sixteen years old.

"Hans, Freiherr von Wehlau Wehlenberg of Forschungstein, my daughter Gerlinda;" the lord of the castle made the introduction with all due solemnity. Hans was so surprised that he bowed low twice, which salutation the young girl returned by an extremely stiff inclination, something between a courtesy and a nod. Then, with eyes still downcast, she took her place at the table, where a cold supper was set forth, and the very frugal meal began.

The old Freiherr was loquacious, and talked incessantly with the guest, who had won his heart by admiring the portrait, but Fräulein Gerlinda was very taciturn. She fulfilled quietly and attentively all her duties as hostess, but maintained a perfectly stiff wooden demeanor, and met with a persistent silence all Hans Wehlau's attempts to converse with her. Her father replied in her stead to the young man's remarks, and her face was as immovable as if she heard not a word.

"The poor child seems to be deaf and dumb," Hans said to himself. "It is a pity, for her face is lovely. I wish she would lift her eyes for a moment."

He made a last attempt to induce her to speak by asking her directly how long she had lived upon the Ebersburg, and whether it was not very lonely here in winter, but her father again replied in her stead: "We live here all the year round, and my daughter has been used to this solitude from her earliest childhood. I have given my consent, however, to her shortly spending a few days at Steinrück, at the urgent invitation of the Countess, who is her godmother. You are acquainted with the Countess Steinrück?"

"I have that honour."

"An old family, but full two hundred years younger than mine," the old man remarked, with much complacency. "The founder of their race is first spoken of in the Crusades; unfortunately, there is a blot on their scutcheon, a *mésalliance* of the worst description, dating about thirty years ago; until then the family records were stainless."

"Ancient as the Crusades, and to be overtaken by such a misfortune in the nineteenth century!" Hans exclaimed, with an indignant expression that won him a nod of approval from his host.

"A misfortune indeed! You are perfectly right, and seem to have a lively appreciation of rank and position which it pleases me extremely to see. Yes, Count Michael has recovered from the blow. I never could have done so; it would have crushed me to the earth, for my escutcheon is stainless, absolutely stainless!"

He began a long heraldic dissertation upon the aforesaid escutcheon, in which he played with the centuries and with the comparatively modern race of Steinrücks as if they were but babies in arms. Hans paid very little attention; he was racking his brain with conjectures as to whether Fräulein Gerlinda von Eberstein were really a deaf-mute or not; and so absorbed was he that the Freiherr at last noticed his absent manner, and asked him if he were listening.

"Of course; so stainless a pedigree cannot but excite my admiration. The Eberstein-Ortenau, then----"

"Have borne that double name since the fourteenth century," the Freiherr completed the young man's sentence. "Gerlinda, child, tell our guest how it occurred."

Fräulein Gerlinda clasped her hands upon the table, without raising her eyes, and, with a face as expressionless as ever, she suddenly, to the guest's dismay, began to speak, or rather to rattle off after the manner of a child repeating a lesson learned by rote: "In the year thirteen hundred and seventy a feud arose between Kunrad von Eberstein and Balduin von Ortenau, because the hand of Hildegund of Ortenau had been refused to the Knight Kunrad of Eberstein, and the Ebersburg, as well as the fortress of Ortenau, was sacked several times, until, in the year thirteen hundred and seventy-one, the Knight Balduin was taken prisoner by the Ebersteiners and thrown into the castle dungeon, where at last he consented to the union of Hildegund with Kunrad, which union was celebrated with great pomp in the year thirteen hundred and seventy-two, and in consequence, in the year thirteen hundred and eighty-six, upon the death of the Knight Balduin, the fortress of Ortenau and the lands belonging to it came into the possession of the lords of Eberstein, who since then have borne the name of Eberstein-Ortenau."

"Wonderful!" said Hans, who was really thunderstruck at this performance of the supposed deaf-mute. He could not understand where she got the breath for her long speech; he had lost his

with simply listening.

"Yes, my Gerlinda is well versed in the history of our house," said the Freiherr, triumphantly. "She remembers it even better than I do, for my memory is beginning to fail me. Yesterday she corrected me in a date, when I was speaking of the enfeoffment of Udo von Eberstein. You remember, my child?"

As if the hitherto motionless pendulum of a clock had been set going by this question, Fräulein Gerlinda started off again and told a much longer story, this time from the fifteenth century, about a certain Eberstein who in a certain battle had saved the Emperor's life and had been by him endowed with a certain castle. All the hard names and the numerous dates fell from her lips with the greatest fluency and certainty, but with a monotony of intonation that reminded one of the clapper of a mill, the more so as her speech came to a pause as suddenly as it began. Hans involuntarily pushed back his chair a little, the whole scene partook of the supernatural. The Freiherr, however, who received this as an expression of admiration, seemed inclined to initiate him still further into the chronicles of his race, when the old clock in the corner struck the hour of nine.

"Nine o'clock already," said Eberstein, as he rose from his chair. "We live very regularly, Herr von Wehlau, and are wont to retire at this hour, a custom which I doubt not your fatiguing ramble in the forest will make grateful to you. I wish you a calm and refreshing night in the Ebersburg."

"That was terrible!" said Hans, with a sigh, when he found himself alone in his sleeping-room in the old castle. "That old man of the tenth century, and that little châtelaine whom I took for deaf and dumb, and who chatters out the old chronicles like a magpie, have nearly turned my brain. I am completely mediæval, and have become extremely exclusive since I have been Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg of the Forschungstein."

Thereupon he went to bed, and dreamed that the old Freiherr was going through all Northern Germany with a lantern to find the Forschungstein, and that Fräulein Gerlinda, disguised as a magpie, was fluttering beside him, chattering incessantly about Kunrad von Eberstein and Hildegund von Ortenau; and when they could not find the Forschungstein, they seated themselves in the branches of their genealogical tree and ascended with it up, up and away into the tenth century, and a very imposing spectacle it was.

When Hans waked the next morning the sun was shining brightly into his room, and his clothes were sufficiently dry to be donned. It was still very early, and no one seemed to be stirring in the house: so he resolved to inspect by daylight the house, which he had reached in darkness and storm. He issued from his room into the long corridor, which was lit by a narrow window, and without much difficulty succeeded in finding the winding staircase with the worn steps, by which he descended into the front hall and thence into the open air.

Undoubtedly the Ebersburg had formerly been a strong and stately castle, perhaps destroyed and rebuilt several times in the course of centuries. Now it was but a ruin. The greater part of it had fallen to decay, and all that was left of the once solid masonry seemed tottering to its fall. In the castle court-yard the grass grew luxuriantly, and an entire generation of bushes and small trees had sprung up, making the place an actual thicket. From the roof of the old watch-tower, which was still apparently in repair, green grasses were nodding, and rooks were flying in and out of the window openings. Fragments of masonry were lying about, with here and there remains of the ancient apartments.

The only wing still standing, that which was now inhabited by the Freiherr, presented a dreary aspect. The ruins were at least picturesque, but the attempts to patch up this part of the castle only brought into stronger relief the decay of the building. The crumbling masonry had been coarsely whitewashed, the missing doors and windows had been replaced in the rudest fashion, and where the rooms were not used boards had been nailed over the apertures. The magnificent old balcony had been supplied with a thatched roof, and the broad stone steps of the entrance hall had been replaced by wooden ones.

Hans Wehlau's artist's eye was outraged by this sight, and he turned again to the ruins, forcing his way through the green thicket in the court-yard, and at last, through an opening in the wall that might once have been a gate-way, he emerged upon the former castle terrace. Here, however, his wanderings were stayed, for from the lower story of the watch-tower, apparently used as a stable, there issued a joyous bleating, and immediately afterwards a goat came leaping through the door-way into the open air, followed by Fräulein Gerlinda, dressed, in spite of the earliness of the hour, in the gray dress of the evening before, and carrying carefully in both hands a small wooden milk-vessel filled to the brim.

This unexpected encounter astonished both the young people. Gerlinda stood as if rooted to the spot, and the guest could not but divine that Fräulein von Eberstein, with her long line of ancestry dating from the tenth century, had milked the goat with her own high-born hands that there might be milk for breakfast. Her evident dismay embarrassed Hans too, so that he could not utter any fitting phrase, but bowed in silence. Fortunately, the goat comprehended the annoying nature of the situation, and put an end to it by merrily leaping up upon the stranger and then rubbing so affectionately against her young mistress that the vessel in her hands was shaken and part of the milk was spilled.

This was a happy interruption of the pause of embarrassment; Hans made haste to take the milk, which Gerlinda allowed him to do, saying gently, by way of excuse, "Muckerl is so glad to get out into the air."

"Thank heaven she can utter something besides mediæval chronicles!" thought Hans, enchanted with her remark. He expressed his pleasure in Muckerl's liveliness, asked exact information as to her age and state of health, and meanwhile placed the milk in safety by setting the vessel down upon a projection of the wall, for Muckerl was scanning him with a highly critical air, and seemed rather inclined to repeat her charge at him; the next moment, however, thinking better of it, she turned her attention to the luxuriant grass that covered the ground.

The view from the Ebersburg was not an extensive one; the castle lay secluded in a deep hollow of the valley, and the mountains rising on all sides were thickly wooded, but the old ruin nestled among delicious green, the tree-tops rustled gently in the morning air, and the birds twittered among them.

The morning sun lay broad upon the ancient castle terrace. Here all around, to be sure, were ruin and decay, but vigorous, luxuriant life was striving compassionately to conceal the desolation. There were broad breaches in the wall bounding the terrace, but wild shrubs and bushes grew there, forming a living breastwork; the huge watch-tower, where the rooks were flying in and out of the windows, was wreathed round with thick dark-green ivy; amid the gray fragments of stone lying about were nestling tender mosses, and vigorous wild vines were trailing everywhere. Upon every stone, from every crack in the walls, hardy plants were springing and thrusting themselves forth, while over everything brooded the deep, dreamy stillness of early morning.

In the midst of these relics of vanished splendour the last scion of the Ebersteins, in her gray Cinderella costume, stood leaning against the wall. All the primness and stiffness of the previous evening had vanished; the young girl was evidently confused at finding herself alone with the stranger guest, and looked up at him with the expression of a frightened child. Thus for the first time he could see her eyes,—a pair of beautiful brown eyes, soft and shy as those of a gazelle; they were in perfect harmony with the lovely face.

The silence lasted some time; Hans was so taken up with gazing into the eyes that were at last unveiled for him that he forgot to resume the conversation, and when he did so at last, it was in a purely mechanical way, as he involuntarily continued the subject of the previous evening.

"I have just been inspecting the Ebersburg," he began. "It must once have been a stately pile, which could give its enemies enough to do, and at the time of the feud, when Kunrad von Ortenau and Hildegund von Eberstein—no, I have transposed their names."

His mention of the names was unfortunate; as soon as Fräulein Gerlinda heard of the middle ages she became as prim and stiff as an image of wood; her long eyelashes drooped, as did her head, and she began in the old monotone, "Kunrad von Eberstein and Hildegund von Ortenau, in the year of our Lord----"

"Yes, yes, Fräulein Gerlinda, I remember all about it;" Hans interrupted her in dismay. "Through your kindness I am thoroughly well informed as to the chronicles of your family. I merely meant to remark that a residence in this old mountain stronghold must be very monotonous. You make a great sacrifice to your father in staying here. A young lady longs to be abroad in the world, to enjoy life."

Gerlinda shook her head in dissent, and suddenly opened her mouth to say, with all the infallible wisdom of a philosopher of seventy, "The world and life are worth nothing!"

"Nothing?" asked the young man, surprised. "Where did you learn to be so sure of that?"

"My papa says so," Gerlinda replied, with much solemnity. Evidently her father's utterances were those of an oracle to her. "The world grows worse with each century, and now shows abundant signs of final annihilation, since the nobility no longer receive the homage due them."

Her eyes were again stubbornly downcast, and she spoke in a tone that vividly recalled to her hearer his dream. His lips twitched oddly, but he contrived to say, quite seriously, "Yes, the nobility. But there are some other men beside them in the world."

Fräulein Gerlinda looked surprised; she seemed to mistrust this fact and apparently reflected profoundly, remarking at last, as the result of her reflections, "Yes, of course,—the peasants."

"True. And we cannot utterly dispute the existence of even other classes of human beings. Literary men, for instance, artists, in whose ranks I belong----"

Fräulein Gerlinda opened wide her brown eyes and repeated, "Among the artists?"

"Absolutely," Hans said to himself, quite forgetting his elevated rank, "she thinks me a mediæval specimen too;" and he added, aloud, "Assuredly, Fräulein Gerlinda, I occupy myself with art, and flatter myself that I have attained a degree of proficiency in it."

The young lady seemed to think such an occupation very derogatory. Fortunately, she recalled the fact that a certain Eberstein, in a certain century, had taken up with astrology, and that partly explained Herr Wehlau Wehlenberg's extraordinary tastes, but she nevertheless felt herself called upon to repeat to him a saying of her father's: "My papa says that a man of an ancient, noble line ought to make no concessions to the present; it is beneath his dignity."

"That is the Herr Baron's opinion," said Hans, with a shrug. "He seems to have been so entirely secluded from the world that he has lost all sympathy with it; others of his rank, however, feel very differently. Look, for example, at the Counts von Steinrück, whose family is just as old as yours."

"Two hundred years younger," Gerlinda interrupted him, indignantly.

"Quite right; full two hundred years. I remember their ancestors are first met with in the Crusades, while yours date from the eighth century."

"From the tenth."

"Certainly, from the tenth! It was a slip of the tongue; I meant, of course, from the tenth century. But to return to the Steinrücks: Count Michael is a general in command; his son was, I think, attached to our embassy in Paris; his grandson has some official position. They are all men of the present, and would hardly coincide with your father in opinion; and you, too, will differ from him when you have seen something of life and the world."

"I do not want to see anything of them," Gerlinda said, softly and timidly. "I am afraid of them."

Hans smiled; he drew a step nearer, and bent down towards the girl; his voice sounded sweet and tender, as if he were speaking to a child. "That is very natural; you live here in such seclusion, in a fairy world, long since faded from reality, like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy-tale. But some time the day will come when the hawthorn hedges will part asunder, and the green walls open, a day when you will awaken from your enchanted sleep; and believe me, Fräulein Gerlinda, your eyes will open then not upon the dust and mould of centuries, but upon the warm, golden sunshine that floods our present age, in spite of all its conflicts and trials. Ah, you will learn to love it all."

Gerlinda listened in silence, but a faint, happy smile playing about her lips betrayed her knowledge of the story of the Sleeping Beauty. She slowly raised her eyes, only for an instant, and dropped them hastily; that which shone upon her in the young man's gaze might perhaps be a ray of the light he had promised her; she suddenly flushed crimson and turned hastily away.

Muckerl certainly was a very intelligent goat, for she had quietly continued to browse, only glancing gravely now and then towards the pair, and appearing on the whole quite satisfied with the course of the conversation. But the matter now must have begun to look grave to her, for she suddenly left her breakfast and ran to her young mistress, beside whom she placed herself, as if on guard.

"I believe--I ought to go back to the castle," said Gerlinda, scarcely audibly.

"Already?" asked Hans, who had not observed that half an hour had been consumed in talk.

They set out together, Hans carrying the milk, Fräulein Gerlinda beside him, and Muckerl following, gravely nodding her head from time to time. The affair evidently had a suspicious look to her,--why had the two suddenly fallen silent?

An hour later Hans stood at the foot of the Ebersburg. He had taken leave of the Freiherr and of his daughter without laying aside his incognito, for fear of causing the old gentleman unnecessary annoyance. What mattered it that the Freiherr should continue to regard him as a 'mediæval specimen'? The adventure was at an end; it was not likely that he should ever again see the Ebersburg.

He glanced up once more at the gray pile, taking a last look at the sunny castle-terrace, and the much-lauded present to which he was now returning seemed terribly prosaic compared with the fairy-tale that he had dreamed up there in the midst of the green waving forest, in those ancient ruin? where all around was blooming fair and fresh, with the little Dornröschen who had retired to her solitude, and was dreaming of the knight who was to break through the hedge and waken the Sleeping Beauty with a kiss from her magic slumber. The young fellow suppressed a sigh, and said, half aloud, as he turned away, "After all, it is a pity that I am not really Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg of the Forschungstein."

A gay company was assembled at Steinrück, in thorough enjoyment of the hunting season, and of the long sunny autumn days. No one was invited to make a long visit, however, save Gerlinda von Eberstein, who had arrived some days since; but each day new guests made their appearance and others departed. Hertha and Raoul Steinrück usually formed the centre of this brilliant society. It had long been known that the two were destined for each other, and that the announcement of the betrothal would probably soon take place; therefore when the general

issued invitations for a large entertainment every one knew that it would be the occasion for this public announcement.

The evening was at hand, and the entire castle was filled with the activity wont to precede some important festivity. Servants were running to and fro, here and there decorations were being completed, and the reception-rooms were already a blaze of light.

The family, with the exception of Gerlinda and Hertha, had just entered these rooms. Count Steinrück, with the widowed Countess on his arm, looked unusually cheerful: to-day was to bring him the fulfilment of his dearest wish; the betrothal of the last two scions of his house was to be celebrated at their ancestral castle, and thus the prosperity of his line was assured,—all the Steinrück possessions would be united under one master.

Hortense, who followed him leaning on her son's arm, also looked proudly content. In her rich and tasteful toilette, and by the artificial light, she looked very beautiful, and far outshone her cousin; that pale, delicate woman was indeed cast into the shade. Raoul was gay and good-humoured; a cloud now and then darkened his brow for a moment, but it quickly vanished, and he lavished the tenderest attentions upon his mother.

"We limited the invitations as much as possible," said Hortense, as she looked through the lighted apartments, "and yet there will scarcely be room for our guests. That is the worst of these old mountain castles, that have no large ball-room and no extended suite of rooms; it is impossible to give an entertainment in them!"

"They were not built for any such purpose," said the general, quietly. "They were intended for a home within, and for protection and defence without. They certainly do not conform to modern requirements, least of all to yours, Hortense; you never loved Steinrück."

"In that respect I perfectly agree with mamma," Raoul interposed. "What delights me here is the hunting in these mountain forests. The castle itself, with its dim, confined rooms, its endless, echoing corridors, and its steep, dark staircases, always seems to me like a prison. I breathe a sigh of relief when I escape from it."

"You seem entirely to forget that this ancient pile is the cradle of your race, and as such should be dear and sacred to you even if it lay in ruins," said the general, with some acerbity.

Raoul bit his lip at this very distinct reproof. "Pardon me, grandfather, I have all due reverence for our ancestral home, but I cannot possibly think it beautiful. Now, if it were the cheerful sunny castle in Provence, with its Eden-like surroundings, its past so rich in legend and in song, where long ago I used----"

"You mean the castle of Montigny?" Steinrück interrupted him, in a tone which admonished the young Count to desist.

His mother, however, went on in his stead: "Certainly, papa, he means my lovely sunny home. You can understand that it is as dear to us as yours is to you."

"Us?" the general repeated, in a tone of cold inquiry. "You should speak only for yourself, Hortense. I think it very natural that you should be attached to your paternal home, but Raoul is a Steinrück, and has nothing to do with Provence. His attachment belongs to his fatherland."

The words sounded half like a threat, and Hortense, irritated, seemed about to reply angrily, when the Countess, her cousin, who perfectly understood the state of feeling in the family, quickly changed the subject. "Our young ladies seem to be late," she remarked. "I begged Hertha to help Gerlinda a little with her toilette; the poor child has not the least idea of how she ought to look."

"The little demoiselle seems to be of a very limited capacity," Raoul said, sarcastically. "She is usually as silent as the tombs of her ancestors, but as soon as you touch the historic spring, she begins to chatter like a parrot, and a whole century comes rattling down upon you with terrific names and endless dates; it, really is fearful."

"And yet you are always the one to induce Gerlinda to make herself thus ridiculous," the Countess said, reproachfully. "She is much too inexperienced and simple-hearted to suspect a sneer beneath your immense courtesy and extravagant admiration of her acquirements. Can you not leave her in peace?"

"She really provokes ridicule," Hortense interposed. "Good heavens, what toilettes! and what curtsies! And then when she opens her mouth! You must forgive me, my dear Marianne, but it is almost impossible to introduce your *protégée* into society."

"That is not the poor child's fault," said Marianne. "She was so unfortunate as to lose her mother when she was very little; she has seen nothing of the world, has known no one except her father, and he, in his eccentricity, has absolutely done everything in his power to make the girl unfit for social intercourse."

"I admire your patience, Marianne, in still having anything to do with Eberstein," said

Steinrück, "I went to see him once, long ago, because I pitied him in his isolation, but I think he told me six times in the course of my visit that his family was two centuries older than mine, and there was no getting a sensible word out of him. He seems now to have become almost childish."

"He is old and ill, and it is a hard fate to pine away in poverty and loneliness," the Countess said, gently. "Since he was forced by his gout to retire from the army, he has nothing to live upon save his pension and the old ruins of the Ebersburg. If he could only be persuaded to let Gerlinda leave him for a while, I should like to take her to Berkheim, or to the city, where we shall spend some time this winter; but I suppose it will be impossible to induce him to spare her."

"Selfish old fool!" said the general. "What is to become of the poor child when he closes his eyes? But our young ladies are indeed late; it is time that they were here."

This was true, but no exigencies of the toilette had caused the delay. Hertha was in her room entirely dressed; she had dismissed her maid, and was standing before her mirror gazing steadily into its depths. She might have been supposed to be lost in the contemplation of her own beauty, but her eyes had a strange dreamy look in them, and evidently saw nothing of the image before them; they were gazing abroad into space.

The door was softly opened, and Gerlinda appeared. The two young girls had always been much together whenever the family were at Steinrück, but there was not the slightest intimacy between them. Gerlinda looked up with timid admiration to the brilliant Hertha, who accorded the girl at most a compassionate toleration, and at times even ridiculed her unmercifully. To-day, too, the 'little demoiselle' gazed at the young Countess with admiration, devoid of the slightest envy of Hertha's bridal loveliness, as she stood before the mirror dressed in white satin falling in soft folds about her perfect figure. A single white rose in her hair was its sole ornament, and a bunch of half-opened buds lay on her dressing-table.

"How beautiful you are!" said Gerlinda, involuntarily.

The young Countess turned with a smile, which, however, was not one of gratified vanity. "I can return the compliment," she replied. "You look most lovely to-night."

The young girl no longer wore the gray Cinderella gown: the Countess had taken care that her god-child should be suitably attired on this occasion; but Gerlinda was evidently oppressed by her unwonted splendour. Perhaps, too, she felt how unsuited she was to this brilliant circle, and this made her still more shy. She stood before Hertha, timid and embarrassed, scarcely daring to raise her eyes.

"Only you must not stand in that ridiculously prim attitude," said Hertha. "On that lonely Ebersburg you absolutely forget how to move about among people. You see no one there but your father, and perhaps the peasants of the village where you attend mass."

Gerlinda was silent and hung her head. No one? She thought of the guest who had arrived in the storm and rain and had departed in the sunshine; but she had never mentioned him hitherto, although his coming had been a great event in her lonely life. An involuntary shyness closed her lips; least of all could she have spoken of it here and now. The memory of the sunny morning dream in the ruinous old castle was not for the ear of the young lady who could so coolly tutor and criticise her little friend.

Hertha turned away, and as she did so she accidentally brushed from her dressing-table her bouquet, without noticing its fall. Gerlinda picked it up.

"Thanks," said Hertha, indifferently, as she took the flowers. They seemed to have been but loosely put together, for one of the roses had become detached from its sister buds and lay directly at the feet of the young Countess, who looked down at it with a rather strange expression. Perhaps she was thinking of that other evening when just such a fragrant half-opened bud had fallen from her hand, only to perish beneath the tread of an iron heel.

"Let it alone," she said, as Gerlinda was about to stoop again. "What does a single rose matter? I have enough here."

"But it is your lover's gift," said the young girl.

"I am going to carry these this evening, and Raoul cannot ask anything more. If the formal congratulations were only over! It is so deadly tiresome to listen to the same thing from everybody, and to have to respond to all those conventional phrases. I am not at all in the mood for it to-night."

The words sounded impatient, and there was nervous impatience in the way in which she began to pace the room to and fro. Gerlinda's eyes, opening wide with amazement, followed the proud, queenly figure in the trailing satin robe; she could not understand how a girl at her betrothal should not be in the mood to receive congratulations, and she asked, naïvely, "Do you not like Count Raoul?"

Hertha paused suddenly. "That's an odd question. What put it into your head? Certainly I like him; we have been brought up for each other. I knew when I was a child that he was to be my

husband. He is handsome, gallant, amiable, my equal in name and rank; why should I not like him? I suppose you think that there ought to be in a marriage of to-day all the romance of your old chronicles, where the lover had to fight and struggle for his bride. You told us such a story yesterday about some Gertrudis----

"Gertrudis von Eberstein and Dietrich Fernbacher," Gerlinda hastily began, as if the name had been a cue. "But she could not marry him, because he was not of knightly descent, but only the son of a merchant."

"She could not?" said Hertha, tossing her head. "Perhaps she would not; probably she felt a repugnance at the idea of exchanging the ancient name of her race for that of a wealthy tradesman. Can't you understand that, Gerlinda? What would you do if, for example, you loved a man beneath you in rank?"

"It would be dreadful!" said the little demoiselle, with all the horror natural to an offshoot of the tenth century, adding, with entire conviction in her tone, "My papa says that could not happen."

"But it has happened, and in your own race. How did the affair end? did your ancestress give up her Dietrich?"

Poor Gerlinda was not in the least aware that she was continually the butt of Hertha's and Raoul's sarcasm, and that they were always inducing her to make herself ridiculous. She was desirous of showing her gratitude for the hospitality extended to her, and she supposed in her ignorance and innocence that every one at Steinrück was interested in the stories which to her were so vastly important. So she clasped her hands gravely, and began to recite, in her usual manner, an extract from her family chronicles, which did not on this occasion end with a happy marriage, as in the case of Kunrad von Eberstein and Hildegund von Ortenau, but with a parting. The story was long, and there was an endless succession of the noble names and the dates which Raoul found so terrible, but the young Countess was not in a mocking mood to-day. She had gone to the window, and stood there motionless, looking out, until Gerlinda concluded: "And so Gertrudis was married to the noble lord of Ringstetten, and Dietrich Fernbacher went on a crusade against the infidels and never returned."

"And never returned,--never!" Hertha's lips uttered the words softly and dreamily, while again the strange expression appeared in her eyes which seemed to be gazing at something in the far distance, beyond the mist and gloom that veiled the landscape outside.

There was a long silence, which Gerlinda hardly dared to break; but at last she said, gently, "Hertha, I think it is time."

Hertha looked up as if awaking from a dream. "Time? For what?"

"For us to go down; they are expecting us."

"True, true; I had forgotten! Go first, Gerlinda. I will come immediately; I have a trifle to arrange about my dress. Pray go!"

The words sounded so like a command that the young girl obeyed without further delay, and she had hardly reached the staircase leading to the lower story when she was met by a servant whom the general had sent to beg that the young Countess would make haste, since the first carriage had just driven into the courtyard.

Gerlinda turned to deliver the message herself; her footfall was noiseless, and she opened the door of Hertha's room as noiselessly, but paused in dismay upon the threshold.

Hertha was sitting, or rather lying, in an arm-chair by the window, with hands clasped convulsively and head thrown back, while from beneath her closed eyelids tear after tear coursed down her cheeks, and her breast rose and fell with wild, passionate sobs. The young girl was weeping,--weeping as violently and painfully as the child had wept formerly when the white Alpine roses, snatched from her destructive hands, had perished in the flames.

"Hertha, dear Hertha, what is the matter?" Gerlinda exclaimed, hastening to her side.

The girl sprang up, her eyes flashing with anger. "What do you want? Why did you come back? Can I never be one moment alone?"

"I wanted--I came only to get you," said the young girl, retreating timidly. "Count Steinrück begs you to come down; the guests are beginning to arrive."

Hertha arose and passed her handkerchief across her eyes. In a moment all trace of tears had vanished, and the young Countess stood calmly before her mirror, to give a last glance of inspection, as she took up her bouquet. "Let us go, then."

They went; the satin train rustled over the stairs, and a few minutes later they entered the reception-room, where Countess Hertha was awaited with impatience.

Carriage after carriage rolled into the court-yard; the guests began to fill the rooms, and at

the end of an hour all were assembled, and General Steinrück announced in due form the betrothal of his grandson to the Countess Hertha.

Every cloud had vanished from Raoul's brow, he had eyes only for his betrothed, standing proud, beautiful, and triumphant at his side, with a smile for every congratulation, for every compliment. All thought this very natural, as was the beaming content on the face of the general, whose special work this betrothal was. He had with a firm hand united those which birth, name, and wealth should of right join together, and what a handsome, happy couple they made!

A dull October sky hung above the endless sea of houses of the capital, extending more widely with every year. There was the usual bustle in the principal streets, where the crowd, the noise, and the rattling of carriages were confusing enough to any one coming from the quiet seclusion of the mountains to plunge into this flood of life.

General Steinrück had his apartments in the military public buildings, where he occupied a suite of rooms on the first floor. Its arrangement was, so far as the Countess Hortense's apartments were concerned, comfortable, and even luxurious. Steinrück conformed to his daughter-in-law's taste in this regard, and let her have her own way in all outward matters, although otherwise he kept a tight rein on his family affairs. His position enabled him to live expensively, in spite of the comparatively small income derived from his estates.

The general's special rooms, on the contrary, were plainly furnished, and his study was almost Spartan in its simple arrangement. No tender half-light reigned here, as in the Countess's drawing-room; there were no soft rugs or Oriental hangings; even the artistic decoration of pictures and statuary was lacking. The daylight entered broad and clear through the tall windows, papers, letters, and books were carefully arranged upon the writing-table, the furniture of light oak, destitute of carving and covered with dark leather, could not have been plainer, and the pictures on the walls were evidently of value only as family relics or as mementos. The room was made for labour and not for luxury, and in its strict simplicity it corresponded perfectly with the character of its occupant.

Steinrück was seated at his writing-table, talking with his grandson, who had just returned from Berkheim, whither he had escorted his betrothed and her mother. Raoul really looked like a happy lover; his face was all sunshine as he told of his journey; and the Count's stern features too were lit up by a smile; the fulfilment of his favourite scheme made him gentler and more accessible than was his wont.

They had been talking of the visit which Hertha and her mother were to pay them, and of the marriage which was to take place in the coming summer, and Raoul said at last, "You will have to dismiss me, grandfather; this is the time for your military audience."

"Not yet," the general replied, with a glance at the clock. "We have a quarter of an hour yet, and, moreover, there is nothing special for to-day,--only a few introductions and reports from younger officers."

He took a written list from his writing-table and looked over it. Suddenly his face darkened, and he muttered, half aloud, "Ah, to-day, then."

Raoul, who was standing beside his grandfather's chair, had also glanced at the list, and had noticed a name with which he was acquainted. "Lieutenant Rodenberg. Has he been appointed staff-officer?"

"Do you know him?" asked Steinrück, turning hastily.

"Slightly. I went upon a hunting excursion last year with the Rodenbergs. I suppose he is one of the sons of Colonel Rodenberg, commanding officer at W----."

"No," said the general, coldly.

"Not? I did not know that there was any other of the name in the army."

"Nor did I; and I made the same mistake that you have done. I ought to explain to you, Raoul, who this Rodenberg is. Your mother has probably informed you long since as to our family history."

The young Count started, and looked inquiringly at his grandfather. "I know that this name is one to arouse painful associations. It cannot be----"

"Louise's son," Steinrück said, sternly.

"Good heavens, this is too much!" exclaimed Raoul in dismay. "Is that wretched story, which we supposed buried in oblivion long since, to be revived? The boy was said to have run away, to be dead, or worse. How comes this fellow, the son of an adventurer, to occupy such a position?"

The general frowned; at the moment the old warrior's *esprit de corps* outweighed all else, even his antipathy to the discarded and detested son of 'the adventurer.' Michael wore a sword,

and was therefore not to be calumniated in his presence. "Take care!" he said, sternly. "You are speaking of an officer in the army, of a very capable officer, with regard to whom such expressions are not allowable."

"But, grandfather, you cannot but perceive that this Rodenberg may annoy us extremely, precisely because he is an officer, and as such justified in meeting us on terms of social equality. How are we to treat him? And he comes to the front just at this time, when my betrothal to Hertha makes us especially conspicuous in society. Of course his first object will be to proclaim abroad his relations with us."

"I doubt it, or it would have been done long ago. No one at present knows anything of the matter, as I have taken pains to ascertain. He certainly must know that we are not inclined to acknowledge any relationship."

"No matter for that. Acknowledged or not, he will sooner or later proclaim himself the grandson of Count Steinrück, and take advantage of the fact. Do you really imagine that any bourgeois officer would renounce such advantage and suppress his relationship with the general in command?"

"I shall certainly endeavour to silence him upon the subject. You are right; at this particular time any revival of old, long-buried stories should be avoided at all hazards. I have seen Rodenberg but once; but from the impression I have of him I do not think that an appeal to his sense of honour will be in vain. He will not obtrude himself upon a family that does not choose to know him, and he has at least as much reason as we have to consign his father's memory to oblivion. However the affair may turn out, you must not utter a word concerning it to your betrothed or to her mother. They accidentally became acquainted with Rodenberg, and have not the slightest idea who he is."

"Just as I said! This man's being an officer is a positive misfortune," exclaimed Raoul, angrily. "In any other sphere of life he could be ignored; now he has already found an opportunity for presenting himself to the ladies of our family, doubtless with some ulterior motive. Of course they must not know who he is. How Hertha, in her pride, would scorn such a cousin! The matter must be kept absolutely secret, cost what it may. We surely are willing to make any sacrifice if----"

"You seem to forget that you are speaking of *Lieutenant* Rodenberg," the general sharply interrupted him. "One cannot purchase silence of an officer in our army; the most that can be done is to appeal to his pride. He must and will understand that there is no honour in a connection with the son of his father; this is the only way in which he can be influenced."

Raoul was silent, but his manner showed that he did not share in this view of the case. Further conversation was impossible, for Lieutenant Rodenberg was at that moment announced, and the general gave orders that he should be admitted. "Leave me," he said in an undertone to Raoul; "I wish to speak with him alone."

Raoul obeyed, but just as he was about to leave the room Rodenberg entered, and the two young men met in the door-way. Michael bowed slightly to the stranger, who merely bestowed upon him a half-hostile, half-contemptuous glance, and was about to pass him without further notice. The young officer, however, confronted him for a moment, barring his way without a word, but with an expression in his eyes that so authoritatively demanded the recognition of his salute that the Count half involuntarily returned it. He inclined his head and withdrew. Steinrück observed this scene, which lasted only a few seconds, and little as he approved of his grandson's discourtesy, he was almost angry with him for yielding as he did.

Michael now approached, and the keenest observer would never have suspected the existence of a tie of relationship between the two men.

The subaltern made his report in strict accordance with prescribed rules, and his superior officer, cool, grave, and attentive, received it in the usual way. Neither for an instant departed from strict military rule. But when all that the occasion required had been said and the young officer awaited his dismissal, the general addressed him: "I should like to discuss with you a matter of some moment to us both. When we first met, neither the time nor the place was fitting for such a discussion; to-day we are undisturbed. May I request your attention?"

"I am at your Excellency's command," was Michael's brief reply.

"Your bearing at that first interview proved to me that you understand in their entire scope the relations existing between us; how those relations are regarded by each of us remains to be explained."

"I see no necessity for any explanation on that point," Michael said, coldly.

The general bestowed a dark glance upon him; he had judged it best to preserve a cold, proud demeanour during this interview that might repel beforehand any familiarity of approach, and he now encountered a behaviour quite as haughty as his own: there was nothing here to repel. "But I see the necessity for our understanding each other," he rejoined with sharp emphasis. "You are the son of the Countess Louise Steinrück" (he did not say "of my daughter"). "I can neither deny this nor prevent you from laying claim to a perfectly legitimate relationship. Hitherto you have

refrained from doing so, and have treated the matter as a secret, which leads me to hope that you yourself perceive the undesirability of a revelation----"

"Which you fear," Michael completed the sentence.

"Which I at least deprecate. I will be perfectly frank with you. You have probably heard from Colonel Reval that an entertainment was lately given in my house to celebrate the betrothal of my grandson, Count Raoul, with the Countess Hertha Steinrück, with whom, I believe, you are acquainted."

Something like emotion flashed up for an instant in the young officer's face, but it was gone before it could be perceived, and he replied, with apparently perfect composure, "So I have heard."

"Well, then. The marriage will shortly take place. During the winter the betrothed couple will appear at court, and in society. This union of the two last scions of my race renders it doubly my duty to keep the escutcheon of that race free from every stain. I do not wish to offend you, Lieutenant Rodenberg, but I presume that you are acquainted with your father's mode of life and with his past?"

"Yes."

The word came harsh and curt from the quivering lips, but it did not reveal the man's mental torture.

"I am sorry to touch upon such a subject to a son, but unfortunately I cannot avoid doing so. You are entirely guiltless in the matter, and you will hardly be a sufferer by it. Your intimate connection with Professor Wehlau prevents any annoying investigations. I hear that you pass for the son of an early friend of his, who has been brought up in his household; a perfectly satisfactory expedient. Moreover, your father has been dead more than twenty years, and he spent the latter part of his life in foreign countries. Then, too, so far as I know, he never openly transgressed any law of the land."

The words were like a dagger thrust,--'so far as I know!' Michael had grown ghastly pale; he made no reply, but shot a baleful glance at the man who so pitilessly stretched him on the rack, and who continued in the same cold, calm manner: "The affair would wear an entirely different aspect if you should mention your mother's name. It would, of course, create a vast sensation in aristocratic circles, and in the army it would give rise to endless gossip, which would be annoying, and perhaps dangerous, for in such cases rumour always transcends reality, and all that has been buried in oblivion for half a lifetime would be ruthlessly dragged to light. I leave it to you whether you could or would endure to have your father's memory thus resuscitated. With regard to my position in the matter, I can only appeal to your sense of justice, which will tell you--"

"Stay!" the young officer interrupted him in a half-stifled tone. "Spare me further words, your Excellency. I have already told you that this entire explanation was superfluous, since I have never for an instant contemplated giving publicity to a relationship quite as distasteful to me as to you. I thought I had made this sufficiently clear at our first interview, when I declined your offered 'patronage.' I see now that it was to have been the price of my silence."

Michael's words were uttered with extreme bitterness, and his hand rested heavily upon the hilt of his sword, but he preserved his self-control, although by an extreme effort of will. The general probably perceived this, for he said, in a tone perceptibly gentler, "That is a very erroneous view of the case. I repeat, I do not wish to offend you."

"You do not?" Michael burst forth, indignantly. "What is this entire interview but an offence, an insult, from first to last? What do you call it, then, this subjecting a son to listen to such words regarding his father, clearly explaining to him the while that therefore he himself has forfeited all claim to consideration? I can neither defend nor avenge my father,--he has deprived me of the right to do so,--and you suppose that I do not suffer under this consciousness! There was a time when it wellnigh ruined me, until I roused myself to do battle with the phantom. I am but at the outset of my career. I have no record to show as yet. When a lifetime filled with honest effort and fulfilment of duty lies behind me, that old phantom will have vanished. Men are not all as pitiless as yourself, Count Steinrück, and, thank God! all have not an escutcheon that must be kept free from stain."

The general suddenly arose with the commanding air with which he was wont to rebuke presumption or arrogance. "Take care, Lieutenant Rodenberg; you forget in whose presence you are."

"In that of my grandfather, who can, perhaps, forget for a few moments that he is also my general. Fear nothing; it is the first time that I ever called you thus, and it will be the last. For me there are no tender or sacred associations with the name. My mother died in misery and want, in agony and despair, but she never once opened her lips to ask aid of him who could have saved both her child and herself by a word. She knew her father."

"Yes, she knew him," said Steinrück, sternly. "When she fled from her father's house to be the

wife of an adventurer she knew that every tie binding her to her home was severed, that there could be no return, and no reconciliation. Will her son presume to condemn the severity of an outraged father?"

"No," replied Michael; "I know that my mother openly defied you, that she had forfeited her home, and that if the father's heart was silent, and only his sense of justice spoke, he could not but repudiate her. But I know, also, that her worst crime lay in her following a bourgeois adventurer. Had he been her equal in rank, the prodigal, debauched son of some noble family, she would not have been so irrevocably condemned, her father's arms would have been opened to her in her misery, and her son would not now have had his father's memory cast up to him as a disgrace. I should have inherited an ancient name; all else would have been carefully suppressed. Most assuredly I should not have been consigned to the hands of a Wolfram, that I might go to ruin."

The general's eyes flashed, but he gave up treating the young officer any longer as a stranger; he now spoke angrily, but it was to a grandson: "Not another word, Michael! I am not accustomed to be thus addressed. Of what do you dare to accuse me?"

"Of what I can vouch for, for it is the truth," declared Michael, returning the Count's look of menace. "It would have been easy for you to place the orphaned boy in some remote educational establishment, where you never would have seen or heard of him, but where at least he might have been made fit for something in life; but this was just what must not be. Therefore I was exiled to a lonely forest, where, with only rude and rough companionship, blows and hard words were all the instruction I received; where all intellectual aspiration was suppressed, all talent ignored, and the only aim was to make of me a rude, ignorant boor, whose life was to be wasted in the depths of the forest. A stranger hand snatched me from that misery. I owe my education, the social position in which I now confront you, to a stranger. To my near relatives I should have owed only intellectual death."

Steinrück seemed speechless at the young officer's incredible audacity, but it was not that alone that silenced him. Once before, years previously, he had heard similar words; the same reproach had been uttered by a priest. Now they were hurled in his face with fiery energy, and the accusation came from the lips of him whom he certainly had hoped to make harmless by a 'peasant life.' Count Michael was not the man to receive an offence or an insult in silence; but now he had no reply to make, for he felt the truth of what the young officer had said. If he had formerly refrained from any clear analysis of his mode of action, it was distinctly revealed to him now as in a mirror, and it was an ugly sight,--one quite unworthy the proud wearer of the Steinrück name.

"You seem not yet to have entirely forgotten Wolfram's teaching," he said at last. "Do you wish to raise another disturbance, as you did formerly at Steinrück? This looks like it."

He could not have done worse than to evoke this memory. Ten years had passed, but Michael's blood still boiled at the remembrance which goaded him to fresh indignation. "Then you called me thief," he said, in a terrible tone; "without proof, without examination, upon a mere suspicion! You would have allowed any one of your servants to exculpate himself, but your grandson was immediately pronounced a criminal. Yes, I then seized upon the first thing at hand that could serve as a weapon; I did not know that it was my own grandfather that had so disgraced me, but from the hour when I learned it I was filled with a burning desire for retribution."

"Michael!" the general interrupted him, warningly "Not another word in that tone, which is unbecoming both to your superior officer and to your mother's father. I forbid it, and you must obey!"

When Count Steinrück spoke in this tone he was accustomed to implicit obedience; but here, for the first time, his personality failed of its effect. Even Raoul, who was by no means easily daunted, bowed before the angry glance of those eyes, but Michael did not bow. He did, indeed, by an effort recover his self-possession, but if his voice sounded more quiet and controlled, it had lost none of its firmness.

"As your Excellency commands. I did not seek this interview: it was forced upon me; but I imagine you are now entirely relieved of all fear lest I should presume upon any tie of relationship. You fancy yourself, with your ancient pedigree, exalted far above the world around us; you have, with an iron hand, thrust out and blotted from your life the only member of your family who dared to defy your pride of ancestry. But your escutcheon is not, after all, as high as the sun in the heavens; there may come a day when it will wear a stain that you cannot wipe out. Then you will know what it is to be obliged, while a passionate love of honour glows in your heart, to atone for the sin and the disgrace of another, as you now force me to expiate the memory of my father; then you will comprehend what a pitiless judge you have been towards my mother. May I consider myself dismissed, your Excellency?"

He stood erect in stiff military guise. The general did not reply; something like a shudder thrilled through him at Michael's words, sounding as they did almost prophetic; for an instant there rose before his mind something dark and formless, like a foreboding of coming evil, but it faded instantly. He mutely motioned to the young officer to withdraw, and Michael went without one backward glance. In another minute the door was closed behind him.

When Steinrück was alone he began to pace the room restlessly to and fro, but his glance rested again and again upon a portrait on the wall of himself as a young officer. No, there was no resemblance between that handsome head, with its nobly-formed, regular features, and that other characteristic but plain face, not the least! And yet those very eyes had flashed at him from that face; it was his voice that he had heard from Michael's lips, and his was the inflexible pride, the iron resolve which did not shun a strife with whatever life might bring; the resemblance lay, not in the features, but in the look and the air.

This was borne in irresistibly upon the mind of the Count, as he stood still at last, and gazed fixedly and gloomily at his youthful presentment. He was indignant, offended, and yet there was in his soul a glimmer of something which had always been lacking in his thoughts of his son and his grandson,—the consciousness that there existed an heir of his blood, and of his character. He had tried in vain to discover a trace of it in Raoul,—in vain! But the repudiated son of the outcast daughter, the young man who had just left his presence as a stranger, had this blood in his veins, and in spite of all his hatred and indignation his grandfather felt that he was an offshoot of his race.

Professor Wehlau occupied a moderately-sized but very pretty villa in the western part of the city. The garden attached to it was large, and the comfortable and tasteful arrangement of the whole bore witness to the fact that advanced science is in no wise hostile to the amenities of life.

The winter was nearing its end; March had begun, and the air was full of hints of spring. In the Wehlau mansion, however, there was always a threatening of storm; the discord between father and son was still far from being resolved into harmony, and the 'thunder-cloud,' as Hans disrespectfully dubbed his father's mood, frequently lowered above his head. This was the case to-day, when the young artist was sitting in the study of the Professor, who had just emptied the vials of his wrath upon his disobedient son.

"Look at Michael," he said at last, in conclusion. "He knows what it is to work, and he gets on in the world. Here he is a captain at only twenty-nine,—and what are you?"

"I wish Michael would for once make an infernal ass of himself!" Hans said, fretfully, "just that I might not have his excellence forever dinned into my ears. You behold in the new-fangled captain the future general field-marshal, who will win no end of battles for our country, and in your son, your own flesh and blood, a fellow of undoubted genius, you see nothing to admire. Really, father, it is past endurance."

"Have done with your nonsense!" Wehlau interrupted him in the worst possible humour. "You would fain persuade me that you are 'industrious!' Of course, according to your artistic conception of the word! Run about and amuse yourself for half the day, under the pretence of making studies, and spend the rest of it playing all kinds of pranks in the various studios! And then comes the inevitable Italian tour, when amusement is the order of the day, all of course in the interest of art! And that you call working industriously! Oh, the life is precisely to your taste, and, moreover, it is the only one for which you are fit."

These reproaches, unfortunately, produced not the slightest effect. Hans seated himself astride of his chair and rejoined without any irritation, "Don't scold, papa, or I will paint you life-size and present the portrait to the university, which will, you may be sure, return me a vote of thanks. I have long wanted to ask you to sit to me."

"This is too much!" the Professor burst forth. "I positively forbid you to represent me with your daubs."

"Then come at least and see my studio. You have never seen one of my 'daubs.'"

"No," growled Wehlau, "I will not put myself in the way of being so irritated; crazy, idealistic stuff,—faded sentimentality,—at best some exasperating caricature. You never can go beyond that, as I know well enough. I do not want to see or to hear anything of the matter."

"But you have heard something of it already," the young artist said, with exultation. "When I sent the portrait of my master, Professor Walter, to the exhibition, various newspapers discussed it; one of them even introduced a very agreeable variation of the usual theme, 'the son of our distinguished investigator;' it said, 'the talented son of a distinguished father!' Take care, papa, I shall one day cast all your scientific fame into the shade. But will you excuse me now? I am to have some distinguished visitors."

Wehlau shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Fine visitors, I've no doubt!"

"The Countesses Steinrück, an it please you."

"What! they are going to pay *you* a visit?" The Professor gazed at his son in surprise.

"Of course; we are beginning to be famous, and we receive the aristocracy in our studio. It is not all in vain to be the 'talented son of a distinguished father.' Are you really determined not to sit to me for your portrait, papa?"

"Confound you, no!" shouted the Professor.

"Very well; then I shall paint you clandestinely, and shall send you treacherously to the exhibition. Adieu, papa!"

And with the most amiable smile, as if the best understanding reigned between himself and his father, Hans withdrew. Outside the door he encountered Michael, who had just come home, and who asked him whether the Professor were in his study.

"Yes; but there is thunder in the air again," said Hans. "Come to the studio for half an hour, Michael, after you have seen my father. I want to make a slight change in my picture, and I must have you."

The young officer nodded compliance, and went to the Professor, whose gloomy face brightened somewhat at his entrance.

"I am glad you are come," he said. "Hans has just irritated me to such a degree that I fairly long for the sight of a sensible man."

"What has Hans been doing now?"

"Nothing at all; that's just it. I have been remonstrating with him about the idleness to which he has been given over for the past five months, and which he is pleased to call work. And what effect do you suppose I produced? None, except to make him more nonsensical than ever. That boy will be my death."

"Do not be unjust, uncle," said Michael, reproachfully. "You know that Hans is at work upon an important picture, and I assure you that he works very hard, although you persistently refuse to bestow a glance upon it. I should suppose that you, as well as the rest of us, have had sufficient proof of his talent. His portrait of Professor Walter made quite a sensation; it was universally admired, and the newspapers even alluded to----"

"To 'the talented son of a distinguished father!'" Wehlau angrily interrupted him. "Are you going to harp upon the same string? Have I not had to endure all sorts of congratulations, and have I not been rude enough in reply to them? But 'tis of no use. Every one sides with the boy; everybody takes his part, and is immensely delighted with the trick he played me at the university."

"Even Professor Bauer took his part, as you call it, when he stopped to see you on his way through the city," interposed Michael.

"Yes, that capped the climax. 'Do you know,' I asked him, 'how that wretched lad of mine employed himself at your lectures? He caricatured you and your audience. He made a sketch of you, recognizable at once, surrounded by all the emblems of natural science, stirring up the four elements in a witches' caldron, while your favourite pupils were blowing the fire.' And what was his reply? 'I know, my dear friend, I know. I saw the picture, and it really was so clever, so capitally done, that I had to laugh and forgive my recreant pupil on the spot; do you do the same.'"

"You had better take his advice, uncle. However, I only meant to say good-morning. I promised Hans to go to his studio."

"To his studio?" the Professor said, with a sneer. "There must be a deal going on there. I wish that pavilion in the garden had been dark as pitch, and foul with damp, rather than have that fellow daubing there. He has taken up his abode right under my nose, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Go, go, for all I care, to the 'studio!' The aristocracy may stare, if they choose, at what it contains,--I'll not set my foot inside it, you may rely upon that."

He turned grumbling to his books, and Michael, who knew that it was best to leave him alone in his present mood, betook himself to his friend.

The pavilion in which the young painter had temporarily set up his modest studio was at the end of the garden, and contained one good-sized room. A window had been closed up, another enlarged, a skylight had been put in, and thus had been arranged the studio that so outraged the Professor, all the more that his permission had never been asked for these changes. Hans always pursued the same line of conduct with his father. 'Certainly, sir,' was his constant phrase, while he calmly and persistently acted in direct opposition to his parent's commands; this being in fact the only way to deal with the choleric old Herr.

Wehlau had in the harshest terms refused to supply his son with the means for renting a studio, and Hans, who as yet had no income of his own, was forced to submit. But that very day he took possession of the garden pavilion, sent for masons and carpenters, had everything arranged according to his wishes, and when his father returned from a short excursion he found the bill for the whole upon his writing-table. Of course the Professor was furious; he protested that he would have nothing of the kind upon his property, and would not even glance towards the pavilion; but he paid the bill, and Hans had again carried his point.

At the present moment the young artist was standing before his easel, painting away at a large picture, while Michael stood opposite him with folded arms, leaning against a short pillar. Conversation was evidently at a stand-still, quite ten minutes having passed without a word from either of the two; suddenly Hans paused in his work and said, "I tell you what, Michael, you're no good to-day."

Michael seemed to have entirely forgotten that he was there as a model for his friend. There was something in his look of the old boyish dreaminess. At the sound of Hans's voice he started as if awakening. "Who? I? Why not?"

"There it is! You start like a somnambulist suddenly awakened. What were you thinking of? You have been a perfect John-a-Dreams since we came back from the mountains. You are not the same fellow at all."

The young captain passed his hand across his forehead and smiled in a constrained way. "I think I need active service. I may have overtaken my brain during these last few months."

"Probably. You are a thorough fanatic in respect to work,--quite unlike myself. But please do me the favour of adopting another expression of countenance; I can do nothing at all with your present melancholy air."

"How shall I look, then?"

"As furious as possible. Just as my papa looks when he surveys my studio at the distance of a couple of hundred paces, only grander, more heroic. Oh, you can look just as I want you to, and I have been tormenting myself for weeks with trying to put what I mean on canvas, and in vain. I must copy it from nature, and you must help me."

"I cannot understand why you are so persistently determined to make use of my face," Michael said, impatiently. "It is not at all suitable for an ideal picture, and it is not in the least like the face you have put upon your canvas."

"You don't understand," Hans declared, with an air of conviction. "Your face is the best model I could have. Of course I shall not make the thing a portrait. All that I can use of your features is already in the picture. But the expression,--the eyes are all wrong! I wish I could provoke you to the last degree,--put you into such a passion with something that you would like to hurl it into an abyss ten hundred thousand fathoms deep, after the example of your namesake with the Evil One,--then I should be all right!"

"Your desire is very disinterested. Unfortunately, there is little hope of its fulfilment, for I am not in a mood to be provoked."

"No, you are in a very tiresome mood, to which your face is admirably adapted; we must give it up for to-day. 'Tis a pity; I should like to give the characteristic expression to my archangel to-day, for he is to be marched out before the aristocratic family whose patron saint he is."

He laid aside his palette and brush with a sigh, but Michael had suddenly grown attentive.

"Before whom is he to be marched out?" said he.

"Before the Countess Steinrück and her daughter---- What's the matter?"

"Nothing; I am only surprised that they should visit your studio. Did you invite them to come?"

"Not exactly, but it came about in the course of conversation. I met the ladies yesterday at Frau von Reval's; they asked about my pictures, the subject of this one seemed to interest them, and they arranged to come here to-day. I have a suspicion that they are thinking of giving me a commission for the church of their patron saint, which would gratify me hugely, for it would prove to my father that my 'daubing' might have practical results; at present he thinks it all child's play. What! are you going?"

"Certainly; you do not want me any longer."

"No; but I told the Countess, who asked after you, that you were always at home at this time, and would be delighted to pay your respects to her."

Michael's face grew dark; he seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then said, coldly, "Then I cannot but stay."

"Assuredly not, if you would atone in any degree for your unconscionable behaviour in the summer. The Countess Hertha was evidently provoked about it; I perceived that very clearly when you were spoken of. Moreover, she was very grave and depressed yesterday."

"Happily betrothed as she is?"

There was contempt in the tone of inquiry, but Hans took no notice of it as he went on: "Why, as for her future happiness, I should hardly go surety for that. If the old general thinks he can restrain his grandson and keep him within bounds by this marriage, he is greatly mistaken."

"How so? What do you know of the young fellow?" asked Michael.

"I hear enough of him. An artist frequents all kinds of society, and I have met the young Count several times. He is undeniably attractive, talented, chivalrously amiable, but I am afraid--- There come the ladies. Their carriage has just driven up. I call that punctuality."

He had cast a glance through the window, and had seen the Countess Steinrück and her daughter in the act of alighting from their carriage, which was drawn up before the garden-gate. He hastened to receive them, and in a few minutes ushered them into the studio.

Captain Rodenberg had not seen the ladies since meeting them at St. Michael's, although they had been in town for six weeks, for they frequented aristocratic circles almost exclusively. The Countess returned his salutation with her accustomed gentle cordiality. She no longer reproached him for not coming to Castle Steinrück, in spite of her express invitation, for she had learned in conversation with the general that the young officer for some reason or other was not liked by his chief. He probably was aware of this, and hence his reserve; but the gentle lady felt herself all the more called upon to treat him with the greatest kindness.

"We have not seen each other for a long time," she said, offering him her hand; "and our last meeting at St. Michael was disturbed by my daughter's indisposition. Hertha was very imprudent to stay out in the open air while a storm was coming up, and then to come home through the rising tempest. It was fortunate that the rain fell only in the valleys, or her cold might have had serious results."

Michael touched the offered hand with his lips, and bowed low to the young Countess, who had taken advantage of the first available pretext to avoid a meeting which, after the scene on the mountain roadside, would have been impossible for each of those concerned. He had seen the ladies only for an instant, when he had taken leave of them as they were getting into their carriage. Now the young Countess hastily interposed, "It was of no consequence, mamma; I begged you to hasten your departure only because I knew how anxious you always are."

"Nevertheless, you were indisposed for several days," observed her mother. "I am sure that Lieutenant Rodenberg, or rather----" She glanced at his uniform. "You have since been promoted, I see. Let me congratulate you, Captain Rodenberg."

"He has worn his new dignity for two weeks now," said Hans. "I have begged permission to paint the future general as soon as that rank is attained."

The Countess smiled. "Well, who knows? Captain Rodenberg advances quickly in his career. We, too, have had an event in our family, of which you may have heard; my daughter has been betrothed."

"I am aware of it." Michael turned to Hertha, whose eyes for the first time encountered his own. He was forced to utter his good wishes upon the occasion of her betrothal; but if she looked for any sign of agitation in his manner, any trace of the passionate gleam that sometimes proved the traitor to his cold reserve, she was mistaken. His bow was as coolly courteous as his words were purely conventional. They could not have been more politely or more indifferently uttered to one whom he had never before seen.

"Countess Hertha is in her haughtiest mood to-day," Hans thought, observing the air with which she received Michael's good wishes, as he led the ladies to the picture, which occupied the prominent place in the studio, although it was only partly finished. The life-size figure of the Archangel stood forth powerfully and effectively upon the canvas, but the face was unfinished, and the head of the Fiend was only sketched in. Nevertheless, the grandeur and boldness of the conception of the picture were manifest, as were also the technical skill and the artistic force of the young painter, who might well be content with the impression produced by his work.

Hertha, who first approached the picture, shuddered slightly, and cast a glance of surprised inquiry at the artist, while her mother, who had followed her immediately, exclaimed, eagerly, "That is--no, it is not Captain Rodenberg, but you have made your archangel strikingly like him."

"Very naturally, since he was my model," Hans said, with a laugh. "I have indeed only made use of his characteristic expression,--one of indignant reproof."

The Countess seemed quite carried away by the picture, and was lavish in her praise. Hertha thought the conception fine, the composition broad, the colouring magnificent, but while noticing and admiring all this, she had no word of praise for the countenance of the Saint.

Hans, with his wonted amiability, played the part of cicerone to the ladies in his studio, since they were desirous to see all his work. He brought out a picture that had been leaning face to the wall, set it up, and was endeavouring to place it in the best light, while the Countess opened a large portfolio lying upon the table, containing a number of sketches and studies, all the result of the young artist's last autumnal excursion,--clever drawings of huntsmen and peasants in the national costume, with here and there a head of some pretty peasant-girl; there was a sketch--slight enough, but wonderfully like--of the priest of Saint Michael, and there were various mountain and forest views, all so fresh and full of life that the Countess turned over leaf after leaf with delight. Suddenly Hans perceived what she was doing, and hurried towards her as if to

guard his portfolio from attack: "Allow me, madame,--the portfolio is very awkwardly placed. Let me show you the sketches," he said, hastily, pushing forward a chair with eager courtesy, and beginning to lay the sketches out upon the table one by one. As he did so, he took one of them, apparently by chance, and laid it aside.

"Am I not to see that drawing?" the lady asked, a fleeting glimpse having shown her a study of the head of a young girl.

"Oh, it is not worth showing. A mere study,--a failure," the young man declared, but his face flushed as he spoke.

The Countess shook her finger at him: "Aha! Herr Hans Wehlau seems to have secrets of his own. Who can tell what romances have been woven among the mountains?"

Hans defended himself with a laugh; but when the portfolio had been looked through, and the Countess turned to the picture he had placed on an easel, he thought it best to hide his 'failure' behind a window-curtain, where it was quite safe from curious eyes.

Hertha was still standing before the large painting, and Michael was at her side. He made no attempt to avoid her, but kept his place with perfect composure, and went on talking of his friend's talent, of his prospects, of his intention to compete for the prize offered for a large historical painting, and of the sketches he had already made of it. The entire absence of constraint in his conversation was a relief to the young Countess, although it slightly embarrassed her. Woman of the world though she were, she could hardly adopt the same tone after--after that hour at Saint Michael.

"I frankly confess," she said, in an undertone, "that this picture of Herr Wehlau's surprises me. We have known only one side of his talent. His sketches and caricatures at M---, where we met him, were clever, and abounded in merriment, like himself. I should not have credited him with the force, the energy, shown in this work."

"And yet it has been play to him," observed Rodenberg. "Hans is one of those fortunate beings who attain the highest aims almost without any effort. To all his other physical and mental endowments a kind fate added this talent, which lifts him far above all commonplace existence."

"A kind fate, indeed. Do you not envy your friend these gifts?"

"No; I should scarcely know how to prize them, for I value highest what must be struggled for. Hans, with his constantly cheerful, sunny disposition, is born for the smiles and sunshine of existence; I am created more for the tempests and conflicts of life. Each has a part to play."

Hertha gazed at the picture that portrayed a scene of tempest and conflict. She knew that the man beside her could contend not only with an enemy from without, but with himself, if need were. She had seen him when his every fibre was quivering with passion, and yet here he stood beside her, perfectly composed and calm; not one traitorous glance gave the lie to his repose of manner. Her presence seemed to produce not the slightest effect upon him.

"Do you prefer conflict, then?" she asked, with something of a sneer. "You seem to me very ambitious, Captain Rodenberg."

"It may be so. I certainly wish to rise, and no one can do so who does not at the outset fix his eyes upon a lofty goal. I can never be aided and abetted by circumstances, like my friend Hans, but it is surely worth something to be conscious of being entirely self-dependent; to know that you have no one save yourself, and that you likewise belong to no one save yourself."

Quietly as the words were uttered, there was iron resolution in them, and they were comprehended. Hertha suddenly turned her eyes full upon the speaker, with something like anger gleaming in their depths. "And you really think thus? Can ambition, indeed, indemnify you for all else?"

"Yes," was the cold reply. "All that I carry towards the future with me is gratitude to the man who has been a father to me, and friendship for his son; in all other respects I have cleared away everything from my path."

The young Countess's lip quivered slightly, but she held her head proudly erect as she said, "Good fortune attend you, Captain Rodenberg. I do not doubt that you will make a career for yourself."

She turned away to her mother, but while together they discussed his sketches with the young painter, Hertha's thoughts were busy with the last conversation. She could not have been more distinctly informed that Michael had come off conqueror in his struggle, and the conviction that this was the case aroused an inexplicable emotion within her. He had chosen to crush out and annihilate his love, and speedy success had crowned his efforts.

When the Countess took leave of the young artist, Michael paid his farewell respects in the studio, while Hans escorted the ladies to their carriage. When he returned, he made haste to take the 'failure' from its hiding-place and to put it in a separate portfolio, which he locked up. "There

would have been a pretty to-do if the Countess had seen this," said he; "she would instantly have recognized her god-child, and what would have become of the dignity of Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg of the Forschungstein? He would no longer have formed a part of the chivalric reminiscences of the Ebersburg."

"Whom did the picture represent?" asked Michael, who had been pacing the floor, lost in thought.

"Gerlinda von Eberstein. I drew it from memory. I told you of my adventure among the mountains, and of my promotion in rank. 'Tis odd, but I cannot help thinking continually of the little Dornröschen, who seemed so ridiculous, and yet was so lovely; she thrusts herself between me and all other memories. Just now, in presence of the Fair One with the Golden Locks, I was haunted by her sweet little face with its dark eyes looking out so dreamily upon a world that vanished ages ago. Moreover, Countess Hertha seems to me changed since her betrothal. It is sure to be so in these *mariages de convenance*, where there is no question of love. Count Raoul is not so very much devoted, either, to his fair betrothed; he certainly is wilder and more dissipated than ever, and I am greatly mistaken if he is not entangled elsewhere."

Michael suddenly stood still. "What? Now? And betrothed? That would be villainous!"

Hans looked at him in surprise. "What a tragic tone! Are you acquainted with the young Count?"

"I first saw him at the general's, and since then we have met several times. I was compelled to make it emphatically clear to him that he was in company of an officer who, if need were, would exact the consideration he seemed inclined to deny him. He seemed to understand at last."

There was a peculiar expression in the glance which the young artist riveted upon his friend, while with apparent unconcern he took up his palette and brushes and began to paint again. "You surprise me. Count Raoul probably prides himself upon his long line of ancestors, but I have never found him as haughty as is usual with his class. He must have some reason for disliking you."

"Or I for disliking him? I think each is pretty well aware of the other's sentiments."

"Aha! now it's coming," Hans muttered to himself, while he painted away. Then aloud, he continued, quietly: "You see, I have only known the amiable side of the Count. As for his betrothal, every one knows that it is all his grandfather's doing. His Excellency commanded, and the grandson bowed to his august will."

"So much the worse, and the more pitiable," Rodenberg burst forth. "Who forced him to obey? Why did he not refuse to comply? The fact is that this much-lauded, accomplished Steinrück is, with all his boasted chivalry, but a poor coward where there is any need of moral courage."

There was so passionate a hatred expressed in his words that Hans was startled. But with the egotism of the artist, who has no regard save for his work, and who overlooks all else, he never sought to discover the cause of his friend's almost savage irritability. He continued to gaze at him steadily, while his brush made stroke after stroke upon the canvas. "I think the Count would have come to grief if he had attempted any resistance," he observed. "They say the general preserves the same discipline in his household as among his soldiers, and will not suffer any opposition to his will. You know your iron chief. How would you like to confront him with a frank 'no'?"

"I have said much more to him than merely 'no.'"

"You--to the general?" Hans was so astonished that for a moment he stopped painting. Michael forgot all his usual caution, and went on, carried away by his emotion: "To General Count Steinrück? Yes. He tried to quell me with his commanding glance, and ordered me to be silent in the tone to which every one else bows; but I was not silent. He had to hear from my lips what he had probably never in his life heard before. I hurled it ruthlessly in his teeth, and he listened. Now, indeed, we are done with each other, but he knows how much I value his name and his coronet, and that as for him and his entire race, I----"

"Would fain dash them down ten hundred thousand fathoms deep into the burning pit! At last!" the artist burst forth, exultantly, as he laid down his brush. "Bravo, Michael! Now you can be good-humoured again; I have got it!"

"Got what?" asked Michael.

"The expression, the glance of flame, for which I have been looking so long. You were incomparable in your indignation,--you were Saint Michael himself."

Rodenberg seemed to recollect himself for the first time; he bit his lip. "And you have been all this time studying me in cold blood? Hans, it is unpardonable."

"Possibly, but it was necessary. Look at the picture yourself; see that brow and those eyes. I hit it off with a few strokes of the brush."

Michael, still irritated and annoyed, approached the easel and looked at the picture. He was struck with the change in it, but before he could speak Hans threw his arm around his shoulder and said, with sudden seriousness, "Come, tell me about yourself and the Steinrücks. Why do you hate Count Raoul, and what gives you the right to say such things to the general, your chief? There must be something here which you have concealed from me."

Rodenberg made no reply, and turned away.

"Do I not deserve your confidence?" Hans asked, reproachfully. "I never have had a secret from you. What are your relations with Steinrück?"

There ensued a brief pause, and then Michael said, coldly and sternly, "The same as Count Raoul's."

Hans stared at him in blank incredulity; he could not trust his ears. "What do you mean? The general----?"

"Is the father of my mother. Her name was Louise Steinrück."

March of this year was a very disagreeable month. After being ushered in by a few bright sunny days it veiled the city in gray mist and rain for weeks. The first buds perished of cold and damp, and people gazed out from behind their window-panes, disgusted with the spring month that did so little honour to its name.

On one of these rainy afternoons Count Raoul Steinrück mounted the steps and pulled the bell of the apartments upon the first floor of a house in the fashionable quarter of the city. He must have been well known to the servant who opened the door, for he merely bowed in answer to the inquiry whether Herr de Clermont was at home, and admitted the visitor without further question.

The young Count entered the drawing-room, in which, in spite of its rich furniture, an air of comfort was lacking. All the demands of the prevailing fashion were fully met in its arrangement, but there was nothing to indicate the individuality of the owners of the apartment. Everything seemed placed where it was only for the time being, and to suggest that the entire interior might shortly be removed, to be put at the disposal of others requiring a temporary home.

At the Count's entrance a young man who had been standing at a window turned and came towards him eagerly. "Ah, here you are, Raoul! We had given you up for to-day."

"I have only half an hour," said Raoul, taking off his overcoat and throwing himself into a chair with an ease betokening that he was quite at home here. "I have just come from the department."

"And the future minister has of course brought away a fit of ill-humour," said Clermont, laughing. "Important government business,--oh, we have no chance at all where that is in question."

The conversation was carried on in French. Henri de Clermont was perhaps a few years older than the young Count Steinrück, and was wonderfully attractive in appearance and manner, although the innocent gaiety of his air was not entirely in harmony with the keen glance of his dark eyes, which were those of a sharp observer. They now rested searchingly upon Raoul's countenance as he replied, impatiently,--

"Minister--government business--of course! If you only knew what an endless waste of dulness and ennui there is to be struggled through. I have been an entire year in the department, and nothing has yet fallen to my lot save the veriest trifles. A Count Steinrück is of no more importance to our chief than is any one of his bourgeois officials, and indeed not of as much if the latter happens to have a greater power of application. You must rise from the ranks."

"Yes, you Germans are wonderfully thorough in such matters," Clermont said, ironically. "With us one rises more quickly with a name and connections to aid him. And so you have been intrusted as yet with nothing important?"

"No." Raoul glanced impatiently towards the door that led into the next apartment, as if expecting some one. "At best a transcript of some confidential transaction, in which the name and position of the one concerned are due warranty for his silence; and this may go on for years."

"If you can endure it. Do you really mean to remain in the government employ?"

The young Count looked up surprised. "Certainly; why not?"

"That's an odd question for a man who is about to marry a very wealthy heiress. You might live in future as sovereign lord upon your estates, although I hardly think such an existence would satisfy you. You need life, society, the stir and action of a capital. Well, contrive to become attached to the embassy at Paris, as your father was before you. It cannot be a difficult position to attain if one pulls the right wires, and the dearest wish of your mother's heart would then be fulfilled."

"And my grandfather? He never would consent."

"If he were consulted; but his power ceases with the termination of his guardianship of your future wife. The will settles that. When does the Countess Hertha come of age?"

"Upon her twentieth birthday,--next autumn."

"And then you need consult no one, and heed nothing save the wishes of your young wife, who will hardly refuse to live with you in the capital of Europe, its brilliant centre. The general's views can then have no weight with you or with her."

"You do not know my grandfather," said Raoul, gloomily. "He will maintain his authority even then, and I---- Is Madame de Nérac not visible to-day?"

"She is dressing; we are going out to dine. Where shall you be this evening?"

"With my betrothed."

"And what a face you put on as you announce it!" Clermont said, laughing. "Every one envies you your brilliant match, and with justice. Countess Hertha is beautiful, wealthy, and----"

"Cold as ice." Raoul completed the sentence with a bitter intonation. "I can assure you that I am not so much to be envied as you suppose."

"True, the young Countess has a certain reputation for caprice. But that is the prerogative of handsome women."

"If it were caprice only, that would be nothing new: she was always capricious. But since our betrothal she has adopted a distant tone; she is perfectly unapproachable. It puts my patience to the severest test. I cannot stand it much longer."

There was extreme irritation in his tone. Clermont shrugged his shoulders. "Who of us can make his own choice? I cannot, although sooner or later I must marry, and my sister was married at sixteen to a man over fifty, Needs must."

Raoul scarcely heard the last words; he had continued to watch the door expectantly, and he suddenly started up, for it opened, and a silken train rustled across the threshold.

The lady who entered was of medium height, slender, and, although no longer in her first youth, exquisitely graceful. Her face could not be called beautiful, perhaps not even pretty, but it had an odd, piquant charm of its own. The black hair dressed in short close curls all over the head made the face look younger than it really was; there was a tender, veiled look in the dark eyes, which could, nevertheless, sparkle brilliantly, as they did now when they perceived the young Count. In vain was all attempt to analyze the charm that lay in those irregular and scarcely refined features; there it was, and when the face grew animated in conversation every line of it was interesting and brilliant.

Raoul had risen instantly and hastened towards the new-comer, whose hand he raised to his lips. "I have only a moment," he said, "but I could not help waiting for a glimpse of you, since Henri tells me you are going out."

"Oh, we need not go for half an hour yet," Frau von Nérac said, with a glance at the clock. "You see, Henri is not dressed yet."

"I must go and dress now," said Clermont. "Excuse me, Raoul; I shall be here again shortly."

He left the room, and Raoul certainly seemed nothing loath to be left to a *tête-à-tête* with his friend's sister. He took a seat opposite her, and in a few moments the pair were engaged in eager and lively conversation, chiefly concerning airy trifles, but gay and brilliant in the extreme. Frau von Nérac showed herself a mistress of persiflage, and the young Count was no whit her inferior in this regard. The cloud upon his brow vanished, leaving not a trace; he was in his element.

But suddenly the talk took a different turn. Raoul casually mentioned Castle Steinrück, and the name evoked a smile from Frau von Nérac that was half sarcastic, half malicious. "Ah, the castle in the mountains," said she; "Henri and I were to have made acquaintance with it, but unfortunately our visit was prevented by the indisposition of the Countess."

"My mother suffers frequently from those nervous attacks; they are very sudden, and very distressing," said Raoul, quickly overcoming his embarrassment. "They deprived her, on that occasion, of the pleasure of receiving her guests."

Frau von Nérac smiled again very sweetly and very significantly. "I am afraid that the guests were the cause of the nervous attack."

"Madame!"

"The general may have had some share in it; but we certainly were the innocent cause."

"You still visit upon me that unfortunate occurrence," Raoul said; "Henri does not; he knows how difficult is the position in which my mother and I are placed, and makes allowances."

"So do I. I persisted in going to see the Countess, although we were obliged to confine ourselves to the merest call, since the general did not feel called upon to renew the invitation. His Excellency seems to be a very absolute monarch, and he certainly has a very obedient grandson."

"What can I do but obey!" exclaimed Raoul, with suppressed impatience. "My mother is right: she and I are both subject to an iron will that is wont recklessly to bend everything beneath it and to break what will not bend. If you knew how humiliating it is to be lectured, examined, hectored like a boy! I have had enough, and more than enough, of it all!"

He had started up in his agitation, whilst Frau von Nérac, leaning back gracefully in her chair, toyed with her fan, and now rejoined, very calmly, "Well, all that will end with your marriage."

"Yes,--with my marriage," the Count slowly repeated.

"How tragic that sounds! Take care that the Countess Hertha does not hear you speak in that tone; she might resent it."

Raoul did not reply, but went up to where the lady was sitting, and bent over her: "Héloïse!"

The word sounded half reproachful, half entreating, but was apparently not understood, for she looked up at the speaker as though in surprise. "Well?"

"You best know what this marriage is to me. I have been hurried into it, over-persuaded by my mother, and I feel it to be a fetter even before it has taken place."

"And yet it will take place."

"That is the question."

There was a flash as of lightning in Héloïse's dark eyes; then her eyelashes drooped, and, as she seemed to examine the picture on her fan, she said, in a careless tone, "Would you attempt a rebellion? It would raise a tempest indeed, and would call down upon you supreme displeasure."

"What should I care, if I could but hope for a certain prize? For its sake I would defy my grandfather's anger. I thought I should be able to overcome--to forget--when Hertha should be my betrothed. I saw you again, Héloïse, and I knew that the old spell was still around me, and would always hold me fast. You are silent? Have you no word of reply for me?"

His eyes sought and found hers; her glance was veiled and tender, and her voice was as tender as she said, softly, "You are a fool, Raoul!"

"Do you call it folly to desire happiness?" he exclaimed. "You are a widow, Héloïse, you are free, and if----"

He could not finish his sentence, for the door opened rather noisily and Clermont entered. The intruder did not seem to notice his friend's start, or the annoyed glance which his sister bestowed upon him, but called out, gayly, "Here I am! Now we can have a quarter of an hour together, Raoul."

The young Count's face betrayed his annoyance at this interruption, and, in the worst possible humour, he replied, "Unfortunately, I have no more time. I told you I had but a minute. Madame--"

He turned to Héloïse, and would apparently have addressed a question to her in an undertone, but Clermont suddenly interposed between them, and, laying his hand lightly upon his sister's arm, said, not without a certain significance, "If you are really in such a hurry we will not detain you, eh, Héloïse? Until tomorrow, then."

"Until to-morrow," Raoul repeated, grasping his hand hurriedly. He was evidently not inclined to make a confidant of his friend, but took his leave in no very satisfied mood.

Scarcely had the door closed after him, when the young widow turned to her brother with a very ungracious air: "You came most inopportunistly, Henri."

"So I perceived," he replied, calmly; "but I thought it high time to put an end to the scene, which you were inclined to take seriously."

Héloïse tossed her head defiantly. "And if I were? Would you interfere to prevent it?"

"No; but I should explain to you that you were inclined to commit an act of supreme folly, and I trust nothing more would be required to bring you to reason."

"Do you think so? You may be mistaken," she said, exultingly. "You underestimate my power over Raoul. I have but to speak the word, and he will dissolve his betrothal and defy his family."

"And what then?"

The cool direct question put an end to the young widow's triumphant tone; she looked in surprise at her brother, who continued, very composedly: "You know the general. Do you suppose that he ever would forgive such a step, that he would ever consent to Raoul's marrying you? And Raoul *cannot* marry against his will, for he is entirely dependent upon him."

"He is his grandfather's heir, and the general is over seventy----"

"And has a constitution of iron," Clermont interposed. "He may live ten years longer, and you are scarcely so infatuated as to suppose that Raoul's passion or your own youth will last so long. You are full five years older than he."

Frau von Nérac folded her fan hastily and noisily. "Henri, you go almost too far!"

"I am sorry, but I cannot spare you. You cannot reckon upon the future; therefore you must comprehend the present. In a few years there will be no choice left you."

Héloïse made no reply, but her air was one of intense irritation. Evidently she felt outraged, but Clermont coolly continued: "And even supposing that Raoul should enter very shortly upon his inheritance, he would still be no fitting match for you. The general's salary enables him to live with a degree of elegance, but his grandson inherits nothing of that. Castle Steinrück is an article of luxury; it probably costs a yearly outlay; it certainly brings in nothing, and all the available property of the family belongs to the South German branch. The North German cousins all have very good reasons for entering either the army or the civil service. Their estates would, to be sure, be sufficient for the support of a country nobleman who, with his family, could consent to live upon his own soil and occupy himself with agriculture. But for you and Raoul,--the idea is ridiculous. Moreover, I am especially anxious that Raoul should remain at present upon good terms with his grandfather; through him alone can we know aught of the Steinrück establishment."

"You might do that much more easily through the Marquis de Montigny," said Héloïse, still irritated. "He has just been attached to our embassy here, and of course goes to his sister's very frequently."

"Certainly; but you are much mistaken if you imagine that the haughty Montigny would lend himself to such matters. He already treats me with a careless indifference that sometimes makes my blood boil. He would sacrifice his position rather than condescend---- But enough of this! I fancy you now comprehend that Raoul's circumstances could never adapt themselves to your requirements; what those requirements are you proved with sufficient clearness during Nérac's lifetime."

"Was it my fault that he squandered his entire fortune?"

"You certainly helped him honestly in doing so; but we will not discuss that. The fact is that we are without means, and that you are forced to make a brilliant marriage. Your romance with Raoul must be nothing but a romance, and you would be very unwise to induce him to break with his betrothed. As long as the general lives, a marriage between you is an impossibility; after that it would be a folly. Remember this, and be reasonable."

"What is it?" asked the young widow, turning impatiently towards the servant, who brought her a card. "We are just going out, and can receive no visitors."

"A gentleman from the embassy wishes to speak with Herr von Clermont for a few minutes only," the servant said, by way of excuse.

"Ah, that is another affair," Henri said quickly, taking the card; but after a surprised glance at it he handed it to his sister, who, evidently startled in her turn, said,--

"Montigny? Calling upon you? You said just now----"

"Yes, I do not understand it; there must be some special cause for his visit. Leave us for a few minutes, Héloïse; I must receive him."

The lady withdrew, and Clermont desired the servant to admit the visitor, who straightway entered the room.

The Marquis de Montigny was a man about fifty years old, of very distinguished appearance, whose bearing, at all times rather haughty, was at present characterized by a certain cold formality. In spite of it, Henri received him with the greatest cordiality. "Ah, Herr Marquis, I am charmed to have the pleasure of receiving you. Let me beg you,"--he invited his guest by a gesture to be seated, but Montigny remained standing, and coldly rejoined,--

"You are probably surprised to see me here, Herr von Clermont."

"Not at all; our relations socially and nationally----"

"Are of a very superficial nature," the Marquis interrupted him. "It is an entirely personal

matter that brings me here. I did not wish to discuss it at the embassy."

His tone was certainly slighting. Clermont compressed his lips and darted a menacing glance at the man who ventured to treat him thus cavalierly beneath his own roof, but he said nothing and awaited further explanations.

"I met my nephew a moment ago," Montigny began again; "he was probably coming from you."

"Certainly; he has just left here."

"And he, Count Steinrück, frequents your house daily, I hear."

"He does; we are intimate friends."

"Indeed?" was the cold rejoinder. "Well, Raoul is young and inexperienced; but I would call your attention to the fact that this friendship is quite worthless for you. No state secrets are confided to so young and insignificant a member of the department. They are very cautious here in such respects."

"Herr Marquis!" Clermont burst forth, angrily.

"Herr von Clermont?"

"I have frequently had occasion to object to the tone which you see fit to adopt towards me. I must beg you to alter it."

Montigny shrugged his shoulders. "I was not aware that I had neglected to treat you with due courtesy in society. Now that we are alone, you must permit me to be frank. I learned but lately of Count Steinrück's intimacy in your household, and I do not know how great may be Frau von Nérac's share in this intimacy. Be that as it may, however, you will understand me when I beg, or rather require, that the Countess be left entirely out of the question in the schemes which you are both pursuing. Select another individual,—one who is not the son of the Countess Hortense and the nephew of the Marquis de Montigny."

Clermont had grown very pale; he clinched his hands and his voice was hoarse as he rejoined, "You appear to forget that we are equals in rank. My name is as ancient and as noble as your own, and I demand respect for it."

Montigny measured him from head to foot with a haughty glance as he replied, "I respect your name, Herr von Clermont, but not your calling."

Henri made a movement as if to throw himself upon the insulter. "This is too much! I demand satisfaction!"

"No," said Montigny, as haughtily as before.

"I shall force you to grant it---"

"I advise you not to try to do that," the Marquis interposed. "You would only force me to proclaim why I refuse you what you ask. It would make you impossible in society, and impose upon me a responsibility which I should assume only in a case of extreme necessity. I repeat my demand. If it is not complied with, I must open the eyes of my sister and of her son. I think you will scarcely drive me to do so."

He inclined his head so haughtily and contemptuously that the salutation was almost an insult, then turned and left the room. Clermont looked after him, trembling with rage, as he muttered under his breath, "You shall pay me for this!"

The house of Colonel von Reval was a kind of centre for the social life of the capital, and was much frequented not only by people of rank and fashion, but also by members of the aristocracy of intellect. The colonel and his wife prided themselves upon numbering among their intimate friends the most distinguished lights of Art and Science, and their ample means enabled them to exercise a generous hospitality.

To-night, at the close of the winter season, all their friends and acquaintances were assembled beneath their roof at a final entertainment. It was far more brilliant in these spacious princely apartments than was possible in the comparative simplicity of their country-seat Elmsdorf, and the guests were far more numerous. They moved through rooms and halls bright with lights and flowers; there was gay talk and laughter, and the cheerful, lively mood that seemed to breathe in the very atmosphere of the Reval household reigned everywhere. Among the throng of commonplace and insignificant individuals, sure to be present at any great entertainment, there was an unusually large proportion of beautiful women and distinguished men. In fact, every one worth seeing and knowing in the capital seemed to be present here to-night.

General Steinrück, the life-long friend of the Reval family, was present with his family, and the brother of the Countess Hortense, the Marquis de Montigny, was of their party.

Even Professor Wehlau, who was not fond of large entertainments, and who eschewed them for the most part, had made an exception to his rule in favour of this evening, and had arrived with his two sons. Hans had not yet made his appearance: he was helping to arrange the *tableaux vivants*, which made part of the evening's entertainment, having undertaken their management, while Michael, having declined to take any part in them, was already among the guests.

"A word with you, my dear Rodenberg," the colonel said in an undertone, drawing the captain aside for a moment. "Have you done anything to displease the general?"

"No, Herr Colonel," replied Michael, quietly.

"No? It occurred to me that he passed you by without a word and with rather a cold acknowledgment of your undeniably formal salute. There is really nothing the matter, then?"

"Nothing whatever. I have talked with the general but once, when I reported to him, and have only seen him now and again when on duty. Why should he pay me any special attention?"

"Because he knows you and what you have done. He spoke very highly of it to me before he made your personal acquaintance, and, besides, I know that my opinion has weight with him. Nevertheless, he has taken scarcely any notice of you during the entire winter; you have never received the invitation usually extended by him to his subalterns, and when I speak of you he always tries to change the subject. It is inexplicable."

"The explanation is probably to be found in the fact that I have not the good fortune to please his Excellency," Michael said, with a shrug.

But the colonel shook his head: "The general is not whimsical; this would be the first time that he ever treated unjustly an officer of whose excellence he was convinced. You must have neglected some duty."

Rodenberg was silent, preferring to suffer under this implication rather than to prolong so annoying a discussion. Fortunately, the colonel was called elsewhere and released him.

Meanwhile, Professor Wehlau paid his respects to the Countess Steinrück, whom he had not seen for several years, and who received him very cordially. She never forgot that he had once left important and pressing affairs of his own to hasten to her husband's deathbed. To his inquiries concerning her health she replied by complaints of her invalid condition, expressing a desire to avail herself of his advice, although aware that he had for many years ceased to practise medicine. The Professor courteously declared himself always ready to make an exception in her case, and placed himself entirely at her disposal. Thus the best of understandings was established between them, when the Countess unfortunately touched upon a dangerous subject. "I have an appointment at your son's for tomorrow. He tells me that his large picture is almost entirely finished and is to be placed on exhibition next week. I am very anxious for a private view of it beforehand, since it is already mine, as you are probably aware."

"Yes," replied the Professor, laconically, his good humour all gone. Hans had triumphantly announced to him that his picture had been bought from the easel, and by the Countess Steinrück, who now innocently asked,--

"And what do you say to this work of our young artist?"

"Nothing at all; I have never even seen it," was the curt reply.

"What! His studio is in your garden."

"Unfortunately. But I have never set foot inside it, and mean never to do so."

"Still so implacable?" said the Countess, reproachfully. "I grant that the game that your son played with you was rather audacious and very provoking, but you must be convinced by this time that so talented and highly gifted a nature is not fitted for cold, grave, scientific pursuits."

"There you are right, madame," the Professor interrupted her, somewhat harshly. "The lad is fit for nothing serious or sensible, and may be a painter for all that I care."

"Do you estimate Art so meanly? I should have thought it of equal rank with Science."

Wehlau shrugged his shoulders with all the arrogance of the scholar who holds no calling equal in rank to his own, and by whom Art is regarded, more or less, as a plaything. "Yes, yes, pictures look very pretty in a drawing-room, I do not deny, and you have a whole gallery of them at Berkheim. This latest acquisition of yours will find a place among them."

The Countess stared at him in surprise. "You do not seem to know the subject of the picture; it is destined for the church at Saint Michael."

"For the church?" asked Wehlau, surprised in his turn.

"Certainly, since it is a sacred picture."

The Professor started to his feet. "What! *My* son paint a sacred picture!"

"Assuredly. Did he never tell you of it?"

"He took good care not to do that. Nor did Michael even mention it to me, although he doubtless knew all about it."

"He certainly did, for Captain Rodenberg stood to him for a model."

"Ah! He must have made a charming saint!" the Professor laughed, bitterly. "Michael is well suited to the part. Have the fellows gone crazy? Excuse me, madame,--I am conscious of my discourtesy,--but it is beyond belief,--that is, I must find out about it."

He bowed hastily, and rushed off so quickly that he very nearly ran against a young girl who was standing hidden in a window-recess, behind the Countess, and who looked after him half terrified.

"Gerlinda, are you there?" asked the Countess, turning towards her. "My child, what is to be done if, whenever you go into society, you hide yourself behind the window-curtains! If you had only been beside me you would have been presented to one of the celebrities of the capital."

The young girl advanced, and asked, timidly, "That angry old man who does not like sacred pictures----?"

"Is one of the first scientists of the age, a magnate in science, in whom all eccentricity must be forgiven. He is, it is true, of a rather choleric temperament."

Gerlinda still gazed after the Professor with some anxiety. No name had been mentioned in the conversation which she had overheard, and she asked no further question, for the beginning of the tableaux was announced, and all the guests betook themselves to the drawing-room, where the stage was set up.

Hans Wehlau, on this evening, covered himself with glory. The pictures which he arranged, not after famous examples, but after his own ideas, in illustration of familiar legends and poems, did honour to his artistic capacity. Each was a creation in itself, and every time the curtain was raised there was a fresh surprise.

The laurels of the evening, however, were borne off by the Countess Hertha Steinrück, enthroned upon a rock, in the richest of robes, as the Loreley. Hans knew very well why he chose to have this picture last in the series, placing the young Countess alone in the frame, with no companion-figure. A long-drawn 'Ah!' of admiration pervaded the assembly at sight of a loveliness that threw all else that had been seen into the shade. She was, indeed, the breathing embodiment of the legend with its intoxicating witchery.

Even Professor Wehlau forgot his vexation for a few minutes, although he had been nursing it all through the entertainment, and was all admiration. But when the curtain had fallen for the last time, and the youthful manager with his assistants appeared in the drawing-room, Wehlau's indignation began to boil afresh, and he tried to speak with his son. This was no easy matter, however, for Hans was in great requisition, the hero of the hour, flattered and caressed; he shared with the Countess Hertha the triumph of the evening. Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before the Professor succeeded in capturing him. "I wish to speak with you," he said, with an ominous countenance, drawing the young man aside into the window-recess where Fräulein von Eberstein had been standing.

"With pleasure, papa," said Hans, who was positively beaming with delight.

This only increased the Professor's vexation, and he came to the point at once. "Is what I heard just now from the Countess Steinrück true? Is the picture you have painted a sacred picture?"

"It is, papa."

"Indeed! Have you both lost your senses? Michael as a saint! It must be a perfect caricature."

"On the contrary, he makes an extremely striking archangel. The picture you see represents Saint Michael----"

"It may represent the devil, for all I care!" Wehlau angrily interrupted him.

"Oh, he's there, too, and as large as life. But how can the subject of my picture affect you?"

"How can it affect me?" the Professor burst out, having much ado to preserve the low tone of voice required by the situation. "You know my attitude with regard to the ecclesiastical party. You know that because of it I am excommunicated by the priests, and here you are painting pictures of saints for their churches. I will not permit it! I will not have it! I forbid it!"

"Impossible, papa," said Hans, composedly. "The picture belongs to the Countess, and is, moreover, promised to the church at Saint Michael."

"Where, of course, it will be installed with all due ecclesiastical pomp."

"To be sure, papa,--on the feast of Saint Michael."

"Hans, you will be the death of me with your 'To be sure, papa.' At the feast of Saint Michael, when all the mountain population is assembled,--oh, this grows better and better! The clerical newspapers will of course get hold of the affair; they will devote columns to the procession, the mass, the worshippers, and among it all will appear everywhere the name of Hans Wehlau,--*my* name."

"*My* name, if you please," the young artist interposed with emphasis.

"I wish to heaven I had had you christened Pancratius or Blasius, that the world might have known the difference!" exclaimed the Professor, in desperation.

"Papa, why are you so furious?" asked Hans, complacently. "In fact, you ought to be grateful to me if I should devote myself to the task of reconciling you and your opponents; and, moreover, the picture is not a sacred picture in the ordinary sense of the term. It is the conflict of light with darkness. I intended, of course, to portray in the figure of the archangel, Science, and in that of Satan, Superstition. It is after your own heart, papa,--a glorification of your teaching. I should like to hang the picture in the University, in your lecture-room, it is painted so exactly to please you. I hope you will be grateful to me and----"

"Boy, you will send me to my grave!" gasped the Professor, taken aback afresh by this extraordinary peroration.

"God forbid! We shall live together long and happily. But now excuse me. I must not stay here any longer."

With which the young man, quite unconcernedly, mingled again with the guests, and began to search for Michael.

In a small room adjoining the large drawing-room Fräulein von Eberstein was sitting quite lonely and deserted. When the curtain fell and the spectators began to circulate through the various rooms again, the Countess Steinrück had been in great requisition. All were anxious to compliment her upon her lovely daughter, and thus Gerlinda lost sight of her chaperon. Timid, and a total stranger among the crowd, she had taken refuge in this deserted room, here to wait patiently until some one should remember her and seek her out.

The young girl had been for a week in the city. The Freiherr had at last yielded to the Countess's wish, and to her repeated representation that Gerlinda ought to see something of the world and have a chance at least of marrying in her own station. This last consideration had prevailed over the father's obstinacy his state of health was such as to remind him constantly of the uncertainty of his life, and he well knew that if he should die Berkheim would be his daughter's sole refuge. She would be left quite alone, and, although the Countess had declared most kindly that after her daughter's marriage she should look to Gerlinda to replace her, old Eberstein's pride revolted at the idea of accepting what was in fact a shelter for his child, delicately as it might be proffered.

For this reason he would have been very glad to see his daughter well and suitably married. For him the word suitably signified a son-in-law with a long and stainless pedigree, and the aristocratic principles of the Steinrücks set his mind at ease on that score. Therefore he made Gerlinda repeat once more to him the entire genealogical chronicle of the Ebersteins, admonished her never to forget that she was sprung from the tenth century, and let her set off with the maid, sent by the Countess, for the capital, where she was to spend some weeks with the Steinrücks, and then accompany them to Berkheim.

The little châtelaine had of course no suspicion of any schemes devised for her future, and had taken but a half-hearted interest in her visit. The brilliant turmoil of society, of which she had a glimpse during her stay at Steinrück, and into which she was now plunged, distressed rather than amused her. Thus she felt glad to be alone for a few minutes on this evening, and sat quite contentedly, but timid as a frightened bird, on a corner divan in the empty room.

Suddenly the *portière* at the entrance was pulled aside, and a young man, casting a hasty glance around the room as if in search of some one, stood as if rooted to the spot upon perceiving its solitary occupant.

"Fräulein von Eberstein!"

Gerlinda started at the sound of that voice; she instantly recognized its possessor. "Herr von Wehlau Wehlenberg."

Hans was already at her side. He had had no suspicion of her presence here, or, indeed, in the city; his duties as manager had kept him behind the scenes, and when he entered the drawing-room Gerlinda had already left it. Their meeting was a surprise to both, and certainly not an unpleasant one, as was evident from the young man's sparkling eyes and the little châtelaine's blushing cheeks.

"I fancied you far away in your mountain home," said Hans, taking a seat beside her. "How is your father?"

"Poor papa has been very far from well this winter," replied Gerlinda; "but as spring approached he grew better, so that I could leave him without anxiety."

"And Muckerl? How is Muckerl?"

The account of Muckerl's health was very satisfactory: she was as gay and hearty as she had been in the autumn; and as her young mistress talked of her she half forgot her timidity; she was so glad to tell of her home, and Hans did not interrupt her, but kept his eyes attentively fixed upon her face.

He had just seen the Countess Hertha in all the pride of triumphant beauty, and his artist eye had revelled in the sight. Here he saw only a delicate, child-like creature, who could not possibly be compared with that other, and whose soft brown eyes gazed up into his own half shyly, half confidently. Nevertheless, little Dornröschen looked to him unutterably lovely to-night in her ball-dress of some airy, pale pink material, relieved by bunches of wild roses and floating cloud-like about the graceful figure. There was in her air and carriage something of the dewy freshness of a rose-bud just opening to the light.

"And how are you pleased here?" Hans asked, when the young girl paused. "Is there not something intoxicating, bewildering, in the life of a great city for one who mingles in it for the first time?"

Gerlinda shook her head and looked down. "I do not like it," she declared. "I would rather be at home with papa and my Muckerl. I feel so lonely and forsaken among all these strange people; they do not understand me, and I do not understand them."

"Oh, you will soon learn to understand them," Hans said, consolingly.

But she still shook her head; the poor child had a vague idea of what was ridiculous about her, and she went on in a pathetic little voice: "They seem to care so little here about their pedigrees! No one knows that we date from the tenth century, and that our family is the very oldest. If I begin to tell of it, Hertha says, 'Gerlinda, stop; you are making yourself ridiculous,' and my godmother says, 'My child, that is out of place here,' and Count Raoul smiles so disagreeably. I know now that he laughs at me. Herr von Wehlau Wehlenberg, you do not think it ridiculous, do you? Your aristocratic self-consciousness is so admirably developed, my papa says."

The knight of the Forschungstein felt extremely uncomfortable at this appeal to his aristocratic self-consciousness. It suddenly occurred to him that his sin had found him out, for as soon as Gerlinda returned to the drawing-room and heard his name, all would be explained. There was only one thing to be done,—make confession himself upon the spot.

"We searched through all the books of heraldry, and at last we found your family," the young girl continued, with an air of importance; and then, falling into what might be called her heraldic style, she began to repeat what had been found in the books: "The lords of Wehlenberg, an ancient imperial race, settled in the Margraviate since sixteen hundred and forty-three, owning estates of value in the various provinces, the head of the family being Baron Friedrich von Wehlenberg of Bernewitz----" Here she broke off to say, with some regret, "We could not find the Forschungstein."

"No, you could not find it, for there is no such place," said Hans, whose resolution was formed. "You and your father have fallen into an error for which I am accountable. I told you, however, at our first interview that I was an artist."

Gerlinda nodded gravely. "I told my papa; he thought it very unbecoming in a man of an ancient noble line."

"But I am not of an ancient noble line, nor even of a modern one."

Gerlinda looked terrified, and recoiled from him. The young man perceived it, and there was a trace of bitterness in his voice as he went on: "I have a confession to make to you, Fräulein von Eberstein, and forgiveness to ask for a deception which sprang from necessity. I reached the Ebersburg that evening wet through, and having lost my way; there was no other shelter to be found far and wide, night was falling fast, and the Baron refused me admittance because, as he would have expressed it, I was not 'of rank.' I had no choice save to be thrust out into the storm or to thrust myself into the ranks of the aristocracy, and I preferred the latter course. But I owe it to you to tell the truth. My name is simply Hans Wehlau, without any mediæval adjunct; I am a painter by profession; my father is a professor in the university here, and we are both bourgeois from head to foot."

The effect of these words was annihilating; the little châtelaine sat stark and stiff as if paralyzed with horror, staring at this bourgeois Hans Wehlau who told her so fearful a tale. At last she recovered her voice, folded her hands, and said, with a profound sigh, "This is horrible!"

Hans rose and made her a formal bow. "I confess myself very guilty, but I did not think that

the truth would so startle you. I have, it seems, lost all worth in your estimation, and shall please you best by leaving you. Farewell, Fräulein von Eberstein."

He turned to go, but Gerlinda started and put out her hand as if to detain him. "Herr Wehlau."

He paused. "Fräulein von Eberstein?"

"Are you not very slightly related to the Freiherr Friedrich Wehlenberg of Bernewitz? A very distant relative, I mean."

"Not the most distant connection. I invented in a hurry a name that sounded like my own, and I never dreamed that it belonged to any one in reality."

"Then papa never will forgive you," Gerlinda declared in a tone of despair. "You can never come again to the Ebersburg."

"Do you, then, still wish me to come?" asked Hans.

She was silent, but her eyes filled with tears, and this disarmed the young man's irritation. It was not the poor child's fault that she had been brought up so ridiculously. He slowly approached her again, and said, gently, "Are you very angry with me for my foolish jest? I meant no harm."

Gerlinda did not reply, but she allowed him to take her hand, and she listened as he went on in the same tone: "Herr von Eberstein is greatly attached, I know, to his family traditions, and no one could require him, at his age, to resign what has been life to him for so long; he belongs, body and soul, to the past. But you, Fräulein von Eberstein, are just entering upon life, and in the nineteenth century we must adapt ourselves to the spirit of the age and see things as they are. Do you remember what I said to you on the castle terrace?"

"Yes," was the scarcely audible reply.

Hans leaned towards her, and his voice had the same cordial, sincere tone as on that sunny morning. "Around you, too, prejudices and traditions have grown like a thorny hedge, tall and dense. Would you dream away existence behind it? Perhaps a time will come when you will have to make a choice between a dead past and a bright sunlit future: should that time ever come, choose well!"

He carried the trembling little hand, still lying in his own, to his lips, and several moments passed before he released it; then he bowed and left the room.

The Countess Steinrück was conversing with Herr von Montigny when Gerlinda at last rejoined her. The Marquis expressed his pleasure in his nephew's betrothal with apparent sincerity. He was enthusiastic also in his admiration of Hertha, who had evidently fascinated him, as she had every one else upon this evening, and he understood well how to clothe his admiration in flattering phrases. When at last he took his leave to join his sister, the Countess turned to the young girl: "Where have you been for so long, my child? I lost sight of you. I suppose you have been sitting alone in some corner. Will you never learn to be like other young girls in society?"

She looked compassionately at her *protégée*, who was wont to receive such reproaches in timid silence, but who now, to the Countess's amazement, replied, with an air of great wisdom,--

"Yes, dear godmother, I will try to learn, for in the nineteenth century we must adapt ourselves to the spirit of the age and see things as they are."

Meanwhile, the Marquis de Montigny had found his sister sitting in an adjoining room engaged in lively talk with Frau von Nérac, in which Henri de Clermont took quite as lively a part. Both ladies seemed much entertained, and were laughing at his sallies, when Montigny approached the group.

"Ah, here you are, Leon!" the Countess called out to him. "No need to present our compatriots to you,--you have seen them at the embassy."

The glances of the two men encountered each other. Clermont's eyes gleamed for an instant with a look of hatred, but he bowed courteously; Montigny returned his greeting coolly as he said, "Oh, yes, we know one another."

He turned then to Frau von Nérac, to whom also he paid his respects courteously; but there must have been something in his manner offensive to the young widow, for her eyes flashed, although an amiable smile played about her lips.

"Of course we know one another," she repeated. "We had the pleasure of a visit from the Marquis the day before yesterday."

"And you never mentioned it to me when I spoke of Frau von Nérac yesterday," said Hortense, in some surprise.

"I was not fortunate enough to see Madame de Nérac," Montigny replied, with a degree of coldness which struck even his sister. "My visit was paid to her brother, with whom I wished to

arrange a matter of some importance. You have not forgotten my request, Herr von Clermont?"

Henri's hand trembled slightly as he leaned upon the cushion of the lounge where he was sitting, but he replied, calmly, "No, Herr Marquis; such things are not easily forgotten."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I may rely upon it, then, that the matter will be adjusted as we decided. Take my arm, Hortense; supper is served."

He offered his arm to his sister, inclined his head to Frau von Nérac, and led the Countess away. As they left the room Henri leaned towards the young widow, and said in a whisper, which did not, however, conceal his agitation, "What do you mean, Héloïse? You know why Montigny paid that visit, you heard the whole conversation from the antechamber, and yet you ventured to allude to his coming!"

Héloïse's lip curled contemptuously, but she replied, also in a whisper, "You seem very much afraid of this Montigny."

"And you are rash enough to irritate him. You surely understood what he said as well as I did, and you know that he threatened----"

"That which he never will carry out."

Henri glanced around the room: it was quite empty; every one had gone to supper. Nevertheless, he still spoke in a whisper as he said, "Do you forget that we are in his power? He has but to speak the word----"

"He dare not speak it; it would cost him too dear. He who ruins us ruins himself also, and brings to light what there is every reason for concealing. You are a fool, Henri, to be frightened by such threats. Montigny must be silent; he risks his own position if he assault ours. He never would be forgiven for speaking out."

"No matter for that, he can do us an injury at the embassy; he can deprive us of our standing there, and it is uncertain enough already. We must yield, at least in appearance, and forego Raoul's visits for the present."

"Do you suppose that he will forego them?" asked Héloïse.

"That is for you to decide. You have only to say what will send him away, for a time at least, and this you must do."

"At the bidding of Herr von Montigny? Never!"

"Héloïse, be reasonable,--you must make a sacrifice of your personal feeling. I am sure I set you the example."

"Indeed you do! I never would have submitted to what you endured at Montigny's hands."

"Do you think I shall forget it?" asked Clermont, with an evil look. "I bide my time. The day of reckoning will come. But let us go in to supper; it will excite remark if we isolate ourselves thus. One thing more: young Wehlau is to present to you his adopted brother, Captain Rodenberg."

"Indeed," said Héloïse, with indifference, rising and taking her brother's arm, as he added, significantly,--

"One of the general's staff."

"Ah, indeed!"

"See that you persuade him to come with Wehlau, when the latter calls upon us. I rely upon you, Héloïse."

The pair sauntered arm in arm towards the supper-room, where all the guests were assembled.

Hans Wehlau, prudently avoiding another encounter with his father, had joined Michael, and was listening, with apparent interest, to what the latter had to say.

"You have seen her and talked with her then?" asked Hans.

"Seen her?--yes; talked with her?--no. The Countess presented me to Fräulein von Eberstein, but I received no reply to my remarks, save an extraordinary courtesy. She is almost a child,--far too young to be introduced into society."

"A girl of sixteen is no longer a child," said Hans, irritably. "And how did you like her altogether?"

"She has a lovely little face. To be sure, I have not seen her eyes,--she held them obstinately downcast,--and I really have not heard her speak at all. The little châtelaine, as you call her,

seems to possess rather a limited capacity."

The young artist bestowed upon his friend a glance of sovereign contempt. "Michael, I always doubted your taste, and now I doubt your judgment. 'Limited capacity!' Let me tell you, Gerlinda von Eberstein is cleverer than all the rest put together."

"That is a bold assertion," said Michael. "You seem very much provoked by any unfavourable word with regard to the young lady. Have you lost your heart again? How many times does this make?"

"Nothing of the sort this time; my interest in this lovely, childlike creature is entirely disinterested."

"Indeed?"

"Michael, I will not have you speak in that tone," declared Hans, with irritation. "But I am quite forgetting that Clermont asked me to present you to Frau von Nérac."

"Clermont? Ah, yes, the young Frenchman at whose house you have been visiting so often this winter. You asked me once to go there with you, I remember."

"And you refused, as usual."

"Because I have neither the time nor the inclination to extend my circle of acquaintances, at least not this year. It is very different with you; you are an artist. Have you known this Clermont long?"

"No, only this last winter, and he very politely invited me to his house. He and his sister have several times asked me to induce you to accompany me."

Rodenberg looked surprised. "Me? That is strange; they do not know me at all."

"No matter for that; they asked it out of politeness. Moreover, you will find the young widow very interesting, perhaps even dangerous."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, of course not for you. Your icy nature never melts, even in presence of the lovely Countess Steinrück, and Héloïse von Nérac cannot be called beautiful; nevertheless she might prove the fair Hertha's successful rival in a certain quarter. I once hinted to you that Count Raoul was hardly loyal to his betrothed; he frequents Clermont's house daily."

"And you think that Frau von Nérac is the attraction?" asked Michael, becoming attentive.

"Apparently. The Count certainly is more devoted to her than is consistent with his duty as a betrothed man. How far the affair has gone of course I cannot--- Hush, there he is!"

In fact, Raoul was just passing where they stood, and, although he had but a slight acquaintance with Hans Wehlau, he stopped and addressed him cordially. And whilst he talked with the young artist, complimenting him upon the very successful entertainment of the evening, he so persistently ignored Captain Rodenberg, who stood close by, that his intention was evident. Michael took no part in the conversation, but when the Count turned away, he looked after him in a way which caused Hans hastily and as if in sudden alarm to lay his hand upon his arm, saying, "You will not attach any importance to his rudeness? There is a feud between you and Steinrück--"

"Which found expression just now after a very childish fashion," Michael completed the sentence. "Count Raoul must be taught that I do not allow myself to be so treated."

"What do you intend to do?" said Hans, uneasily; but there was no time for a reply, for they had encountered Clermont and his sister, to whom he presented his friend.

The brother and sister received the captain with great courtesy, and Henri left him to talk with Frau von Nérac, while he entered into conversation with Hans with regard to a picture upon an opposite wall, pronouncing an opinion with which the young artist disagreed. A lively discussion between the two ensued, in the course of which they walked across the room to examine the picture more closely, leaving Frau von Nérac to bestow her entire attention upon Rodenberg.

Their conversation turned at first upon the assembled guests, and the young widow, looking towards Hertha, who was the centre of an admiring group, said, "Countess Steinrück is indeed a brilliant beauty! The entire assemblage is at her feet, and she receives its homage with the air of a princess to whom such tribute is due. She will surely rule her future husband supremely."

"The question is whether the husband will submit to her sway," observed Rodenberg.

"A husband always submits to the sway of a beautiful and beloved wife. You, indeed, seem unaccustomed to submit."

"Only because I am quieter and graver than most men; even where a beautiful woman is concerned, I do not easily lose my head. I am ignorant of Count Steinrück's views in this respect. You know him intimately, madame?"

"He is a friend of my brother's, and I naturally see him often."

The answer sounded as innocent as did the question, but there was something like dawning mistrust in the look which encountered Michael's cool observant gaze. It lasted but for an instant, and then Héloïse began with a smile to talk of something else.

She talked well and fluently, and Michael, although he spoke French with ease if not with elegance, contented himself with listening. All manner of subjects were touched upon, politics, the news of the day, art, and society. Frau von Nérac was evidently a mistress of the art of conversation.

Rodenberg had perceived at the first glance that she was not beautiful, but at the end of five minutes he comprehended that she did not need beauty to be dangerous; there was something intoxicating in her mere proximity. She leaned back in her chair with a grace all her own as she toyed with her fan, presenting a picture to which the most tasteful of toilets added a charm. Her smile was bewitching, and the gleam in her dark eyes was wont to work like a spell. Unfortunately, Captain Rodenberg seemed quite insensible to this charm; as often as the brilliant eyes met his they encountered the same cold, scrutinizing glance, and Héloïse knew well that it expressed no admiration.

At last Clermont and Hans finished their discussion and approached the others. For a few moments the conversation was general, and then the two young men took their leave, and Henri again seated himself beside his sister.

"Well, what about Rodenberg?" he asked. "So far as I could hear, he was extremely monosyllabic. You did almost all the talking. I suppose he is a clumsy, pedantic German."

Héloïse gave a scarcely perceptible shrug. "Give that man up, Henri, once for all; he is as stolid and inaccessible as a rock."

"No one is absolutely inaccessible; all must be besieged on the right side, and it is just these stolid natures that are most easily captured."

"You are mistaken here. There is something in the air and expression of this Rodenberg that reminds me constantly of General Steinrück. He has the iron, inexorable look--that cold, keen gaze--of the old Count. I cannot endure him!"

"He is of great importance to me," said Henri. "Did you ask him to the house?"

"No; he would not come if I were to do so; and if by any chance he did come, it would be to observe, to watch, as he has just done all the while I have been talking. I have no fancy for encountering those eyes again. Be on your guard with him, Henri!"

Clermont did not seem to attach much importance to this warning, for he saw that Héloïse was out of sorts, and he knew why she was so. She could not endure to be cast into the shade by another, and on this evening all lesser lights paled before the day-star of Hertha's beauty. The young Countess Steinrück was enjoying a triumph that might well satisfy the most extravagant vanity. Wherever she turned she encountered looks of admiration; all thronged about her to offer her a homage which she received graciously but haughtily.

Raoul scarcely left her side. He seemed to-night to be fully conscious of the value of the prize which had fallen to his share so easily, and the old love for his cousin, dating from his boyhood, flamed up afresh. It was one of those crises when one loving glance from Hertha's eyes, one cordial word from her lips, might perhaps have delivered him from those other fetters, and have won him back to his betrothed,--bridging over the gulf which each day yawned more widely between them. But there was a cold reserve, imperceptible to strangers, in her demeanour towards him which cut him to the soul, chilling all warmth of feeling and awakening his antagonism.

For the moment the young Countess was not in the reception-rooms, but in Frau von Reval's dressing-room. Like all who had taken part in the tableaux, she had retained her costume; the veil that floated over her shoulders had become disarranged; Frau von Reval's maid was fastening it afresh. It was soon adjusted, and the maid dismissed; but Hertha, instead of returning to the reception-rooms, sat motionless in an arm-chair, gazing dreamily into space.

Frau von Reval's dressing-room was one of a suite of rooms quite removed from those used for entertaining, and upon this evening the entire range of apartments upon this side of the house was deserted, and but dimly lighted,--a quiet, agreeable refuge for any one wishing to withdraw for a few minutes from the heat and turmoil of the drawing-rooms. The young Countess seemed, indeed, weary, worn out with conquest and homage.

Yes, the evening had been one long triumph for her. All had bowed before the victorious power of her beauty,--all save one. One alone had dared to defy her; he only had retained

sufficient strength of will in the tempest of passion to break the meshes of the net thrown around him, and go on his way free from all bondage. Had he not greeted her to-night as coldly and formally, complimented her with as conventional a courtesy, as if that hour at Saint Michael were forgotten, obliterated from his memory?

All the more vividly did it live in Hertha's remembrance. Her anger stirred afresh as she thought how this man had dared to tell her to her face that he knew her to be a coquette, that he would root out from his heart, like some vile weed, his love for her. But, in the midst of her indignation, a voice within her whispered that he was right. Yes, she had played a reckless game with him. It was the result of the waywardness of a nature spoiled by fortune, trained by a weak mother to disregard all save its own desires, and learning all too early to despise the homage of the other sex, or to use it as a plaything. But then, formerly, she had still been free! The proud, self-willed girl had not yet felt as a fetter the disposal of her hand; she could still have said 'no' when asked to decide. Instead of this she had given her consent to Raoul freely, without compulsion,--as, indeed, without love. But was love a reality? Had she not seen how an intense passion, which seemed to fill a man's entire soul, could die away and perish in a few months?

The opening of a door in an adjoining room and approaching footsteps roused Hertha from her reverie, and admonished her that it was time to return to the assemblage. She was about to rise, when a voice which she recognized held her motionless.

"Here we are alone. I shall detain you for but a few moments, Count Steinrück."

"You wished to speak with me alone, Captain Rodenberg; I am at your service," was the reply in Raoul's voice.

Hertha could neither see the new-comers nor be seen by them, but she listened, startled; what she heard sounded harsh, hostile.

In fact, the two young men in the next room confronted each other with a hostility which neither now took pains to conceal, but Raoul was irritated and excited, while Michael was calm and cool; this, of course, gave him an advantage from the beginning.

"I have only one question to ask," the latter began. "Was it by accident, or by intention, that just now, when you spoke to my friend, you so entirely overlooked me?"

"Do you attach such value to my notice of you?" There was an offensive smile upon the young Count's face, and the tone in which the question was put was still more offensive.

"I attach not the slightest value to your regard. I am not at all covetous of the honour of your acquaintance. But since we do know each other, I exact from you the observance of the forms of good society, with which you scarcely seem familiar."

"Captain Rodenberg!" Raoul burst forth in a tone of menace.

"Count Steinrück?" was the cold rejoinder.

"You seem to wish to force me to admit relations between us which I do not acknowledge. You will achieve nothing in this way."

Michael shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "I think I have made sufficiently manifest the value I attach to relations with the family of Count Steinrück. Ask the general, he can satisfy you on that score. But I do not mean any longer to permit on your part conduct intended from the first to be insulting. Will you alter this conduct in future? Yes, or no?"

The question sounded so imperious that Raoul stared at the speaker, half indignant, half amazed. "It must be admitted, Captain Rodenberg, that for arrogance you are unrivalled."

"Certain individuals can be reached only with their own weapons. May I beg for an answer?"

"I am not accustomed to answer questions put in such a tone," the young Count said, haughtily,--"least of all from the son of an adventurer, and of a mother who----"

He paused, for Michael stepped up to him, pale as death, but with flashing eyes. "Silence, Count Steinrück! One slighting word of my mother,--one only, and I shall forget myself and fell you to the ground!"

"With your fists?" asked Raoul, contemptuously. "I am used to fight with the weapons of gentlemen."

His words produced their effect,--Rodenberg controlled himself. "And yet you are so ungentlemanly as to goad on your adversary with insults which no man could endure calmly," he said, bitterly. "I have not provoked this quarrel, but I see that any continuation of this conversation would be useless. You shall hear from me to-morrow."

"I shall look to do so," replied Raoul, and, with a brief salutation, he left the room.

Michael remained for a time; he did not wish to rejoin the company with the Count. He paced

the room several times with folded arms, and then threw himself into an arm-chair.

Meanwhile, Hertha's first surprise had been gradually transformed to anxiety, and at last to terror, upon hearing the issue of the conversation. She now rose, and pale, but resolute, appeared upon the threshold of the next room. "Captain Rodenberg," she said, softly.

He sprang up dismayed, for at the moment of her appearance he had perceived that the door of the adjoining apartment was open, and that every word that had been uttered might have been overheard.

"You here, Countess Steinrück?" he said, hastily. "I thought I saw you just now in the reception-rooms."

"No; I was sitting there,"--she pointed to the next room,--"and I have been the involuntary auditor of a conversation not intended for stranger ears."

Michael bit his lip. Just as he had thought! However, he collected himself and said, as carelessly as possible, "We certainly thought ourselves alone, but the affair is of no consequence. I had a slight difference with Count Steinrück, which we discussed with some heat, but it will doubtless be adjusted."

"Is that 'doubtless' sincere? The close of the conversation seemed to imply the contrary."

Rodenberg avoided her glance, and replied, composedly, "Our conversation had reached a point at which it threatened to become stormy, and therefore we broke it off. We shall discuss the matter more calmly to-morrow."

"Yes,--with arms in your hands,--I know it!"

"You are unnecessarily distressed. There has been no mention of anything of the kind."

"Do you think me so inexperienced as not to understand the significance of your last words?" said Hertha, approaching him. "A challenge was given and accepted."

Michael was silent; he saw that subterfuge was useless. "It was a very unfortunate chance that made you the witness of our interview," he said at last. "It will surely be as painful for the Count as for me that you should have been so, but there is no help for it now, any more than for the affair itself, and I must entreat your silence in the name of each of us. Forget what was not intended for your ears."

"Forget! when I know that to-morrow each will confront the other with deadly intent?" Hertha exclaimed, in extreme agitation.

Rodenberg looked at her in surprise. "Each? For you there is no question of danger save for your betrothed. It is natural that you should tremble for him; my death must be a matter of supreme indifference to the Countess Hertha,--nay, even desirable in this case, for it means life for my adversary."

Hertha did not reply for a moment,--she slowly raised her eyes to his, with a strange expression in them, somewhat like reproach, still more like trembling anxiety. But Michael either could not or would not read those eyes. Was the old game to begin anew? He stood stiffly erect, as if already confronting his adversary.

The young Countess perhaps comprehended his thoughts, for her cheek flushed; she hastily retreated a few steps, and her manner grew more formal.

"Is no adjustment possible, then?" she asked.

"No."

"Not even if I speak to my betrothed, if I beg him----"

"It will avail nothing. The Count could scarcely be persuaded to retract his words, which is what I insist upon. Let me beg you to give up all thought of such a course; these matters are not to be adjusted by a lady."

"But a lady was the cause of the quarrel, although you refuse to allow her to attempt a reconciliation," Hertha said, with indignation. "Do not look at me in such surprise; I know the cause of this quarrel, whatever may be the ostensible pretext for it. You never forget an offence, Captain Rodenberg,--never,--as I know, and this is the way in which you avenge yourself."

Michael's face grew dark. "Do you really hold me capable of so mean a revenge? I do not think I deserve this!"

"And yet you hate Raoul? I know why only too well----"

"You do not know why," he interposed, with emphasis. "You are entirely mistaken. I never sought this quarrel, but I was compelled by the Count's behaviour to call him to an account. The

provocation came from him. I admit that I reciprocate his dislike, but its justification lies in circumstances of which you have no idea, and which have no connection whatever with that hour at Saint Michael!"

It was the first time that he had made any allusion to the hour in question, and as he did so there was no change either in his stern voice or in his formal demeanour; he seemed to grow even more hard and stern. But his eyes dwelt upon the young Countess, who did, indeed, justify all that Hans had said of her,--she looked the heroine of a fairy legend.

Standing beneath the hanging lamp that lighted the room but dimly, her half-mediæval, half-fantastic robe, a costly combination of heavy gold brocade velvet and transparent lace-like material, glistening with gems and embroidery, shimmered and gleamed with a strange lustre. But from her head, crowned with a starry diadem, there waved over her shoulders and below her waist a magnificent veil,--her unbound hair, which, falling on each side of her face, encircled it like a halo.

Michael stood beyond the circle of light and gazed at the wondrous vision. He had seen her thus in the tableau, throned upon a rock,--the enchanting sorceress of the legend. In his ears had rung the sweet, alluring song, and what had terrified him had not been the dangerous rock or the depths beneath the billows, but the prize itself! He would not risk life and safety to embrace, perhaps--a fiend. He had torn himself loose from the spell with all the force of his will. And yet at this moment the old wild longing stirred again. It seemed as if one blissful moment would be well purchased at the price of life, salvation, the future; as if to be dashed against the rocks to his destruction were naught so that he might for a moment clasp his bliss in his arms and call it his.

But, whilst such thoughts made havoc within him, he stood calm and cold, without the quiver of an eyelash. Hertha saw only the frigid bearing, heard only the stern words, and her words were as cold. "Since that hour we have been foes! Do not deny it, Captain Rodenberg,--no need for falsehood between us. Of all that you then told me in your anger, hate alone has survived; I should have remembered this before appealing to you. It is ill depending upon the magnanimity of an angry foe."

Michael endured her reproach without a word in self-defence; he grew pale,--always with him a sign of extreme emotion. "And to whom should I display magnanimity?" he asked at last. "Should I spare the Count, knowing that I have nothing but relentless hostility to expect from him? I am not of the stuff of which martyrs are made! But, once more, you do me injustice, Countess Steinrück, when you accuse me of a mean desire for revenge. Show me how this quarrel may be adjusted consistently with my honour, and it shall be done. But I see no possibility of such an arrangement; and whatever the conclusion of the affair might be, it would leave us enemies were we not so already. Perhaps it is best so."

He looked an instant longer towards the lovely head beneath the lamp-light, then bowed and left the room.

Meanwhile, the festivity was still going on, although some of the guests soon took their leave, and among them the members of the Steinrück family, who were always wont to make their appearance late and to leave early. The ladies had already said farewell to Frau von Reval, when Michael, who was passing through the hall, suddenly heard himself addressed, "Captain Rodenberg, a word with you."

The young officer turned, surprised; it was the first time this evening that General Steinrück had deigned to notice him. "I am at your Excellency's command."

The Count beckoned him to one side. "I wish to speak with you," he said, briefly, "to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, at my house."

Michael started; he scarcely understood. "Is this a military order, your Excellency?"

"Regard it as such. Nothing of any nature whatsoever must interpose to prevent your appearance at the time stated."

Rodenberg bowed silently. The general approached him, and, lowering his voice, went on: "And if by any chance you should be called upon to make a decision, I beg you to postpone it until after our interview. I shall see that the same course is pursued by---the other side."

"My decision is already made," said Michael, quietly, "but I shall obey."

"Good! Until to-morrow, then!"

Steinrück turned away, and the captain saw him join the Countess Hertha, who came hastily to meet him. She had told, then; she had invoked another authority, finding her own interference of no avail, and that other could not lightly be set aside, although the expression of Michael's face as he perceived all this showed no inclination to bow to it.

In the mean time the general had offered his arm to Hertha to conduct her to her mother; she uttered no question, but her eyes were full of anxious inquiry.

"All right, my child," Steinrück said in an undertone. "I have taken the matter in hand, and you need not be afraid. Only remember that this must be kept secret. I rely upon your discretion."

Hertha drew a long breath and forced a smile. "Thanks, Uncle Michael. I trust you implicitly,-- you will avert all misfortune."

It was early the next day. The Countess Hortense was sitting at breakfast, when the Marquis de Montigny entered.

"I am an early visitor, but I was passing the house," he said, greeting his sister affectionately. "Are you alone? I thought all breakfasted together here."

Hortense shrugged her shoulders. "Not at all; my father-in-law rises with the dawn, and has usually been at work for three hours when I get up. There is something frightful in such strong, restless natures, which never feel the need for repose."

"They seem to me rather to be envied, especially at the general's age," remarked Montigny.

"Perhaps so; but he thinks others should emulate him. Our household is regulated like a barracks; everything is done at the word of command, and woe to the servant who is guilty of unpunctuality! It has cost me a positive struggle to preserve my personal liberty. I carried my point at last, but poor Raoul is absolutely forced to submit to this martinet rule."

"I am afraid such a rule is sometimes necessary; Raoul is not easily controlled," said Montigny, dryly. "You, as a woman, are of course ignorant of much which I have learned since my arrival here, and of which the general is also cognizant. It is time that your son were married, Hortense."

"I have no doubt that he sometimes goes rather far in his youthful exuberance," the Countess admitted. "His is a fiery, enthusiastic nature, that rebels against rules and barriers, but marriage will put an end to his follies, and Hertha is beautiful enough to hold him captive always. You admire her, I am sure; she had a brilliant triumph last evening."

"No wonder. By the way, Hortense, the Clermonts were there last night. Are they intimate with Herr von Reval?"

"I think Raoul introduced them there. It is the fashion to frequent the Reval house."

"Indeed? Then Raoul is intimate with young Clermont?"

"He is, and I should like to have him and his sister here, but--here you have a proof of my father-in-law's incredible tyranny--the general absolutely forbids my inviting them. I was once obliged to recall an invitation which I had sent them at Raoul's request. The general is determined to exclude the Clermonts from our circle."

The marquis suddenly grew attentive. "That is strange. What reasons does he assign?"

"Reasons? He never condescends to give me any. He simply commands, and I must obey."

"I think you do well to obey in this instance," the Marquis said, in so significant a tone that his sister looked at him in surprise.

"Why? Have you heard anything against the Clermonts? They do not seem to be very brilliantly circumstanced pecuniarily, but they brought excellent letters of introduction, and they belong to a very ancient French family."

"Certainly; there is no doubt of that."

"Well, then, I do not understand you, Leon."

The Marquis moved his chair a little nearer, and laid his hand upon the Countess's arm: "Hortense, I am forced to open your eyes, for you seem utterly blind in this matter. You are desirous that Raoul should marry Hertha?"

"Desirous? Why, I rest all my hopes upon it. This marriage means wealth and splendour for Raoul, and for me the freedom I have so long desired. How can you ask such a question?"

"Then let me advise you not to encourage your son's intimacy with the Clermonts. I hear he is there every day, and--Frau von Nérac is a widow."

Héloïse smiled incredulously. "Héloïse von Nérac? She is not even pretty."

"But she is very dangerous."

"Not as a rival of Hertha. Such a betrothed could hold any man captive."

"If she chose; but she does not seem to choose. The young Countess treats her betrothed very strangely; she is very reserved, while Frau von Nérac, on the other hand, is very engaging."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Hortense, her anxiety at last aroused. "Raoul's marriage is to take place so shortly; he never would be so insane as to sacrifice his entire future for the sake of this Héloïse."

"He would not be the first whom passion has blinded to self-interest. But I meant only to warn, not to terrify you. I only suspect; it is for you to discover the truth. But be cautious; a false step might ruin everything."

The Countess changed colour; the thing thus hinted at might well terrify her, for it meant the destruction of all her hopes. "You are right; there may be mischief to be feared," she said. "I thank you for your warning."

Montigny rose, quite satisfied with the result of the conversation. The diplomat had achieved his purpose without mentioning what was not to be mentioned. He knew that Hortense's maternal solicitude would prompt her to use all her influence to withdraw Raoul from his intercourse with the Clermonts, and he thought that he had amply provided for Henri de Clermont's acquiescence in such cessation of intercourse. As to whether the suspicion he had expressed were well founded or not the Marquis cared little; what he desired was that his nephew should be delivered from associations the pernicious nature of which was but too well known to him. He once more advised his sister to be cautious, and then he took his leave.

In the mean time another conversation, of a far more stormy character, had been taking place above-stairs in the general's study. Steinrück had confined himself on the previous evening to forbidding his grandson to take any further steps in the quarrel with Michael; but this morning he had sent for him, and was now emptying the vials of his wrath upon the young man's head.

"Are you dead to all reason, to all prudence whatsoever, that you must select Michael Rodenberg with whom to pick a quarrel?" he asked. "If you had been led in a moment of passion to insult him, I could have understood it; but from what I hear from Hertha, your rudeness seems to have been deliberate and intentional."

"It was by the most unfortunate chance that Hertha happened to be in the next room," said Raoul, confronting his grandfather with an air of defiance, "and that she should have taken it into her head to tell you----"

"Was the wisest, the most sensible course she could have adopted," the Count interrupted him. "Another girl would have appealed to you with tears and entreaties, which would have availed nothing, for, as matters stand, you alone cannot put a stop to the affair. Your betrothed applied to me, rightly judging that I was the one to interfere here. This duel must under no circumstances take place."

"It is an affair of honour, in which I shall permit no interference!" exclaimed Raoul, angrily; "and it is, besides, my own personal affair."

"No, it is *not*, or I should let it take its course, for you are no longer a boy, and are responsible for your own actions. But this quarrel affects our family interests most painfully. Have you never reflected that it will drag to light circumstances which should be kept strictly private?"

The young Count looked dismayed. He certainly had not thus reflected, and he replied, somewhat abashed, "I do not think that such a consequence is inevitable."

"But certainly it is most probable. However the duel may terminate, it will attract universal attention to its principals; there will be all sorts of inquiries as to what provoked it, and the required explanation will be found in the name of Rodenberg. Hitherto it has escaped special notice, because it occurs several times in the army list, and because the captain has occupied towards us the position of an entire stranger; it will soon be discovered that he is no stranger to us, for as soon as he is seriously questioned by his comrades or his superior officers he must confess the truth. At first you were outraged by the bare possibility of such a revelation, and yet you are the one wantonly to provoke it."

The truth of this was so apparent that even Raoul could not gainsay it. "Perhaps I did not perceive all the bearings of the matter," he said, sullenly. "One can't always control his mood, and this Rodenberg's arrogance irritated me. He behaves as if he were entirely my equal."

"I fear the arrogance was on your side," said Steinrück, sternly. "I had a sample of it when you first met Michael here; he was forced to compel you to show him the merest courtesy, and I have no doubt this was the case when you met him afterwards. Did you provoke a challenge or not?"

Raoul evaded a direct reply; he said, contemptuously, "How was I to know that the adventurer's son was so sensitive on a point of honour? But no wonder!"

"Captain Rodenberg is one of my officers, and his honour is stainless, you will please to remember!" The general's voice was sharp and stern. "I beg that there may be no fresh insult to make a reconciliation impossible. It is just nine o'clock; your antagonist may be here at any moment."

"Here? You are expecting him?"

"Of course; the affair must be adjusted among us personally. He received my summons coldly enough, but he will be here, and I trust you now see clearly why this duel must be prevented. You were the one to offend, from you must come the apology."

"Never!" Raoul burst forth. "Rather let the worst come to the worst!"

"That I will not allow!" said Steinrück. "Is Captain Rodenberg there? Admit him."

The last words were addressed to a servant who appeared at the door, and in a moment Michael presented himself.

He saluted the general, but seemed not to observe the presence of the young Count, who, standing aside, cast at him an angry glance.

"I have summoned you hither to adjust the affair between you and my grandson," the general began. "First of all, it is necessary that you should take notice of each other. I beg you to do so."

The request sounded like a command, and as such was obeyed; the young men bowed to each other, very formally indeed, and the general continued: "Captain Rodenberg, I have learned--from whom, is of no consequence--that you consider yourself as having been insulted by young Count Steinrück, and that you purpose demanding satisfaction of him. Is this so?"

"It is, your Excellency," was the calm reply.

"The Count is, of course, ready at any moment to grant you satisfaction, but this duel I neither can nor will permit. In any other affair of the kind I should leave the arrangement to those principally concerned, but this cannot be here, in view of the peculiar relations in which you stand to our family. You must be aware of this."

"Not at all. Those relations have been so entirely ignored hitherto that there is no reason for regarding them now, and strangers are ignorant of them."

"They will be so no longer if matters are pushed to a bloody issue. The public and the press are wont on such occasions to investigate curiously the personal connections of those concerned, and the truth would be speedily discovered."

Michael shrugged his shoulders. "Count Steinrück should have remembered this before provoking such an issue. It is now too late for such considerations."

"It is not too late. Some means of adjustment must be devised. I repeat to you what I have just declared to my grandson, that under no consideration can this duel take place."

The words were uttered emphatically, but they produced no effect; Michael's reply was still more emphatic. "Upon a point of honour, your Excellency, I can permit no control. If the Count can bow to a command in such a case, I cannot!"

Raoul looked at him half indignantly, half in surprise. He, the son and heir of the house, had never ventured so to confront his grandfather, neither would the general have suffered such open rebellion against his authority; but from Rodenberg he did not resent it. He frowned, indeed, ominously, but he condescended to a kind of explanation.

"I am a soldier like yourself, and would not ask of you what is inconsistent with your honour. You believe yourself to have in no wise provoked this quarrel?"

"I do."

Steinrück turned to his grandson: "Raoul, I now desire to hear from you whether what Captain Rodenberg regarded as insulting on your part was accidental or intentional. In the first case the affair is arranged."

Raoul was sufficiently familiar with this tone, but he had no intention of embracing the means of adjustment thus afforded him. He had meant to insult, and was only restrained from frankly declaring the fact by fear of his grandfather; he took refuge in a sullen silence.

"It was intentional, then!" said the general, with slow emphasis. "You will, then, retract this insult, this wanton insult, here in my presence."

"Never!" exclaimed Raoul. "Grandfather, do not drive me to extremes. The limit of my submission to you is reached when I allow such words to be used to me before my antagonist. I refuse to be humiliated further. Captain Rodenberg, I am at your service; appoint the time and the place."

"It shall be done to-day," Michael replied. "Will your Excellency permit me to take my leave?"

"No, not yet!" exclaimed Steinrück, suddenly dropping his formal tone and stepping between the young men. "I must remind you both of what you seem to have forgotten. You are blood relations, and this tie of blood I will have respected. Strangers may have recourse to pistols in such cases; the sons of my children must settle their quarrel by other means."

"Grandfather!" "Your Excellency!" There was the same tone of defiance in each voice, but the general went on, imperiously:

"Hush, and listen to me! This is a family matter, in which the public should have no share: it is for the head of the family alone to adjust it. I am the authority here, I alone have the right to interfere, and I forbid you to have recourse to weapons. The blood flowing in the veins of each of you is mine, and I will not have it thus spilled. As head of the family, as your grandfather, I demand implicit obedience from my grandsons."

His tone and manner were so commanding that rebellion seemed impossible,—the old chief of the Steinrücks compelled obedience. In fact, neither of the young men gainsaid him. Raoul stood still in sheer bewilderment at what he had just heard. 'My grandsons,' and 'the blood flowing in the veins of each of you is mine!' Why, it amounted to a formal recognition.

Michael too felt this; his eyes gleamed, but not with delight, and his bearing was still more haughty than before, although he did not speak.

"Raoul is the offender, as he himself admits," Steinrück began again. "In his name I declare to you, Michael, that he retracts everything that could bear an insulting construction; and you, on your part, will relinquish your haughty bearing, which is a kind of provocation. Does this content you?"

"If Count Raoul confirms your words—yes."

"He will do so. Raoul!"

The young Count did not reply. He stood biting his lip, his hand clinched, as he cast a glance of hatred at his antagonist. Apparently he was resolved to defy his grandfather's authority.

"Well?" said Steinrück, after a pause. "I am waiting."

"No, I will not!" burst forth Raoul.

But the general stepped up to him, and, looking him full in the eye, said, "You must, for you are in the wrong. If Michael were the offender I should require the same from him, and he would obey; since you insulted him, it is your part to yield. I require only a simple 'yes;' nothing more. Will you confirm my words, or not?"

Raoul made a final attempt to maintain his defiant attitude, but his grandfather's flashing eyes cast their wonted spell upon him,—they forced him to obey. A few seconds passed, and then the young Count uttered the desired 'yes,' half inaudibly indeed, but it was uttered.

Michael inclined his head. "I withdraw my challenge; the affair is adjusted."

Steinrück gave a sigh of relief. He was not quite so iron as he seemed. His sigh betrayed his suffering at the thought of his two grandsons confronting each other in mortal combat.

"And now shake hands," he went on, in a gentler tone, "and remember in future that you are of the same race,—although it must in future, as hitherto, be kept a secret from the world."

But Raoul's obedience would go no further: he turned away with an expression of frank hostility; and Michael said, "Pardon me, your Excellency, but you must allow us to do as we choose in this respect. The Count, as I perceive, is not anxious for a reconciliation, nor am I. I promise to give no occasion for a renewal of the quarrel. As for a tie of relationship between us, we are alike determined to ignore anything of the kind."

"Wherefore?— Does my recognition not satisfy you?" Steinrück asked, indignantly.

"A recognition forced from you by necessity, by fear of a public scandal, which must be kept secret because it is considered a disgrace,—no, it does not satisfy me! Count Raoul has enjoyed his grandfather's affection all his life, he may yield obedience to his commands; I have always been outcast, repudiated every hour of my life; I have been made to feel that the Steinrücks considered me beneath them in rank, and would fain banish me from their social circle. Here, in this very room, you declared to me that for you there was no tie of relationship between us. I now make the same declaration to you. I do not choose to accept privately as a favour what is mine of right before all the world; however you may acknowledge me as your grandson, I shall never admit that you are my grandfather, never! And now may I entreat General Count Steinrück to dismiss me?"

He spoke with perfect mastery of himself, but there was a sound in his voice that made Raoul start and look at him in surprise; he seemed to hear his grandfather speaking. In fact, the resemblance had never been so striking as now, when the two men stood erect confronting each other. The eyes, the carriage, everything bore witness to the relationship just disowned; the young man's stern resolve was an inheritance from his grandfather. He was the old Count's youthful presentment.

"Go, then!" said the general. "You choose to see in me only your superior officer. So be it for the future."

Rodenberg saluted, bowed to his cousin, and left the room, where for some minutes after his departure an oppressive silence reigned, broken at last by Raoul: "Grandfather!"

"What is it?" said Steinrück, who was still looking towards the door behind which Michael had disappeared.

"I think you have now had sufficient proof of the arrogance of your 'grandson.'" The word was uttered with infinite contempt. "He was quite magnificent as he rejected the recognition that you offered him, and actually refused to admit any tie of blood between us. And you have forced me to humiliate myself to that man!"

"Yes, this Michael is iron," Steinrück muttered, between his teeth. "Nothing avails with him, neither kindness nor severity."

"And, moreover, he resembles you immensely," Raoul went on, in his indignation and in his irritation against his grandfather seizing upon the chance to irritate him in turn. "I never noticed it before, but just now when he stood opposite you the resemblance was almost terrifying."

The general slowly turned his gaze from the door and riveted it upon his grandson, with an odd expression in his eyes. "Did you perceive it too? I knew it long ago."

Raoul did not comprehend this calm. He had looked for an angry retort, an indignant disclaimer of any resemblance. The Count perceived his surprise, and, suddenly adopting his old authoritative tone, he said, "But no matter! The quarrel between you is now made up, and I do not believe that even you have any temptation to renew it. Avoid each other in future; it will not be difficult. And now leave me."

Raoul went, but with rage in his heart. Whereas hitherto he had felt only a haughty dislike for Michael, he now hated him with all the intensity of his passionate temperament. Perhaps General Steinrück would have done more wisely not to subject him to the humiliation he had undergone,--it could never be forgotten by either cousin.

Hertha was standing alone at her window gazing out, but she saw nothing of the surging life in the principal street of the capital. Her eyes were persistently turned in the direction of the general's place of abode. He had promised to send her tidings in the course of the forenoon, and if he had really succeeded in preventing the duel his messenger should have already arrived, but there was no sign as yet of the Steinrück livery, and the young Countess's impatience and anxiety increased with each minute that passed.

All at once she leaned far forward. She had recognized the general, who was just turning the corner; yes, it was he himself, and as he recognized her he waved his hand to her. Thank God, he was smiling! That could not betoken any unhappy termination.

She left the window, but did not dare to hasten to meet the Count. No one must suspect anything unusual. Only when she heard his step in the anteroom did she fling open the door and hurry towards him. "You come yourself,--you bring me good news?"

The question was uttered breathlessly, and Steinrück replied in a soothing tone, "Certainly, my child; there is no cause for further anxiety: the affair is arranged."

Hertha drew a long breath of intense relief: "Thank God! I hardly dared to hope."

The general cast a searching glance at her pale, weary face; then, taking her by the arm, he led her back into the room and closed the door. "I certainly have had a hard time with the obstinate fellows," he began. "Neither would yield, neither would make the slightest advance. At last I had to exert all my authority to bring them to reason. Nevertheless the affair was not so grave as you supposed; a couple of thoughtless words of Raoul's, a sharp reply from Rodenberg,--it was quite enough to send such a couple of Hotspurs to mortal combat. They would fain have sprung at each other's throats there and then. Fortunately, I heard of the matter in time to prevent mischief."

He spoke in a half-jesting tone, but Hertha perceived that his smile, as well as his gayety, was forced. She was not deceived: she knew the gravity of what he seemed to esteem so lightly.

"And they have given you a sleepless night, too; you show that," he continued. "Our coy little betrothed repents her treatment of poor Raoul yesterday, eh? Let it be a warning to you, Hertha. No man can endure such treatment, even at the hands of the woman he loves the best."

"Least of all, perhaps, at her hands. But do you imagine that Raoul really loves me?"

The general was startled by the tone of bitterness in which she spoke. "Has he not wooed and won you?"

"According to a family arrangement, in compliance with your express desire. I know the value of this love 'to order.'"

"Surely this is nothing new to you," said Steinrück, gravely. "You knew it all from the first. You

both yielded to considerations deemed very important by those of our rank. There is no great amount of romance about such unions; but, so far as I know, you have never missed it. Why should you suddenly adopt this bitter tone with regard to Raoul, who might with justice accuse you in return?"

The young Countess was silent; she had no answer for this question.

"The old evil spirit is stirring again; it must be conjured and banished," the general said, with a fleeting smile. "I have had to do it once before, in the early days of my guardianship. Then I was obliged to discipline a spoiled and idolized child, who had known no will save her own. You rebelled passionately, and your mother shed tears because I was so stern, and prevented her also from yielding. We had a stormy scene, but when the child's passion was exhausted she came to me of her own accord, put her little arms around my neck, and said---- Do you remember, Hertha?"

She smiled, and, laying her head upon his shoulder, completed the sentence: "I love you dearly, Uncle Michael. Very dearly!"

He inclined his head and kissed her forehead. "Because I knew how to control you. Ever since I have been secure of your affection; but Raoul does not understand yet. I could wellnigh believe that the knight who is the ideal of the dreams of this proud, wayward girl must have something in him of the dragon-slayer, or he can never rule her."

"He must be like you!" exclaimed Hertha, eagerly,--"like you, Uncle Michael, with your iron force of character, your invincible will, even your sternness. I could have fallen in love with you if I had known you in your youth."

Steinrück shook his head, smiling. "What! Flattering your old uncle? But in truth your nature craves to be striven for, to be won by storm. My child, fate seldom gives us our choice in these matters: we must yield to destiny, as you are now learning. Believe me, in the eyes of a hundred other women Raoul is the ideal of manliness and chivalry; since I have learned that you love him in spite of his not being the hero of your dreams, I am not disturbed. And, to be frank with you, Hertha, I did not know this before yesterday. Until then I had grave doubts of your sentiments, but the mortal anxiety that you betrayed last evening when you entreated my interference, and the way in which you received me this morning, have shown me how you trembled for Raoul."

A crimson flush slowly mounted to the cheek of the girl, and she hung her head without a word in reply.

"Was it necessary that some danger should threaten your betrothed to wring from you such an avowal?" the general went on, reproachfully. "Hitherto you have played but a cold, formal part towards Raoul, and it has estranged him from you. Only show him the trembling anxiety for his life that you showed me, and you can do with him what you will; he will be a willing captive."

Hertha's blush deepened, and hurriedly, as if eager at all hazards to change the subject, she said, "You really think all danger over?"

"Yes; the insult as well as the challenge has been retracted in due form. The quarrel is at an end."

"But not the enmity! I could only give you a faint idea last evening of what really passed between them. You do not know what words Raoul made use of,--not concerning the captain himself, but concerning his parents."

"Ah, it was that, then!" muttered Steinrück.

"Do you know anything about them?" the Countess asked, hastily.

"I only know that there is not the slightest stain upon Rodenberg's honour, and that suffices me. How did he receive Raoul's words?"

"Like a wounded lion. He was absolutely terrible: if Raoul had said another word I believe he would have struck him down."

The general's attention was roused by the girl's passionate tone, and he gazed at her with a dawning suspicion in his look, while Hertha, all unconscious of his glance, went on, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks: "Rodenberg was indignant to the last degree; he silenced Raoul with a look and a tone such as I have never seen and heard before, save once; in you, Uncle Michael, that time at Berkheim, when they brought before you the poacher who had shot our forester; it brought you directly to my mind as you were then."

Steinrück made no reply to these last remarks; he still gazed fixedly at the young Countess, as if trying to decipher something in her features. "Perhaps Raoul's words were not unfounded," he said at last, very slowly. "Who can tell what he may know of Rodenberg's origin?"

"He was all the more inexcusable for touching upon the matter," Hertha persisted, with a vehemence of which she herself was unconscious. "You yourself say that the captain's honour is

stainless, and Raoul surely knows it as well as you; and therefore he attacked the parents. It was cowardly and malicious; it was base and----"

"Hertha, you are speaking of your betrothed!" the general sternly interrupted her.

Hertha paused, and her colour faded. Steinrück laid his hand heavily upon her own, and said in an undertone, but with severity, "For whose life did you tremble? For whom were you anxious?"

She was silent, although she knew but too well,--the sleepless hours of the past night had revealed the truth to her,--but no sound escaped her lips. The Count gazed steadily at her. "Hertha, I demand an answer. Will you not, or can you not, give me one? Surely the betrothed of Count Steinrück knows what she owes to him and to herself."

"Yes, she knows well," said Hertha, gravely and firmly. "Have no fear; I shall redeem my word."

"I look for no less from you!" He clasped her hand tightly in his own for a moment, then dropped it and arose. "What time is appointed for your departure?" he asked, after a pause.

"The beginning of next week."

"That is well. I thought of persuading your mother to remain here; but I now think you had best go as soon as possible. You need--change of air. And one word more, Hertha. Could Raoul have seen and heard you just now, when you spoke of his antagonist, he never would have receded from the duel, and I could not have blamed him for refusing to do so. Farewell!"

He spoke coldly and sternly, leaving the room as proudly erect as ever; but in the hall outside he stayed his steps for a moment and covered his eyes with his hand. Was it tottering to its fall, the structure that he had reared so proudly upon what he had deemed so sure a foundation?

'He must be like you, with your iron force of character, your invincible will, even your sternness.' Those words had roused the Count's suspicion. Yes, there was one who resembled him trait for trait, and who could understand how to control the wayward child if he were but allowed free play. This must be put a stop to at all hazards. Hertha must go,--must be removed from so perilous a proximity. Her whim--it could be nothing further--would change when deprived of the object that had gratified it. It was not to be supposed serious in any way. But it was hard for the general that the peril should come from such a quarter, that it should be just this man that threatened destruction to his plans. He could not have thought it possible.

Upon this same forenoon Professor Wehlau was sitting at his writing-table in his study, where, for a wonder, he was not at work, but was poring over a newspaper which seemed to contain something that annoyed him greatly; there was a black cloud upon his brow.

The newspaper, the best and most brilliantly conducted in the capital, did, in fact, contain a long article concerning 'Saint Michael,' the first important work of a young artist, a pupil of Professor Walter, which was to be publicly exhibited in a few days. The critic, who had seen it on the easel, spoke of it with enthusiastic admiration, and did not fail to inform the public that the picture was already sold. It was destined for the pilgrimage church of Saint Michael, where it was to be installed the ensuing week with due solemnity. This last announcement was too much for the Professor's equanimity,--he fairly gnashed his teeth.

"Why, this is better and better!" he growled. "If they are already beginning to turn the lad's head in this fashion, there will be no doing anything with him. 'Magnificent composition, brilliant execution, talent of the highest order justifying the most extravagant expectations!' Oh, yes, here it comes again; I know the jargon! 'The talented son of a distinguished father.' The deuce take these admirers, and Hans too, and Michael into the bargain!"

He threw the sheet aside and began to pace to and fro. Wehlau was one of those who cannot endure to be in the wrong. He would rather have maintained that white was black than have confessed that his eye, which was wont to see so clearly in scientific affairs, had been utterly deceived with regard to his own son. Hans was and must remain a good-for-naught, who, since he had declined to become his father's pupil and successor, was fit for no grave pursuit in life. He was wedded to this opinion, and he clung to it with all the obstinacy of his character. Had the article denounced his son as a dauber he would have triumphed. But it called him a genius, and this he looked upon as an insult, since it proved himself in the wrong.

"Does the man hope to persuade me that the boy is good for something?" he soliloquized, angrily. "I say it is false! The lad is a fool,--a booby, who with his face and his amiability has bribed the critic as he bribes everybody. *He* do anything of any consequence! He'll not impose upon me; I'll never set foot in his studio, nor look at one of his pictures, although ten critics should praise them and twenty countesses buy them!"

He raised his hand as if to make a solemn vow, when suddenly the door was opened, and the old gardener, who likewise did duty in the studio as Hans's servant, of course without any permission from the Professor, made his appearance.

"What is the matter?" snarled Wehlau, in the worst of humours. "You know, Anton, that I am not to be disturbed in my study. What do you want?"

"Excuse me, Herr Professor," said the old man in evident distress. "I have just come from the studio,--from the young master."

"That's no excuse; I'll have no such interruptions in future. Do you hear?"

"But, Herr Professor, the young master is so ill,--so very ill,--I thought he would die in my arms!"

"What!" Wehlau exclaimed. "What is the matter with my son?"

"I do not know. I was working in the garden, when he opened the window and called me, and when I went to him he was lying on the floor half dead. He had been taken suddenly ill,--mortally ill, and had only strength enough to say 'Call my father!' And I came running to find you."

"Good God! the boy has been in perfect health hitherto!" cried Wehlau, hurrying out of the room. All his vexation and annoyance were forgotten, as well as the vow he had made, as he ran through the garden towards the studio, followed by Anton.

Upon opening the door of the atelier he was shocked to find the young artist lying back in an arm-chair with closed eyes; his hand was pressed upon his heart, whence the breath came in short, laboured gasps. His face could not be clearly seen, since the heavy window-curtain was drawn closely, and there was but a dim light in the part of the room where he lay.

The Professor was at his son's side in an instant, bending over him. "Hans, what is the matter with you? You cannot be ill? It is the only folly in which you have not indulged hitherto, and I positively forbid it. Speak to me, at least."

Hans opened his eyes, and said, in a broken voice, "Is that you, papa? Forgive me for sending for you. I thought----"

"But what is the matter with you?" The Professor would have felt his son's pulse, but the young man withdrew his hand, as if unconsciously, to put it beneath his head.

"I do not know. I suddenly grew fearfully dizzy; everything was dark before my eyes; it was terrible."

"It all comes from this confounded paint,--your cursed daubing," Wehlau exclaimed, in despair. "Anton, open the window, let in the fresh air, and bring some water instantly."

He seized the left arm of the sick man, who tried to repeat the manœuvre previously executed by the right one. This time, however, his father was too quick for him, and clasped the wrist firmly. "Why, how is this? Your pulse is perfectly normal." There was suspicion in his tone, and he turned hastily and dashed aside the window-curtain. The daylight streamed into the room and showed the young man's face as fresh and rosy in colour as ever. Its expression of suffering did not for an instant deceive the experienced physician.

"This is another of your infernal tricks," he burst forth. "Heaven have mercy on you if you have played this farce with me just to get me inside your studio."

"But, at all events, here you are, papa," cried Hans, who, seeing that any further attempt to feign illness would be useless, sprang to his feet. "And you certainly will not go away without a glance at least at my 'Saint Michael.' There it stands against the wall; you have only to turn round."

The entreaty sounded very fervent, but Wehlau marched straight towards the door. "Do you suppose you can force me in this way? I shall have a word to say to you hereafter about your base deceit. Now let me out."

Instead of obeying, Hans closed the door in the face of old Anton, who was bringing the water ordered by the Professor, and turned the key. "No use to try to get out, papa. There is no help for you. This is my kingdom; I have duly captured you, and shall not release you. Look at the picture."

This was more than the Professor could bear. The tempest that had been gathering strength during the last few minutes broke forth with fury, but it failed to affect Hans, who showed an amount of strategic capacity that would have done honour to his friend Michael. He talked fast and loud, edging his father, meanwhile, towards the opposite wall, and, when he thought him near enough, he suddenly seized him by the shoulders and turned him round.

"Hans, I tell you if you dare to----" Wehlau suddenly paused, for involuntarily he had glanced at the picture. He looked at it again, and then slowly approached it.

The young artist's eyes sparkled triumphantly. He was sure of his cause now, but he stationed himself behind his father to cut off retreat, which, however, the Professor had ceased to contemplate. He stood as if spell-bound, staring at the picture.

"It is my first work of any importance, papa," Hans began in his most caressing voice. "I could not possibly send it out into the world without showing it to you. You must not be vexed with me for the stratagem I had to employ to get you here; it was the only way to induce you to enter my studio."

"Hold your tongue, and let me look at the thing in peace and quiet," Wehlau growled, moving to get the best point of view.

Thus several minutes passed, and then the Professor began to mutter to himself in a way that sounded half angry, half approving. At last he turned to his son and asked in a low tone, "And you mean to tell me that you did this thing all yourself?"

"Certainly, papa."

"I don't believe it."

"You will surely not refuse me credit for my own work? How do you like it?"

The Professor began to mutter again, but this time it sounded more promising. "Hm! the thing is not so bad; there is force and life in it. Where did you get the idea?"

"Out of my head, papa."

Wehlau looked from the picture to his son, in whose head he had declared there was no room for anything save folly: the matter seemed to him inconceivable.

"Michael deserves the principal credit in the affair," the young artist said, laughing. "He has been an incomparable model. Of course I had no end of trouble in getting him into the right mood, but on one occasion I succeeded in irritating him so that he burst into a furious passion, and then I caught the expression and fixed it on the canvas. But you don't tell me what you think of my daubing."

The Professor's features twitched oddly; apparently he would fain have scolded and fumed afresh, but it was impossible, and at last he said, very gently, "But in future you will paint no more altar-pieces,--promise me that."

"No, papa; my next picture will portray natural science in the person of 'our distinguished investigator.' When will you sit to me?"

"Let me alone!"

"That is only half a promise, and I want a whole one. Shall we begin to-morrow?"

"Deuce take it! yes,--since there's no help for it."

"Victory!" shouted Hans, throwing his arms around his father, who no longer resisted; on the contrary, he clasped his son close, and looking into the young man's sunny blue eyes, he said, in a burst of tenderness, "You'll never make a scholar, my boy, of that I am now convinced, but, nevertheless, you may be good for something after all!"

At Saint Michael preparations were making for the festival of the saint; a very great occasion this year, since the new altar-picture was to be consecrated in its place with all due solemnity. The pilgrimage church was in festal array, and the Alpine hamlet, usually so quiet, was filled with the bustle of joyous excitement; preparations were making to receive the thousands of pilgrims who would arrive on the morrow from all parts of the mountains to pay their devotions in the sanctuary of the archangel: all was not yet ready, and it was the eve of the holiday.

On this afternoon the pastor had been as much pleased as surprised by the sudden and unexpected appearance of his former pupil, Captain Rodenberg. There was something pathetic in the old priest's delight. "Such a surprise!" he said, detaining the young man's hand in his clasp. "The last thing that I dreamed of was seeing you just at this time."

"I have only a single day at my disposal," replied Michael. "I must be in M---- the day after tomorrow again to join Colonel Fernau, whom I accompanied thither. I managed to get a three days' leave, and I made this little excursion to see your reverence."

Valentin smiled and shook his head. "Do you call it a little excursion? Why, it is almost a day's journey from here to M----; you have to drive alone through the mountains for five hours. But I am glad you think your old teacher worth the trouble; I shall at least have you on St. Michael's day; my faint hope that Hans might come has been disappointed."

"He wished to come, but he thought he owed it to his father to stay away. The Professor takes it to heart that the name of Hans Wehlau should be in such close connection with a festival of the church. You know----"

"Yes, I am perfectly aware of my brother's attitude with regard to the church," said Valentin, with a half-smothered sigh. "I made an abject apology to Hans when his 'Saint Michael' arrived,

for I had never given our madcap credit for the earnestness and depth of character shown in this work of his."

"You all did him injustice; his own father especially underrated him," Michael warmly declared. "I alone, seeing the picture from the first sketch, was aware of what it promised. Hans has had a great triumph during its exhibition. It was instantly appreciated by the public, and elicited a burst of admiration; the critics praised it with rare unanimity, and everything has been done to spoil the artist with flattery. Fortunately, he is one of those who cannot be spoiled. Is the picture in its place yet?"

"It has been hung since the day before yesterday,--a costly and beautiful gift from the Countess to our church. She meant to be present at its consecration, and came from Berkheim to Castle Steinrück for the purpose."

"She will be here to-morrow, then?" Michael asked.

"No; unfortunately, she has been taken ill; she caught cold on the journey, and is seriously indisposed, so she sent me----"

Here they were interrupted by the sacristan, very hurried, very worried, with a number of questions to ask and communications to make with regard to the festival. His reverence had to arrange, decide, and oversee; there was a deal to be done.

"I think I ought not to monopolize you any longer," said Rodenberg. "The Herr Pastor appears to be in constant requisition. I will go up to the church for a while, to see how Saint Michael looks in his present surroundings. We shall have some quiet hours together this evening."

"I am afraid that can hardly be. You do not yet know,--I was just going to tell you, but----"

His reverence did not finish his sentence, for old Katrin came in at that moment with her arms filled with evergreens and garlands, and wanted to know where they were to be put, and the sacristan too stood waiting. Valentin was at his wits' end.

Michael left him and took the familiar road to the pilgrimage church. It was early in May, and the mountains were beginning to show the presence of spring, always so late to arrive among them.

The Eagle ridge was still girdled with ice, in dazzling crystal splendour, but the brooks from the glaciers, their chains broken by the sun, were dashing foaming down to the valleys, and the dark hemlock forest nestling against the rocky wall had already shaken the burden of snow from its boughs. From the alps and meadows surrounding Saint Michael the snow had also disappeared; they were laughing in fresh sunny green, while through them here and there trickled tiny rivulets from the heights; it was as if the whole mountain world had awaked to life. Still, however, above the heights and depths, above forest and meadow, the wild spring blasts were careering, sounding their note of promise and of victory.

Michael entered the church, quite empty at this hour of the afternoon, but having donned its modest festal garment. Here upon these lonely heights there were no fragrant blossoms of the spring,--column and portal were wreathed about with dark evergreen, and little nosegays of Alpine flowers were the sole decoration of the altar. There was, nevertheless, a breath of spring in the solemnity reigning in the quiet, spacious structure, now filled with the golden light of the declining sun. The church might wear a more festal aspect when thronged with a devout crowd, but it was much more beautiful in the profound consecrated repose in which it awaited its festival, still untouched, as it were, by all the aspirations, prayers, and laments which would arise from within its walls on the morrow. No inharmonious sound disturbed its quiet; even the roaring of the wind outside, dying away in long-drawn notes, sounded like the tones of a distant organ.

Saint Michael was enthroned above the high altar; not the dim picture of the saint which time had half destroyed, and which had been but the crude outcome of mediæval piety,--that had been respectfully transferred to the church vestibule,--but the work of the young artist who was making a name and fame for himself. Michael had been familiar with it from its first conception, he had seen it repeatedly; but it had been for him, as for the public, and even for the painter himself, only a picture, a scene of conflict, accidentally illustrating a legend of the church. He was surprised to the last degree by the impression produced by the picture in its present place. In the twilight of the chancel, between the tall Gothic windows with their glowing colours, it took on quite another appearance; it seemed freed from all earthly taint, the embodiment of the ancient sacred legend, repeated in all religions and among all races of mankind, of the victory of light over darkness.

Rodenberg slowly approached the high altar, and as he did so he became aware of a kneeling female figure, hitherto concealed by a column from his observation. It was no peasant: a gown of dark silk fell in folds upon the ground, and beneath the veil of black lace that had been thrown over the head there was a gleam as of red gold which Michael knew only too well. He paused as if stayed by a spell. Was this a freak of his fancy which was always bringing up before him the same image? Just then the lady, roused by the sound of his footstep, turned her head; an exclamation of surprise that was almost terror escaped her lips. Those were Hertha's eyes gazing at him.

It was surely a fate that had brought these two together for the second time in a lonely Alpine village, at an hour when each had believed the other miles away,—at least thus this unexpected meeting seemed to them. Both so lost their self-possession that neither observed the other's embarrassment; there was a pause, which Michael was the first to break. "I am sorry to have disturbed you, Countess Steinrück; I thought the church was empty, and did not perceive you until this moment."

Hertha slowly arose from her knees, conscious that her exclamation, her apparent dismay, called for some explanation. She had been lost in contemplation of the picture; she could not have told how long she had been gazing at Saint Michael, when suddenly he whom the saint suggested stood before her. There was a tremor in her voice as she rejoined, "I was, indeed, surprised. His reverence had not told me that you also were to be his guest."

"I arrived unexpectedly only half an hour ago, and had not heard of your being here, having been told only that you, with the Countess your mother, were at Steinrück."

"We both meant to come to Saint Michael," said Hertha, who by this time had regained her self-possession, "but my mother was taken ill,—not seriously, however,—yet I came with some anxiety. It was her express wish that at least one member of our family should be present at the festival and at the consecration of her gift, and so I yielded to her desire."

Michael uttered a few words of condolence and sympathy, mere phrases, which fell mechanically from his lips and were scarcely heeded. He did not look at Hertha as he spoke, and she avoided glancing at him. Instinctively their looks refused to encounter each other; they dwelt upon the picture, now fully illumined by the setting sun, which, streaming through the side windows into the nave of the church, cast a broad band of golden light upon the high altar.

The picture had none of the traditional setting of its predecessor: no circle of angelic heads looked down from above; no flames flickered up from the abyss; the two life-size figures were alone within the frame, each powerful and effective in its way. Above them arched the clear shining heavens; beneath them yawned a rocky gulf, the abode of eternal night.

Dashed from on high, on the very edge of the abyss, Satan was writhing upwards with the last desperate effort of a conquered foe not in the guise of the horned dragon-like monster of the legend, but in a human form of strange demoniac beauty, with dark wings like those of a bird of night. The face expressed agony, rage, and at the same time horror of the power that had hurled him to destruction; while in the upturned eyes there was the hopeless despair of a lost soul conscious of the light that had been radiant about it, but to be henceforth quenched in eternal night. It was Lucifer, once the Son of the Morning, and now showing in his ruin a gleam of his former splendour.

Above him, in the clear heavens, Saint Michael, in glittering mail, was sustained by two mighty wings, like those of an eagle, and like an eagle he was swooping down upon the foe. In his right hand flashed the sword of flame, and flame also flashed from his large blue eyes, while his hair, loosened by his impetuous flight, waved above his brow. His look, his bearing, bore witness to the battle that had been fought, and yet the entire figure of the archangel was as if bathed in the halo of glory that beamed about the strong, victorious champion of light.

"The picture produces a totally different effect in these surroundings," said Hertha, her gaze still fixed upon it. "Much more solemn, and much more powerful! The archangel has something terrible in his aspect; one can almost feel the fiery breath of annihilation proceeding from him. I am only afraid that the peasants will not comprehend this conception; they may perhaps regret the solemn indifference of the old picture."

"Ah, you do not know our mountaineers," rejoined Rodenberg. "This is just the picture that they will comprehend, as they could no other, for this is their Saint Michael, who sweeps in wind and storm above their mountains and valleys, and whose lightnings flash destruction. This is not the heavenly champion of the ecclesiastical legend, but the archangel of the popular faith in his original form. You thought me heretical once because I saw in the story the old Pagan worship of light and the ancient German god of thunder. You see now that my friend's conception coincided with my own: he has given something of the aspect of Wotan to his saint."

"And Professor Wehlau inoculated you both with these ideas," Hertha interposed, reproachfully. "He cannot endure the thought that his son has painted a genuinely sacred picture; something Pagan and old German must be discovered in it. As if the people would see in Saint Michael only the avenger! Tomorrow, on the anniversary of his appearance, he will be in their minds all beneficence, as he sweeps down from the Eagle ridge; his sword of flame only ploughs the soil, and the sparks of light that stream from it bestow the vigour and life of spring upon the earth. I have been hearing the beautiful legend again today."

"Well, this year he seems to have determined to descend in storm," said Michael. "The wind is rising on the heights, and in all probability the Eagle ridge will send down to us in the night one of those spring storms which are dreaded in all the country round. I know the signs."

As if in confirmation of his words, the wind outside grew louder and fiercer. It sounded no longer like the tone of an organ, but like the dull roar of distant breakers, now rising, now falling.

The sun sank, attended by a few light clouds, in a sea of flame, the splendour of which filled the entire church. The faded old pictures on the walls, the statues of saints on pillar and column, the crosses and church banners, all looked instinct with a strange, ghostly life in the red light. The carved angels upon the altar steps seemed to stir their wings gently, and the broad band of gold which streamed across the picture turned to crimson and grew deeper as it mounted higher. Gradually the rocky abyss and Lucifer faded into shadow and darkness, while Saint Michael's mighty form, with its eagle-wings, was still surrounded by a halo of light.

There was a long silence. Hertha broke it, and there was an uncertain sound, a hesitation in her voice as she began: "Captain Rodenberg, I have a request to make of you."

He looked at her. "I am at your service."

"I should like to know the truth with regard to a certain affair,--the entire, unvarnished truth. May I learn it from you?"

"If it be in my power----"

"Most certainly, your consent is all that is needed. My uncle Steinrück has told me that the matter in which I entreated his interference is entirely arranged; of course I do not doubt his words, but nevertheless I fear----" She paused.

"You fear?"

"That the reconciliation is only momentary and apparent. You could not, perhaps, refuse your general the obedience he required of you, any more than Raoul could refuse it to his grandfather, and when you next meet the quarrel may be renewed."

"Not by me," said Michael. "Since Count Steinrück retracted, in the general's presence, his offensive words, I am entirely satisfied."

"Raoul? Did he really do that?" exclaimed Hertha, half incredulously, half indignantly.

"Under any other circumstances no reconciliation would have been possible. The Count, in fact, submitted to his grandfather's authority, when the general expressly required him to retract his words."

"Raoul submitted thus? Impossible!"

"You do not question the truth of what I say?"

"No, Captain Rodenberg, no; but I am more and more convinced that there is something concealed from me at the root of this matter. Very strange expressions were made use of during that scene at Colonel Reval's, and yet you are a stranger to our family, are you not?"

"I am," replied Michael, with cold emphasis.

"There was an allusion to associations which you, as well as Raoul, seemed to repudiate. What associations were those?"

"Do you not think that the general or Count Raoul could answer you better than I?"

Hertha shook her head. "They could or would tell me nothing. I have asked them. I hope to hear the truth at last from you."

"And I must beg you to excuse me. An explanation would only be painful, and to what it might lead you are aware."

"I heard only the beginning of the conversation," said the young Countess, divining that here a point was touched that were best avoided. "It was enough to cause me to fear the issue; but indeed I----"

"Do not trouble yourself to spare me," Rodenberg interposed, with intense bitterness. "I know you heard the entire conversation, and the word can scarcely have escaped you with which Count Steinrück--insulted my father's memory."

Hertha was silent for a moment, and then said, in a low voice, "Yes, I heard it, but I knew that it was a mistake. Raoul, too, sees the error now, and therefore retracted his words. Is this not so?"

Michael's lips quivered; he saw that the young Countess had not the slightest suspicion of his relations to her family, or of the tragedy that had been enacted in it, and it was not for him to explain it to her; but neither would he listen any longer to that voice so filled with tender sympathy; its tones were more potent to enthrall than ever were the songs of the sirens of old. He knew, indeed, that his next word would open a gulf between them that never could be bridged over. So much the better. It could not be helped, if he would retain his self-control, and in the hardest tone he could command he replied, "No!"

"No?" repeated Hertha, recoiling a step in dismay.

"It startles you, Countess Steinrück, does it not? But it must be said, nevertheless. I can defend my own honour against all attack, by whomsoever made. Against an assault upon my father I am powerless. I can strike the insulter down. I cannot give him the lie."

His voice was calm, although monotonous, but Hertha saw and felt how the man's entire nature was writhing beneath the wound which he thus ruthlessly tore open before her. She could best appreciate his pride,--pride that refused to bow even where he loved. She could estimate what this confession cost him, and, forgetting all else, yielding to the impulse of the moment, she exclaimed, "Good God! How terribly you must have suffered!"

Michael started and gazed at her inquiringly. It was the first time that he had heard her speak in this tone which came from her very soul, and vibrated with passionate sympathy, as if she felt his torture in every fibre of her frame. It was like the first glimmer of a bliss of which he had indeed sometimes dreamed, but from which he had turned with all the pride of a man resolved never to be the sport of a caprice. What he now saw and heard was no sport; it was an outburst of entire self-forgetfulness, of reckless frankness.

"Can you thus understand and feel for me?" he asked, and his heart beat high. "You, born and bred upon sunny heights of existence, with never a glimpse of the dark depths of human misery? Yes, I have suffered terribly, and I still suffer, when forced to connect the idea of disgrace with what should be sacred and dear to me--my father's memory."

Hertha stopped close to his side, and her voice fell on his ear soft and tender as a soothing touch upon a painful wound. "If you could not love your father, you had a mother,--her memory at least is stainless."

"Her memory! Yes. But she was a wretched woman, who had given up home and family to follow the man whom she loved, and by whom she believed herself beloved. She paid for her delusion with the misery of a lifetime, and it killed her."

"And her family knew this and permitted her thus to die?"

"Why not? It had been her free choice, She only expiated her fault. Can you not understand this, Countess Steinrück?"

The words were as bitter as ever. Hertha slowly raised her eyes to his,--there was nothing in them of the keen brilliancy that sometimes made their expression half demonic; their light now shone through tears.

"No, but I can understand how she could follow the man whom she loved, and could believe in him in spite of all the world, although her path lay through darkness and disgrace, and even led to ruin. I could have done this too."

"Hertha, what words are these from you to me?" Michael burst forth passionately, seizing her hand before she was aware and pressing it eagerly to his lips. This recalled the young Countess to herself, and she hastily tried to withdraw her hand.

"Captain Rodenberg, for the love of heaven! you forget----"

"What?" he asked, clasping her hand still more firmly.

"That I am Raoul's betrothed."

"Only his betrothed, not his wife! The tie may yet be severed. Give me the right to do so and I will break----"

"No, Michael, never! It is too late. I am bound."

"You are free if you will only say the word, but you will not say it."

"I cannot!"

"Is that your final decision?"

"It is."

Michael dropped her hand and retreated.

"Then I can only pray your forgiveness for my temerity."

Hertha saw how profound was his emotion. She was now expiating the early frivolity of her conduct towards him. He had no faith in her. The old evil spirit, the old suspicion was stirring within him again, whispering to him that her courage was that of words, not of deeds, and that she surely must prefer an alliance with a count's coronet to the love of the son of an adventurer. One word from her lips would convince him of his error, but before the young Countess there arose at this moment the stern dark face of the old general. She felt the iron clasp of his hand,

she heard his words: 'Surely the betrothed of Count Steirück knows what she owes to him and to herself!' The remembrance admonished her imperiously of the sacredness of her promise. A woman could not a few weeks before marriage sever an alliance into which she had entered voluntarily, because she had changed her mind. Hertha hung her head and was silent.

Meanwhile the sun had set, and with it had departed the golden glory in which the interior of the church had been bathed. Pictures and statues were cold and lifeless again, and gray twilight shadows were softly descending over all. The bright figure of the archangel alone could be discerned in the recess behind the altar. But the wind that roared about the walls outside had found an entrance somewhere: it wailed ill long-drawn notes through the vaulted arches, to die away whispering like spirit-tones.

Hertha shuddered involuntarily at the strange moaning sound, and then turned to go. Michael followed her, but at some slight distance, and neither spoke. They came out into the vestibule of the church, where they were met by the pastor looking much distressed. "I was in search of you, Countess Hertha," said he, out of breath with his hurried walk. "Here you are too, Michael. A messenger has arrived from Castle Steirück----"

"From the castle?" Hertha interposed. "I trust my mother is no worse?"

"The Countess's illness seems to have become graver, and Fräulein von Eberstein wished you to know it; here is a letter for you."

Hertha opened the letter hurriedly and glanced through it. Valentin saw her grow pale.

"I must go; there is not a moment to be lost. I entreat your reverence to have the wagon made ready immediately."

"Do you wish to go now?" Valentin asked in dismay. "It is growing dark; the night will have fallen absolutely in half an hour, and there is a storm brewing. You cannot possibly take that long mountain drive in the night."

"I must! Gerlinda would not write as she does if my mother were not dangerously ill."

"But you yourself run a great risk in persisting in going. What do you think, Michael?"

"It will be a stormy night," said Michael, advancing. "*Must* you go, Countess Steirück?"

For answer she handed to him and to the pastor the letter she had received. It consisted of a few hasty lines: "My godmother has suddenly grown worse; she is asking for you, and I am terribly anxious. The physician talks of a severe, perhaps dangerous attack. Come immediately! GERLINDA."

"You see I have no choice," the young Countess said in a trembling voice. "If I start immediately I can reach the castle before midnight. I must go, your reverence."

During the last few moments they had been walking towards the village. Hertha and the priest had some trouble in making their way against the wind. Valentin made one more attempt to persuade her to wait at least until daybreak before setting forth, but in vain.

At the parsonage they questioned the servant from the castle, who had ridden over on horseback, but he could give his young mistress no consoling tidings. The Frau Countess was certainly very ill; the Herr Doctor had looked very grave, and had bidden him make all the haste he could.

Michael had taken no part in the priest's remonstrances, but now he stepped to Hertha's side and asked, in a low voice, "May I go with you?"

"No!" was the reply, in a voice as low, but none the less decided. He retired with a frown.

Ten minutes later Hertha was seated in the little mountain wagon which her mother always used when she came to Saint Michael, and in which she herself had arrived at the parsonage. The coachman was skilful, and the servant who had accompanied her was mounted upon a stout mountain pony, as was also the messenger from the castle. Nevertheless the old priest stood with anxious looks beside the vehicle from which the young Countess held out her hand to him to bid him farewell. Then the beautiful face, now very pale, turned towards the door of the parsonage, where Michael was standing. Their glances met once more; there was in them a last farewell!

"God grant the storm do not increase during the night!" said Valentin, sighing, as the wagon drove off. "Those servants would all lose their heads in any actual peril. I hoped you would offer to accompany the Countess, Michael."

"I did so, but my offer was rejected in the most decided manner, and of course I could not persist."

The pastor shook his gray head disapprovingly. "How can you be sensitive and irritable at such a time? You could not but see how agitated the poor girl was; but in all matters where the Steirücks are concerned your sense of justice is dulled. I have long seen that."

Michael made no reply to this reproach; his gaze followed the wagon, which soon disappeared in a bend of the road, and then he looked across to the Eagle ridge, which towered white and ghostly in the gathering darkness. It was still distinct, but the clouds were beginning to gather about its summits,--storm-clouds that loomed up slowly and threateningly.

When Valentin and his guest were once more seated in the priest's modest apartment, although they had not met since autumn, and each had much to hear and to tell, there was no ready flow of conversation. Michael especially was uncommonly absent and monosyllabic; he seemed scarcely to hear some of the priest's questions, and his answers to others were quite irrelevant. The pastor perceived with surprise that his thoughts were preoccupied.

The light had quite faded, and old Katrin had just set the lamp upon the table, when there was a knock at the door, and an elderly man in a hunting costume entered the room, baring his head as he advanced to the pastor.

"God bless your reverence, here I am in Saint Michael once more! Do you remember me? It must be ten years since I left the forest lodge."

"Wolfram, is it you?" exclaimed Valentin, much surprised. "Whence do you come?"

"From Tannberg. I had to go to the sessions there on account of a small property left me by an old cousin, and as to-morrow is Saint Michael's day, I thought I would take a look at my old home and see after your reverence. I got here half an hour ago and went to the inn, but I thought I'd look in on your reverence this evening."

The priest glanced with a degree of embarrassment at Michael. This unexpected arrival must be far from agreeable for the young officer, for if Wolfram did not recognize him at first, he certainly would do so shortly.

"You are right not to forget me or your old home," said he, with some hesitation. "I am not alone, as you see. I have a guest----"

"So I heard,--an officer," the forester interposed, standing erect and saluting in true military fashion. "I heard it at the inn,--a son of your reverence's brother in Berlin."

Michael had recognized his former foster-father at the first glance. The powerful, thick-set figure was unchanged, as were the hard features, and the hair and beard, now grizzled, were as neglected as formerly. The man was as rude and rough as ever. At sight of him Rodenberg was for a moment filled with bitterness at the thought that under such brutal guardianship his boyhood and the first years of his youth had been wasted. True, his sense of justice told him that the forester had acted according to his light, but, nevertheless, he could not bring himself to accost him with the old familiarity. There could not but be a certain condescension in his manner as he offered his hand to the new-comer. "The officer is not quite a stranger to you, forester," he said, quietly. "I think we have seen each other before."

Wolfram started at sound of the voice, and scanned the speaker from head to foot, then shook his head. "I have not the honour, so far as I know, Herr Captain. I seem to know the voice, and there is something in the face--what is it? I believe, your reverence, that the gentleman is like that queer fellow Michael who ran away."

"And of whom you seem to have but a poor opinion."

"You're right there!" said the forester, after his blunt fashion. "I had trouble and worry enough with the young rascal. He was as strong as a bear, but so stupid that no one could do anything with him; he did not understand anything, and at last he got me into disgrace with the Herr Count. I was glad to be rid of him when he ran away; he must have gone to ruin somewhere, for he was good for nothing."

Michael smiled slightly at this rather unflattering sketch of character, but the priest said, gravely,--

"You are greatly mistaken, Wolfram; you always were mistaken with regard to your foster-son. Look more closely at my guest,--he is Captain Michael Rodenberg."

Wolfram started and stared speechless at Michael as if he had seen a ghost. "The Herr Captain--he--Michael?" he stammered at last.

"Who did not quite go to ruin," said Michael. "You see he managed to get a captaincy."

The forester still stood as if thunderstruck, trying in vain to grasp the incredible fact. He looked up in helpless bewilderment at Michael, now a head taller than his former foster-father, and scarcely ventured to take the young man's offered hand. He stammered a few words, half in salutation, half in excuse, but he evidently found it impossible to comprehend the situation.

Valentin benevolently came to his relief with a few questions as to his welfare during the last ten years, but it was some minutes before the forester could collect himself sufficiently to reply, and even then his answers were rather incoherent. There was not much to tell; his present

situation on the young Countess's estates brought him a better salary than his former one, but he lived as before in the forest, with no associates save his underlings, rarely saw anything of the world, and seemed to lead the same half-savage life as formerly at the forest lodge. He saw the general frequently, for the Count was very conscientious in the discharge of his duties as guardian, and himself inspected his ward's estates, but he had seen his young mistress to-day for the first time for ten years; he had met her on his way to the village, as she was returning to the castle.

This was told in a broken, disconnected fashion, the speaker's eyes being all the while riveted persistently upon Michael. If the captain took any part in the conversation the forester was mute; his shyness seemed to increase rather than to diminish; his wonted self-assertion had vanished. Michael, moreover, was as taciturn and absent-minded as he had previously been in talking with the priest; even this unexpected meeting could not keep his thoughts from incessantly following the little mountain wagon, which had now probably accomplished a third of its journey, and he suddenly left the room to see if the moon, which had just risen, were shining brightly enough for the mountain drive.

Wolfram looked after him, and then said to the priest in a strangely--subdued tone, "Is it really true, your reverence? Is that really and truly Michael,--our Michael?"

Valentin could not forbear smiling, as he replied, "I should think you could see that for yourself."

"Yes, I do see it, but I can't believe it," the man declared. "*That* the boy to whom I have given many a blow for his stupidity and obstinacy? The innkeeper said the captain was so wonderfully clever that they had put him on the general's staff, and in the last war he fought furiously, and made short work with the enemy. And now he's a captain, just like my Herr Count when I entered his service forty years ago, and some day he may be a general like his Excellency."

"It is quite possible. But did not the innkeeper mention his name when he told you all this?"

"No; he called him only 'the captain.' Oh, he has a great respect for him. Well, so far as I can see, there's no being very familiar with Herr Michael now. He is friendly enough, but there is a kind of way about him that makes you keep your distance. He calls me Herr Forester; I suppose I must call him Herr Captain."

"You certainly must conform yourself to altered circumstances," said the priest, gravely. "And one thing more, Wolfram. It is not necessary that you should tell the innkeeper and your other acquaintances that Captain Rodenberg is your former foster-son. He had very little intercourse with the villagers in old times, and is so much altered that no one recognized him when he returned here an officer. I know that Count Steinrück enjoined silence upon you with regard to your foster-son, and you were silent. You would oblige Michael and myself if you would pursue the same course now."

"I never was a tattler, as your reverence knows," rejoined Wolfram. "I shouldn't gain much by my former prophecies about Michael; the people would be sure to tease me with them, and I must go home the day after to-morrow; I don't want anybody here to get wind of the matter until after I have gone."

Michael's return put a stop to the conversation. Immediately afterwards the forester took his leave and returned to the little village inn, which stood at a considerable distance from the parsonage. Meanwhile the night had set in, and St. Michael soon lay buried in slumber.

The signs in the heavens, which had been so evident to a practised eye, had not prophesied falsely. Towards midnight the storm burst with a savage fury rarely equalled even in these mountains. The little Alpine hamlet was sufficiently familiar with the storms of autumn and of spring, and its inhabitants were wont to sleep calmly and quietly while the wind raged above the low stone-laden roofs and rattled at the doors and windows. But to-night the uproar was so terrible that it roused them from their repose. They crossed themselves and lay awake listening; it seemed as if Saint Michael were to be swept off the face of the earth.

There was a gleam of light in the parsonage. The priest had risen, and was standing at the window, entirely dressed, when he heard Michael's step upon the stairs.

"I saw a light in your room, and so came down," the captain said as he entered. "The storm has roused you from your bed. I thought it would do so."

"And you have not been in bed at all," rejoined Valentin. "At least I have heard your step continually above my head. You must have paced your room for hours."

"I could not sleep, and I forgot that I should disturb you."

"Not at all; my sleep was broken with anxiety about the Countess Hertha and her mountain drive. Thank God, the storm did not come until near midnight! She must have reached the castle by eleven."

"Are you perfectly sure of that?" asked Michael, eagerly.

"Yes; the drive down could not, even with extreme caution, take more than three hours, and for that length of time the sky was tolerably clear; moreover, the moon is at the full. What I feared was that the storm would overtake the Countess on the way. Once in the valley she was out of danger."

"If she arrived there. But how can we be sure of it?" murmured Michael. He could not but admit that the priest was right; in all probability Hertha had long since been safe in the castle; but the restless anxiety which had robbed him of sleep would not leave him; it possessed him with a vague dread, a foreboding of evil.

He, too, had gone to the window, and both men stood looking out silently into the storm and night, illuminated by a gray light from the moon, which behind its veil of clouds shone brightly enough to reveal objects at some distance. Suddenly the dim figure of a man appeared, seeming to come directly from the village, and making his way with sturdy steps in the teeth of the wind towards the parsonage. Michael's keen eye first detected him; he pointed him out to the priest, who shook his head, surprised. "In such weather! Some one must be desperately ill and requiring the sacrament, but I know of no one in the village who is ailing. The man is certainly coming here. I must go and let him in."

He went to open the door himself, and immediately afterwards Wolfram's voice was heard. "It is I, your reverence. I come like a ghost in the night, but it can't be helped. If you had been asleep I should have had to knock you up."

"What is the matter? What brings you here?" Valentin asked, anxiously, as he conducted his visitor into the room.

"No good, your reverence. First let me get my breath. That cursed wind,--it nearly knocked me down! I come about the young Countess----"

"Countess Steinrück? Where is she?" Michael hastily interrupted him.

"Heaven only knows! She has not returned to the parsonage?"

"Good God, no!" exclaimed Valentin. "The Countess set out for the castle."

"Yes, but she had to turn back. That confounded horse shied at a mountain brook! I should like to wring the brute's neck! And the coachman, instead of holding on to the reins, was tossed off the box, and there he lies with a hole an inch deep in his head. The servant got him back with difficulty to the inn, and the young Countess was lost on the way back. Not a soul knows where she is,--and in such a night, when all the fiends are abroad!"

He paused to take breath. Michael had grown very pale. Confused and vague as was the man's tale, he saw that his forebodings were justified.

"Was the Countess uninjured. Where did the accident happen? At what time? Answer! answer!"

He assailed the forester so peremptorily with his questions that Valentin, in spite of his anxiety, gazed at him in amazement. Wolfram did his best to tell his story more connectedly, and was partly successful, but his tidings were not more consoling. "At first all went well. The road was perfectly clear in the moonlight, and they drove on tolerably fast. Then the brute, the horse, suddenly shied at a brook that tumbled swollen down the mountain, rushed into the stones by the wayside, fell, and pulled over the carriage with him."

"And the Countess was not injured?" The question was as eager as the foregoing ones.

"No, she was on her feet in an instant, but the coachman lay bleeding on the ground, and the wagon had lost a wheel. Of course the men lost their heads,--that kind of folk never have any sense outside the walls of their castle. The young Countess seems to have been the only one to have her wits about her, and she brought the others to order. She could not go on with the broken wagon; there was nothing for it but to return. The coachman, who could not walk, was put into the wagon among the cushions, and one of the servants with the shying horse stayed with him, while the Countess and the other servant mounted the other horses and set out to go back to Saint Michael, promising to send help. Nothing has been seen or heard of her since."

"At what time did this happen?" Michael interrupted him.

"At about nine o'clock."

"Then she ought to have been here by ten, and it is now one hour past midnight!"

He uttered the words in a tone of such anguish that the priest again cast at him a look half inquiry, half dismay. But Michael had eyes and ears only for the forester and his tidings, and he urged him impatiently, "Go on! go on!"

"There's not much more to say," Wolfram declared. "The two men waited for help for two

hours, and when it did not come, and the weather grew more threatening, they had the sense to set out by themselves. The coachman had somewhat recovered, and was put upon the horse, which the other man led by the bridle, and so at last they reached the inn, but could go no farther, for the storm was too furious; they were perfectly sure that the Countess was at the parsonage. But she never got back to the village; she would have had to pass the inn, and no one had seen her. The servant is crying like an old woman about his young mistress, but he could not be prevailed upon to go to the parsonage through the storm. So I came,--and there your reverence has the whole story. What is to be done?"

"There has been an accident!" exclaimed the priest, his anxiety increasing with every moment. "I feared it when this wretched mountain journey was undertaken. They have fallen down some roadside precipice."

"They are more likely to have lost their way," said Michael, his voice faltering in spite of his effort to steady it. "Did the two servants who returned find no trace of the others?"

"No, not the least."

"Then there can have been no plunge down a precipice; two persons, and two horses, could not disappear from a tolerably safe road without a trace left behind. They have lost their way."

"But that is impossible,--there is no other road," said the priest.

"Yes, one, your reverence, near Almenbach, where the path winds upward to the mountain chapel. The roads are very similar, moonlight is illusive, and if the Countess did not soon find out her mistake, she must have got among the clefts of the Eagle ridge!"

"God protect us!" exclaimed the priest. "That would be almost as bad as a plunge down a precipice!"

Michael bit his lip; he knew that this was no exaggeration; from his boyhood he had been familiar with the clefts and abysses of the Eagle ridge.

"It is the only imaginable possibility," he rejoined. "At all events, there is not a moment to be wasted; hours have been lost already. We must set out immediately."

"Now? In such a night?" asked Wolfram, staring at the captain as if he thought him insane, while Valentin exclaimed,--

"What are you thinking of, Michael? You do not mean----?"

"To go in search of the Countess. Of course. Do you suppose I could stay quietly here while she is exposed to all the horrors of this night?"

"You ought to wait, and not attempt impossibilities. You know our mountains, and that nothing is to be done while the storm is raging thus. As soon as it subsides, as soon as the morning dawns, we will do all that men can do. To go out now would be worse than folly,--it would be madness!"

"Madness or not, it must be attempted!" Michael burst forth. "Do you imagine that I set the least value on my life weighed against hers? If I had to follow her to the summit of the Eagle ridge, where death seemed certain, I would either deliver her from peril or perish with her!"

Valentin clasped his hands in dismay. This burst of despair and anguish betrayed to him the well-guarded secret of which he had, indeed, within the last few minutes had some suspicion, and he exclaimed under his breath, "Can this be? Good God!"

Michael paid him no heed; he had turned to Wolfram, and said, hastily, "I need companions; we must search in different directions; will you go with me?"

"I? Now, when all the fiends of hell are loose in the mountains? The Wild Huntsman was never so furious in all the years I spent at the forest lodge."

"Infernal superstition!" muttered Rodenberg, stamping his foot. "Then go for the innkeeper; he is a good mountaineer and a brave man."

"That may be, but he'll not stir out in weather like this. He took his oath of that when some one spoke of it awhile ago, and he said a ton of gold would not tempt him, for he had a wife and children to take care of."

"Then I will go alone. Send help after me as soon as the morning dawns. Let the innkeeper and a party take the road towards the mountain chapel, which I shall follow, and pursue it to the Eagle ridge, if necessary. You, Wolfram, with some others, search the forest around the lodge, your former domain. Your reverence will please to have the road gone over again as far as to the spot where the accident occurred. Summon the whole village to help. I have no more time to lose."

In spite of his terrible agitation, he spoke in the energetic tone of command which he was

wont to use to his subordinates, and as he hastily left the room the forester looked after him with a bewildered air, evidently greatly impressed.

"He has learned how to command. That's plain!" he said, in an undertone. "He behaves as if the entire village belonged to his regiment and had to obey orders. Queer! My Herr Count was just so. Michael's look and tone are just like his; he might have learned them from him, or have been his son. There's something queer in it, your reverence; it looks like witchcraft."

The priest made no reply,--he was as if stunned. Hertha's danger, Michael's reckless resolve to follow her, the discovery he had just made with regard to the pair, everything coming at once upon the venerable man, unused as he was to any passionate emotion, overpowered him: he felt dizzy.

In a few moments Michael returned, completely equipped for his midnight expedition in a rough plaid, with his mountain staff; he held out his hand to his old teacher: "Farewell, your reverence, and if we should not see each other again, God protect us!"

Valentin clasped his hand and held it fast; fear lest he should lose his favourite outweighed the thought of Hertha's peril. "Michael, be reasonable. Hark! how the wind is roaring! You'll not be able to get a hundred steps from the house. Wait at least for half an hour!"

Rodenberg withdrew his hand impatiently. "No, every minute may be fraught with life and death. Farewell."

He walked to the door, where Wolfram was standing motionless. His hard features worked strangely as he asked, with hesitation, "You really mean to go, Herr Captain, and all alone?"

"Yes, since no one has the courage to go with me," said Michael, bluntly.

"Oho! we are not cowards either!" exclaimed the forester, offended. "A Christian man like the innkeeper, who has a wife and children, ought not, indeed, to venture, but I have nothing of the kind, and since there's no help for it--why, I don't care--I'll go too!"

Valentin was greatly relieved by these words,--glad that Michael was not, at least, to go alone; but Rodenberg merely said, "Come, then! Two are always better than one."

"That depends," said Wolfram. "Perhaps the Wild Huntsman thinks so too, and will carry off both of us. Good-bye, your reverence; it can do no harm for you to pray hard for us while we are gone. You are a holy man, and if you will speak a good word for us to Saint Michael, he may, perhaps, interfere and put the hellish crew outside to rout; 'tis high time."

Michael waved his hand to the priest from the threshold of the door; Wolfram followed him, and in a few minutes both were lost to sight outside.

The Eagle ridge had, in fact, sent forth one of the spring storms, so justly dreaded in all the country round. Those who shared the forester's superstition might well believe that a rabble of fiends from the pit were abroad dealing destruction about them. There was a wild uproar in the air, a crashing and howling in the forest, while the moon, veiled by the rack of clouds, shed over earth and sky a weird ghostly light more dreary than any darkness. Wolfram crossed himself from time to time when the wind shrieked its loudest, but he tramped bravely onward through the storm,--it needed a man of his physical vigour and one familiar with the mountains to make headway on such a night and in such a place.

Both men reached the road to the mountain chapel without discovering a trace of those whom they were seeking; here they separated.

Michael, in spite of his companion's remonstrances, pressed on to the Eagle ridge, which began here, while Wolfram turned aside towards his old domain about the forest lodge. It was agreed that he who first discovered the missing ones should conduct them to the mountain chapel and there await daybreak. In any case the two men were to meet there at dawn, in order, if their search had been fruitless, to wait for the villagers from Saint Michael, and to continue the quest by daylight. These were Captain Rodenberg's orders.

"I wonder if he will ever get back again!" muttered Wolfram, pausing for a short breathing-space in the midst of the forest. "It is sheer madness to go among the cliffs of the Eagle ridge; but he'll climb it if he does not find the Countess below. I'll wager my head on that! No use to gainsay him; on the contrary, he orders me round as if he were my lord and master. I wonder why I put up with it, and why on earth I came with him. His reverence is right; it is madness to climb the mountains on such an infernal night, when not a cry could be heard, no signal be seen. We don't even know which way to go, but Michael doesn't care for that. And I thought him cowardly! To be sure he always, as a boy, wanted to run into the midst of the Wild Huntsman's crew to see them closer,--it was only men that he ran away from. Now he seems to have stopped running away from them, but he orders them about like a lord. And you have to obey,--there's no help for it,--just like my old master the Count."

He heaved a sigh, and was about to march on. Just then there was a slight lull in the blast, and

the forester gave a long, loud shout, as he had been doing at intervals. This time, however, he started and listened, for he seemed to hear something like the sound of a human voice. Again Wolfram shouted with all the force of his lungs, and from no great distance came the wailing tones, "Here! Help!"

"At last!" exclaimed the forester, turning in the direction whence came the voice. "It is not the Countess, I can hear that; but where one is the other must be."

Giving repeated calls, he hurried on, the answers coming more and more distinctly, until in about ten minutes he came upon Hertha's attendant, who no sooner saw him than he threw his arms about him, clinging to him like a drowning man.

"Take care, you'll upset me!" growled Wolfram. "Did you not hear me shout before? For two hours we have been hallooing in every direction. Where is the Countess?"

"I don't know; I lost her an hour ago."

The forester roughly shook the man off the arm to which he was still clinging: "What? Lost? Thunder and lightning, man! what do you mean? Just when I think I have found the Countess, you turn up without her. Why did you not stay with her, as was your bounden duty?"

"It was not my fault," wailed the man. "The fog--the storm--and the horses have gone too!"

"Hold your tongue about the horses!" Wolfram interposed, roughly. "Men's lives are at stake, and you tell me nothing that I can understand. How came you here without the Countess?"

It was some time before the exhausted man was able to answer the forester's questions. He was an old family servant, faithful and trustworthy, and had therefore been chosen by the Countess to attend her daughter on this expedition, but he had completely lost his presence of mind in the face of the present peril, and had been of no service whatever to his mistress.

As Michael had surmised, they had taken the wrong road, and had discovered their mistake only upon reaching the mountain chapel. Then they had turned their horses' heads; but the moon, which until then had shone brightly, began to be obscured, and their ignorance of the country was disastrous. In vain did they turn in every direction; they could not find the road again and were completely lost. The horses, bewildered and nettled by the aimless wandering to and fro, finally refused to stir a step. There was nothing for it but to alight.

Then the tempest began; clouds gathered from all quarters. The Countess sent her attendant back a short distance for the horses, which had been left at the foot of a declivity, in a last hope that by trusting to their instinct the way might be found; but the servant had no sooner left her than the gathering mist closed about him, obscuring everything. He could not find the horses, nor make his way back to his mistress. His cry of distress was drowned by the roar of the tempest, and he had probably wandered away from her in his attempt to find her. How he had gone astray he could not tell.

"That is the worst of all!" exclaimed the forester. "The Countess is now entirely alone, and very likely has wandered towards the Eagle ridge, as Captain Rodenberg supposed. I should like to know why he chooses to run blindly into all kinds of danger after her? What we have to do, however, is to get to the mountain chapel as soon as possible. Come along! On the way we can go on shouting; it may do some good."

The storm raged with undiminished fury. Black clouds swept overhead and enveloped the mountains, breaking from time to time into a host of misty phantom shapes. And there was a roaring, a shrieking, and a howling, as of a myriad voices of the night echoing from the air above and from chasm and abyss below.

At the foot of a huge fir, the summit of which soared bare and dead into the air, a female figure was crouching, worn out by fruitless wandering, chilled by the mist and despairing of succour. The delicate child of luxury, whom hitherto the winds of heaven had not been allowed to visit too roughly, had nevertheless bravely confronted a real peril, and had done everything to encourage her attendant while they were together. The trembling old servant could neither advise nor aid his mistress; but he had at least given her a sense of human companionship, and now he had disappeared. No searching for him, no call, was of any avail; she was alone amid the horrors of this night,--entirely alone.

More than an hour had passed thus,--a time which must always be dream-like in her memory. She wandered on and on. Gloomy forests; dark rocky crests reared aloft like phantoms; mountain streams, whose foaming waters gleamed dimly in the fitful glimpses of the moon,--all passed her by, shadowy and indistinct. Like a somnambulist, she wandered on the brink of clefts and abysses, not heeding the perils of a path which she never would have dreamed of traversing in the broad light of day. But at last it came to an end in its upward course, and she could go no farther; she sank down exhausted.

There was a moment's lull in the storm; the clouds broke, and the moon, sailing into the clear space, illumined the scene clearly. Hertha saw that she had reached a narrow rocky eminence, and that an abyss yawned close beside her. Around her was a broken sea of cliffs and rocks,

below her was the black night of the forest, and above her soared the dizzy heights of the Eagle ridge, about whose rocky crests the clouds were flying, while the topmost peaks gleamed ghost-like in their robes of snow. The distant muffled roar of the glacier streams fell upon her ear, but only for a few moments. Then the roaring of the wind began afresh, drowning all other sounds; the moon vanished, and the dim, weird twilight fell on all.

The old fir-tree creaks and groans and sways; it seems as if the blast would tear it loose from its rocky bed. Hertha clasps her arms about the trunk, neither moaning nor weeping, but a tremor runs through her entire frame, and there is an icy pressure upon her temples. Her eyes are fixed upon the white gleaming peaks still glistening distinctly, and the old legend recurs to her. From those summits Saint Michael sweeps down at dawn the next day. Cannot the mighty patron saint of her race, the victorious leader of the heavenly host, to whom thousands will pray on the morrow, come to the rescue of a poor child of mortality whose warm young life shudders at the thought of the icy embrace of death? But his dominion begins with the dawn,—it is with the first ray of morning that his sword of flame flashes forth beneficently over the earth; and now night and destruction reign.

A fervent prayer bursts from the poor girl's very soul. Clearly and distinctly the picture rises upon her mental vision: the archangel with the eagle's wings and eyes of flame enthroned above the high altar, surrounded as by a halo by the light of the setting sun, and by her side stands one, strangely like the picture,—one who had once declared to her, 'If my bliss were as lofty and unattainable as the Eagle ridge, I would scale the heights though each step threatened destruction.'

Ah! she knew it was no empty boast. Michael would follow her through peril of all kinds: he would seek her and find her if he knew of her danger; but he now supposed her long since safe at the castle. And yet it seemed to her as if the intense passionate yearning that filled her heart, mind, and soul must draw him to her side, as if he could and would hear the desperate cry that burst from her lips, half a prayer to St. Michael and half a call to him whom she loved: "Michael,—help!"

Surely there was an answering call, distant and faint, but still his voice, and she hears it through the tempest as he has heard hers: "Hertha!" And again it comes louder, and with an exultant sound: "Hertha!"

She rises to her feet and answers. Nearer and nearer sounds the succouring call, until just below her she hears: "What! Up there? Courage, dearest, I am coming."

Then ensue minutes that seem endless. Michael is ascending slowly, laboriously, but at last she sees him; he plants his mountain-staff firmly and swings himself up beside her, clasps her in his arms, and she clings to him as if never to leave him more.

But this blissful moment of forgetfulness is brief: danger still threatens; not an instant must be lost.

"We must go," urged Michael. "The fir is tottering, and may fall at any moment; these clefts are never safe. Come, dearest."

He clasped his arm about her, and she leaned upon him in unquestioning confidence, as he half led, half carried her down the rocky slope. The moon had emerged again, and lighted them on their way, revealing at the same time all the terrors of the path by which Hertha had ascended half unconsciously, and the perils of which were doubled in descending. But not in vain had Michael lived for ten years in these mountains; the man had not forgotten what had been familiar to the boy for whom no rocky summit had been too lofty, no cleft too deep. Thus they made the descent, the abyss close beside them, the wild uproar of the stormy night about them, their hearts filled with an exultant joy that no tempest, no abyss, could affect. At last they reached a place of safety. Michael had kept his word: he had snatched his bliss from the Eagle ridge.

Morning was approaching, and the tempest was subsiding; it no longer raged with savage fury, and the heavens were gradually clearing; the clouds slowly dispersed, and about the mountain-tops the first gray glimmer of dawn appeared.

Michael made a halt as they issued from the rocky gorge. The mountain chapel was almost a mile away, and his exhausted companion was obliged to rest. All peril was past; there was no difficulty about the rest of the way if it were traversed by daylight. He found a shelter for Hertha beneath a protecting rock, where she sat shielded from the wind, while he stood beside her. The young Countess's attire had suffered sadly: her dark wrap was torn and muddy, she had lost her hat, her heavy braids hung loose about her shoulders, as, pale and weary, she leaned her head back against the wall of rock. And yet Michael thought he never had seen her look half so lovely as at this moment,—his love, whom he had battled for and won through storm and tempest.

They had scarcely spoken on the way hither, each step was taken at the risk of life, and now they were still silent, gazing upward at the Eagle ridge, where the gray dawn was beginning to yield to a crimson tint that deepened every moment. At last Michael bent over her and said, gently, "Hertha!"

She looked up at him, and suddenly held out to him both her hands. "Michael, how did you

ever find me in those abysses? You could have had no clue to guide you."

He smiled and carried her hands to his lips. "No; but I divined where my Hertha was,--where she must be. And you, too, dearest, knew that I should come to you: you called me before you heard my voice. Now I no longer dread that harsh refusal which fell from your lips yesterday. I have no fear of the promise given by you to one whom you do not love. I have won you from the Eagle ridge, and I shall surely triumph over Raoul Steinrück."

"I can never be his wife!" exclaimed Hertha. "I know now that it is impossible! But do not quarrel with him again, Michael, I implore you. If it is possible----"

"But it is not possible!" Michael gravely interrupted her. "Do not deceive yourself, Hertha; there must come a struggle, probably a break with your entire family, who never will forgive you for dissolving a tie so desired by all of them,--for sacrificing a Count Steinrück to a bourgeois officer. And there is something beside with which they will taunt both you and me,--I told you of it yesterday in the church,--the blot upon my life."

"Your father's memory," she said, softly.

"Yes; they will never cease to remind you that you are giving yourself to the son of an adventurer, whose name is not without stain. I thought to terrify you with this yesterday, but, God bless you! you thought only of my suffering. Nevertheless, shall you be able to endure the shadow upon your life when that name shall be your own?"

His eyes sought hers with a look in them of the old mistrust of the former Countess Steinrück with her haughty self-consciousness. But the delusive gleam had vanished from the eyes which the boy had pronounced 'beautiful evil eyes,'--they were shining with the clear sunshine of love and happiness.

"Must I repeat to you, then, what I said to you yesterday when you spoke of your mother?--'I, too, can follow him whom I love even into misery and disgrace,--ay, even to ruin.'"

He clasped her in his arms, and she rested there as she had done before on the Eagle ridge, behind which there was a dark crimson glow,--a flaming herald of the morning as it mounted aloft. The snowy summits began to blush with rosy tints, and the clouds still lying on the horizon were all 'in crimson liveries dight.'

"The day is breaking," said Michael, pressing his lips again and again upon the 'red fairy gold' of the head resting on his breast. "As soon as you are able we will set out upon our homeward way. I will take you to your mother to-day."

"My mother!" exclaimed Hertha, regretfully. "Oh, how could I so far forget her! God grant I have been nearer death than she! My mother would give ear to my entreaties, I know, but she submits blindly in everything to my uncle Michael, and there will be a severe struggle with him."

"Leave him to me," Michael interposed. "Immediately upon my return I will inform the general that you wish to annul your contract with Raoul, that----"

"No, no!" she remonstrated. "I must bear the first brunt of his anger. You do not know my guardian."

"I know him better than you think; this will not be our first encounter. If any one can measure himself against the general it is I,--his near of kin."

Hertha looked at him in bewilderment. "What do you mean? I do not understand."

He released her from his clasping arms, and, gazing into her eyes, said, "I have intentionally delayed a disclosure that must be made to you, dearest. I could not make it until I was sure that you were mine, even although you saw in me only the son of a homeless adventurer. I am no alien to you or to your people, nor was my father. Did you never hear of the general's other child, his daughter?"

"Certainly,--Louise Steinrück. She was once, I think, on the eve of betrothal to my father; but she died very young,--scarcely eighteen."

"You have been told, then, that she died. I thought so. She did die for her father, her family, who cast her off when she married the man of her choice. She was my mother."

The young Countess looked at him in utter amazement. "Is it possible? You a Steinrück?"

"No; a Rodenberg, Hertha. Do not forget that I have no share in the name of my mother or of her family, nor do I wish to have."

"And your grandfather? Does he know----"

"Yes; but he sees in me only the son of an outcast father, whose name, even, must not be mentioned in his presence; and now that I shall snatch you from his heir, Raoul, he will oppose us to the utmost. But what matters it? You are mine of your own free will, and I shall know how to

guard my treasure."

He did, indeed, look ready to defy the world for her sake. Then he clasped her hand in his to guide her back to that world which lay in the depths below them, still woven about by mist and twilight. Up above, the snowy summits were bathed in crimson light; the eastern skies gleamed and flamed; there was a flash, as of the waving of a sword, and the sun rose slowly, red and glowing. Born of the tempest, the young day gave greeting to the earth. On the brilliant beams of the morning sun Saint Michael descended from the Eagle ridge.

The Countess Steinrück was indeed seriously ill, so seriously that by the advice of the physician she was kept in ignorance of the peril through which her daughter had passed. Hertha, upon her arrival, simply told her mother that the storm had detained her in Saint Michael for the night, and thus the Countess was not even aware of the meeting with Captain Rodenberg.

About a week later, in one of the reception-rooms of the castle, the priest of Saint Michael was sitting with his brother, who had lately arrived, and had sent a messenger to summon Valentin. The conversation between the brothers was evidently of a serious nature, and Professor Wehlau said at last, "Unfortunately, I can give you no hope. This last attack of the disease from which the Countess has suffered for so many years, is a mortal one. Her condition is, happily, free from pain, but it is hopeless. She may live four or five weeks longer; she will never witness her daughter's marriage."

"I feared this when I saw the Countess last," rejoined Valentin. "But it is a comfort to have you here. I know what a sacrifice you make in coming in the midst of your university course, and when you have so entirely given up practice."

Wehlau shrugged his shoulders: "What else could I do? My relations with the Steinrücks are almost as old and as intimate as your own; and then Michael, who brought the news of the Countess's illness, gave me no peace. He urged me so strongly that at last I consented to come. I thought it odd, for he knows the Countess only in society, but he insisted that I should yield to her request and come."

The priest was evidently interested to hear this, but he merely asked, "And you brought Hans with you? I shall see him, then."

"Certainly; he will go to you in a day or two. He of course stays with our relatives in Tannberg, while I take up my abode here on the Countess's account. The boy's whims are unaccountable. Early in April he began to talk of going to the mountains to sketch, and I had to convince him that it would be folly, since the mountains were then deep in snow. And when I made up my mind to come here, he suddenly discovered that it was necessary he should go to Tannberg for 'relaxation.' He must need it after all the flattery and nonsense that have been put into his head of late, and which my sister-in-law will doubtless keep fresh in his memory."

"But you brought him?"

"Brought him? As if I had anything to do with it! Oh, my gentleman is quite independent now. I dare not do anything to clip the wings of such a genius, however ridiculous may be the flights it undertakes. He came with me, and comes over here every day with the greatest regularity to inquire after me and the Countess. I can't understand the fellow any more than I can Michael. They could not show more tender interest in the Countess if she were their own mother. And she is in very good hands with the country physician here, and that young god-daughter of hers,—what is her name?"

"Gerlinda von Eberstein."

"Ah, yes! A queer little thing, who scarcely opens her lips, and makes the most remarkable courtesies. But she is a capital nurse, with her quiet, gentle ways. Countess Hertha is too agitated and anxious beside a sick-bed."

They were interrupted. The physician had arrived and wished to speak with his distinguished colleague. Wehlau rose and left the room. Then the servant added that the forester, Wolfram, was below, desiring to see his reverence. Valentin told the man to admit him, and upon his entrance said, kindly, "You here still, Wolfram? I thought you had gone home some days ago."

"I am going to-morrow," the forester replied. "My business is finished in Tannberg; I wanted to ask once more after the gracious Countess. The servants told me that your reverence was here, and so I thought I----" He stammered and hesitated and seemed unable to proceed.

"You wished to bid me good-bye," Valentin interposed.

"Yes, I wanted that, and something else besides. I've been worried about the thing for a week, your reverence, and haven't breathed a word of it to a living soul; but I can't help it, I must tell your reverence."

"Tell me, then. What is it?"

Wolfram glanced towards the door, and then, approaching the priest, said, almost in a whisper,--

"'Tis Michael,--Captain Rodenberg, I mean. The next thing he'll snatch the sun from the sky if he takes it into his head to want it. What he's at now is not much less. It will make no end of a fuss in the Count's family. The general will rage and scold, and then Michael will be down upon him just as he was before. Oh, he'll stop at nothing."

"Are you talking of Michael?" Valentin asked, bewildered. "He went to town long ago; my brother has just brought me a message from him."

"That may be. I only know about the night of the storm. When I took the servant whom I found to the mountain chapel, as had been agreed, I left him there and went some distance towards the Eagle ridge just at day-dawn, in hopes of finding some trace of the captain or the Countess. I really did not think that I should ever see either of them again alive. But after a while I saw them both on a rock, and they were very much alive: he kissed her!"

"What!" exclaimed the pastor, recoiling.

"No wonder your reverence is shocked. I was too, but I saw it with my bodily eyes. He, Michael,--Captain Rodenberg I mean,--had his arm around the Countess's waist, and he kissed her. I thought the world had come to an end."

Valentin would probably have thought the same had he not been in some measure prepared for the revelation; therefore he was more troubled than surprised as he said, more to himself than to the man, "It has come to a declaration, then. I feared this."

"And the young Countess seemed very well pleased; she made no objection at all. They neither of them saw or heard me, but I plainly heard him say 'My Hertha!'--quite as if she belonged to him; and she betrothed to the young Count! Now, I ask your reverence, what is to be done? That boy was always at some mischief. And he's at it still. He'll never be content with a kiss; he'll marry the Countess right out of the midst of her ancestors and her millions. If they won't give her to him he'll shoot the young Count, send the general and all the family to the right about, turn every one out of doors, and carry off 'his Hertha' from the castle, just as he got her away from the Eagle ridge, and marry her. Ah, your reverence, I know him!"

Wolfram had apparently fallen into the other extreme; whereas he had formerly despised his foster-son, he now entertained a boundless respect for his capability, which he veiled, it is true, in grumbling, discontented words. He was quite sure that Michael could do what he chose in spite of every one, even of the general, in Wolfram's eyes the most awe-inspiring of individuals.

The priest was much distressed by this revelation, confirming as it did his worst fears, but he could do nothing at present save enjoin silence upon the forester. There was no fear that his injunction would be disobeyed. Wolfram evidently regarded his communication in the light of a confession, and readily promised to divulge no word of his discovery. When he had gone, the old man clasped his hands and said to himself, "The struggle will be for life and death. And when those two unyielding, iron natures confront each other in enmity--Good God! what will be the issue?"

On the afternoon of the same day Valentin was already on his way back to Saint Michael, and the Professor sat in his room answering some letters, when the Freiherr von Eberstein was announced.

The old gentleman had come to see his daughter and to inquire after the Countess, and when he heard of the arrival of the famous professor from the capital he resolved to take advantage of the occasion to consult him with regard to his own ailments. Wehlau suspected something of the kind when the frail, stooping figure appeared, and instantly assumed a reserved demeanour, for he was nowise inclined to extend to strangers the exceptional privilege accorded to the Countess.

"Udo, Freiherr von Eberstein-Ortenau on the Ebersburg," said the old man, inclining his head with solemn dignity.

"So I have just heard," said Wehlau, dryly, offering his visitor a chair. "What can I do for you?"

The Freiherr took a seat, rather discomfited by this reception. His name and title had not apparently produced the slightest effect.

"I hear that you have been summoned to attend the Countess Steinrück," he began again, "and I wished to speak with you about her."

The Professor muttered some inarticulate words. He was not fond of discussing cases of illness with unprofessional people, and was not at all inclined to retail here the opinion he had expressed to his brother. Eberstein, however, took his inarticulate mutterings for assent, and continued,--

"At the same time I wish to consult you with regard to an ailment of my own, which for years---

"Excuse me," Wehlau bluntly interrupted him, "I no longer practise medicine, and was not summoned hither professionally. I hastened to the Countess's sick-bed from motives of friendship. I could not possibly accept a stranger as a patient."

The Freiherr stared in surprise and indignation at the bourgeois professor who could speak of the medical treatment of a Countess Steinrück as a matter of friendship, and refuse to accept as a patient a Freiherr von Eberstein. In his seclusion he had formed no idea of the social position of the famous investigator, but he had heard formerly that scientific men were all eccentric, entirely unacquainted with the usages of polite society, and consequently rude and unpolished in the extreme. He therefore magnanimously forgave the Professor for these characteristics of his class, and, since he really needed his advice, he determined to make him understand clearly who and what his visitor was.

"I am a near friend of the Countess's family," he began again. "We two are the oldest lines in the country; my family is in fact two hundred years the elder: it dates from the tenth century."

"Very remarkable," said Wehlau, without the least idea of what the tenth century had to do with the matter.

"It is a fact," declared Eberstein, "an historically authenticated fact. Count Michael, the Steinrücks' ancestor, first emerges from the twilight of legend during the crusades, while Udo von Eberstein----" And off he went into the ancient chronicles of his house, beginning a discourse similar to the one with which Gerlinda had so terrified the guest at the Ebersburg. It swarmed with knightly names and feuds, and with all the glorious mediæval blood and murder in which the Ebersteins had a share.

At first the Professor seemed desirous of discovering some means of cutting short this unwelcome visit, but he gradually became attentive, even drawing up his chair close to that of the old Freiherr and gazing steadily into his eyes. Suddenly he interrupted him in the middle of a sentence and seized his hand.

"Permit me,--your case interests me. Strange, the pulse is all right!"

The Freiherr exulted; this discourteous professor knew now that he was in presence of the scion of a lofty line, and was ready to give the advice he had at first refused.

"You find my pulse all right?" he asked. "I am glad of that; but you will nevertheless prescribe for----"

"Applications of ice to the head during twenty-four hours at least," said Wehlau, laconically.

"What! with my gout!" the old gentleman exclaimed, in dismay. "I cannot endure the least cold, and if you will investigate my case----"

"Not the slightest necessity. I know perfectly well what ails you," declared the Professor.

The Freiherr's respect increased for this famous physician, who could pronounce upon a patient's condition by merely looking at him, without asking a single question.

"The Countess certainly spoke in the highest terms of your keenness of apprehension," he rejoined; "but I should like to ask you a question, Herr Professor Wehlau. Your name strikes me as familiar. Can you be in anywise related to Wehlau Wehlenberg of the Forschungstein?"

"Forschungstein?" Again the Professor hastily felt the Freiherr's pulse, while the old man resumed, condescendingly,--

"It would not be the first time that a member of an ancient family had refused to adopt a title when forced by circumstances to embrace a bourgeois profession."

"Bourgeois profession!" exclaimed Wehlau. "Herr von Eberstein, do you imagine that scientific pursuits are followed like--shoemaking, for example?"

"They certainly are very unbecoming noble blood," said Eberstein, haughtily. "As for the Forschungstein, it is the ancestral seat of a young nobleman who came to the Ebersburg last autumn and partook of my hospitality during a stormy night. An amiable young man that Hans Wehlau Wehlenberg----"

"Of the Forschungstein!" the Professor interposed, with a burst of laughter. "Now I understand it all. It is another prank of that graceless boy of mine. I remember his telling me that he had passed a stormy night in an old castle. I am sorry, Herr Baron, that my good-for-naught should so have imposed upon you. His Forschungstein is, however, all the antiquity that either he or I can lay claim to. No, he is plain Hans Wehlau like myself, and when next I lay eyes upon him I shall give him my opinion of his promotion to the nobility."

He laughed again loud and long, but the old Freiherr evidently did not appreciate the joke of the affair; he sat at first speechless with indignation, and at last broke forth: "Your son? Only

Hans Wehlau? And I received him as an equal, and treated him like one of my own rank! A young man of no name, no family----"

"Pardon me," interrupted the Professor. "I do not mean to excuse the trick, but as for a name and a family, in the first place Hans is *my* son, and I have achieved somewhat in the scientific world, and in the second place he himself is not without fame in another domain. The name of Wehlau may well compare with that of Eberstein, which owes all its importance to mouldy old traditions, entirely disregarded nowadays."

This touched the Freiherr on his most sensitive side; he arose in furious indignation: "Mouldy traditions? Disregarded? Herr Wehlau, I cannot, of course, require from you any appreciation of matters far too lofty for your bourgeois apprehension, but I demand respect for----"

"But I have none,--none at all!" shouted the Professor, angry in his turn. "I am a scientific man of enlightened ideas, and I have not the slightest respect for the mouldy dust of the tenth century, nor for the Udos and Kunos and Conrads and whatever else the fellows were called who knew nothing save how to drink themselves drunk, and kill one another. Those times, thank God, are past, and when your old owls' nest, the Ebersburg, has quite fallen to decay, no human being will know anything more about it."

"Herr Professor!" exclaimed Eberstein, fairly growing purple in the face; he could get no further, for his fury brought on so violent a paroxysm of coughing that at sight of his distress all the physician stirred within Wehlau, and in spite of his anger he forced his visitor into a chair, and supported his head, while the old man repulsed his aid, gasping, "Leave me! I wish no help at the hands of an iconoclast--a blasphemmer--a----"

With a sudden accession of strength he regained his feet, seized his cane, and hobbled out of the room.

"Applications of ice to the head during twenty-four hours; don't forget!" the Professor called after him, throwing himself into a chair and allowing his wrath to cool. The Freiherr, on the contrary, hobbled along, nursing his ire, to his daughter's room to relate the dreadful story to her. She knew the 'young man of no name, no family,' who had insinuated himself as an equal into the Ebersburg; she would, of course, share his indignation at the deceit.

While this passage at arms had been taking place between the two fathers, their children had been enjoying the most peaceful and friendly *tête-à-tête*. Hans Wehlau had come over from Tannberg, as was his wont, to see his dear father and to inquire after the Countess. This last seemed to be the most important purpose of his coming, for it was his first care, and he made his inquiries, not of his father, who was surely more than able to satisfy his anxiety, but of Fräulein von Eberstein in person. The Professor, of course, knew nothing of these interviews, but supposed that his son came directly to himself, and was deeply touched by his recent increase of filial devotion.

On this day the young artist had been sitting in the reception-room with Fräulein von Eberstein for full half an hour, and they had been talking of other things besides the Countess's illness. Hans had just said, "Then you have not told your father yet? He still thinks me a Wehlau Wehlenberg?"

"I--I have had no opportunity," replied Gerlinda, with hesitation. "I did not want to write it to papa, for I knew it would vex him, and so I did not mention meeting you. Then we went to Berkheim, and then when we came here my poor godmamma was taken ill, and I could not think of anything else."

The words sounded very timid, and Hans plainly perceived that she had lacked, not opportunity, but courage to make the disclosure.

"And, besides, you feared the Freiherr's anger," he went on. "I can easily conceive it, and of course I must save you the dreaded explanation. In a day or two I will drive over to the Ebersburg and confess my sins myself."

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't do that!" exclaimed Gerlinda, in dismay. "You do not know my papa; his principles are so strict in this respect, and he never would permit----"

"The bourgeois Hans Wehlau to come to his house, or to visit his daughter. That may be. But the only question is whether you, Fräulein von Eberstein, will permit it?"

"I?" asked the young girl, in extreme confusion. "I can neither forbid nor permit."

"And yet I ask for an answer from you, and you only! Why have I come hither, do you think? Not for the sake of my relations in Tannberg. I could not stay in town, although I have lately had so much to gratify me there. The first recognition of an artist by the public has something intoxicating in it, and this I have had in fuller measure than I had ventured to hope for. It came from all quarters, and yet I was besieged by one memory, one longing that would not be banished, that left me no repose, and that at last drew me away to where alone it could be stilled."

Gerlinda sat with downcast eyes and glowing cheeks. Young and inexperienced as she was, she yet understood this language. She knew whither his longing had drawn him. He was standing beside her, and as he bent over her there was again in his voice the gentle, fervent tone that was but rarely heard from the gay young artist.

"May I come to the Ebersburg? I should so like to have another sunny morning hour on the old castle terrace, high above the green sea of forest. There, beside you, the poetry of the past, the splendour of the world of fairy-lore, were first revealed to me. If I might but gaze again into Dornröschen's dark dreamy eyes! I have not forgotten those eyes; they sank deep into my heart. May I come, Gerlinda?"

The crimson on the girl's cheek deepened, but the downcast eyes were not raised, and her reply was almost inaudible: "I always hoped you would come again,--all through the long winter,--but always in vain."

"But I am here now!" exclaimed Hans, "and I will not leave you until my happiness is assured. Ah, sweet little Dornröschen, did I not tell you that the day would come when the knight would appear and break through the thick hedge, and rouse the Sleeping Beauty with a kiss? And all the while, deep in my heart, I cherished the hope that the knight's name might be--Hans Wehlau."

He put his arm around her waist as he uttered the last words. Gerlinda shrank, but did not withdraw from his clasp; she slowly raised the 'dark dreamy eyes' to his, and said, softly, very softly, but with the fervour of intense happiness, "So did I."

The young man was not to blame if, in view of this confession, he carried out the fairy legend in detail, and kissed his Dornröschen nestling so contentedly beside him. But when he clasped her closer, calling her his 'dear little betrothed,' Gerlinda started and grew very pale. "Ah, Hans, dear Hans, it will not do! I had quite forgotten; we never can marry each other."

"And why not?"

"Oh, papa never will allow it. Why, we date from the tenth century."

"The tenth century presents no obstacle to my marriage in the nineteenth. Of course there will be a row with the Freiherr; I am quite prepared for that; but I am proof against storms of that kind. I know from experience what it is to brave a furious papa and have my own way in the end."

"But we never shall succeed," the little châtelaine moaned, drearily. "We shall be just like Gertrudis von Eberstein and Dietrich Fernbacher, who loved each other so dearly. Oh, Gertrudis was married to the Lord of Ringstetten, and Dietrich went on a crusade against the infidels, and never came back."

"That was very silly of Dietrich," rejoined Hans. "What business had he with the infidels? He ought to have stayed at home and married his Gertrudis."

"But she could not espouse him, because he was not of knightly descent, but a merchant's son," cried Gerlinda, the tears gathering in her eyes, while she dutifully repeated the exact words of the ancient chronicle.

"That was in the Middle Ages," Hans said, soothingly. "They are far more sensible in such matters nowadays. I shall certainly not march against the infidels. The most I shall attempt will be the siege of the Ebersburg, and I shall surely carry it by storm."

"Good heavens! Papa! I hear his step!" exclaimed Gerlinda, freeing herself from the arm Hans had clasped about her, and running to the window. "Oh, Hans, what shall we do now?"

"Present ourselves to him as a betrothed pair and ask his blessing," the young man promptly replied. "It has got to be done, and the sooner the better."

The heavy, shuffling step of the Freiherr was in fact audible in the next room, with the tap of his cane on the floor. He opened the door and stood as if paralyzed on the threshold. He saw the man 'of no name, no family,' with his daughter; at a respectful distance from her, to be sure, but the mere fact of their being together was enough to rouse his indignation. He advanced slowly into the room. "Ah, Herr Hans Wehlau!" he said, emphasizing the name with contempt.

Hans bowed. "At your service, Herr von Eberstein."

The old gentleman was evidently desirous of assuming the angry attitude required by the occasion, but his gout played him an ill turn; just at this point his feet refused to sustain him, and he sank into the nearest arm-chair, where he presented a spectacle that was pitiable rather than terrible. Nevertheless, he controlled himself, and continued: "I have just come from a"--he suppressed a more violent expression--"a certain Professor Wehlau, who declares himself your father."

"Which he assuredly is," said Hans, perceiving clearly that his confession was unnecessary.

"And you admit it?" cried the Freiherr, angrily. "You confess that you have played a disgraceful farce with me; that you sneaked into my house under a false name, assuming a title---

"

"Beg pardon, Herr Baron, that I did not do," Hans interposed. "I only took the liberty of adding a second name to the one belonging to me of right. You yourself prefixed the 'Baron.' But you are quite right to reproach me, and I frankly beg your forgiveness for the stupid trick by which I extorted a hospitality at first denied me. I call upon Fräulein von Eberstein to witness that it was my intention to go to the Ebersburg to tell you the truth. A jest might well be forgiven to the passing guest who appeared at night and departed in the morning; but to prolong the jest would be deceit. This I perceived as soon as I met Fräulein von Eberstein in the capital, and I did not delay an instant in revealing the truth to her."

Eberstein cast a surprised and indignant glance at his daughter. "What, Gerlinda! you knew this and concealed it from me? You have allowed this Hans Wehlau to approach you, and have even perhaps accepted his excuses for what is entirely inexcusable? Highly unbecoming conduct!"

Gerlinda answered not a word; she stood by the window, pale and trembling, gazing anxiously at Hans. The little Dornröschen was no heroine. All the more undaunted was the Knight of the Forschungstein. He saw that nothing was to be gained hereby temporizing; the danger must be braved, and he attacked the high thorny hedge with ardour.

"Fräulein von Eberstein has done even more," he began. "She has given me a highly gratifying reply to a question that I put to her. I have just told her of my love for her, and have had her confession that it is returned. We pray you, therefore, Herr Baron, to bestow upon us your paternal blessing."

Very unexpectedly the old Freiherr received this declaration with a tolerable degree of composure, but this was simply because he did not comprehend it. He thought it a fresh 'disgraceful farce,' for it never occurred to him that the son of a bourgeois professor could presume to woo a Fräulein von Eberstein.

"Herr Wehlau, I must beg you to desist from such ill-timed pleasantry!" he said, loftily. "You appear ignorant of the presumption of your conduct, and you surely have reason enough to be serious in my presence."

"Then I must pray you to speak, Gerlinda, and to confirm my words. Tell your father that you have given me the right to ask him for your hand; that you consent to belong to me, and to me alone."

The words were uttered with extreme tenderness, but for Gerlinda they contained a serious admonition to overcome her timidity and to second her Hans bravely. Moreover, was he not beside her, ready to protect her? She accordingly broke forth with, "Oh, papa, I love him so dearly, so very dearly! Even if he is not of noble blood and has no coat of arms, I care for nobody but my Hans!"

"My darling!" cried the young fellow, clasping her to his heart. And then an incredible, an inconceivable occurrence took place. Before the very eyes of the Baron Udo von Eberstein-Ortenau the man of 'no name, no family,' *kissed* the last scion of the lofty race dating from the tenth century, and not only once, but twice in succession!

For a moment the old Baron was unable either to speak or to stir. He gazed at the pair, and then lifted his eyes to the ceiling, evidently expecting nothing less than that the walls should tumble in and crush this daring wretch. Castle Steinrück, however, seemed to be of opinion that this affair belonged entirely to the Ebersburg, which was doubtless falling in ruins at this moment with a dull crash. The Baron perceived that the end of the world delayed incomprehensibly in putting in an appearance, and conceiving that it was his part to supply its place, he tried to spring to his feet. But the gout was in league with the lovers: it held him fast. Instead of stepping between the pair like an avenging angel, he swayed to and fro in a helpless way, and then sank feebly back in his arm-chair.

"Gerlinda!" he called, hoarsely. "Degenerate child! Come here! Come to me this instant!"

Gerlinda made a faint effort to obey, but when Hans clasped his arm about her more closely she submitted, and repeated, sobbing, "Oh, papa, I love him so dearly!"

"Herr Hans Wehlau," Eberstein fairly yelled, losing all self-control, "release my daughter on the spot, I command you! Retire immediately!"

"In a moment, Herr Baron. Permit me first to take leave of my betrothed," said Hans, calmly, kissing Gerlinda's brow. Again the Freiherr made convulsive efforts to rise.

"I will call for help! I will summon the servants! I will sound the alarm!" he screamed, vainly endeavouring to reach a small table-bell at a little distance from his chair. Suddenly the door opened, and Hertha, having heard the disturbance, entered.

"Countess Hertha!" exclaimed Eberstein, with an appealing look, "I pray you save my child, whom this man has bewitched; turn him out of your castle!"

Hertha paused in dismay. There stood Hans Wehlau with his arm around Gerlinda, taking a tender leave of her, while the old Baron writhed about in vain efforts to rise from his arm-chair. The scene was incomprehensible to her.

Hans finally made up his mind to obey the old Freiherr's command; but he did not resign his betrothed to her father, but to the young Countess, to whom he said, in a tone of entreaty, "I beseech your kindness and protection, Countess Steinrück, for my betrothed. For the present the Herr Baron refuses to entertain my proposal, and I must yield for a while, since my future father-in-law----"

"Insolent wretch!" shouted Eberstein, who really seemed in danger of falling into a fit.

"----is entitled to a certain degree of respect, although I can no longer submit to his insulting remarks," the young man completed his sentence. "I therefore pray you to take charge of my Gerlinda. I shall return as soon as Herr von Eberstein recovers some degree of composure."

Then he calmly kissed his Gerlinda for the fourth time, carried the Countess's hand to his lips, bowed low and gracefully to the Freiherr, and left the room.

Professor Wehlau, in the mean time, had got over his vexation, and had answered his letters. After all, that crazy old Freiherr of the tenth century was nothing to him. The man was evidently irresponsible, and Wehlau was disposed to judge his son's conduct more leniently than at first. The idea of the Forschungstein amused him much, but he nevertheless resolved to read his graceless scion a lecture when he should next see him, and the opportunity immediately presented itself, for Hans at that moment entered the room.

"I've just heard of another of your pranks," were the words with which his father received him. "What nonsense have you been about at the Ebersburg? You, a knight of the Forschungstein!"

"Was it not a capital idea, papa?" asked the young fellow, laughing. "I have just heard that you have had an interview with the Freiherr. He probably wished to consult you about his gout?"

"Possibly; I diagnosed insanity," said Wehlau, dryly, "and ordered applications of ice. They will not help him much, however, since the disease is too deep-seated, but they will calm him, and that is something."

"How so? Did you quarrel?"

"We certainly did. I never advise humouring fixed ideas, as do some of the profession. My system is to rouse patients from their illusions, and when this Udo von Eberstein began to recite his old chronicles I quickly made clear to him my views with regard to his mediæval nonsense."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Hans; "you must have touched him on the raw. He never will forgive either you or me."

"What of that? What have either you or I to do with that old Ebersburg owl?"

"Very much, since I am betrothed to his daughter."

The Professor honoured his son with a long stare, then frowned, and said, crossly, "What! more nonsense? I should suppose we had had enough."

"I am perfectly serious, papa. I have just betrothed myself to Gerlinda von Eberstein. You have known her at the bedside of the Countess, and you cannot but rejoice in such a lovely creature for a daughter."

"Hans, are you utterly insane? The daughter of a notorious lunatic! Why, it may be hereditary in the family. The girl has something shy and strange in her air, and the father is as mad as a March hare."

"Not at all," said Hans; "he only dates from the tenth century; a certain abnormal condition of the brain must be looked for, otherwise my father-in-law is quite sensible."

"Father-in-law!" repeated the Professor. "I have a word to say in the matter, and I wish to declare now, upon the spot, that if you really have this nonsensical idea in your head you had best get rid of it without delay. I forbid you to entertain it."

"Oh, you can't do that, papa. The Freiherr forbade Gerlinda, too. He nearly fell into convulsions when I proposed for her, but all to no purpose; we are going to be married."

Wehlau, who now perceived that his son was in earnest, threw up his hands in despair. "Have you lost your senses? There is no doubt that the old man is crazy, and I tell you as a physician that the germ of insanity is hereditary. Would you entail such misery upon your family?--bring unhappiness upon an entire generation? Be reasonable."

This gloomy picture of the future made not the least impression upon the young man, who coolly rejoined, "It really is extraordinary, papa, that you and I never can agree. And we were getting along so delightfully together. You had just become reconciled to my 'daubing,' and were

even in a fair way to be proud of it, and now you quarrel with my betrothal, when you ought to be highly gratified. Aged aristocracy applies to you only when it has the rheumatism; I ally myself with youthful aristocracy by marrying it,--a palpable advance."

"It is the most nonsensical of all your nonsensical exploits," exclaimed the Professor, angrily. "Once for all----"

He was interrupted by a servant, who came to summon him to the Countess's bedside, since he had given orders to be so summoned as soon as his patient should awake. Wehlau went on the instant, desiring his son to await his return; he should not be gone longer than a quarter of an hour.

Upon leaving the Countess's room the Professor encountered Gerlinda, who had hailed as a relief a summons to her godmother's bedside. For the moment she could escape her father's anger, and Hertha undertook to restore the Freiherr to some degree of calm.

The instant Wehlau perceived the young girl he hurried up to her. "Fräulein von Eberstein, I should like to see you alone for a minute. Will you allow me to ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly, Herr Professor," replied Gerlinda, quite dismayed by being thus addressed. She always felt unconquerably shy in presence of the Professor, who had never seemed to notice her, and his rather imperious demeanour, even at the sick-bed, was not calculated to put her at her ease. She was overpowered by timidity now at the thought that this man was the father of her Hans, as he came close up to her, and began to ask her all kinds of questions which she did not understand, staring at her the while so fixedly that she began to be afraid. The poor child never dreamed that she was to undergo a test as to the soundness of her intellect, and in her bewilderment she made uncertain replies, which of course confirmed Wehlau in his previous opinion.

At last he questioned her as to the family traditions of the Ebersteins,--the subject of the old Freiherr's monomania. During her stay in the capital and at Berkheim Gerlinda had not bestowed much attention upon the Eberstein chronicles; the Countess and Hertha had exercised a beneficial influence upon her in this respect, but it was of no avail on the present occasion. She was spell-bound by Wehlau's gaze, as is the fluttering bird by the eye of the serpent. All she desired was to satisfy her examiner, and when he most unfortunately asked, "Your name is a double one, is it not,--Eberstein--Ortenau?" she instantly folded her hands and began: "In the year of grace thirteen hundred and seventy a feud broke out between Kunrad von Eberstein and Balduin von Ortenau, because----" and then there was no stopping her. She told the endless tale of Kunrad and Hildegard, of dungeon and marriage, from first to last, without stopping an instant to take breath, and all in the old monotone. She never even noticed that the door opened, and that Hans, who had foreboded mischief, appeared upon the threshold. He came in time to hear the familiar conclusion.

"Just as I thought!" the Professor exclaimed, in triumph. He rushed to his son, hurried him into a corner of the room, and said, in an eager whisper, "I told you so! She is already astray in mind: the wretched germ is entirely developed, and is doubtless hereditary. If you persist in your senseless purpose you will bring wretchedness upon yourself, your family, and your entire posterity. I protest against it both as a physician and as a father. I forbid it in the interest of humanity; you have no right to impose upon the world a generation of lunatics."

"Papa, I believe you are 'astray in mind' yourself!" exclaimed Hans, hastening to Gerlinda's side. "I will not allow my betrothed to be so tormented. I really cannot see what right the fathers have to meddle here; our marriage is our own affair, and we can see to it ourselves."

Summer had come. July had begun, but the marriage which was to have been solemnized in the Steinrück family had been of necessity indefinitely postponed. Although Professor Wehlau had concealed the truth from the young Countess and had allowed her to cherish illusive hopes, the general and the rest of the family were aware of the calamity that awaited her. But they had convinced themselves that Hertha would be drawn to them more closely by her mother's death, and as soon as her period of mourning was over the celebration of her marriage could take place.

Count Steinrück had no suspicion that fate had already shattered the proud structure of his hopes. He knew nothing of that eventful night of storm, or of Captain Rodenberg's presence at Saint Michael; all his knowledge of affairs at Castle Steinrück was derived from Hertha's letters and from the report of the physician.

On that St. Michael's morning, at the young Countess's earnest entreaty, Michael had conducted her merely to the end of the mountain road in the valley, whence, accompanied by the servant, she easily reached the castle, where her mother's condition forbade any explanation of what had occurred. The physicians prescribed entire repose of mind for their patient, and thus the affair would have to remain a secret until the hoped-for recovery of the Countess. Michael, indeed, knew through Professor Wehlau that there could be no recovery, and was all the more strongly moved to shield from any agitation the woman from whom he had received only kindness and consideration. If there were to be a struggle, it should be after her death.

And now this had taken place. The physician had just telegraphed to the general that his

patient had passed away gently during the night. Steinrück, in common with all the family, had been prepared for this intelligence, but still the death of the gentle, amiable woman, who had always submitted so unconditionally to his guidance, affected him very deeply, and he could not even pay her the last offices of friendship, and follow her remains to the grave.

These July days were ominous, and filled with signs of the approaching tempest, of which, whatever may have been the ignorance of the public, military men were well aware. General Steinrück knew that he could not leave the capital for even a few days; that he must hold himself ready for orders. His duties as head of his family must yield to those of the soldier. Raoul, indeed, could leave at any time; the youthful diplomat could easily be spared for a while, especially in a case like the present, when he was called upon to represent his grandfather.

Steinrück was sitting with a very grave face in his study, reading over the telegram received that morning, when an orderly announced a staff-officer. There was but a small portion of his time that could be given to family affairs: he was constantly interrupted by messages, despatches,--communications of a military nature. He gave orders to admit the officer at once, and Captain Rodenberg entered.

The general was painfully affected by this meeting, although he was quite prepared for it. He had, indeed, seen Michael several times on service since he had interfered between him and Raoul, but he had not spoken with him; this was their first interview, and the young officer must be made to feel that he was not forgiven for having repulsed all advances. He found, in fact, only his superior officer, who received him with great coolness.

"You have some special information for me?"

"No, your Excellency; I come this time upon personal business, and must beg you to grant me a brief interview."

Steinrück looked surprised. "Personal business? It must be something extraordinary." He waved his hand and said, laconically, "Go on."

"The Countess Marianne Steinrück died last night----"

"Have you heard of it already?" the general interrupted him. "From whom? How long since?"

"Two hours ago."

"How can that be? I have but just received the despatch; no one is aware of its contents, not even my grandson. How should you know of this?"

"My old friend and teacher, the pastor of Saint Michael, who, by the Countess's desire, was with her in her last moments, telegraphed to me the intelligence of her death."

This declaration seemed still more surprising to the Count. He said, sharply, "This is certainly-strange! What reason could the pastor have for sending you intelligence in which you could not possibly take any interest, even before it was known to the family? The thing seems to me so extraordinary that I must beg you for an explanation."

"That is what brings me here. The telegram was sent me at the request of the Countess Hertha."

"To you?"

"To me."

The general changed colour. At last a suspicion of the truth seemed to dawn upon him. He raised his head haughtily. "What does this mean? How do you happen to be on terms of such intimacy with the betrothed of Count Steinrück?"

"It is my duty, in her name, to recall the promise given by her to the Count," said Michael, returning the Count's haughty look. "This would have been done long since but for the severe illness of the Countess Marianne. Beside her death-bed there could be no conflict, no thought of personal considerations. I know that it must seem heartless to allow any such to intrude now, when Hertha is still weeping beside her dead mother, but I act by her desire, for Count Raoul will presumably hasten to her when he hears of her loss, and she neither can nor will receive him as her betrothed. This is what I wished to explain to your Excellency; all other explanations can be made hereafter. This is no time for----"

"No time for what?" Steinrück angrily interrupted him. "I should suppose you had said everything already. Go on."

"As you please. Hertha has given me the right to act as her representative. I speak in the name of my betrothed."

This was intelligible enough, and transcended the general's worst fears. He had divined the possibility of danger, and had tried to separate the pair. It had been of no avail. His lofty scheme was utterly overthrown; the prize which he had destined for his heir had at the last moment

fallen to the lot of another. He ought to have denounced with indignant scorn the audacious insolence of the man before him, instead of which he cast at him a long, strangely gloomy look, and was silent. It was only when Michael, puzzled to understand this silence, gazed at him in surprise that he seemed to collect himself, and then he burst out, angrily,--

"These are most extraordinary announcements to be made so calmly. You appear to find it perfectly natural that the betrothed of my grandson should belong to you, simply because you have the audacity to stretch forth your hand for her. Raoul will reckon with you for such presumption. I advise you to reflect that such a prize is beyond the reach of a--Rodenberg."

"No prize that I can win is beyond my reach, and I have won Hertha's love," said Michael, coldly. "She submitted to a family arrangement that disposed of her hand while she was but a child, but she must not atone for her too hasty consent by life-long misery. Any opposition from Count Raoul is hardly to be expected. He certainly has lost all right to claim his former betrothed."

"What do you mean by such words, Captain Rodenberg?"

"I must request you to ask the Count himself that question. Since, as I see, your Excellency has no knowledge of the state of the case, I prefer not to be your informant."

"But I insist upon an explanation. I must know to what you refer."

"To the relations of the Count to Frau von Nérac."

Steinrück started. This was the danger of which he had had a vague foreboding.

"Héloïse von Nérac?" he repeated, in a low tone.

"The sister of Herr von Clermont. This knowledge, I assure you, was unsought; accident alone revealed it to me. Hertha asks of the Count only the formal retraction of a promise long since broken by him, and I cannot think that it will cause him any regret to comply with her request. Fear of his grandfather's interference alone prevented him from himself dissolving the tie binding him to the young Countess."

A pause ensued. The blow was so sudden and unexpected that the general needed time to collect himself.

"I shall question Raoul," he said at last. "If he admits what you say to be the fact, the Countess certainly has a right to ask to be released from her promise; but that cannot further your hopes, for I neither can nor will consent that my ward----"

"Should follow the fortunes of a Rodenberg," Michael bluntly completed the sentence. "I am aware of it, but I must remind your Excellency that your power as guardian comes to an end in a few months."

Steinrück advanced towards the young man, the old fire in his eye, the imperious tone in his voice. "My power as guardian, yes! But then my power as head of the family comes into play, and to that you will submit."

"No!"

"Michael!"

"No, Count Steinrück. I do not belong to your family, as you have just shown me. However unworthy of his betrothed Count Raoul may prove himself, in your eyes he is still the wearer of a coronet, as I am still the adventurer's son, who must not dare to lift his eyes to a member of your family, even although beloved by her. Fortunately, Hertha thinks otherwise. She knows everything, and yet gladly consents to bear my name."

"And I tell you you will rue asking her to share it. You do not know the girl's pride. Avoid her."

"No, no," said Michael, with a half-contemptuous smile. "I know my Hertha better. For months we contended with each other like bitter foes, conscious all the while that we could not live apart. She has been hardly gained, my fair, proud darling. In storm and tempest I won my betrothed from the clefts of the Eagle ridge. No human power can snatch her from me!"

The cold, grave man seemed transformed; passionate delight glowed in his eyes and rang in his voice as he confronted the Count triumphantly.

Again the general gazed at him with that strange expression, in which there was more pain than anger. "Enough," he said, collecting himself. "I must settle with Raoul next. You shall hear from me shortly. Now go."

Michael bowed and went. The Count gazed after him gloomily. It was strange that neither of them could maintain the cold, unfamiliar tone and manner which each tried so hard to assume. They always met at first as superior and subaltern, as unfamiliarly and coldly as if they had never seen each other before; but in a little while they were grandfather and grandson, even in their

angry contention. To-day, too, there was open warfare between them when they parted, and yet the Count murmured, when he was alone, "What would I not give if he were Raoul Steinrück!"

Half an hour afterwards, when the young Count returned from his morning ride, he was told that his Excellency had been inquiring for him, and wished to speak with him. In a few moments he entered the general's study. "You wished to see me, grandfather? Have you any news from Steinrück?"

For answer his grandfather handed him the telegram. "Read it yourself."

Raoul glanced through it and laid it down. "Sad news, but not unexpected. The last letters prepared us for the end. You said yesterday that if it came you should not be able to leave the capital, so I shall go alone with my mother."

"Yes, *if you can*."

"There will be no difficulty about my leave. The Minister offered to give it to me when he heard of the state of affairs at Steinrück. I can go at any moment to----"

"Console your betrothed," the general completed the sentence.

"Of course. I have the first right to do so."

"Have you still that right?"

The young Count started at the tone in which the words were spoken, but his grandfather left him no time for surmise, but asked, sharply,--

"What are your relations with Héloïse von Nérac?"

The question was so unexpected that for a moment Raoul was confused, but in the next he replied, "Why, she is the sister of my friend Clermont."

"I know it. But is she not something more? No subterfuges! I require the plain, unvarnished truth. Is your intimacy with her such as your betrothed would approve? Yes or no."

Raoul was silent. He was no liar, nor could he feign while those eyes were fixed upon him as if to search his very soul and wring the truth from him however he might try to conceal it.

"It is true, then," said Steinrück, hoarsely. "I could not and would not believe it."

"Grandfather----"

"Hush! I need no further reply; your silence has spoken. Can it be? A girl like Hertha sacrificed, and to whom? Have you lost both sight and sense? The thing is as incomprehensible as it is disgraceful."

Raoul stood biting his lip and chafing at reproaches uttered in such a tone. It irritated him beyond endurance, and his air when he spoke was defiant rather than ashamed. "You load me with reproaches, grandfather, but Hertha, with her insulting coldness, her frigid reserve, is most to blame for our estrangement. She never loved me; she is incapable of loving."

"You are greatly mistaken there," the general said, bitterly. "You, to be sure, failed to win her love, but another knew how to succeed. To him she is neither proud nor cold; to him she willingly sacrifices her rank, and he dares to offer her a name not without stain,--Michael Rodenberg!"

The young Count at first stood gazing at his grandfather as if thunderstruck, and then his whole nature seemed to rise in revolt. He had, in spite of all, once loved his cold, beautiful betrothed; her invincible reserve had driven him from her. The thought that she could belong to another, and that other the man whom he hated, robbed him of all self-possession, and he burst forth furiously, "Rodenberg? He dare to woo a Countess Steinrück, to beguile her secretly while she is betrothed to me! Scoundrel----"

"Hush!" the general said, in a tone of command. "You have been the scoundrel, not Michael. He has just been here to recall in Hertha's name her promise to you, and to disclose everything to me. You kept silence, while you betrayed your betrothed."

"How could I speak? You would have annihilated me with your anger if I had dared to tell you of my love for Héloïse."

Steinrück's lip quivered contemptuously.

"It was from fear of me, then? Do you suppose that I care for an obedience founded upon falsehood and treachery? Ah! I fear that even without your breach of faith Hertha would have been lost to you as soon as Michael entered the lists against you."

"Grandfather, this is too much!" Raoul's voice was wellnigh choked with anger. "Would you rank above me, your grandson, the last scion of your house, a man disgraced by his father's

shame?"

"A man who will, nevertheless, mount to a height you can never hope to attain. He marches on to his goal although a world in arms oppose him, while you, with all the splendour of your name and of your descent, with all your rich endowments, will never be aught save one of thousands lost in the crowd. You both are of my race, but only one of you has inherited my blood. You are your mother's image; there is in you nothing of your father save his weakness of character. Michael is my own, and if his name were tenfold Rodenberg, I acknowledge him a Steinrück."

It had come at last, the recognition which the old Count's pride had so long refused to his grandson, which he had never admitted to his face. It broke forth now, almost against his will.

At his grandfather's last words Raoul grew pale; he said nothing, but if anything could increase his hatred of Michael, it was this declaration. Steinrück paced the room to and fro several times, as if to regain his composure, and then paused before the young Count.

"Your betrothal is annulled. After what you have just admitted to me I cannot dissuade Hertha from recalling the troth she plighted to you. Your mother will tell you of all that you have lost in a worldly point of view. In this matter we are exceptionally of one mind, and she seems to have had a suspicion of the danger that threatened you, for she lately assured me that in compliance with her urgent entreaty you had given up all intercourse with the Clermonts. You have deceived her as you have deceived me, and for the sake of a woman----"

"Whom I love!" exclaimed Raoul, goaded to reply; "whom I love to distraction. Not one word against Héloïse, grandfather. I will not suffer it, although I know that you hate both her and her brother because they belong to my mother's native land."

Steinrück shrugged his shoulders. "Your uncle Montigny belongs to the same land, and you know that my respect and esteem for him are great. But there is something suspicious about this brother and sister, in spite of their lofty descent which seems to be genuine. They mingle aimlessly and idly in society here, and will probably vanish from it some day as suddenly as they appeared in it. Then your foolish romance will come to an end, but it will have cost you a brilliant future."

"Who says it will come to an end? If Hertha can venture to brave your anger, and outrage every tradition of our family, I surely have a right to marry a woman whose name confers more honour upon our house than a Rodenberg can boast."

"You intend to marry Frau von Nérac!" said the general, coldly. "Is your household to be supported by your salary in the Foreign Office? There is no need of explaining my position in the affair. I once allowed that foreign element to mingle among us; it never shall do so again,--it has wrought mischief enough."

"Grandfather, you are speaking of my mother!" cried Raoul, angrily.

"Yes, of your mother, to whom I owe your estrangement from me and from your fatherland,--your indifference to, nay, dislike for what should be most sacred to you. What is there that I have not done to withdraw you from this baneful influence? But kindness and severity have alike proved in vain. The poorest peasant is more devoted to the soil upon which he was born than are you to your country, and linked to a Héloïse von Nérac your fate would be sealed. When fear of me no longer restrained you, when death had closed my eyes, it might well be that the last of the Steinrücks turned his back contemptuously upon his fatherland to become body and soul a Frenchman!"

There was in the midst of the old man's indignation such bitter pain in the tone in which these last words were uttered that the angry retort died upon Raoul's lips. His answer was cut short by the opening of the door and by his mother's appearance.

She had no suspicion of what had occurred. The general had gone to her for a few moments after his interview with Michael to tell her of the death of the Countess; his sense of justice forbade his accusing Raoul to her before the young man had been heard in his own defence.

"Oh, you are here, Raoul," she said. "They told me your grandfather had sent for you, and I knew it was to tell you of the despatch from Steinrück. Are we to start together to-day, or will you follow me tomorrow? I had better take the express train to-night, to be with Hertha as soon as possible."

The general turned with apparent composure to his daughter-in-law: "Raoul is not going to Steinrück. Circumstances oblige him to remain here."

The Countess looked surprised, but her surmises were wide of the truth. "Can they refuse him a leave upon such an occasion?" she asked. "And you tell me that you cannot go, either, papa? Then what Leon hinted to me yesterday is true. War is unavoidable?"

"I can give you no assurance on that head," replied Steinrück, ignoring all but her last words. "Every one knows how grave is the situation, and Raoul, like the rest of us, must be ready to stand by the flag."

"Stand by the flag?" repeated the Countess. "He is not a soldier. His delicate health always excluded him from a military career. He was even released from the usual year of service on account of the weakness of his chest."

"That was, it is true, the verdict of the physicians formerly,--a verdict which I never could understand, for Raoul always seemed healthy to me. That he is so at present you will surely not deny. A man who makes it his boast that no hunting-expedition ever fatigues him, who can ride all night and be ready for any madcap exploit in the morning, must be able to serve in time of war."

"And you could be so cruel as to require----"

"What?" the general asked, hastily. "Ah, you dread his serving as a common soldier. Unfortunately, that must be; but it will not be for long, and I shall take care that he is placed near me. Every one knows that he is my grandson, and he has but to fulfil his duty as a soldier."

"But to fight against my people!" Hortense exclaimed, passionately. "If it came to that it would kill me."

"We live through much, Hortense, that is harder to bear. I know how many tears it would cost you, and I could not ask you to stay here in the capital if war with France were really declared. You cannot sympathize with us. But Raoul is the son of a German, and must do his duty as such. He was formerly unfit for service, now he is strong and well enough to act a soldier's part."

The words sounded calm, but iron in firmness. Hortense, however, was incapable of understanding her father-in-law,--she always would beat upon this rock although she knew she could not stir it. "You can free him from any necessity for such a part," she said, impetuously. "One word from you to the examining physician, a simple statement from General Steinrück that he does not consider the weakness of his grandson's lungs yet overcome, and no one will venture---"

"To accuse him of falsehood? Assuredly not; but some one ventures, I find, to consider him capable of falsehood. I make allowance for you on account of your present agitation, Hortense, or----" His look completed the sentence.

Raoul had hitherto taken no part in a conversation in which his passionate interest was plain; now he advanced. "Grandfather, you know that I am no coward. You have often reproached me with rashness and foolhardiness, restraining me where I would have ventured, but you must see that I cannot take part in this conflict; my whole nature revolts at the idea of lifting my hand against my mother's country and her people."

"I cannot spare you this," Steinrück declared, unmoved. "In such a case self-control must be exercised and duty must be done. But why waste words? It is a necessity to which you must both submit. Enough has been said."

"But I neither can nor will submit!" exclaimed the young Count in great agitation. "I have never served in the army, and shall not be called upon to do so now, unless you insist upon it. You mean to force me into this war with my other fatherland. I see but too clearly----"

He paused suddenly, the general's look was so stern and forbidding.

"I should suppose that you could have but *one* fatherland. Are you to learn this now for the first time? You *must* take part in this war; you must fight it out from first to last, that you may finally come to the consciousness of who you are. In the storm of battle, in the uprising of your entire nation, you may perhaps learn to know where you belong; you may find again your lost love of country. It is my sole, my last hope. As soon as war is declared you will enlist,--enlist immediately."

The tone was the same to which Raoul had always submitted, but now he burst forth in open rebellion: "Grandfather, do not goad me too far. You have always reproached me with having my mother's blood in my veins, and you are right. All that I knew of happiness and freedom in the sunny days of my youth belonged to France, and there alone does life seem to me really worth the living. Here, in cold, gray Germany, I have never felt at home. Every joy is doled out to me grudgingly here; the phantom of duty is always held up to me. Do not inexorably force me to choose. The result might be other than what you desire. I do not love your Germany; I never loved it; and, come what may, I will not fight against my France!"

"My Raoul,--I knew it!" cried Hortense, exultantly, extending her arms to him.

Steinrück stood still, gazing at the pair. He had not looked for this. Raoul's fear of him had hitherto kept him within bounds; he had not dared to give utterance to his sentiments. These bounds were broken, and even the old Count's iron nature was shaken. His voice sounded strangely when he spoke again,--"Raoul, come here!"

The young man did not stir; he stayed beside his mother, who had thrown one arm around him as if to detain him. Thus they stood, hostile and defiant; but the general was not the man to endure such revolt beneath his roof.

"Did you not hear my command? I must repeat it, then: Come here to me!"

His tone and look once more exercised their old power. Raoul obeyed mechanically, as if yielding to an irresistible force.

"You will not fight?" said Steinrück, seizing the young man's hand in a vice-like grasp. "That remains to be seen. I shall volunteer in your name, and once enlisted, you will be taught the meaning of discipline. You are aware of what awaits the soldier who disobeys, or--deserts. Hush! not a word!" he continued, as the young man started as if to protest against words so full of disgrace. "In spite of your threat, I bid you choose. And that you may not lavish too much admiration upon your son's courage, Hortense, I tell you what could not long be kept from you; Raoul's betrothal to Hertha is annulled, and by his own fault. For love of Frau von Nérac he has been false to the duty he owed to his betrothed."

"Raoul!" exclaimed the Countess, in utter dismay. The general slowly released his grandson's hand from his clasp and turned away.

"You must settle all that with him. I shall know how to avert the worse evil. I will see to it that the last of the Steinrücks is saved from the disgrace of betraying his fatherland as he has betrayed his betrothed."

With these words he left the room.

The discord in the Steinrück family weighed heavily upon its members. Hortense left for Steinrück, since the general insisted that one member at least of his household should follow his relative to the grave. He could not leave town himself, and political events might well account for Raoul's absence. But had Hortense also been absent the world would have suspected the family dissension, and she complied all the more readily with her father-in-law's desire on this occasion, since she still had some confidence in her personal influence with Hertha. In the stormy scene between Raoul and herself that preceded her departure, Michael's name had not been mentioned; she knew nothing of his relations with Hertha, or of his connection with the Steinrücks. In her mind Héloïse von Nérac was the sole cause of the breach between the young people, and she still hoped that she should succeed in appeasing the offended girl, and in recovering for her son all that he had so wantonly sacrificed with Hertha's hand.

The general and his grandson had met but for a few moments in the twenty-four hours following their decisive interview, and these moments had been painful enough. At present the young man had gone to his friend Clermont's, determined to prove to his mother and grandfather that he was no longer a boy to be disposed of according to their pleasure. He found Héloïse alone, and informed her of all that had taken place on the previous day, the passionate agitation of his manner showing how profoundly he had been moved.

"The die is cast," he concluded. "My betrothal with Hertha is at an end. I am as free as you are, and there is no longer any reason for concealment. Tell me at last, Héloïse, that you consent to be mine, to bear my name. You have never yet really done so."

Héloïse had listened in silence, and with a slight frown. It seemed almost as if this turn of affairs were an unwelcome one to her.

"Stay! not so fast, Raoul!" she said, in reply to his ardent words. "You acknowledge that your grandfather never will consent to our union, and you are entirely dependent upon him."

"For the moment. But I am his heir-at-law; nothing can affect that, as you know."

Héloïse was quite aware of it, but she was also aware of how little the income to which the young Count would fall heir would comport with her requirements. The matter had been the subject of an exhaustive discussion, but a little while previously, between herself and her brother, and the picture that Henri had then so ruthlessly drawn, of the dull life of a retired provincial town, had little in it to allure a woman to whom luxury and splendour were as her vital air.

"Then let us hope for the future," she said. "The present is hostile enough to us. Not only your family dissensions, but political events threaten to part us."

"Part us? And wherefore?"

"Why, you must see that we cannot stay here if the war, which Henri thinks unavoidable, should really be declared. As soon as our ambassador leaves the capital we must go too. Henri tells me to be ready for a hasty departure."

"Then let Henri go, but stay yourself. I cannot let you go. I know that I ask a sacrifice of you, but remember what I have sacrificed for your sake. To lose you now would be too horrible! You must stay!"

"What should I stay for?" she asked, sternly. "To look on while the general carries out his threat, and sends you in full uniform to fight against France?"

Raoul clinched his fist. "Héloïse, do not you too drive me to desperation. If you knew all that I have had, and yet have, to bear! My grandfather has scarcely spoken to me since yesterday, but his eyes, when he looks at me, make my blood boil, they are so full of scorn. My mother, from whom I have hitherto never known anything save love and tenderness, reproaches me bitterly. And now you talk of our parting, and I must brave it all alone. It is beyond endurance."

He did indeed look like a desperate man, and Héloïse gazed at him with mingled pity and indignation. With all his gallantry, his reckless bravery, and his scorn of danger, he was but as a reed shaken by the wind when moral courage was in question.

"Must we be parted?" she asked, gently. "It is for you to decide that, Raoul."

He looked up surprised. "For me?"

"Certainly. I cannot stay any more than can Henri. We know that you are ours at heart, and that only compulsion keeps you among Germans. Break loose from your bonds, and follow us to France!"

"What madness!" exclaimed Raoul, springing to his feet. "Now, when war is imminent! It would be rank treachery!"

"No, it would be a bold, courageous step to take,--a fearless confession of the truth. If you stay here you are false to yourself as well as to others. What should you resign? A country where you always have been, and always must be, a stranger, circumstances that have become intolerable, and a grandfather with whom you are in open warfare. The only one whom you have to consider--your mother--may, indeed, grieve over the destruction of her schemes, but she never would grieve over such a step on your part."

"My name is Steinrück," said Raoul, gloomily. "You seem to forget that, Héloïse."

"Yes, that is your name, but you are a Montigny from head to heel. You have often boasted to us that this was so; why deny it now? Is your father's name to dictate to you what you must think and feel? Has not your mother's blood an equal right? It draws you in every fibre towards her land, to her people, and should the holiest force in nature be outraged and denied? They would compel you to fight against us. *That* would be 'rank treachery,'--a use to which you never can allow yourself to be put."

Raoul had turned away; he would fain have been deaf to her words, but yet he drank them in eagerly. These were his own thoughts as they had besieged him day after day, refusing to be banished.

The only thing that could now be his safeguard he did not possess,--a sense of duty. Duty had always been to him a ghastly phantom, and thus it appeared to him now; but it possessed the power to appall.

"Hush, Héloïse!" he said, hoarsely. "I must not listen,--nay, I will not listen. Let me go."

And in fact he turned as if to leave the room, but Héloïse approached him and laid her hand upon his arm. Her voice was full of eloquent entreaty, and there was the soft veiled look in her eyes which he knew but too well.

"Come with us, Raoul. You will be consumed in this wretched struggle with yourself. It will be your ruin, and I--ah, do you think I can endure to part from you? that I shall suffer less than your mother in knowing you in the ranks of our foes? Follow us to France."

"Héloïse, spare me!" The young Count made a desperate effort to escape; in vain. Sweeter and more alluring rang the tones from which he could not flee. The toils of the glittering serpent were thrown more and more closely around him.

"Ah, he will find means to bend you to his will, that inexorable old man. Escape from him before he makes good his threat. War is not yet declared. You are still free to act. Procure your leave from the Foreign Office, no matter under what pretext. When you are far away, when orders can no longer reach you----"

"Never! never!" exclaimed Raoul. He felt himself about to succumb, and his sense of honour, all of it that was left, revolted. His grandfather's image arose before him,--the 'inexorable old man' with scorn in his eyes. Once more it won the victory over the threatened loss of his love, once more it snatched him from danger.

"Never!" he repeated. "I could not live beneath such a burden, even beside you, Héloïse. Farewell!"

He hurried to the door, where he encountered Henri Clermont, who had just returned from a walk, and who would have detained him.

"Whither so fast, Raoul? Have you not a moment to give me?"

"No!" the young Count gasped. "I must go on the instant. Farewell!"

He rushed away. Clermont looked after him, surprised, and then turned to his sister: "What ails the fellow? why is he in such desperate haste?"

"It is his reply to my suggestion that he should follow us to France," H elo ise replied, in a deeply irritated tone. "You heard it. He bade me farewell."

Henri shrugged his shoulders. "He will be here again to-morrow. I should suppose you would be aware by this time of your power over him. He has resigned Hertha Steinr uck and a princely fortune for your sake. You he never will resign!"

The storm had burst: war was declared, and events followed one another with such rapidity that all personal considerations, all personal interests, were overwhelmed by them.

In the house occupied by the Marquis de Montigny everything was packed and ready for departure. He had remained to share the last cares of the Ambassador, and was now to leave the capital in a few hours. He seemed still to be awaiting some one, for from time to time he went to the window and looked out impatiently. At last the servant announced young Count Steinr uck, who instantly appeared.

Raoul looked unusually pale, and his air was strangely disturbed, but it passed unnoticed by his uncle; at that time every one was in a state of feverish agitation. He held out his hand to the young man.

"Did you get my note? I am just about to start, but I cannot go without a few words with you."

"I was coming, at all events, to bid you good-by," replied Raoul. "My mother will be inconsolable at the idea of not having taken leave of you."

"I must go back to Paris immediately," Montigny declared, with a shrug; "but your mother has written to me from Steinr uck, and it is of the contents of her letter that I wish to speak to you."

The young Count braced himself to meet what he knew was coming. Hortense, who had not been able to see her brother before leaving town, had poured out her heart to him by letter, and a tempest from this quarter was to be expected. In fact, the Marquis, without any circumlocution, went directly to the point:

"I hear that your betrothal to Hertha is annulled. It is impossible for me to understand how you could resign her, and I fear you will only too soon appreciate what you have lost. Still, after all, that is your own affair. But my sister writes me that you intend to marry the lady, Frau von N erac, who has caused the breach, and she is in despair at the thought. I, however, assured her, in my letter of farewell, that she might be quite easy upon that point, that matters would never go so far."

"And why not?" Raoul burst forth. "Am I a child in leading-strings, to be dictated to? I am legally of age; you all seem to forget this; and in spite of all opposition H elo ise is mine, and shall not be snatched from me."

There was more than mere obstinate determination in his words: they were uttered with a passionate recklessness that revealed the feverish agitation of the speaker so plainly that Montigny involuntarily softened his voice, and, taking his nephew's hand, drew him down to a seat beside him.

"First of all, Raoul, promise me to be more calm. If my mere hint is met by such excitement on your part, how can you endure the whole truth? Had I suspected that you were so deeply entangled I should have spoken long ago. The certainty of war does away with many of the considerations that hitherto have kept me silent. Nevertheless, I must ask you to give me your word that no one, not even your mother, shall learn what I am about to tell you."

His grave, calm words, in which there was a distinct tone of compassion, did not fail of their effect, but Raoul made no reply, and the Marquis continued:

"I threatened Clermont some months ago that if he did not withdraw from all intimacy with you I would open your eyes, and he was prudent enough to induce you from that time to conceal your relations with him. Hortense and I have both been deceived, but I shall not permit my sister's only son to fall a victim to such snares. You do not know who and what this Clermont is---

"Uncle Leon," Raoul interrupted him, eagerly and with intense emotion, "do not go on, I entreat you. I do not wish to know. Spare me!"

Montigny looked at him in surprise and dismay. "You do not wish to know? You seem to be partly aware of what I would say, and still you could---

"No, no, I do but suspect, and that only since yesterday. By chance--do not ask me---

"Do you fear to have the bandage torn from your eyes?" Montigny asked, sternly. "Nevertheless, it must be done. You know Clermont and his sister only as private individuals,

spending their time in travelling because their income does not suffice for a life in Paris suited to their inclinations. The purpose of their stay here is much less innocent. Their errand is a means of which every government must avail itself, but to which no man of honour can ever lend himself. Only those to whom any means for maintaining a superficial position in society is welcome ever accept such employment. That those thus engaged in this instance are really the scions of an ancient noble family only makes their trade the more disgraceful. I think you understand me."

Raoul did indeed seem to understand, although he made a hasty gesture of dissent. "You are speaking of Henri; you may be right, but Héloïse is innocent,--she has no share in her brother's acts,--she knows nothing of them. Do not slander her; I will not believe you!"

"You must believe facts. I tell you, and I vouch for what I say, that in the 'instructions' given the brother and sister Frau von Nérac has the principal part to play, because as a woman she is less liable to be suspected, and in consequence has greater freedom of action. I can give you proofs, can tell you what amount has been paid----"

"No, no!" groaned Raoul. "For God's sake hush, or you will drive me mad!"

"She seems to have driven you mad indeed, or you never could have sacrificed Hertha to her," said Montigny, bitterly. "You were nothing but a tool in the hands of the pair, a key to open to them doors that would else have been closed against them. Through you they hoped for admission to military circles, perhaps even for information in diplomatic quarters. Hence Clermont forced his friendship upon you, and his sister played a part towards you which you unfortunately took for earnest, blindly falling into the trap thus laid. Surely you are now cured, and will think no more of marriage with a hired spy!"

Raoul winced at the word, then sprang up and hurried to the door. Montigny barred his way. "Where are you going?"

"In search of them!"

"Folly!" said the Marquis, detaining him. "Where would be the use? Contempt is the only punishment for such villany."

Raoul made no reply, but the pallid face which he turned towards his uncle wore an expression that startled the elder man. "What is the matter? This is not merely the anguish of betrayed affection; you are in mortal dread--of what? Tell me----"

"I cannot! Do not keep me here!" cried the young Count, releasing himself violently from his uncle's detaining hand and rushing from the room without a word of farewell.

Montigny looked after him with a dark frown. "What can this mean? I wish I had spoken before."

All was made ready for departure in the Steinrück abode. The general was to join his corps on this very evening, while the young Count was to remain behind for a few days. He had on the previous day received orders to report to the military authorities. His grandfather, in this instance as always, had carried out his determination in spite of Raoul's opposition.

For the last few days the general had been so incessantly occupied that he had scarcely seen his grandson. On the previous evening he had attended a military council held for the last time before the departure of the army, and lasting far into the night. He reached home towards morning, and when, after a couple of hours of sleep, he again entered his study, all kinds of despatches and messages were awaiting him there, and through the forenoon one matter after another engaged his time and attention in addition to the arrangements for departure. It needed the old Count's iron strength of physical and mental constitution to meet the requirements of the hour.

It was noon when Captain Rodenberg made his appearance. He had been here on the previous day upon some military errand to the general, on which occasion another of his superior officers had been present, and the interview had been of an entirely formal nature. To-day also Michael's demeanour was in strict accordance with military rule, but instead of the message which the general expected to receive by him he said, "I have no message to deliver to your Excellency to-day, but the business that brings me here is of such importance that I must beg for an immediate hearing. Will you allow me to close the door, that we may not be interrupted?"

Steinrück looked surprised at this strange prelude, and asked, "Is the affair in question connected with the service?"

"It is."

"Then close the door."

Michael complied, and then returned to his place. There was an agitation in his air which it evidently needed all his self-command to control, and which his voice betrayed as he said, "I

delivered to your Excellency yesterday a document that was of the greatest importance. My orders were strict to give it to no one save yourself, and not to let it leave my hands except to place it in your Excellency's."

"Certainly, I received it from you. Were you aware of its contents?"

"I was, your Excellency. The paper was in my handwriting, as I acted as secretary during its composition. It concerns the initiative movements of the Steirück corps; of course my orders were strict as to its delivery."

"And I confirm that delivery; the paper is in my desk."

"Is it really there?"

"To what can this lead?" asked the general, sharply. "I tell you that I locked it up there with my own hands."

"And I pray your Excellency to convince yourself that it is still where you placed it. The immense importance of the matter must excuse my audacity. I willingly incur the reproach of presumption to be assured of the safety of this document."

Steirück shrugged his shoulders impatiently, but he took the key which he always carried about him and went to his writing-desk. The lock was a complicated one, and usually yielded with reluctance to the key. To-day the lid of the desk sprang open at a slight touch. The general changed colour.

"The desk has been broken into," Michael said, in a low voice, pointing to the key-hole, which showed evident signs of having been tampered with. "I thought so."

Steirück said not a word, nor did he waste an instant upon an examination of the papers that lay before him, and which were probably of little importance. He hurriedly pressed a spot in the wooden side of the desk, to all appearance identical with the rest of the partition, but which instantly slipped aside, revealing an ingeniously--constructed secret drawer, now, to Steirück's dismay, entirely empty.

"This is the work of a traitor!" the Count exclaimed, angrily. "No one except myself is aware of this secret drawer, or how to open it. Captain Rodenberg, what do you know of this robbery? You have some suspicion, some trace. Tell me!"

Michael was wont, in speaking to his superior officers, to be brief and to the point; to-day he departed from his rule and went into detail, as if to prepare his hearer for what was to come before it should be uttered.

"Late last evening I was sent, with a despatch that had just arrived, to the conference at which your Excellency was assisting. On my return I was obliged to pass by your house upon the garden side. As I turned the corner--it was about midnight--I saw a man disappear through the small door in the wall beside the grated iron gate. I should hardly have noticed his doing so--the servants probably had a right to use this entrance--had I not thought that I recognized the figure, although I saw it but for a moment beneath the light of the street-lamp."

"And who did you think it was?" the general asked, with intense eagerness.

"The brother of Frau von Nérac,--Henri Clermont."

"Clermont? I always have considered him as an adventurer, and have closed my doors against him. You are right: his appearance on that spot at that hour was more than suspicious. Did you not follow up the clue?"

"I did, your Excellency, but it ended where all was above suspicion--or, at least, seemed to be so."

He laid significant emphasis upon the last words, but Steirück paid no heed; he insisted, impatiently, "Go on! go on!"

"I tried to persuade myself that I had been mistaken, and walked on, but the matter left me no rest. I turned after a while, and as I walked around the house I noticed a strange light in your Excellency's study; it was not the light of a lamp, but like that of a solitary candle burning at the farther end of the room. It might well be accident, but, my suspicions roused by the sight of Clermont, I determined to have the matter explained at all hazards. I rang the bell, and told the servant that in passing I had observed a singular light in the study, which might possibly proceed from the beginning of a fire, and advised his seeing to it immediately. The man was startled, and hurried away, returning after a few moments, however, to inform me that I was mistaken; he begged pardon, but there was only a single candle burning in the room, and there was no one there except----"

"Well? Why hesitate? Go on! Who was there?"

"Count Raoul Steirück."

The general's face was ghastly pale, and his breath came short and quick as he said, "My grandson--here?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"At midnight?"

"At midnight."

A long pause ensued; neither man spoke. The eyes of the old Count looked strangely fixed; the dim, dark foreboding that had once before assailed him again emerged from the gloom and took on shape and form. But this dark presage faded; he collected himself and repelled the horrible thought.

"Then we must apply to Raoul," he said, regaining his composure. "I will send for him."

"The Count is not at home," interposed Michael.

"Then he is at the Foreign Office; I will send there instantly. This matter must be cleared up; there is not a minute to lose."

He stretched out his hand towards the bell, but suddenly paused, encountering Rodenberg's glance. There must have been something terrible in the young man's eyes, for the general slowly withdrew his outstretched hand and said, in a low tone, "What is it? Out with it!"

"I have bad news for you, Count Steinrück,--news hard to bear; you must prepare for the worst."

The general passed his hand across his forehead and gazed as if spell-bound at the speaker. "The worst? Where is Raoul?"

"Gone!--to France!"

Steinrück did not start, did not even exclaim. He put his hand to his heart without a word, and would have fallen if Michael had not supported him as he sank into a seat.

Several minutes passed thus. Michael stood silent beside the arm-chair, where the Count leaned back half unconscious. The young officer felt that any word, any offer of help, would be useless. At last he stooped over him.

"Your Excellency!"

There was no reply. The general seemed to know nothing of what was around him.

"Count Steinrück!"

Still the same distressing silence. The Count leaned back motionless, his eyes gazing into vacancy, his labouring breath the only sign that he still lived.

"Grandfather!"

The word came gently and with hesitation from the lips that had resolved never to utter it, but it was spoken, and it dissolved the old man's icy torpor. Steinrück started, and suddenly buried his face in his hands.

"Grandfather, look at me!" Michael at last broke forth. "Break this fearful silence; say at least one word to me."

Obedying as if mechanically, the general dropped his hands and looked up at the young man. "Michael," he groaned, "you are avenged!"

It was indeed a Nemesis. Upon this very spot the son, tortured by the disgrace of his father's memory, had declared to his pitiless grandfather, "Your scutcheon is not so lofty and unimpeachable as the sun in the heavens; a day may come when it will wear a stain that you cannot efface, and then you will feel what an implacable judge you have been." The day had come, and had felled at one stroke the mighty old oak that had defied so many tempests.

"Courage!" said Michael. "You must not succumb now. Remember what is at stake. We must devise some plan."

It was the right appeal to make. The thought of the peril that menaced him roused the general from his dull despair. He arose, at first with difficulty, but as he stood once more erect he seemed to recover his self-possession.

"If I could but overtake the scoundrel! With my own hands I would force him--but there is no time. The hour is fixed for my arrival at headquarters."

"Then send me," interposed Michael. "Orders from my general in relation to a secret and important mission will relieve me from all other duty. Railway travel is obstructed and delayed

everywhere by the transportation of troops; it takes double time to make even a short journey. My uniform and your orders will place every military train at my disposal; I shall overtake Raoul this side of the border."

"Then you know which way he has gone?"

"Yes, and I have kept trace of the Clermonts also. I would not, I could not give utterance to a suspicion founded upon mere possibilities so long as proof was lacking, and I was upon duty from which I was relieved only an hour ago, when I hurried to Clermont's lodgings. He had departed with his sister, and by the South German line, as being the swiftest. I drove directly to that station, which was thronged with troops for transportation. The morning train had already left, the mid-day train was just ready to depart. How far it could go and what delays it might encounter could not be foreseen. As I was speaking with an official I saw Raoul on the other side of the platform, alone and hurrying along beside the carriages, in which he seemed to be searching for some one. Suddenly the final signal was given, he tore open the first door at hand, entered the train, and was whirled away. I could not overtake him, the breadth of the railway-station was between us, but I hurried to the office to learn for what point the last single passenger had purchased his ticket, and was told for Strasburg."

The general leaned heavily upon the back of the arm-chair by which he stood as he listened to this hasty report, but he lost not a syllable of it; and at the last word, which might well have crushed him, he stood erect again with much of his old vigour.

"You are right. There is still a chance of overtaking him." He did not mention Raoul's name. "If any one can come to the rescue it is you, Michael! This I know. Recover the papers from him, living--or dead!"

"Grandfather!" exclaimed the young officer, recoiling.

"On my head be the consequences. You shall be scathless. I once required you to spare my blood flowing in the veins of each of you,--now I tell you not to spare the traitor. Wrest his booty from him,--you know what is at stake,--wrest it from him, living or dead!"

The words were terrible, and more terrible still was the expression in the old man's eyes, gleaming with no ray of pity, but filled with the iron resolution of the inexorable judge. It was plain that he would have sacrificed his grandson, the heir of his name, who had once been so dear to his heart, without the quiver of an eyelash.

"I shall do my duty," Michael said, in an undertone that, nevertheless, had in it an echo of that other voice.

The general went to his writing-table and took up a pen; his hand trembled and almost refused to perform its duty, but he controlled the weakness and wrote a few lines, which he handed to the captain.

"I trust everything to you, Michael. Go! Perhaps you will succeed in saving me from the worst. If I hear nothing from you in the course of the next twenty-four hours I must speak, and must declare the last Steinrück----"

He could not finish the sentence; his voice broke, but he grasped Michael's hand in a convulsive clasp. The repudiated son of the outcast daughter was to be the saviour of the honour of the family; he was the old Count's last, sole hope, and the young man answered the clasp of his hand,--

"Rely upon me, grandfather! Have you not said that I can do all that can be done? You shall hear from me at your head-quarters. Farewell!"

The confusion and bustle reigning in the South-German railway-station at E---- had increased incredibly, for the comparatively insignificant little town was the point of meeting of three railway lines, and lay in the direct road to the Rhine. Trains for the transportation of troops were running day and night, and the town itself was crowded with soldiers.

Some hundred paces from the station there was a third-rate inn, usually frequented by peasants only, and certainly no fit stopping-place for the strangers who had reached it an hour previously,--a young lady, apparently of high rank, accompanied by an elderly priest and a servant. The apartment to which they had been shown was neither comfortable nor clean, and yet it was the only shelter that they could find.

The lady, who sat at a table leaning her head upon her hand, was in mourning, and looked very grave and pale, although this in no wise detracted from the beauty of the face beneath her crape veil. The priest was seated opposite her at the table, and had just said, "I am afraid we must stay here for a while; your servant has searched the entire town: all the hotels are overcrowded, and various private mansions are occupied by strangers. You might perhaps endure this house for a night, but any longer stay would be impossible for you, Countess Hertha."

"But why?" asked Hertha, calmly. "We shall have no choice to-morrow either, and at a time

like the present we must yield to necessity."

The priest of St. Michael, for it was he, looked in amazement at the petted young Countess, now so ready to content herself with accommodations that would under other circumstances have been indignantly rejected by her.

"But there really was no necessity," he observed. "Michael wrote expressly that he could not be here with his regiment until the day after to-morrow, and that he would telegraph you beforehand. Until then we might have stayed quietly in Berkheim."

Hertha shook her head. "Berkheim is full four leagues away. The orders might be changed, the telegram might be delayed, and then I should be too late. Only here on the spot can I be sure of the time of the arrival of the regiment. Do not blame me, your reverence! I must bid Michael farewell; when he is going perhaps to death, even the bare possibility of missing him is terrible!"

Valentin did not look inclined to blame her, but he marvelled at the dominion which Michael exercised over the proud, wayward girl.

"I am thankful that I was able to come with you," said he. "The pastor of Tannberg was quite ready to send me his chaplain to take my place for a while, and I can conduct you back to Berkheim."

Hertha gratefully held out her hand to him. "I have no one but you! My guardian is angry with me, as I foresaw that he would be. He never even answered my letter, and Aunt Hortense was so furious when she learned of my betrothal to Michael, that I could not possibly remain a day longer at Steinrück, loath as I was to leave my mother's grave so soon. I am grieved to have caused your reverence so much trouble and exertion. I am afraid that your accommodations are even worse than mine."

"For the present I have a room upon the ground-floor which certainly is not very inviting," said Valentin, smiling, "but the host has promised me for the night the gable-room in the upper story, since the strangers now occupying it will leave by the evening train. The time for its departure is at hand; I will go and attend to matters."

He left the room, and Hertha walked to the window, which she opened wide. The day had been very hot, and the evening brought no refreshment; the air was sultry and oppressive. Not a star was visible in the clouded heavens, and on the distant horizon there was from time to time a gleam of lightning, unveiling the dim mountain-range. Near at hand sparkled the lights of the railway-station, and close to the house the river rushed, seeming to emerge from the darkness only to be lost in it again. The ripple and dash of its waters were the only signs of its existence.

The young Countess leaned her glowing forehead against the window-frame, resolving to be steadfast and brave. Michael should see no grief that could make departure harder for him; but now that she was alone she could weep her fill. Her sense of loss in her mother's death, the pain occasioned by the strife with her family, all faded in her anguish for the lover whom perhaps she had won only to lose again forever.

Suddenly she heard voices close beneath her window. The host was standing at the inn door with a stranger, and Hertha could hear that they were speaking of the gable-room. The innkeeper asked civilly when the room would be vacant, as some one was waiting to occupy it, and the stranger replied that he had just learned at the station that the evening train would not leave for two hours; for so long he and the lady with him must retain the room. His voice attracted the young Countess's attention. She knew that fluent German spoken with a slight foreign accent, and in another moment she recognized, by the light of the lamp just lit before the house, the speaker, Henri Clermont, who, since he spoke of a lady with him, must be on his way back to France with his sister.

Hertha retired from the window with a pained sensation. Until a short time previously she had had but the merest superficial acquaintance with these people, meeting them from time to time in society. Only lately had she learned of Raoul's relations with Frau von Nérac. A chance meeting was certainly to be avoided, and the young Countess resolved not to leave her room for the next two hours.

Meanwhile, bustle and noise were on the increase at the railway-station. Trains came and went, engines whistled, and the platform was crowded with travellers and onlookers, making inquiries or condemned to an involuntary delay.

This last was the fate that had befallen the passengers who had arrived half an hour previously by a train already delayed several hours. They were told that it could not proceed immediately, since, in addition to the military transport which was just gliding into the station, other troops were expected, and the passenger-trains must wait until the road was clear again. All had patiently resigned themselves to circumstances, with the exception of a solitary passenger, who evidently was in great haste and found the delay hard to endure. He had retired to a dark, secluded part of the station, where he was pacing to and fro with signs of intense impatience, consulting his watch every five minutes. Suddenly he paused, and then withdrew into still deeper shadow, for an officer who had arrived with the military train came talking with a railway official, directly towards where he stood.

"The express--train passed through with but little delay, then?" asked the officer. "But the passenger-train that arrived at noon is still here? Are its passengers here also?"

"Certainly, Herr Captain," replied the official. "They are still waiting, and must wait for some time yet."

The solitary passenger seemed to recognize the officer's voice, and to wish to avoid meeting him, for he turned hastily and walked in another direction. His sudden movement, however, betrayed his presence to the sharp eyes of the officer searching the gloom. He briefly thanked the official, and in a few steps overtook the stranger, and barred his way.

"Count Raoul Steinrück!"

The encounter was most unwelcome to the young Count, this was plain, but he thought it purely accidental--the captain was doubtless on his way with his regiment to the seat of war. He stood still, and asked, bluntly, "What do you wish, Captain Rodenberg?"

"First of all, I wish for a private interview with you."

"I regret that I am in great haste."

"So am I. But I trust that the matter I have to settle can be disposed of briefly."

Raoul hesitated an instant, and then called out to the official, who still stood near, "How long will the passenger-train be delayed?"

"For an hour at least," the man replied, shrugging his shoulders and walking away. Raoul turned to Rodenberg.

"Well, then, I am ready; but here at the station, where every word can be overheard, we cannot----"

"No, but over there I see a small inn. We can go there; it is close at hand."

"As you please, since the matter admits of no delay. I beg you to be very brief, however, since, as you see, I am on my way elsewhere," the young Count said, haughtily, turning in the desired direction. Michael followed him closely, never taking his eyes from him, and evidently surprised by his ready compliance.

They reached the house, and entered the gloomy, dim inn-parlour, at present deserted. The host showed them into a small adjoining room, which seemed appropriated to the use of the better sort of guests. He brought a light, and then, finding they had no further orders to give, vanished. They were left alone.

Raoul stood in the centre of the room. He was ghastly pale; there was a feverish gleam in his eyes, and with all his effort at self-control he could not conceal his intense agitation.

"Time and place seem to me but ill chosen for an explanation," he began. "I should certainly have called you to an account later with regard to the disclosures made by you to my grandfather in the name of the Countess Hertha."

"No need to refer to that now," Michael interrupted him. "I have a question to put to you. You are on your way to Strasburg; what do you want there?"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Raoul, indignantly. "You forget that you are speaking to Count Steinrück."

"I speak in the name of General Steinrück, who has sent me to recover the papers which you have with you, and the value of which you know as well as I do."

The young Count started as if he had received a blow. "The papers? My grandfather believes---?"

"He and I believe! And I think we are justified in so doing. Pray let us have no circumlocution. I have but little time to lose, and am resolved to use force if necessary. Will you compel me to do so?"

Raoul gazed at him as if dazed; suddenly he covered his face with his hands and groaned, "Ah, this is terrible!"

"Spare me this farce!" said Rodenberg, harshly. "It can avail nothing. The general's desk has been broken open, the document stolen, and the servant who unexpectedly entered the room found the thief----"

A savage exclamation from Raoul interrupted him; the young Count seemed about to throw himself upon him. Michael raised his hand. "Control yourself, Count Steinrück; you have lost the right to be treated with any consideration."

"But it is a lie!" Raoul burst forth, violently. "Not I--but Henri Clermont----"

"I have no doubt that Clermont was the instigator. I myself saw him lurking in the garden at midnight. But another must have lent his hand to the shameful work. A stranger, a Frenchman, could hardly have gained access to the general's rooms."

"But he could to mine. He had the key of the garden gate and of my bedroom. My grandfather always disliked him, as did my mother also of late: we chose to escape the perpetual reproach that was sure to follow Henri's visits. I did not dream of his vile purpose in asking me to give him the keys."

Michael leaned against the table with folded arms, gazing steadily at the speaker; it was plain that he did not believe him.

"The son of the house then opened its doors to the spy? And how did he find the secret drawer, so well concealed in the desk? How did he find the spring that alone could open it?"

"My own desk, which he knew well, is similarly arranged. It was given me by my grandfather, who had it made for me after the model of his."

"Ah, indeed! Go on."

Raoul clinched his hands convulsively. "Rodenberg, do not goad me too far. You see in me a desperate man. You must believe me, you must disabuse my grandfather of his terrible suspicion, or I never would answer questions put in such a tone and with such an air. I came home last night late and found the doors, which are always locked between my rooms and the general's, open. Since we alone have the keys opening them, my suspicions were awakened. I went to the study, and found the man whom I had called my friend----"

"At his work," Michael concluded the sentence. "Apparently you did not interrupt it, since he found time to complete the robbery."

"He had already completed it. As I stood in utter dismay, crushed by the frightful discovery, we heard the door of the antechamber open, and approaching footsteps. In mortal terror Henri clasped my arm and conjured me to save him. Discovery would be his ruin, as I knew, and I hurried to the door and prevented the servant's entrance by telling him of my presence. When the man had gone and I turned round, Clermont had escaped."

"And you did not pursue him and wrest his booty from him? You did not tell the general what had happened?"

Raoul's eyes were downcast, and he replied, scarcely audibly, "He was my nearest friend, the brother of the woman whom I loved to madness, and whom I then believed guiltless. The next morning I hurried to them; they were gone, and an hour afterwards I made a terrible discovery; then, reckless of all other considerations, I set out to pursue them."

He paused as if exhausted. Michael had listened with apparent composure, except for a slight contemptuous quiver of the lip. Now he stood erect. "Have you finished? My patience is at an end; I did not come here to listen to fanciful tales. Give me the papers, or I shall be forced to resort to violence."

"You do not believe me?" exclaimed Raoul. "You still do not believe me?"

"No, I do not believe one word of this tissue of falsehood. For the last time, then, give me the papers, or by the eternal God I will obey the order which my grandfather gave me when I left him,--'Wrest the papers from him, living or--dead!'"

A shiver ran through Raoul's frame. Here it was again,--the strange resemblance. He knew those flashing eyes, that iron tone; he seemed to see his grandfather's self before him pronouncing upon him sentence of death.

"Fulfil your orders, then!" he said, dully; "and then you will know that the dead did not lie."

There was something in this dull submission that had a more powerful effect than could have been produced by the most passionate asseverations. Michael was impressed by it. He knew that Raoul possessed sufficient physical courage to defend to the death what he did not choose to resign, had it been in his possession; and, stepping up close to him, he laid his hand upon his arm.

"Count Raoul Steinrück, in the name of the man from whom we both are sprung I demand of you the truth. The papers upon which the safety of our army depends are not in your possession?"

"No!" said Raoul, firmly; and once more his down cast eyes were lifted to meet his questioner's gaze.

"And Clermont has them?"

"Doubtless they are in his hands."

"Then I am losing time here; he must be pursued and overtaken. The train that brought me here leaves in half an hour. I must go to the station."

He turned to go, but the young Count detained him. "Take me with you! Give me a place in the military train. Our paths are the same----"

"No, they are not!" Michael interrupted him, coldly. "Stay behind, Count Steinrück. I may perhaps be compelled to demand the papers of Herr von Clermont pistol in hand, and at the decisive moment you might possibly remember again that he is your 'nearest friend,' and the brother of the woman whom you 'love to madness.'"

"Rodenberg, I give you my word of honour----"

"*Your word of honour?*"

The emphasis that Michael gave to these words was so crushing that Raoul stood mute, as the captain went on in the same pitiless tone,--

"If you have not been guilty of the worst of crimes you have permitted it, and even shielded it from discovery. Either act is high treason; the accomplice is as bad as the thief."

He went without a backward glance. As he passed through the hall a door opened, and Valentin appeared, stood for a moment mute with astonishment, and then advanced hastily. "Michael! Is this you?"

"Your reverence!" was the rejoinder, in the same tone of astonishment. "You here?"

"That I ask you. You appointed the day after tomorrow, and if Hertha had not in her anxiety hastened her journey----"

"Hertha here? With you? Where is she?" Michael eagerly interrupted him; and when the priest pointed to the door in the upper story opening upon the staircase, the young officer heard no more, but rushed up the steps, tore open the door, and in another instant clasped Hertha in his arms.

But this interview had to be as brief as it was passionately tender. Rodenberg clasped his betrothed to his heart, but his first word to her was one of farewell.

"I cannot stay. I only wanted to see you, to snatch one moment of bliss. I must go."

"Go?" Hertha repeated, clinging to him, half dazed with sudden joy and dread. "Now, in this first moment of reunion? You cannot."

"I must," he insisted. "Perhaps we may see each other again the day after to-morrow."

"Only perhaps! And if we do not? Can you not spare me a moment for farewell?"

"My darling, you cannot dream what it costs me to leave you now; but duty claims me. I must obey."

Duty! Hertha had heard the word often enough from the general's lips, and she comprehended its significance. Her eyes filled with tears, but she made no further effort to detain her lover. Once more he pressed his lips to hers.

"Farewell! One thing more,--Raoul is here. Possibly he may attempt to see you if he should hear of your presence in the house. Promise me neither to see him nor to speak with him."

A contemptuous expression flitted across the young girl's face. "*Her* presence would forbid on his part any such attempt as you fear."

"Whose presence? Whom do you mean?" asked Michael, with intense eagerness.

"Héloïse von Nérac!"

"What? here? And Clermont----"

"He is with her."

"Thank God! Where--where are they?"

"Just above us, in the gable-room. But tell me----"

"I cannot! Do not ask me, do not follow me. *Everything* depends upon my finding them, and then--then I can stay with you."

He hurried from the room, past the priest, who looked after him in dismayed surprise; nor could Hertha in the least understand this scene, although she clung for comfort to Michael's last

words,--"Then I can stay with you.'

The gable-room, in which a single candle was burning, was even more scantily furnished than were the other rooms in the house, but the strangers occupying it, who had arrived by the noonday train, had taken possession of it without complaint, since they needed it for only a few hours. They were each in travelling-dress, apparently waiting impatiently for the signal for departure. Henri Clermont was pacing the room restlessly, whilst Héloïse sat leaning back in an old arm-chair.

"What a delay this is!" she exclaimed, in despair. "It seems as if we never should get away from here. It will be impossible for us to cross the borders tomorrow morning as we hoped."

"And it is entirely your fault," Henri interposed, irritably. "How could you be guilty of such imprudence as to speak French just as we were about to change cars? You might have known that the excited crowd at the station would insult us."

"How could I know that the German mob was so irritable? And after all there were only two or three who were insulting; the better sort took our part. There was no need for the police to interfere as they did."

"True, but while matters were being adjusted the train moved off, and we, hemmed in on every side, could not get to it. We have lost half a day, when every minute is full of peril for us. Moreover, we have attracted attention, and may be glad that we could disappear in this wretched inn. We must not venture to show ourselves again at the station until just before the train starts. They may be even now upon our track."

"Impossible! Even if the discovery has been made, Raoul will be silent."

"Raoul behaved like a madman. In another instant he would have called for help, and betrayed me. Had I not whispered, 'Remember Héloïse. If you betray me she is lost to you!' he would not have let me go."

"And we have left him to bear the brunt of the tempest!"

Héloïse's voice trembled as she spoke the words, but Henri shrugged his shoulders.

"That can't be helped. It was either I or he; there was no other choice when matters had gone so far."

The conversation was carried on of course in French, but in so low a tone that not a word could be heard beyond the walls of the room. Now Henri's voice sank to a whisper as he went close up to his sister.

"It was not easy for you to give him up, I know, but the reward is worth the sacrifice. What I have here assures our entire future. We may ask what we will, and they----"

He broke off suddenly and turned to the door, which was quietly opened. Héloïse started up with an exclamation of terror; the instant she recognized the man standing on the threshold she knew that their schemes and calculations were fruitless. Not in vain had been her dread of those 'cold, hard eyes:' they brought ruin to her brother and herself.

Rodenberg closed the door and approached the pair. "Herr von Clermont, there is no need to tell you why I am here. I trust you will spare me all explanation, and that a few minutes will suffice for the business between us."

Clermont had grown very pale, but he made an effort to maintain his composure.

"What do you mean, Captain Rodenberg? I do not understand you."

"Then I must be more explicit. I demand the papers which have been stolen from General Steinrück's desk. No need to put your hand to your breast; you see I, too, have a pistol here, and I am probably the better shot. Moreover, it might be uncomfortable for you to have shots exchanged here; the station is very near, and is crowded with troops; escape would be impossible. You had better resign yourself to circumstances."

Clermont in fact dropped his hand from his breast and said through his closed teeth, "And if I refuse to do so?"

"Then you must bear the consequences. War is declared, and a spy would have but a short shrift. I leave you to choose. One word from me, and you are lost."

"That word, however, you will not speak," said Clermont, with a sneer; "for then I should have something to say which might not be exactly agreeable to one of your generals in command."

The threat touched a sore spot, but Michael with instant presence of mind deprived it of its point, rejoicing, coolly, "You are mistaken; Count Raoul Steinrück is here with me, upon your track. He may well be forgiven the heedlessness of a moment. But enough of this idle talk. Must I use force? My shot will rouse the neighbourhood."

He stood, pistol in hand, gazing steadily at his opponent, who saw clearly that the game was lost. Clermont was no coward in the usual sense of the word, but he knew that strife with this man would be vain, and his weapon, Raoul's share in his treachery, had been wrenched from his hand. In fact, he believed that Raoul himself had revealed the theft. After a moment's delay he slowly drew forth the papers from his breast-pocket and handed them to the captain, who took them without altering his menacing attitude.

"Retire to the window," he said, authoritatively. "I must see that the papers are all here and intact."

Clermont obeyed, going to the window, where Héloïse had already taken refuge. Michael tore open the envelope which bore the general's address, and which had apparently been opened. The superscription of the papers revealed their contents, their seals were unbroken, and, after a brief, keen scrutiny, he was satisfied that none had been abstracted.

Meanwhile, Henri had whispered a few words to his sister, who now timidly approached the captain. "Captain Rodenberg--we are in your power."

The words sounded imploring and distressed, but as she confronted the captain and raised her eyes to his, he encountered that strange gleam which many men had found so perilous, and which had wrought Raoul's ruin; it was harmless here.

"The way to the station lies open for your brother and yourself, madame," said Michael, coldly. "I shall place no further obstacle in your path; but allow me to hope that in future you will choose some other country--not Germany--for the scene of your operations."

Héloïse recoiled; his tone of utter contempt was worse than a blow.

As Rodenberg went down the stairs his old teacher came to meet him. "Michael, what in heaven's name has been going on up there? Countess Hertha has been in mortal terror, and so have I; but we did not venture to follow you."

"Reassure Hertha, I pray your reverence, and tell her I shall be with her in five minutes."

He spoke the words hurriedly as he passed the priest and went through the inn-parlour to the little room where he had left Raoul.

The young Count was sitting at the table, his head leaning upon his hands, in an attitude of despair. He looked up as the captain entered, but his eyes were dull and lifeless.

"The peril is past," said Michael. "By chance Clermont and his sister were in this very house. I forced him to relinquish his booty, and I think I can answer for his silence, since no plotter is anxious to tell of disgraceful schemes frustrated. For the sake of the honour of the Steinrück name, we too must hold our tongues. The name is saved from disgrace, and there is nothing to prevent your return to your home, Count Raoul; no one will ever know that the papers have been in hands other than those for which they were intended. I shall instantly telegraph to my grandfather, and early to-morrow I shall leave here to carry to him the missing packet. This is what I wished to tell you."

Raoul sat as if stunned, listening to the words that lifted such a terrible burden from his soul; the strange rigidity of his features did not relax. He seemed to wish to speak, perhaps a word of gratitude, but the scorn in his cousin's look and bearing closed his lips. 'My grandfather,'--the words sounded so natural, so exultant. Count Michael had indeed found a grandson who was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. They belonged together, and after this exploit of Michael's the old Count's arms would be opened wide to receive him.

When Rodenberg had gone, Raoul arose and slowly left the room and the house. Outside, he paused as if reflecting, and then retreated into the shadow as two figures emerged from the doorway. He recognized them as they glided past him on their way to the station, but he betrayed his presence by no sign, no sound. The proximity of the woman who but a short time before had possessed such power over him scarcely made any impression upon him. He knew that she was vanishing from him forever, but the knowledge gave him no pain. All within him seemed empty and dead, incapable of sensation.

From the open window just above him came the same voice that he had heard a few moments before, but how different was its tone!

"Hertha, my darling, forgive me for leaving you as I did. I had to fight for one hour of farewell. Now there is no duty to keep me from you. But we will have no tears,--we are still together."

Then another voice spoke,--a voice which the listener also knew well, and which sounded strange to him in its tenderness and sweetness.

"No, Michael, you shall not see a tear. I will think of nothing save the joy of having you here."

Was that really Hertha? Ah, she had learned to love indeed, and he who had once been her betrothed knew now what he had sacrificed. It drove him far from the lovers; he walked on

aimlessly in the darkness, beside the rushing river, until a wall barred his way. It was one of the supports of the bridge, above the arches of which the railway crossed the river; below the current ran strong, and an old willow dipped its boughs deep into the water.

The air was close and sultry, but a storm was at hand, and the lightning flashed sharply and incessantly. Raoul leaned against the trunk of the willow and gazed down into the dark whirling water; it cost him an effort to think clearly.

What should he do now? Go home? He could be there on the morrow, and some pretext for his absence could easily be invented.

No one knew what had happened, with the exception of the two who would keep silence for the sake of the honour of the Steinrücks, but the last of the name felt utterly unable to confront his grandfather again. The stern old man had pronounced sentence upon the traitor to his country,--the look of cool contempt beneath which Raoul had winced half an hour ago would fall upon him day after day from his grandfather's eyes,--death were indeed preferable to such a fate!

Loud hurrahs resounded from the railway-station, where the crowd were cheering the troops who were about to take their departure, and behind those dimly-lighted windows a young soldier was bidding farewell to his betrothed whom he might never see again. But here, beneath this willow, stood one for whom all was lost,--betrothed, honour, even a country.

The military train came rushing along, and just as it reached the bridge there was a flash of lightning. For an instant everything stood revealed in the dazzling light, the heavy threatening clouds, the dim distant mountains, and the whirling river, but the spot beneath the willow was vacant, and there was a plash in the foaming waters. In a moment the night swallowed all up again, the train thundered across the bridge, and in the west there was a zigzag gleam,--Saint Michael's sword of flame.

Two days later at General Steinrück's head-quarters various officers were assembled waiting for orders, but with unusually grave faces, and conversing in undertones. They had learned the sad misfortune that had befallen their chief. His grandson, the handsome, gallant, and gay Count Raoul, was dead; he had been walking at night on the river-bank, a false step had precipitated him from it into the river at a spot where the current was unusually strong, and he had been drowned.

It was terrible for the old man thus in the evening of his days to see the last of his name and race vanish in the bloom of youth, while he could not even stand beside his coffin or follow it to his ancestral tomb. Duty detained him at the head of his corps; indeed, in the two days that had elapsed since he had heard the sad news no duty of his position had been neglected; he was now giving audience to Captain Rodenberg, a bearer of important despatches. Not one of the officers suspected the nature of the scene--the closing scene of a family drama--that was enacting behind those closed doors. Michael was standing there beside the general, saying,--

"They found him at daybreak, quite near the house where we were staying. I had time to make the necessary arrangements, and then I was obliged to leave, intrusting everything else to the care of my dear old teacher, who also undertook the sad duty of carrying the news to Countess Hortense of her son's death and of having the body taken to Steinrück."

The general had listened in silence; now he asked, "And does no one know----?"

"No one save ourselves. Clermont and his sister will be silent,--must be silent for their own sakes. Were anything known of what has occurred, existence would be impossible for them anywhere. Here are the papers. I deliver them into the hands of my general, and the honour of the Steinrück name is intact."

Steinrück received the papers, and held out his hand to his grandson: "I thank you, Michael."

The young officer looked at him anxiously, not deceived by the rigid composure of his manner; he knew what lay behind it.

"Grandfather," he said, gently, "now you can mourn for him."

The general shook his head. "I have no time for tears, and they belong only to the beloved dead. That he could so wound me---- But enough; let him rest in peace."

He turned away and went into the antechamber, where the officers were assembled, and where he was received with the silent respect accorded to affliction. One of the group then stepped forward, and, in the name of all present, expressed to their leader the sympathy felt for him in the heavy loss which he had sustained. Steinrück listened calmly, apparently unmoved; he merely bowed in acknowledgment.

"I thank you, gentlemen. The blow which soon must strike thousands has fallen first upon me, but heaven has already sent me consolation, for here,"--and with the words a flash of his former energy broke through his forced composure, and the old soldier stood erect and vigorous,--"here beside me stands the son of my dead daughter, *my grandson*, Michael Rodenberg!"

A year had passed, a year full of terrible conflict and of tremendous results, full of shouts of victory and of wailing for the dead, and when summer again greeted the earth it greeted a newly-arisen kingdom.

Upon the mountain road leading from Tannberg to Castle Steinrück was rolling an open carriage in which were two officers. The captain, who sat on the right, would easily have been recognized as a soldier, even in civilian's dress; but his companion, who wore the uniform of a lieutenant of reserves, had an artistic rather than a military air, in spite of being tanned very brown by exposure to the sun and wind.

"The luck is all yours, Michael," he said, with all his old gayety. "You are returning crowned with laurels to your betrothed, while I still have a hard battle to fight. My little Dornröschen has indeed been faithful and brave, but the tall thorny hedge still confronts me in all the toughness of the tenth century. This uniform of mine is very uncomfortable in travelling, but I hope to impress my father-in-law with it. Perhaps it may move him to be confronted by the nineteenth century in all its warlike pomp."

"As usual, you regard the matter in its ludicrous aspect," rejoined Michael; "but indeed you ought to reflect that not only the old Freiherr, but your father also, refuses his consent."

"Yes, fathers are undoubtedly very difficult to deal with," Hans assented. "By dint of reading Gerlinda's letters to my father I have at last convinced him that she is sane, but he obstinately insists that lunacy is hereditary in the Eberstein family, and admonishes me to have regard for future generations. The Freiherr, on the other hand, maintains that godless irreverence is hereditary. Moreover, he must have an inkling that since the troops are dismissed I shall shortly come to the surface, for he has forbidden Gerlinda to drive to Steinrück. As if there were any use in that! I shall as the Knight of Forschungstein attack the Ebersburg, and as a preliminary climb the castle wall, and find my Dornröschen waiting for me on the terrace."

Michael listened rather absently, gazing the while towards Castle Steinrück, which had been visible for some time and was now close at hand. He remarked, casually, "You seem to be in constant correspondence with her,--was not an interchange of letters forbidden?"

"Of course it was, by both fathers. That is why we wrote so constantly to each other during the war. The archives of the family will be wonderfully enriched by the letters recounting the story of our love and misfortunes. But these last have gone on long enough, and if the old Freiherr will not listen to reason he must be clapped into the castle dungeon, and be kept there, as was Balduin of blessed memory six hundred years ago, until he consented to the marriage of Kunrad von Eberstein and Hildegard von Ortenau. Oh, I am well up now in the family chronicles. I make no more mistakes in the names."

Michael made no answer; as the carriage was driving up the hill he gazed eagerly towards the castle windows. Hans followed the direction of his eyes.

"And your grandfather is there too?"

"Yes, he came a week ago, and he has been obliged to ask for a long leave; the fatigue he has undergone has told terribly upon his health. But I hope everything from this mountain air."

The young artist shook his head, and said with sudden seriousness, "The general is very much altered. I was shocked when I saw him again. True, a campaign at his age, and then the sudden death of his grandson,--it is but natural. I think, however, that he is much fonder of you than he ever was of Count Raoul."

"Perhaps so. But at his time of life the effect of such shocks is never quite overcome," said Michael, evasively. He knew well what his grandfather could not overcome, but it was a secret between them.

Hans talked on, receiving ever briefer and more absent replies; his friend seemed scarcely to hear him, as he sat gazing towards the castle. Suddenly he drew forth his handkerchief and waved it in the air.

"What are you about?" asked Hans. "Ah, I see; there waves another handkerchief, and--yes, there stands the Countess Hertha on the balcony. She is beautiful indeed, your golden-haired fairy princess up there in the brilliant sunshine! My Dornröschen cannot vie with her, and my betrothed, instead of millions by way of dowry, has only an obstinate old papa. But then her family is full two hundred years older than the Steinrücks. Don't forget that, Michael! In the Middle Ages my future wife would decidedly have taken precedence of yours."

At last the carriage drove into the court-yard, far too slowly for the impatience of the young officer, who tore open the door, alighted, and ran up the steps to the hall, and, in spite of the servants there assembled, clasped in his arms Hertha, who had come to meet him. It was the first public acknowledgment of their betrothal.

"And I must look on, and cannot do likewise, just because I have a foolish papa and papa-in-law," grumbled Hans. "But only wait, my gentlemen, hardhearted parents as you are, and I will

bring you to your knees."

In the wainscoted room with the large bow-window, where the ancestral portraits looked down from the walls, and the escutcheon of the Steinrücks was carved above the fireplace, Count Michael now sat with his grandson, whom he had seen for the first time in this very room, where the boy had suffered under so false an accusation. Fate had devised a terrible requital, and the general evidently suffered severely from it.

In fact, he was greatly altered, and in twelve months had grown older by as many years. While the campaign lasted, the responsibilities of his position, his military duties, nerved his arm, and his will forced mind and body to do his bidding. But his strength failed him when his duties were ended. The features of the handsome old face looked pinched and hollow, the eyes had lost their fire, even the carriage was bowed and weary. At this moment, however, his eyes rested with intense satisfaction upon his grandson, whose hand he held in his own.

"I should think you might well be content," said he. "It is seldom that so young an officer receives such distinguished honours as have been heaped upon you, and I can bear witness that you deserve them. Your conduct in the field surpassed my expectations, and I expected a great deal from you, Michael."

"Perhaps the recognition of my services would not have been so flattering if it had not been accorded to the grandson of the general in command," rejoined Michael, with a smile. "From the moment when you introduced me as your near of kin I was but too well aware of the especial attention paid me."

"At all events, the recognition you have received was your due, and Hertha may well be proud of her hero. Have you settled upon the time for your marriage?"

"Not yet. Hertha takes various considerations into account, and, hard though it be, I must submit. Her betrothal to Raoul has never been publicly annulled, and the year of mourning is just ended. We meant, however, to leave the decision to you, grandfather. If you think we ought to wait---"

"No!" Steinrück declared. "You have agreed to have the marriage celebrated very quietly, and I should like to give you to each other myself. In a few months--it may be too late."

"Grandfather!" said Michael, half in remonstrance, half in reproach.

"Why should I not speak of it to you? You must confront the inevitable."

"But it is not inevitable. Why will you not rouse yourself from the melancholy that is sapping your physical strength? Has every pleasure in life vanished in Raoul's grave? Hertha and I are still with you to help you to forget the past."

The general slowly shook his head. "You best know what you are to me, Michael, but my vigour has departed, and you know, too, when it left me. That blow struck at the very root of the old tree; it cannot recover."

Michael made no reply; he knew that, although his grandfather had been spared the worst, enough had occurred to wound to the quick the pride and the sense of honour of the old Count, who had always been devoted heart and soul to his country.

"The Countess Hortense is, I hear, with her brother again--with your consent?" asked Rodenberg.

"Yes; while the war lasted I neither could nor would permit my son's widow to remain in France. Now, however, she has gone back to Montigny. She has never felt at home here, and Raoul's death has severed the only tie that united us. I have assured her an independence as far as it lay in my power. You know the disposition that I have made of my property. Castle Steinrück falls to you as my sole heir, and with Hertha's hand you come into possession of all the family estates, which I was so anxious to assure to my grandson. My plans are fulfilled, but not as I had devised them, and it is better thus. You will fill your position well, and will guard and protect Hertha with a strong arm. God bless you both!"

It was by no mere chance that Hans Wehlau accompanied his friend. He hoped to enlist Michael's betrothed as an ally in his last decisive attack upon the prejudices of his father and of his father-in-law *in spe*. This attack could take place only at Steinrück, for it was there only that Gerlinda's father was to be met, and it was there only that he could be brought into contact with Professor Wehlau, who was at present paying a visit to his relatives in Tannberg.

Hertha had already done all that she could to encourage her little friend, and to prevail with the old Freiherr, but to no more purpose than was Hans's second presentation of his suit a few days after his arrival at Steinrück. In vain had he donned his uniform; the warlike pomp of the nineteenth century made no impression whatever upon the tenth. Udo von Eberstein was determined to adhere to the traditions of his house, and threatened to shut his daughter up in a

convent rather than allow her to marry a man of no rank. He was inexorable, and neither the lover's insistence nor Gerlinda's tears availed to soften his heart.

It was not very difficult to entice Professor Wehlau to Steinrück. He willingly accepted an invitation from Michael, but one which Hertha extended to the inmates of the Ebersburg, 'by chance' for the same day, was only half successful. The Freiherr made his appearance, but he prudently left his daughter at home, moved to this precautionary measure by the possibility of meeting at Steinrück the man who persisted in wanting to be his son-in-law, and who was upheld by Gerlinda in his irreverent presumption. The visit, however, appeared about to pass without any disturbance; the enemy who threatened the race of Eberstein with a plebeian name was nowhere to be seen, and the Freiherr, who had had a long talk with the general of the times when they were brothers-in-arms, was in the best of spirits.

Count Steinrück having been called away for a few minutes, the Freiherr was left alone in the bow-windowed room. He turned as the door opened, expecting to see the general again, but started violently upon confronting Professor Wehlau.

The Professor was startled in his turn; he knew nothing of his opponent's presence here, and was for an instant undecided what manner to adopt towards him. A gentler disposition gained the upper hand, however, and he muttered, "Good-day, Herr von Eberstein."

"Herr Professor Wehlau, are you here?" asked Eberstein, returning his salutation with a very stiff inclination. "I hope you have not brought your son with you."

"No; he is in Tannberg."

"I rejoice to hear it. My daughter is at the Ebersburg."

Wehlau shrugged his shoulders. "Not much cause for rejoicing. I'll wager that the pair are together the instant our backs are turned."

"I beg your pardon," said Eberstein, with dignity. "I have strictly forbidden Gerlinda either to see or to speak to Herr Wehlau."

"Of course, and you forbade her to write to him, but my Hans brought home a whole wagon-load of her letters. Fräulein Gerlinda possesses a like number, I suppose."

"This is disgraceful!" exclaimed the old Freiherr, informed thus for the first time of his child's disobedience. "Why do you not employ your paternal authority? Why have you permitted your son to come hither?"

"Because he is twenty-six years old, and a child no longer," replied Wehlau, dryly. "You, indeed, keep your daughter under lock and key. I wish I could do the same with my madcap; but it would not help matters: he would scramble out of the window and into the Ebersburg, if he had to do it by the chimney. The affair cannot be allowed to go on thus; we must have recourse to serious measures."

"Yes, we must!" Eberstein agreed, with an energetic thump of his cane on the floor. "I shall shut Gerlinda up in a convent for the present as a boarder. Then we'll see whether my gentleman can visit her by way of the chimney."

"A very sensible idea!" exclaimed the Professor, almost tempted to shake his opponent by the hand. "Stick to it, Herr von Eberstein. I am really glad to see you, in your condition, capable of such energy."

The old Freiherr, who had no idea of the insulting nature of the Professor's diagnosis of his case, and who thought he alluded to his gout, sighed heavily. "Yea, my condition grows worse every day."

"Are you aware of it yourself?" asked Wehlau, drawing up a chair and seating himself. "Of what did your father die, Herr Baron?"

"My father, Colonel Kuno von Eberstein-Ortenau, fell in the battle of Leipsic at the head of his regiment," was the reply, given with much conscious dignity.

Wehlau looked surprised; he seemed to have expected a different answer, and he forthwith began a regular cross-examination. He asked about the Freiherr's grandfather and great-grandfather, about his first and second wife, about his aunts, uncles, and cousins. Any other man would have been irritated by such inquiries, but Eberstein thought only that the Professor was greatly changed for the better; it did him good to be questioned thus with such interest about all the Udos, Kunos, and Kunrads, to whom this very man had formerly alluded in such disrespectful terms. He paraded his pedigree to the best advantage, and willingly answered all questions.

"Extraordinary!" said Wehlau at last, shaking his head. "Not a single case of mental disease, then, in your entire family?"

"Mental disease?" Eberstein repeated, in some dudgeon. "What can you be thinking of? I suppose that is your specialty, however. No, the Ebersteins have died of all sorts of diseases, but

their minds have never been affected."

"That really seems to have been the case--- Is it possible that I have been mistaken?" murmured the Professor. He turned the conversation to the family chronicles, to the origin of the Ebersteins in the tenth century, but the Freiherr's replies were perfectly clear and sensible, and at last he clasped his hands and said, in a tone of deep emotion, "Yes, yes, my ancient noble line, known and honoured in history for nine centuries, goes to the grave with me! Whether Gerlinda marries or not, the name must die with me, and that soon, as my old Ebersburg will ere long be but a heap of ruins. The present generation knows nothing, wishes to know nothing, of the splendour and glory of ancient times, and I have no son to preserve their memory. The scutcheon of my race will be broken above my coffin and thrown into the grave with me, with the last sad words, 'Freiherr von Eberstein-Ortenau, known to-day, but never more.'"

There was such bitter pain in the tone in which these words were uttered that Wehlau suddenly grew very grave, and looked with genuine emotion at the old man, down whose withered cheeks two tears rolled slowly. The man of science and of the present had never appreciated the pride of the noble in his ancestors; but he understood the suffering of the old man bewailing the downfall of his race, conscious, in spite of every effort to the contrary, of the iron heel of modern times crushing and obliterating the traces of centuries. At the moment all that was ridiculous fell away from Udo von Eberstein, extinguished by the tragic melancholy of a fading world, over which sentence was pronounced in the words, 'Known to-day, but never more!'

There was silence for a few moments, and then the Professor suddenly offered his hand to his former antagonist. "Herr von Eberstein, I have done you injustice. We are liable to err, and there really was much that was strange in your---- Enough, I beg to apologize."

The old Freiherr was far from guessing the reason for this apology; he thought it referred to the want of respect formerly shown for the Eberstein pedigree, and it pleased him greatly that the irreverent man of science should be so thoroughly converted. He took the offered hand and pressed it cordially.

At this point Michael made his appearance in some dismay, having just learned that the two men, whose meeting was to be arranged with such caution, were alone together in the general's room. They were probably by this time flying at each other's throats, and Captain Rodenberg came instantly in hopes of averting a misfortune. To his astonishment, he found the pair engaged in peaceful converse, in fact with clasped hands.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said Michael, scarcely believing his eyes. "The Countess Hertha is very desirous of seeing you, but if you are engaged in conversation----"

"No, we have finished," said Wehlau, assisting the old Freiherr, who was very infirm, to rise. Thus they proceeded to the drawing-room, where Hertha received them, but beside her stood a man at sight of whom the Freiherr's melancholy gave place to anger.

"Herr Hans Wehlau! I thought you were in Tannberg!" he exclaimed.

"And he was there when I left," interposed the Professor. "How did you get here, you rascal? through the air?"

"No, papa, I only drove after you. I wanted especially to speak with Herr von Eberstein upon a most important matter----"

"I will not listen to anything," protested the Freiherr; "I know all about your important matter, but I have just agreed with your father that we must have recourse to serious measures, very serious measures, to frustrate your matrimonial schemes."

"Yes, very serious measures," the Professor reiterated. "We certainly agreed upon this,--but, after all, why do you refuse to let your daughter marry my son?"

Eberstein looked at him completely puzzled. The question was extraordinary, just when an alliance had been formed against this marriage, but he was spared the trouble of replying, for Hertha demanded his attention at the moment, and Wehlau availed himself of the opportunity to draw his son aside.

"I was mistaken," he said, bluntly. "This time you were right. The old Freiherr is quite rational, with the exception of a few abnormal ideas which must be laid to the charge of the tenth century; such a pedigree is not normal. Such whims, however, are not hereditary, and so, if there is no help for it, marry your Gerlinda if you choose."

"Thank heaven, papa!" said Hans, with a sigh of relief. "You have caused me worry enough with your anxieties about generations not yet in existence."

"It was my duty. But, as I told you, my mind is now easy with regard to your posterity. Let us see how you will manage the old Baron and his pedigree."

"I shall carry them both by storm," exclaimed the young artist, triumphantly, "and win my Dornröschen in spite of them."

Meanwhile, Hertha was assisting the young lover's plans. She led the conversation with the Freiherr to the subject of her own betrothal, reminding the old man that she, like Gerlinda, was the last of her race, and that her name too was to be merged in one without a title; but Eberstein opposed her angrily.

"That is quite a different thing. Your betrothed is the Count's grandson, the son of a Steinrück; on the mother's side he belongs to your family. Moreover,"--he turned courteously to Michael, whose manly form and carriage were greatly to his taste,--"moreover, Captain Rodenberg has served with distinction during the war. Even in the times of our glorious ancestors brave deeds were worth a patent of nobility and won the accolade. But a son-in-law with a paint-brush for a sword and a palette for a shield,--oh, never, never!"

"At all events, he can perpetuate brave deeds," said Michael, smiling. "Perhaps you are not aware that my friend has just gained the victory in a trial of artistic skill. His name is lauded throughout the public press, and is unanimously----"

"Don't talk to me of the 'public press!'" exclaimed Eberstein, in high dudgeon. "It, too, is an invention of to-day, and worse than all the rest. Reckless, indiscreet, slanderous, it tramples everything in the dust, holds nothing sacred, and is the devil's own work."

"You are quite right, Herr Baron; the press is terrible," assented Hans, who had approached in time to hear the Freiherr's last words. "But I pray you to permit me to tell you what I ask. Do not put your fingers in your ears; it really has nothing to do with Gerlinda and me, but only with the contest of which Michael has just told you. I engaged in it before the war, and during the campaign received intelligence that my sketch had taken the prize and that the picture had been ordered. To carry out this order your permission is necessary."

"My permission?" asked Eberstein. "What have I to do with your pictures?"

"That you can understand if you will kindly condescend to glance at the sketch. It is an historical picture to hang in the principal hall of the new Rathhaus in B., and, of course, in such a place it will be very conspicuous, which is why I must ask your permission to paint it. Should you refuse me I must make another sketch. Here it is."

He opened the door of the adjoining room. Fortunately, the old Freiherr was not so obstinate as Professor Wehlau had been with regard to the picture of Saint Michael, and, half curiously, half mistrustfully, he entered the room, followed by the others.

The picture referred to was in fact then leaning against the wall, only a cartoon as yet, done in charcoal, but a faithful presentment of the future picture. The artist had succeeded in rendering with vivid effect a scene from the mediæval wars under the Hohenstauffen. On the right of the picture was the Emperor, a majestic, powerful figure, surrounded by princes and prelates; on the left the people were crowding, while the centre of the canvas was occupied by the victorious warriors returning home to lay at the feet of their sovereign the trophies of their prowess. The composition was stirring and characteristic; the interest centred upon one man, evidently the hero of the hour, the leader of the victors; a splendid figure, with dark hair and eyes, and noble regular features, mail-clad, and full of manly vigour. Erect, pointing towards the trophies heaped upon the ground, he seemed to be recounting to the Emperor his tale of victory. This single warrior was the central point of the composition; upon him was concentrated the interest of the spectators; and his helm and breastplate bore the insignia of the Ebersteins, while upon his shield was the scutcheon now crumbling to decay above the gates of the Ebersburg. Here was its resurrection.

The old Freiherr had approached the picture to examine it; suddenly he started, his sad eyes brightened, his bowed form stood erect, and, with a gesture that was almost youthful, he turned to the young artist standing behind him. "Did you do this? And that is----"

"The reproduction of a portrait which I saw upon my first visit to the Ebersburg," Hans completed the sentence. "You, perhaps, remember our conversation upon that occasion, and can now understand why I ask your permission to paint this picture."

Eberstein made no reply; he stood gazing fixedly at the picture, at the image of himself when he was still young and happy, and fit to bear arms. His eyes grew moist at the memory of that time.

"What does all this mean?" asked the Professor, who knew the picture, but had not been informed of its secret significance. The old Baron turned to him and said, in a tone half of melancholy, half of conscious pride,--

"Those are my features. Thus looked Udo von Eberstein forty years ago."

"You are very much changed since then," said Wehlau, in his blunt fashion; but Hans hastily interposed.

"No, no, papa! Look closely at the Freiherr and you will recognize the features. The picture is to be painted in fresco, Herr Baron, and will probably last as long as the Rathhaus is in existence, for some hundreds of years at least."

"Some hundreds of years," murmured Eberstein, ecstatically. "But no one will know that scutcheon."

Hans stepped close to his side. "Unfortunately, it is known already. That terrible press--you know I share your horror of it--has mastered the whole matter, and has printed the names in full. An article in the principal newspaper of our imperial capital--permit me to read you the close of it."

He produced a newspaper and read aloud: "'After this detailed description we cannot withhold from our readers the information that the central figure of the picture,--the knight with the fine characteristic head,'--here it is in black and white, Herr Baron,--'the fine characteristic head, is an only slightly idealized portrait,--the portrait of the Freiherr Udo von Eberstein-Ortenau of the Ebersburg, the last scion of a once famous race, which traces its pedigree back to the tenth century; the scutcheon of the Ebersteins, seen upon the helmet and shield of the knight, is thus immortalized.' Indeed I could not help this, Herr Baron,--a couple of innocent remarks of mine to acquaintances,--shall I have the article contradicted?--it will else go the entire round of Germany, in all the newspapers."

"No, my young friend," replied Eberstein, with dignity. "I forbid you to contradict it; on the contrary, the press seems to me to have been in this instance neither reckless nor indiscreet. It does but fulfil a duty in bringing to light facts that have escaped the memory of thousands of our contemporaries. Let the article go the entire round of Germany!"

"The fellow has a terrific talent for intrigue," muttered the Professor. "The old Baron has actually swallowed the hook."

Hans twisted the paper to and fro in his hands with well-feigned embarrassment. "Yes, Herr Baron, but there is a concluding sentence which you ought also to hear----"

"Read it," said Eberstein, with solemn condescension, and Hans read on:

"'And now for a final communication which will interest especially our fair readers of the other sex. The young artist worked *con amore* when he painted the knight of the Eberstein arms, with the Eberstein features also, since he is about to be united to the only daughter of the Freiherr in question----'"

"Stay--stop,--that must be contradicted!" exclaimed Eberstein; but, without further ado, Hans forced the newspaper upon him, and drew out from behind the tall picture something which, upon closer inspection, proved to be Fräulein Gerlinda von Eberstein. There she stood, the little Dornröschen, not quite so much of a child as when we first saw her, but lovelier than ever as she lifted eyes and hands of entreaty to her father.

"Oh, papa, do not be so cruel! I love him so dearly!"

"Did not I tell you they were sure to be together?" exclaimed the Professor, advancing. "Herr von Eberstein, there is nothing to do but to say 'yes.' My Hans will do as he chooses, as you see; and that delicate little thing, your daughter, is quite capable of dying of grief if you separate her from him. And when she is dead you will be left alone with your stainless pedigree."

"That would be terrible!" said Eberstein, with a look of dismay at his child.

"Then let us put an end to the matter!" And the Professor put his arm around the young girl and gave her a paternal kiss, after which all was settled so far as he was concerned.

The old Freiherr was scarcely conscious of what happened then,--he was really taken by storm. He found himself embracing his daughter and a future son-in-law. Gerlinda sobbed upon his breast and Hans hailed him as his beloved father-in-law. There was nothing for it but to clasp the pair in his arms, which he did. Udo von Eberstein relented, and consented. In spite of brush and palette, Hans had been the one to perpetuate the memory of the ancient name.

Towards the end of July a marriage was quietly celebrated in the pilgrimage church of Saint Michael,--the marriage of Captain Michael Rodenberg to the Countess Hertha von Steinrück. As Michael was a Protestant, like his mother and his grandfather, the Protestant marriage had first taken place in Castle Steinrück. Now, in presence of a small circle of relatives and friends, among whom were the betrothed couple, Hans and Gerlinda, beaming with happiness, the reverend pastor of the little Alpine village united before the altar of his church, as they had desired, the two young people to whom he was so closely bound by ties of affection.

The morning mists were still veiling the Eagle ridge, but they were beginning to roll away to lie like a translucent veil at its feet, when the bells in the old church rang out a joyous peal that echoed among the mountains, while upon Michael and his young wife, now one for life, looked down from above the altar the mighty archangel with eagle's wings and eyes of flame, the victorious leader of the heavenly host,--Saint Michael!

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAINT MICHAEL: A ROMANCE ***

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