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Dingelstedt

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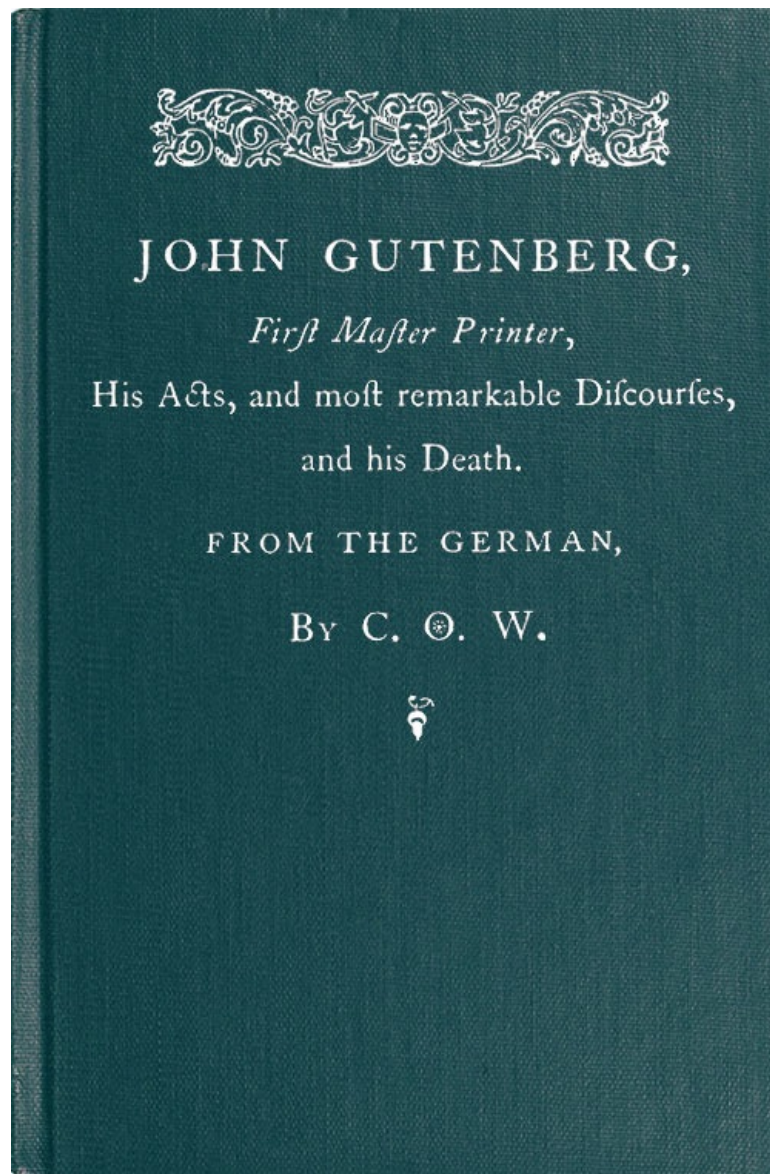
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PRINTER ***



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JOHN GUTENBERG,

First Master Printer,

His Acts, and most remarkable Discourses, and his Death.

FROM THE GERMAN,

By C. O. W.



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JOHN GUTENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

As how John Fust, master printer in the city of Maïence, gave his daughter Christine to wife to Peter Schoeffer his partner, and what came of it.



WEDDING! how much joy is contained in that word! but even more in the thing itself! You, however, who live in these days, can hardly form an idea of what a wedding was in the good old times, for you possess only the shadow, and even that is of the palest hue. Guests, among whom the husband and the minister appear dressed in black from head to foot, a large room furnished in the modern style, a very prosaic square table, on which, after the marriage contract is signed, the repast is served up, the whole accompanied with the stalest and most common-place compliments, the coldest ceremonies.... No, no! a fig for your modern weddings!

Reader, you ought to have found yourself at the appointed hour at the great St. Humbert at Maïence, in the street now called La Rue des Savetiers, and which then bore the name of St. Quentin, for that which I relate to you happened in the year of our Lord fourteen hundred and sixty-one, before Maïence became a federal fortress. That was indeed a wedding in the true sense of the word! A grand, a noble wedding! At the moment when the clock struck twelve, the procession, attired in most superb garments, came out of the church of St. Quentin, and, having turned the corner of the Rue des Savetiers, took the road to the house of the great St. Humbert. All along the route it was accompanied by the joyous acclamations of the crowd; citizens, their wives and daughters, opened their small casements, and put out their heads to gaze, and the little boys in the street maliciously ran behind the wedding guests, trying to jeer and to mock at the bridegroom, as is still the custom in these days—one, indeed, of the only customs left us of olden times.

The sun shed his brightest and warmest rays on the house of the great St. Humbert, for it was on the 14th day of August that Christine Fust, the worthy daughter of the printer John Fust, espoused her father's partner, Peter Schoeffer of Gernsheim. On that day, too, the house of the printer was open to all comers; those presses, generally so black and so mysterious, were now crowned with flowers; the screws, the levers, the timber, groaned no longer under the brawny arms of the workman, and the paper and parchment remained neglected in a corner. All the inmates were gone to the church of St. Quentin to be present at the marriage; the workmen, dressed in their finest clothes, stood ranged in a goodly group around their chief, who held firmly aloft the banner of the Corporation, ornamented with the Imperial Eagle. The Burgomaster himself, Jacob Fust, a master goldsmith, brother of the printer, and rich beyond belief, had come in person to do honour to the wedding of his niece. And how can we find fault with the father of the bride, who walked proudly at the head of the band, arm-in-arm with his brother the grandee and the renowned goldsmith, if he cast now and then on the assembled crowd looks in which disdain was somewhat mingled. It is true that he smiled more benignly at the windows from whence certain silvery voices were heard to cry out as he passed, "We wish you much happiness, Master Fust!" Or again, "May peace and a blessing rest on the house of the printer!"

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To speak truly, it must be confessed that the couple who had just been united were not in their first youth, and if the bridegroom had nothing in common with Adonis or Apollo, the bride on her side was far from representing that type of beauty which the ancients have bequeathed to us, and which may still be seen in the gallery of the Medici. Let not this surprise you, reader! Peter Schoeffer in 1449 was already renowned in the Academy of Paris for his skill in caligraphy; he had even then rendered great services to Master Fust, who chose him for his son-in-law; so you perceive that at the time of which we are speaking there was no longer any question of youth or sprightliness for Schoeffer. Christine, on her part, had no doubt chosen her husband for his moral qualities; she had declared herself ready to bestow her hand on the homeless stranger on the day on which he, who was then only her father's workman, should lay at her feet, reposing on a velvet cushion, a copy of the admirable Psalter of the year 1457. Yes, it was not until then that Christine consented to surrender her hand to that of Schoeffer—to that hand which had designed the initials of the Psalter, which had illuminated them in such brilliant colours, and had arranged the beautiful types, the ink of which, it is maliciously said, still clung to his fingers more or less.

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The betrothal dated from the year 1457; but, as the father had insisted on proving the character and the talent of his workman, he had made it a condition that the two volumes of the great Latin Bible should be completed before the fulfilment of the marriage. On St. John's day, 1462, the finishing touch was put to the work. Peter Schoeffer wrote upon the last page to the effect that the task was ended; he printed his father-in-law's arms alongside, and on the following 14th of August the book was exposed to the public, at the same time that the marriage was announced; John Fust slyly remarking that he brought on that day two treasures to light, the one conjointly with Schoeffer, the other he generously made over to him.

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To the two treasures were allotted their separate place of honour. Christine dazzled the eyes of the public, robed in rich crimson velvet, such as was seldom worn in those days by citizens' daughters. Her little white wreath was attached to her hair by a string of Venetian pearls, presented on that very morning by her uncle the Burgomaster, and it must be allowed the pearls became her well. The Bible, on its part, had its silver clasps well rubbed and polished, and, being placed on a table, it shone, to the edification and admiration of all beholders.

10

If at the end of the table where the Burgomaster presided, dividing the wedding guests on his right and left, there reigned a certain degree of solemnity, it was made up for at the lower end, round the long board prepared for the workmen, where the most noisy and expansive gaiety prevailed. That patriarchal custom which required that the head of the family, after having tasted of a dish, should join in a prayer with all the guests, that custom, at the time of which we speak, had even in the richest families fallen into disuse, only when, as on the present occasion, a dignitary happened to be at table, a special gravity was observed, and a great decorum maintained. "Noblesse oblige," says the proverb, so we must not be surprised if the Burgomaster, instead of taking part in the joyous hilarity of his relatives, and especially of his workmen, looked around him with anxious and pensive eyes. The cares of government clouded his countenance, and occasionally wrinkled his fine lofty brow.

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In truth, alarming days were hovering over the good city of Maïence. Two crosiers were clashing rudely for precedence, both being competitors for the Archi-episcopal throne; and, as generally happens in such conflicts, the blows fell less heavily, and in less number, on the backs of the actual combatants than on those of the victims who were the objects of contest. A year previously the Archbishop Dietrich d'Isembourg had been deprived of his see for failing in proper respect towards his spiritual pastor, and Adolfe of Nassau, appointed Archbishop in his room, was preparing seriously, arms in hand, to expel a predecessor who seemed far from disposed to yield his post with a good grace. All the Rhine country, the Palatinate, Bavaria, Würtemberg, and even Brandenburg itself, had taken part in the quarrel, for one side or the other; in the city of Maïence Dietrich d'Isembourg reckoned partisans who were still holding office side by side with those who secretly favoured the new order of things, and rivals and enemies met together full of an animosity which they took but little pains to dissimulate.

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To this cause of dissension was added the quarrel between the citizens and the nobles—a quarrel which dated forty years back, and was even now far from being quelled; descendants of the emigrant families ran about the town exciting the malcontents, they themselves only awaiting

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an opportunity to regain, in the general confusion, the privileges which they had lost.

These were the grave matters which pre-occupied the mind of the Burgomaster of Maïence, the great Jacob Fust, and left him but little leisure to think of anything but his cares at the wedding of his niece Christine. Did a noisy *vivat* make itself heard at the lower end of the table, was a joyous song resounding, near the entrance door, in honour of the newly-married couple, the Burgomaster would raise himself anxiously on his great carved oaken arm-chair, and, commanding silence, exclaim, throwing his head back, "These are sad times in which we live;" and his brother the printer would echo his words, throwing back his head in like manner. As for the bridegroom he was in the height of good humour, for the pre-occupations of his uncle the Burgomaster affected him but very slightly. "Eh! what then," said he to the assembled guests, "are we not here in our free city of Maïence, under the protection of the pastoral staff of His Grace our Archbishop, whom may God protect? Let my Lord of Nassau intrigue, and cabal as he will, as long as the Rhine flows between him and us, as long as our good walls defend us, we may laugh at his Grace; and moreover our art, our beautiful art, does it not flourish more and more every year? Have we not five good presses in the workshop? Have we not fifty vigorous arms employed in our service? Come, come, my gracious uncle, come, worthy father, put away your fears, and your scruples; fill up your glasses, and second me when I drink to 'the noble art of printing,' with 'three times three.'"

The guests responded to this appeal, and the noise of the *vivat* had scarcely subsided when a great disturbance was heard on the stairs adjoining the banquet-room, and a confusion of voices and footsteps, which seemed to indicate a quarrel. The host was about to rise and go in person to the spot from whence the noise proceeded, to call the disputants to order, when the door was suddenly thrown open. On the threshold appeared two workmen, dragging a third individual by his arms, and who, to judge from his age and appearance, was only an apprentice; "Look, master," said the eldest of the men, "here is a fellow who dares to disturb your festival by coming even into your house to abuse your art, and your noble trade." "Yes, it is true," continued the second workman, "but it shall not be permitted, were I never again to touch a type, or the cheek of a pretty maiden!"

"It is the Strasburger who lies!" exclaimed the young boy, making vigorous efforts to free himself from the gripe of his accusers. "I said not a word against you or your art; it is they, on the contrary, who slandered your son-in-law, and even your daughter dame Christine; and you see, master, that was more than I could bear, so my French blood rebelled." "Let peace be in this house," replied Fust, in a commanding tone; "and you Strasburger, who are the eldest, you speak first, and let go your hold of the Parisian!"

"Master, we were down below there, sitting drinking our beer, as your worshipful company, saving your presence, is now seated drinking your wine; we sang, we drank, we laughed, not a soul among us thought of quarrelling; suddenly, I had just delivered myself of a little *bon-mot*, such as is not unusual at our German weddings—"

"Strasburger, what was that *bon-mot*? Come, out with it frankly!"

"I said," replied the workman, hesitating, "I said—"

Here the Parisian, with the vivacity of a Frenchman, interrupted the other, and repeated the *bon-mot* in question—a witticism so strongly seasoned, that, although it might be allowable at a country wedding, it could not be repeated here without a breach of good manners.

This unexpected communication was received with a violent burst of laughter from the male part of the company, including even the worthy Burgomaster Jacob Fust, the bridegroom alone felt his anger rising, and, having some difficulty in restraining himself, he bounded from his seat, while the cheeks of his gentle better-half, Christine, became of a deeper hue than the velvet of the dress she wore.

The Strasburger, emboldened by the success of his *bon-mot*, and by the excellent reception it had met with, cast a look of triumphant satisfaction on the little Parisian, who stood by speechless and astounded. At this moment a bashful glance directed to him by dame Christine, unseen by all the rest, rewarded him for his chivalrous conduct. The old workman continued his harangue.

"Master, you see, it is on account of this innocent jest that the fellow has made this disturbance; he pretended that the honour of your house was compromised, as well as that of the dame, your daughter, which God defend from injury; he struck the table violently with his fist, and, in fact, behaved like a madman. The Frankforter, who stands there, tried by a paternal remonstrance to bring him to reason, and we were once more seated behind our goblets, when, behold, the young good-for-nothing recommences. We were drinking unanimously to the health of the art of printing, that it might flourish at least a thousand years, when all on a sudden, with his two little spindle legs, he leaps on the table, upsets the goblets, and exclaims that we must not forget him who first invented the trade, who was the author of all our good fortune, him who revealed our beautiful art to the world at large. We both opened our mouths wide—may the Lord forgive us our sin—the wretch told us he was going to speak of the Holy Trinity, when, behold, he calls out, with all the force of his lungs, 'Long live Gutenberg; long live Master Jean Gutenberg, of Maïence!' The Frankforter then seized him by one leg, I by the other, we dragged him down

from the table and brought him here. Now he stands before you, he who was not ashamed in your own house to give all the honour and praise to Gutenberg." The Strasburger was silent. At the name of Gutenberg the company became visibly embarrassed; the countenances of some of the guests evinced an ironical pleasure. Peter Schoeffer, looking down, busied himself awkwardly in readjusting the frill of his shirt, while Master Fust, not caring particularly to meet the fiery eye of the little Parisian, turned alternately from one workman to the other.

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"Children," replied he, after a moment's painful pause, "children, you are but simpletons after all; what is the use of troubling your heads, on a day like this, with such nonsense? Leave Gutenberg to himself, and let us enjoy in peace the good which God has given us!"

"Master," exclaimed the little Frenchman, in a lofty tone, and interrupting Fust, without hesitation, "that is what we have done; but allow me to say one word, one only, with an honesty worthy of the great art which we promote; if all this company thinks to-day of you, and of Master Peter Schoeffer of Gernsheim, of his letter-founding, of his skill in engraving, in illuminating, in printing, ought we, on that account, to forget the man to whom we owe all that we now have? That is why, I say it again, and may all those who feel as they ought to do, say it after me, 'Long live Gutenberg of Maïence, the first printer of the world, long may he live!'"

22

With three bounds, and before he could be prevented, the audacious boy reached the table, seized one of the filled wine-cups, and emptied it at a draught. He had just laid it down again, with a crash, when Master Fust, red with anger, pushed him roughly aside, "Fellow," he exclaimed, in a voice husky with vexation, "what have you done?" "What you should have done instead of me," replied the little Frenchman, without being disconcerted, and becoming more calm in proportion that his master grew more excited. "How! you have the audacity to come here and jeer us in the presence of our guests, and, above all, in the presence of my brother, the most worthy Burgomaster? To the door, to the door, with the little brawler! Go, go, to your Gutenberg, see if his great presses are at work; go, run through the streets and highways with your hero. To the door with him, I say!" The printer threw a few pieces of small money to the Parisian, and with an angry gesture pointed to the door. "Master Fust," replied the other, while collecting the coins which were scattered over the floor, "if I pick up this money, it is to take what you owe me; but I cannot go to Master Gutenberg, and that you know as well as I do. Since the day he was obliged to give up his establishment to you, for a debt of a hundred, or a couple of hundred dollars, which you lent him at a high interest, he has not been in a position to set up any press worth speaking of. So it always is in this world. To the one, head and intelligence, to the other money!"

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These last words were scarcely uttered, when a blow from a fist fell on the cheek of the little Frenchman. Master John Fust, incapable of further self-control, had struck the blow; and, if Schoeffer and the two other workmen had not interfered, a serious scene might have ensued, to the cost of the audacious boy, and in presence of the guests. In an instant the whole assembly was in an uproar; Christine took refuge, trembling, in the arms of her husband; the guests swore, threatened, jeered, murmured; the workmen in the meanwhile had all the trouble in the world to restrain the little Frenchman, whose clear silvery voice called out through the crowd, "Master Fust, you have no right to strike me! you had not the right even when I was in your service, you have it still less now. I insist on your giving me satisfaction!"

25

"Turn out the brawler, turn him out," said the Burgomaster, in a solemn tone; but the workmen tried in vain to execute the order.

"I shall go of my own accord, and alone," said the little Parisian, grumbling, "as soon as these German fists have loosened their hold of me, not before. Yes, I shall go straight to Master Gutenberg, and if he has no work to give me at his presses, well, I would rather untie for him the strings of his shoes, than remain any longer in a house where one is forbidden to speak out one's thoughts in liberty. You, Fust, you, Schoeffer, what would you be without that Gutenberg, whom you have robbed of his goods! O, cursed be the false, the inhospitable threshold! And you who live under this roof, take care lest the hymeneal torch lighted this day change not into a burning flambeau, which shall swallow up, under its wings of flame, the ruins of your ill-gotten wealth!"

26

During this allocution, uttered with all the earnestness of passion, the two workmen had dragged the boy towards the door, resisting all the way. One kick, and he rolled down the staircase, carrying with him the Frankforter and the Strasburger. Schoeffer shut the door on the disputants, reconducted Christine, with much care and solicitude, to her arm-chair, tried to calm his father-in-law, and succeeded in restoring, at least, an appearance of calm to the festival, and to the guests, who had been first surprised, and then alarmed, at this scene.

CHAPTER II.

27

What John Gutenberg, Master printer, said, and what he did, while Peter Schoeffer was



If you have not been spoiled, reader, by the sight of the fine rooms of Messrs. Brockhaus and Hadnel, those *coryphées* of the present day of the art of typography, who draw off their books on Stanhope presses, in frames of highly polished wood, fastened with bright iron screws, perhaps you will not feel any repugnance to follow me into the low dark abode to which I am about to introduce you. We enter. The night is mild and beautiful, the moon's silvery beams rest gently on the undulations of the eternally flowing Rhine, a light breeze trembles through the vine leaves, the deep shadows of the houses conceal here and there the streets of old Maïence. But why should we occupy ourselves with such matters? Did the old man with silver hair, with his head bending over the table, and given up body and soul to his work, occupy himself with them? Where were his workmen? They were out of doors enjoying the beauty of the night, being rocked gently in small boats on the river, or drinking in taverns, or standing at church doors saying soft gallantries to their mistresses, and he the solitary, the indefatigable workman, why did he take no rest? His inflamed eye-lids, his forehead furrowed with wrinkles, his rounded back, showed how much he stood in need of it.

28

A smoky lamp hung from the beam which divided the ceiling of the room into two equal parts, and shed its feeble light on the table where John Gutenberg was working. But beware, reader, of representing this table to yourself as furnished with any of those perfect instruments which are the improvements of modern days; with a case for the letters, a *visorium*, a composing-stick, a galley, or a catch; it was nothing more than a great oaken board, on which his letters were placed in little woollen bags, ranged in alphabetical order; the form in which they were to be disposed was in front of the artist, and at his side, on a desk, roughly put together, reposed the heavy in-folio which he used as a manuscript. Let the compositor of the present day, who complains, often justly, of the illegible copy of the poet or the philosopher, compare humbly his task with that of his great predecessor! He was obliged first to select from his bags, to place the letters with great delicacy, to turn back to the manuscript in order to read it, and to recommence his labour incessantly until one whole line, laboriously put together, had been ranged along a string; if at this point his negligence, as a compositor, had permitted one fault, he must needs unfasten the string, and recommence his work from the beginning!

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30

Miserable place as it was, there worked the first printer of the world! A humble cradle which contained a giant! Poor, wretched house, what a difference between it and those palaces which the disciples of the great inventor have since built for themselves! The shutters of Gutenberg's room were hermetically closed, not one of the moon's silver rays could penetrate them; the smell of the printer's ink, of the oil, and the black smoke, made the close air of this poor apartment still more oppressive; a painful stillness prevailed, disturbed only by the metallic noise of the letters as they touched each other. But I will not dwell any longer on this melancholy picture, in which you might have seen the old man, whose stray white locks shaded his broad forehead, whose feeble fingers could only slowly and with trembling fulfil their task, whose knees tottered, and who whenever he turned over the leaves of his manuscript was forced to wait a few seconds to regain breath and strength. No, no, reader, think of Gutenberg rather as you would doubtless like to see him, standing on his pedestal of stone, in the centre of the square, in front of the Cathedral of Maïence, one of the last achievements, but by no means one of the happiest efforts, of the great Thorwaldsen.

31

John Gutenberg, in his humble workshop, turned round on hearing the door behind him creak on its hinges. "You see, I knew it," said one of the new comers on entering, "there he is, still at work." He to whom these words were addressed shrugged his shoulders slightly, both came forward, and the foremost, with his head respectfully uncovered, approached Gutenberg, who gave his visitors a friendly greeting. Addressing the second, "Will it please you, my dear Doctor," he said, "to look on for a few moments while I am at work? If so, take this stool, and sit at your ease, as far at least as that is possible in my humble abode. Beildech," said he to the other, "did you take care to fasten the latch as you came in?" "Yes, Master," replied Beildech; "but it must be close upon midnight, it is time for you to leave off work; here you are still at your table; will you never learn to think of yourself, and of those who love you?" At these words the old man, with a gesture full of tenderness, took the hand of the speaker and pressed it on his heart. Beildech was the only one who, through good fortune and evil fortune, had invariably stood by Gutenberg, from the day when the latter left the gates of his native town on horseback, to direct his steps towards Strasburg; days of youth and of beauty.

32

33

The second person whom we introduced was named Dr. Humery. He was Syndic of the free city of Maïence, and a wise man, if ever there was one, and well versed in the knowledge of all that was right and just. The chronicles say that even in a state of blindness he could have distinguished black from white, and white from black—a science which has completely escaped the numerous successors of the Syndic Humery! He called himself the patron of Gutenberg in the year 1455, when a sentence of the tribunal of Maïence, having forced the poor printer to give up his workshop to John Fust his creditor, Gutenberg, his heart overflowing with resentment against his native town, fled to Strasburg; but finding that he succeeded no better there than elsewhere, he soon returned to his own country. While Master John was seeking some resting-place where he might pursue his art, it was the Syndic Humery who advanced the seventy crowns which Gutenberg required to set up his new presses, and who provided him with the quarters which we have described. "On account of which," said the convention, "the above named Master John is held to continue his labours at the risk and the peril of Humery."

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"Consider," said the disinterested Syndic, "that you are no longer young; I wish to save you from all further risk of getting into trouble. Continue your work on my account, so that what you do, shall be mine by an equitable payment, but, on the other hand, let it be understood that I am likewise responsible for your losses; and above all, Master Gutenberg, beware of your old tricks!"

Gutenberg said gratefully Yes and Amen to all that was proposed to him, but his heart was broken. He neither asked nor wished for anything but to be allowed to cultivate his art, that well-beloved art, to which he had consecrated the earliest, the best days of his life. In the absence of children, which had been denied to his old age, he desired at least to play with his metallic characters, black to the outward eye, but full of the attractive force of affection to the printer. So it happened that Gutenberg took up his abode at the back of the Syndic's house, working with his press as far removed as possible from the little windows, before which, as soon as it was dusk, he hastened to fasten the shutters. Reader, if you ask me a reason for this peculiarity, here is one which may account for it. From the windows of the house of the Syndic Humery you might see a little old smoky building, which, by a caprice of fortune, happened to be exactly the birthplace and cradle of the ancient race of the Gutenberg (*zum guten Berg*), a noble stock, of the existence of which the great typographer had been obliged to inform strangers, in the place where he invented the art of printing. Who can tell? Perhaps the eyes of the old man could not reconcile themselves to the sight of the balcony, where he had played as a child, from the table where he stood arranging his letters.

In the present day the proprietors of the Casino have pitched their tents in the yard of the building where Gutenberg lived, and, in default of other proofs, an inscription says, on the part of the natives of Maïence, that it was assuredly there that stood the house of their *immortal countryman*.

As for the very humane Dr. Humery, when he had looked over Gutenberg's shoulder for about a minute, he said, with a jerk of his head, "It seems to me, worthy Master John, that during the last week your work has made very little progress." Gutenberg made no answer, but a vivid colour, which I can only compare to the brightness of the setting sun on the glaciers, flushed the old man's cheeks. Humery continued: "Under pretext that you could not agree with them, you have discharged two of your best workmen." "That is true, gracious Doctor; they printed according to the modern fashion, without drawing a string at each line; in such a manner how was it possible to accomplish anything really good?" "But," replied Humery, "you must have seen that the Bible which Fust has just edited is a magnificent piece of workmanship, and you must confess yourself that it much surpasses your *Katholicon*, the last and the only work which has issued from your press."

At these words, Gutenberg, without answering, placed a marker in his in-folio, shut it up, tied up his bags which contained his letters, and put them away in the drawer of his table, with the frame containing the unfinished page; he then washed his hands, and began pacing up and down his room. "Now you have made him angry," whispered Beildech to the Syndic, "look to yourself to make your peace with him." Upon which the faithful servant went out slamming the door after him, the latch falling noisily into the staple.

The Syndic took the arm of Gutenberg kindly. "Master, do not be vexed with me if I now and then say a word which may doubtless appear rather harsh to you, but which I speak from my heart. See how many hours you spend in dreaming, in devising means to perfect your art, and in the meanwhile hands more active than yours rob you of your discoveries. Peter Schoeffer, for instance, has he not made a fortune with his impressions? and he has secured a rich wife into the bargain. Besides," continued the Syndic, while the other maintained an obstinate silence, walking all the time, with long strides, backwards and forwards in his workshop, "besides, as you grow in years, your temper becomes so whimsical and touchy that it is next to impossible not to lose patience with you. Recollect all the law-suits, all the quarrels, which have disturbed your younger days, and, as we are speaking freely to one another, tell me what have you gained by keeping your art secret, to such an excess even that you only work with bolted doors, and you forbid your workmen to loiter in the streets, for fear they should be tempted to divulge your secret? These are no longer similar times to those when you came from Strasburg, and when you printed your first *Donat*; it was then allowable to make a mystery of your discovery, but now that Fust and Schoeffer have publicly established a workshop at *the Great St. Humbert*, with workmen and apprentices from all parts of the world, when such towns of Germany as Strasburg, Bamberg, and Frankfort, and Holland are hastening to reap what you have sown, one asks oneself of what use it is to keep your art concealed, as if it were the philosopher's stone. This mystery, instead of serving your purposes, can only be of use to your enemies and further their interests!" Here the wise Syndic Humery was silent, awaiting the impression that so eloquent a discourse would certainly produce on his interlocutor, who until now had never uttered a word. Gutenberg had taken down his cloak from the peg where it hung, and, having covered his head with his black velvet cap, he contented himself with saying to the Syndic, while he looked fixedly at him, "There exists an old proverb which says that many fools are capable of asking more questions in a breath than a wise man can answer in a whole day." Thereupon Gutenberg, without adding another word, passed before the Syndic, bowing coldly, and was going out at the door, when he turned round, "Besides, Herr Syndic, I here repeat once more that I am not, neither do I call myself Master Gutenberg; learned Doctor, I am Herr Gutenberg, son and descendant of an ancient noble family, and that you ought to know better than most people." Upon which the old man disappeared, leaving the Syndic Humery alone in the workshop.

Unhappy man! what bitterness must have filled thy heart, when enveloped in thy cloak, both arms crossed over thy weary breast, thou camest forth alone in the deserted streets of Maïence! Thou didst revolve in thy mind, doubtless, the mortifications thou hadst experienced in thy native town, thou didst think of those for whom thou hadst worked, and who now trampled on thee! Thy star was on the decline.

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That very morning John Gutenberg had seen a copy of the magnificent Bible recently edited by Fust and Schoeffer, and, in spite of the secret pride of the printer, he could not deny to himself that his pupils had surpassed him. Gutenberg belonged to that class of men of genius, or choice spirits, destined by Providence to conceive the grandest ideas, to attain the most wonderful discoveries, but who are crippled in the details of execution, and incapable of drawing any material profit from their discoveries. Peter Schoeffer, on the contrary, reared in Paris, and trained to the intrigues of life, was, thanks to the facility of his conception, just the man to seize the idea of another, and to turn it to his own profit. Fust, now his father-in-law, was wonderfully useful to Schoeffer by his practical skill in business, and so we shall be easily believed when we assert that our two intruders had not much difficulty in excluding from their partnership the poor old inventor. From henceforward the sole masters of their trade, they conducted it in a manner infinitely lucrative to themselves.

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Gutenberg found this out ere long. In the year of our Lord 1460, seeing his *Katholicon*, finished, before him, he examined it, and as he compared in his mind the meagre, ill-formed characters with the beautiful type of the *Psalter* of Fust and Schoeffer, his soul was bowed down with an overwhelming sense of inferiority, and on that account he omitted to put his name in great letters at the end of his work, as the others had done. He contented himself with adding on the last page the following modest postscript:—“*This book has been printed with the assistance of the Most High, who by one stroke of His hand opens the mouths of babes, and who often deigns to reveal to the humble that which He hides from the wise.*” Then he added—“*The whole was executed in the good city of Maïence, which forms a part of the glorious German nation, which it has pleased the goodness of God to distinguish by the light of His spirit, and the gift of His grace, above many other nations of the earth.*” A pious and touching record from a son to his adoptive mother! grander, and above all more patriotic than that Roman pride which forbid that even after death the mortal remains should be restored to an ungrateful country!

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If the Syndic reproached Gutenberg with making an unnecessary mystery of his labours, the effort being useless, herein lay the cause. Gutenberg had always professed that he never would make a trade of his art. “Have I then,” said he, “created a new corporation, among the many others, only that I may see the ancient escutcheon of my ancestors suspended side by side with the vulgarest ensigns at the doors of taverns, and of abbeys? My art belongs to me as much as to the rest of the world; let it remain the property of intelligence, and only be practised by those who have been initiated in it. Let others, if they will, place themselves on a rank with the tailor, who cuts my doublet, and the shoemaker, who sews the leather of my shoes, what I require is something above that—it is the constant improvement of my art, it is an independent labour, for which neither my name nor my ancestors need blush.”

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Poor dreamer! thou knewest not what a serious practical thing a new discovery becomes to its author, and the more important it is, the more it conceals in its bosom hopes and riches for the future, the more quickly disappears, from the memory of men, the source from which it was derived. For human activity there exists no monopoly, no privileges; no sooner does a new idea break forth than it becomes public property; what the one finds, the other cultivates, he profits by it, he improves it, it is a streamlet of blood added to the general circulation. The name and the person of the solitary originator, whatever may be his efforts, will soon disappear; but all that has been denied to the man while living, becomes a debt to posterity, which is bound in gratitude to seek out and bring to light him who has contributed in so large a measure to art and science by his inventive genius. That is why, O Gutenberg, on that very spot where, perhaps, on that night thou wert looking up to heaven in deep sadness, feeling that thy star was on the wane, thy descendants see to-day thy bronze form casting its shadow before thee! May every one now gaze on thee, love and admire thee!

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CHAPTER III.

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Who John Gutenberg found in his dwelling when he came back to it, and what conversation he there held with the little Parisian.

HEN John Gutenberg returned he found in his humble room, besides his faithful Beildech, a young stranger awaiting him, who hastened, when the old man entered, to rise and salute him respectfully. Surprised at so late an hour of the night to see a stranger, Gutenberg asked him the



motive of his visit. "Master," replied the young man, "I come to do homage, through you, to the great art which you exercise." Then he added a familiar saying, "May God bless the workshop to-day, to-morrow, and always! who cares for its size when it is so full of honour?" Gutenberg inclined his head good humouredly. In his present frame of mind so untimely a visit from an apprentice seemed somewhat inopportune to the old man; he thought himself bound, however, to bow, and to bestow a small *denier* in acknowledgment of the compliment. Typographers, then only very recently in existence, had nevertheless formed themselves into a separate body; such was the will of the master-workers in the middle ages. The card-makers, the engravers on wood, the image venders, had done the same for some time past in the Low Countries, in France, and in Germany, and it is only in this manner that we can account for the rapidity with which not only workshops, masters, and apprentices were established on the borders of the Rhine, and in Alsace, but that whole corporations appeared in Italy, France, Holland, and almost all over Europe.

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Beildech having placed in the young man's hand the proffered coin, the latter bent his head in acknowledgment. "Forgive me, gracious Master," he said to the old man, "but at present I am not on a walking tour, and if I come to you it is not so much to receive a gift as to ask for work, and to put at your disposal a pair of vigorous arms and a very light heart."

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The frank and familiar, but yet respectful manner, of the young stranger awakened Gutenberg's attention. "Thou belongest not to these parts," he said to him, "one can tell that by thy accent." "No, Master, the blood which runs in my veins is only half German, my mother is French, and I was born in Paris. I was a card-maker until the noise of the profession of which you are the creator attracted me first to Strasburg, then to Maïence; until now I have worked for Master Fust, but, as he has just turned me away, I come to you."

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This information, as may be supposed, was not calculated to conciliate the favour of his new patron for the little Parisian. Gutenberg answered, not without a certain bitterness, "Boy, if thou dost expect to find a well-covered table with me, and a press as easy to manage as those which thou hast quitted, thou mayest find thyself mistaken. I do not feed my workmen, and as for work, I have at this moment but little to dispose of."

The young man looked with a blank expression round the room. "Master Gutenberg," said he, "you will do wrong to send me away thus discomfited, without an engagement. I know you have just dismissed two workmen who refused to submit to your orders, and that you want help in your workshop, weak as the help may be that I can offer you. Try me; I am the child of honest parents, my name is Claude Musny at your service, and I am the son of Gisquette Musny."

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Here Gutenberg's attention seemed for a moment particularly arrested, less, perhaps, by the name of the son than by that of his mother; one might even have perceived a slight emotion passing over the face of the old man as he examined more closely the features of the young Frenchman. "Thou sayest thy mother's name is Gisquette? Gisquette, what a lovely name!" repeated the old man, as if to himself; then, after a moment's silence, he added, "Claude, I am very sorry, but the thing is impossible, I cannot employ thee." "In that case adieu, Master Gutenberg, and may you prosper always, and for ever, according to the wish of the most devoted of your disciples!" At these words the little Frenchman seized the hand of the old man and kissed it with much fervour, before Gutenberg had time to withdraw it.

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Beildech, who during this interview had been preparing his master's humble couch for the night, hazarded timidly a remonstrance as he took the cloak from Gutenberg's shoulders. "Master Gutenberg, you ought not to have dismissed the young man in that manner; he appeared to me a good little fellow, and had he unloosed his tongue to you as he did to me, I am sure you would not have sent him away, for let me tell you it is owing to you that the poor lad is now without bread." "Eh! why did you not say so sooner?" "Dare one ever speak to you in the presence of a stranger?" replied the attendant to his excited master; upon which he related in a few words the story of the dismissal from Fust, as he had just heard it from the little Frenchman himself. Gutenberg was no sooner acquainted with the chain of circumstances than he rushed to the window with the little panes framed in lead, opened it, and began calling after the young stranger. He had not proceeded far, and his cheeks were red with emotion as in a moment's time he re-appeared before the old man. Gutenberg passed his thin hand complacently through the fair locks surrounding the happy young face. "Thou art a naughty boy," he said, "and more than that, thou art a simpleton for not having told me all that thou hast suffered on my account from those tradesmen!"

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"Master, you were a stranger to me, and besides, what I did was less in honour of you than of your noble art, of which you are the sole inventor. Was it necessary to come here and boast, in order to win your good will? Be sure I should never have related what I did to that *famulus* there if it had not been to beguile over weariness, and to kill the time, while we were both waiting your return."

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The *naïve* candour of the young Parisian completely conquered the heart of Gutenberg, and although midnight had long since struck, he told Beildech to bring a jug of wine; he sat down and desired his new apprentice to do the same. "For to-night you must, at any rate, remain here, all the taverns are now closed, and we will manage as well as we can. Beildech, make up a bed for the lad as you think best, but, above all, let us have quickly something to drink! That idle talk of the Syndic has stirred my bile, and if we drink later than usual we shall only sleep the better for

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it, and to-morrow being a holiday we need not be at the press at peep of day.”

So the master and apprentice sat side by side, clinking their goblets, and drinking to the health and prosperity of the art of printing. Old Beildech was obliged also to take his share, for said Gutenberg, “He, too, deserves well of me, and of the great art of typography. Was it not he who saved my presses in the wicked quarrel which I had with Dritzehn, and his heirs, when they all tried to trample on me, and would have forced my secret from me for a bit of bread? Believe me, my son, I have endured much, and heaved many a sigh, ere I reached my present position. Ah! when the little Herr Gutenberg came into the world, they did not sing the song they ought to have sung around his cradle, that would have been that he would wander from town to town, with a pack upon his back, practising his poor trade.”

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At this forlorn picture, Claude could not help laughing. “Master,” said he to Gutenberg, “if the curiosity of a young man will not appear indiscreet, I should like to hear you relate how the first idea of your invention occurred to you?” At this question from the lad a grave and sad expression crossed the old man’s face; he laid his hand on his broad forehead, furrowed with wrinkles, and looking down into the depths of his goblet, he answered, “My friend, in this world whatever is best and noblest always comes alone, and of itself, without our being able to say from whence or how—so it was with the art which I pursue. The method of printing with boards as you do for cards, and as others do for books, ceased to satisfy me. The step from engraved boards to moveable types was comparatively easy. The ancients, with their wisdom, had already long since pointed out the way, but no attention had been paid to them. It was on looking one day at my signet ring, that I was led to think of using moveable types. I had amused myself with impressing on the soft wax the little pilgrim with his cockle-shells, which has always been the armorial bearing of the Gutenbergs of Maïence, and it was on seeing my coat-of-arms reproduced that it occurred to me one might cut letters in wood, or in stone, and afterwards print them. Claude, thou seest how far I still was from the goal, and yet even then light was breaking in upon me for the advancement of my own art, and of other branches connected with it. If thou knowest Strasburg, I lived at that time in the Faubourg St. Arbogaste; I will not tell thee the time and the trouble it took to achieve the manufacture of wooden blocks, how many attempts I made before I succeeded, and how many losses I sustained! One of the greatest difficulties, when I had formed my characters, was to print them. A press is apparently a very simple thing, without complication, and yet there is an abyss of separation between a press and the brush which was used in former days, that great pad of rag and of horse-hair, with which one could only print one side of a page at a time, and even that with great difficulty. It was one of my greatest vexations that I could not find a fit instrument to hold my little wooden letters. I could not manage to get the impression straight and even, and strong enough to produce the engraving without seeing my letters constantly break, and fall out of place. One day, as I was seated alone in my workshop, a world of ideas passed through my mind, without my being able to realize any one of them; I became prostrate with the sense of my own weakness, and a feeling of despair, at seeing myself incapable of success, took such possession of me that I suddenly rushed out of doors, like a madman. I required to breathe the pure air of heaven, and I wished to try if in the midst of quiet fields, and gentle scenes, I might, for a few moments, forget my grief. It happened to be just that beautiful autumn season when the hills and the gardens around Strasburg, far and near, swarm with vintagers, young men and women gathering the grapes. My son! man is corrupt from his earliest years, and his heart is full of wickedness. My soul was bursting with the blackest, vilest envy. At the sight of these poor, happy work-people, I said to myself, each has his own place under the sun, each knows what he has to do, and I—I alone, am condemned to be a useless, unemployed wanderer! At this very moment, as if the Almighty wished to punish me in his own way, for my blind rebellion, a load of grapes was thrown just before me, under the screw of the wine-press; the machine began working immediately for the vine-dresser. Ah! it was as if scales had suddenly fallen from my eyes. I ran, I flew to my workshop; I worked the whole night, in concert with my faithful Lawrence Beildech, and in the morning, when Aurora appeared on the horizon, lighting up my poor dwelling with her rays, I had before me a printing press, rough and shapeless it is true, but the discovery was made! Claude, thou mayest believe me when I say that I could also have behaved like that great mathematician, of whom I have read somewhere, who, jumping out of his bath where he had solved a problem, ran naked through the streets of his native city, exclaiming, ‘I have found it! I have found it!’ Some day, perhaps, thou mayest thyself experience these ecstasies, when, after having long wandered in darkness, suddenly light breaks in upon thee, a delirium seizes one, the sinner falls down on his knees to thank God, from whom proceeds all light, that God to whom we, the ungrateful children of earth, do not fear, in our ignorant pride, to aspire to an equality!”

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Here Gutenberg clasping both hands round his mug, raised it to his lips, and drank a long draught. Claude had listened with *naïve* emotion to the relation of the old man, and when he had finishing speaking, Claude replied, in a tone of prophetic inspiration, “Master, you have discovered and accomplished a divine work, what are all arts in comparison of yours, with its incessant fecundity? No, no, do not take what I say as a piece of insipid flattery, but I can only liken your invention to an old fable which I saw represented in my joyous city of Paris, I think they called it a Mystery; there was a hero who if I recollect right was named Prometheus; he wished to steal fire from heaven, to bring down a spark of it to our cold gloomy earth. You have done as he did; may then your name, and your art, live for ever!”

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Here the young man stood up and drank. Gutenberg meanwhile had with a pensive air been shaking his head and his grey locks, his eyes fixed before him. “Claude,” said he, “thou speakest

according to thy years, and thy imagination. Life has no shadows for thee, thy dreams have not yet been destroyed. It is different with me. Claude, believe what I say, I see the time coming when these little mobile letters, which I have discovered, will become living realities; like so many serpents, they will climb the walls of our Cathedrals, even up to the clock towers, and they will be as gnawing worms to the old thrones of our Emperors. Yes, these moveable letters contain also a Satanic element, which thou dost not perceive. I have created, I have invented them, but they cannot be otherwise than destructive. I have lighted a torch, but let the wind and the storm arise, and shake their wings, and I warn them that the flame will suddenly become a devouring fire, consuming everything around it."

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Claude did not quite understand the sense in which the old prophet uttered his denunciation. His survey only skimmed over the surface of events, without seeking to penetrate beyond, and he was incapable of foreseeing the inevitable consequences, the fearful re-actions which must ensue from so wonderful a discovery. Full of love for his old master, he repeated incessantly his congratulations to the old man for the imperishable monument he had raised to his own name. This even Gutenberg would not admit. He said, "My art is not like any other art; a painter sketches his figures on the canvas, and he perfects the creation of his thought; the same with the poet, the engraver, the architect, and the musician; we, on the contrary, with our presses, are only the servants of others; printing is only an instrument for thinkers. Of what importance are the fingers which regulate the letters in a book? Of what importance is the hand which works the press, which arranges the pages and the leaves, which gives a visible form to the action of the mind? Will the reader ask who has printed the book? He will only care to know the name of him who has conceived it, written it, which name will shine in large letters on the first page, while we the typographers will only appear at the end in a modest paragraph, hardly perceptible, dragged as it were in tow by the author on his journey to immortality."

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The Master rose and moved towards the window; outside a gentle breeze whispered to the river, to the town, and to the surrounding country, in the stillness of the night. Gutenberg looked up with emotion to the brilliant starlight of the heavens. "Lord," murmured he, in a low voice, "thou knowest the aim which I have sought, and the nature of my work, may it all end in Thee; let my poor life, my name, be forgotten, if such be thy will; let them be lost in the vastness of thy Infinity!" He spoke, and disappeared in the recess of the room, where he was in the habit of seeking repose for the night. Claude watched him with surprise; but Lawrence Beildech, who had not listened to his beloved Master without being moved to tears, said softly to the young man, "He is often so—he has the heart of a child—may the Almighty have him in His holy keeping!"

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CHAPTER IV.

How two Crosiers being engaged in a quarrel, the poor people of Maïence were the sufferers, and Master John Gutenberg in particular.



PERHAPS, Reader, you may have happened to witness a threatening storm enclosing the hills around with its gloomy wings, while the valley below sleeps carelessly in the last rays of a lingering sun. The labourers are standing outside their doors contemplating their harvest with satisfied looks, the blue smoke curls as it rises lightly from the chimneys; all is calm and stillness, when in one hour, only one short hour.... Spare me, Reader, the representation of such a picture.

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Never in the worst times of religious warfare had the city of Maïence such a day to endure as that of the 23rd of October, 1462. In the calendar it is named Simon and Jude; and one asks oneself if the people of Maïence should mark it with a black cross in sign of mourning, as a day really worthy of its patron Judas, or with a red cross in commemoration of the blood which flowed in their city, and the flames which bursting out on all sides consumed their houses. The prince Adolfe of Nassau, in order to compel the Archbishop Diether to let go his hold, conceived the somewhat novel expedient, (especially so, when we reflect that it emanated from the brain of a spiritual shepherd,) of smoking his competitor out, as bees are smoked in order to oblige them to vacate their hives. It might have been about four hours after midnight when a hundred of the boldest and most enterprising of the followers of Adolfe of Nassau scaled the wall of the city at its highest point; for, exactly on account of its height, and, above all, of its position on the edge of the river, which bathed its feet, it was thought peculiarly safe, and the sentinels, which were posted elsewhere, were considered unnecessary at that spot.

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To leap into the city, to put to the edge of the sword the soldiers who kept the gates, to set fire to the nearest houses, whose inhabitants they massacred, was for the invaders the work of a moment. When day began to dawn the flames of these incendiary fires lighted up the streets, the alarm bells rang, the houses resounded with cries and lamentations, as well as with the noise of arms; a memorable spectacle of anguish which lasted from the first rays of the morning until the

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evening sun retired to rest, bathed as it were in blood, behind the waters of the Rhine. The people defended themselves in a manner worthy of free citizens; but, when they beheld 400 of their most valiant colleagues lying dead in the streets, when they saw, above all, women, young girls, and children, throwing themselves with clasped hands in the midst of the combatants, praying for mercy from the soldiers of Prince Adolfe, who were occupied in setting fire to the houses which they had first pillaged, then the poor Maïençois threw away their arms in despair, and, as so many sheep overtaken by a storm, they allowed themselves to be conducted, without resistance, to the Grand Square of the archiepiscopal city. There it was announced to them, on the part of their new prince, that from that moment they were at liberty to depart, themselves, and all who belonged to them, wherever they pleased, but that they must leave the town without delay by any one of its numerous gates.

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I wish, Reader, you could peruse, as I have done, the ancient Chronicles of the city of Maïence. You would therein perceive how the old chroniclers vie with one another in lamenting unanimately over this bloody page of the history of their city. You would read the heartrending description of the misery of so many unfortunate creatures, who, mortally wounded and stricken, saw themselves banished from their hearths without the means of existence, leaving behind them desolation and despair. How noble and just, on the other hand, is the anger of these same chroniclers when they speak of certain cunning citizens, who, having made a secret alliance with the Prince of Nassau, now that there was nothing more to fear, openly paraded their assurance in the midst of the general mourning. You might also read how one of these honest historians in his simplicity expresses indignation against the Archbishop Diether, who, aroused from his morning slumber by the alarm bell, immediately clothes himself in disguise to prevent the people from recognizing him! Forgetting, in his haste, his ring, his cross, and his crosier, he slides down by a cord from one of the castle windows, and jumping into a small boat, the worthy Pastor, not deigning to cast one look behind him on his poor city in flames, follows the course of the stream without delay. But what then! O, simple chronicler, does that astonish thee, as if the circumstance were in any way extraordinary, or had any right to surprise thee!

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Amid this multitude escaping for its life our chief business is to look around us, and inquire, in the universal misery, what has become of our old acquaintances.

At the Great St. Humbert the partizans of the Prince of Nassau, we must confess, terribly abused the right of might; they threw the presses out of the windows, when they fell on the pavements and were broken; in the Rue des Savetiers it literally rained alphabets, the plunderers broke open all the chests and boxes, without finding anything to satisfy their avidity. Of what avail was it that Master Fust swore, with clasped hands, that he possessed nothing, that he had given up everything; when he threatened to complain to his brother, the Burgomaster, the richest goldsmith of the city, and one who stood well in the books of the Archbishop Adolfe, the soldiers answered by bursts of laughter; and on finding neither gold nor silver to carry off, their unlettered hands seized the most valuable impressions, which they found piled up under the framework of the roof. "This is not good to eat," said a long-bearded soldier of the Palatinate, "it would be too indigestible, but after all it may serve as litter for the horses;" and, so saying, he threw six large in-folios into his great sack, where they disappeared as in a gulph.

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The scene was even still more distressing at the house of Peter Schoeffer, who, at the same time that he tried to inspire his new helpmate with a little courage, entered into a violent dispute with one of his fierce visitors. Dame Christine had retired to the furthest end of her apartments, where on her knees, before her *prie-Dieu*, she implored the Virgin mother of God. Schoeffer was running first into the court-yard, trying to arrest the progress of the pillage, and then returning to his wife bringing scraps of information, which, alas! were anything but re-assuring. At this fearful moment an impudent dragoon forced his way suddenly into the apartment of Dame Christine, and looked around with savage and avaricious eyes to see what he could seize upon. The poor woman offered trembling all she possessed in necklaces and jewels. "Not enough," said the robber, in a brutal tone, and with both hands he began diving into the chests. At the bottom of one of them the Psalter of 1457 suddenly attracted the eyes of the soldier; less, Reader, as you will readily believe, on account of its beautiful type, than for its silver clasps, which excited the avarice of the Vandal. With a smile on his lips he drew out the volume. Dame Christine, who valued the Psalter, not only as her book of devotion, but, also, as the wedding gift of her husband, tried to dispute the possession of it with the invader. At the cries of his wife Schoeffer rushed into the room, snatched the book from the hands of the soldier, who defended himself, and in trying to strike Schoeffer with the heel of his heavy boot, he wounded him with his spur. Schoeffer struggled, and seizing the *prie-Dieu* hurled it with such force in the face of his enemy that he was covered with blood, and began swearing and howling most piteously. His fellow-soldiers ran to his assistance; they drove Schoeffer and Christine out of their house, a merciless hand collected the cinders and live charcoal, which were in the hearth of the common sitting-room, and in a few moments the flames bursting forth from every issue enveloped the entire building with their fiery tongues, as if the malediction of the little Parisian against the house of the printer was to be accomplished without loss of time.

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The family of Fust, assembled in the court of the Great St. Humbert, was sending up its cries to Heaven, and uttering useless imprecations against the plunderers, who, after having pillaged and burned the house, left the smoking ruins, to tempt fortune by proceeding further in the work of destruction. It will not be difficult to understand that the efforts of the workmen, who knew not to which Saint to vow themselves, whether they ought to try and extinguish the fire, or rather

attempt to save what the flames had spared, should have remained without much result. Neither did the neighbours, in the midst of the general confusion, feel much disposed to come to the aid of a man who by his haughtiness in prosperity had estranged them from him. Fust, not knowing what he was about, tore his hair and threw it into the flames, which were consuming his property; the Burgomaster, his brother, too much occupied with the general distress, or, which is more probable, completely absorbed in the care of his own concerns, found no time to think of his own flesh and blood. In every part of this wretched city, enemies, plunderers, and massacres, were alone to be seen; the gates were closed, and the entrances to private houses carefully barricaded from the inside. Fust, incapable of giving any orders, stood motionless watching the flames, while Christine, in despair, hid her face in her husband's bosom. The workmen wandered here and there, with hands clasped, and high above their heads the fire crackled and sparkled, the beams were swallowed up in the blaze, and in the air paper ashes flew about, tossed in malicious play by the fresh breeze of the morning.

To describe the impression produced by this scene would be almost impossible. It was solitude and silence, annihilation and despair in the midst of turmoil and clamour. At this moment a new personage appeared on the scene. "May God and His mercy be with you all, poor unfortunate creatures!" said the new comer, in a tone of compassion at once deep and sincere. If we add that instead of thanks the speaker was only answered by cold recognitions, and met by eyes from whence flashed hatred and defiance, every one will guess that it was John Gutenberg, who, with his knapsack on his back, his pilgrim's staff in his hand, and his doublet tucked up for a journey, had just entered the court-yard of the Great St. Humbert.

It was indeed he, and Fust, glad to find some one on whom to vent his anger, hurled these words at him, accompanied by looks as fiery as the flames which were consuming his house. "Man—what brings you here? Are you come to feast your eyes on the sight of our misery, or, perhaps, to beg your bread from beggars?" The person so offensively addressed, contented himself with shaking his head gently, and without even looking at Schoeffer, who at the sight of Gutenberg had turned away, taking Dame Christine with him. "I imagined," said the old man, "that at such a time of universal suffering you would, doubtless, have forgotten our little former quarrels, and if I come it is to learn your fate, anxious to hold out a hand of succour, if such is in my power. I have already lost all recollection that we parted in anger, and hope that I may still have the means of showing my interest in a house in which I worked for so many years with you and your son-in-law." Fust, for all answer, replied, "You see there is nothing left to be done here, or to be carried away, we are all ruined like yourself."

"Master," replied Gutenberg, "let there be an end of all petty jealousy. I am not in a better condition than you are; the partisans of Nassau have done what they listed at the Syndic's house; my presses are broken, my alphabets scattered, nothing is left but the bare house and walls."

Schoeffer had in the meanwhile re-entered, and, taking part in the conversation, said with bitterness to his former patron, "Well, most worthy sir, you, it appears to me, have only cause for increased tranquillity; is it not well known that you possess no actual right in your presses, and that you only continue your profession at the risk and peril of the Syndic?" At this unfeeling speech one might have seen a vivid colour mount up in the face of the old man. "It is true, it is as you say," replied he; "but who ought to know better than yourself the cause of my misfortunes? I do not mourn over the little I may have lost, my only regret is to see my work interrupted; time and bodily strength are wearing away, two things of which an old man may well be covetous, that is my sorrow, for who knows when, or where, the Master may find a place in which to set up once more his compositor's table?"

"Do you still think then," said Fust, in a depressed tone, "that it will ever be possible to re-establish a printing-house? Yours and mine were the two first, believe me, they will be the two last. Every one will avoid in future the revival of a profession on which the curse of heaven so evidently rests. You and I to be so completely ruined! O cursed be the hour when you first crossed my threshold, when by enticing words you persuaded me to join in the work of Satan! May it pass away for ever, and vanish like the smoke issuing from my house, and come to nothing, like this calcined plank on which rested the first printing press!"

A loud crash served as an accompaniment to this terrible wish. The yard, and the street in which it stood were buried under the fragments, the dust, the cinders, and the burning timber. One workman disappeared under the avalanche, the others ran away with loud cries. Schoeffer carried his weeping wife far from this scene of desolation; the old Fust and Gutenberg remained alone in the midst of the ruin. The former with both hands over his eyes had fallen almost to the ground on his trembling knees. Gutenberg, on the contrary, as if renewed with the vigour of youth, stood erect, and laying his hand on the shoulder of his antagonist, he addressed the following words to him, in a tone of inspired prophecy. "O you of little faith, who think because the temple is in flames that the Divinity must also burn! That which happens now happens justly, for your labour has been far less for the sake of your art, and its progress, than for your own personal interest. I tell you, Master Fust, this art, of which you despair, shall be eternal as the word which created it is great in the sight of men; and it is as little likely to perish in the flames of your dwelling, as the heavens are likely to perish which you see stretched out so far above you, in their blue stillness and beauty! Behold, Master Fust, your workshop is empty, your workmen are dispersed—reflect on what I say! Fate, sitting above your head bowed down with grief, scatters the ashes of your books to the four winds of heaven; well, by the very fact of the suspension of our work, and banishment from our hearths and homes, our art will extend itself to

the farthest corners of the world. Let then all burn that can burn, O Fust! The art of printing is a Phoenix which will rise from its ashes and cover the whole world with its wings!"

CHAPTER V.

The Lord Archbishop Adolfe of Nassau having bethought him of John Gutenberg, the printer, causes a search to be made for him by one of his horsemen, who finds him in a fisherman's hut.



IN the district of the Rheingau, on the right-hand side of the great river, some miles below Maïence, is a little town to which, in the present day, is given two different names, according to fancy; it is sometimes called Eltvil or Elfeld. When those smoking Leviathans, the steamboats, pass roaring before the modest houses of Eltvil, the sound of the silvery bell has scarcely echoed in the air, when a little boat, carrying a white and red flag, is unmoored and cuts swiftly through the water. It arrives alongside, the passengers mount the large vessel, but the tourists, strutting up and down the deck, scarcely condescend to cast even a vacant look on their new fellow-travellers. And why should they? Of what importance to the fair daughter of Albion, reclining on one of the benches, is the graceful Rheingau peasant, who, with her basket on her arm, and her knitting in her hand, mounts silently the side of the boat, and after addressing her parting adieus to her friends, male and female, whom she leaves on the bank, goes quietly and takes her seat on a rustic wooden stool.

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It is at Eltvil that we shall take up again the thread of our story, which was so abruptly broken by the incendiary of Maïence. Three years have passed since that event, three cruel years to the poor inhabitants of the Rhine country. Gutenberg has resumed, as before, his pilgrim's staff. Claude Musny walks in front in charge of the light baggage of the little caravan, and this joyous child of a light-hearted nation, thanks to his gaiety, which neither privations nor contrarieties can reach, has it often in his power to bring back moments of forgetfulness and serenity to the old man. Lawrence Beildech, inseparable from his master, walks by his side, sometimes supporting Gutenberg's faltering steps, and when necessary coming to the assistance of his failing eyesight.

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What a caravan, and what a journey; and what thoughts must have passed through the mind of the chief actor and guide when he reflected, especially on that first occasion of his flight in this very same direction—a flight then resembling that of an eagle soaring from its nest! Beildech carefully avoided every word which might recal those days to his Master; but one evening when our travellers had halted on a hill overlooking the Rhine, Gutenberg broke the general silence by saying, with much sadness, "Dost thou recollect, my good Beildech, how in the year —20 we travelled this road together? I proudly on horseback, a boasting young aristocrat, just like all the rest, thinking myself quite equal to the Furstenberg, the Volksberg, the Gelthuss, the Humbert, canst thou not see me now with my fine floating feather fastened to my velvet cap, and my slashed doublet covered with an abundance of ribbon? Ah, Lawrence, how handsome it was! and how merrily we passed by on the road heavily mounted cavaliers sent by the abbots and the citizens, so desirous were we to be the first to salute the Emperor Rupert; and, afterwards, when we were far away, how the people of Maïence came and attacked our houses...."

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"Ah! those were good old times," said Beildech, sighing and shaking his head.

"Yes, thou art right; they were happy times," replied Gutenberg. "Alas! when will our weary pilgrimage and our sorrows come to an end?" At these words, which fell with some bitterness from his lips, the noble old man fixed his gaze on the glorious setting sun, whose brilliant rays surrounded his thinly covered head, and his pale sorrow-stricken face. One might have said that they wished to form a luminous martyr's crown around him.

Gutenberg did not speak without reason of his trials, for during three successive years the little caravan had wandered along the Rhine, now descending, now re-mounting it, and our three travellers had arrived in this manner as far as Strasburg, where Gutenberg wished to remain, hoping in that city to meet with old friends. He knocked on all sides, but found only closed hearts or fastened doors. No one cared about typography; the sacking of Maïence had dispersed crowds of fugitive workmen to all parts of the Rhine country, and printers were in such especial abundance, that there seemed no opening anywhere for the old man. To place himself under the orders of another was what the Master could not make up his mind to do. Gutenberg wished for his own workshop, and to work at his own hours, even though his purse should remain scantily furnished.

93

At the end of three years the peregrinations of the caravan came to an abrupt termination; a termination which it certainly did not seek or desire. Gutenberg fell suddenly dangerously ill. It was with difficulty that his companions procured him shelter and a lodging with a boatman, who

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possessed, on the left bank of the Rhine, opposite the rich and powerful convent of Erbach, a hut where he earned a scanty livelihood, partly by fishing, partly by the profits he made in carrying over pilgrims in his little boat to the monastery. It was here that Gutenberg was obliged to remain, overcome by sickness. The place suited him inasmuch as it was removed from the haunts of men, which the old man, soured by grief and depressed by misfortune, endeavoured, every day more and more, to avoid; the hut, which was buried in the vine-branches, overlooked the Rhine, whose waters almost bathed its threshold.

95

It is thus that, in the year of Our Lord Jesus 1465, John Gutenberg, the inventor of the art of printing, was laid up under this wretched roof, a prey to sickness, forgotten and forsaken by mankind. The most trying season of the year had found him still travelling; fatigue, illness, grief, disappointment of every kind, had overpowered the old man, and it was on this account that his two companions watched with so much anxiety and anguish by the side of their master's pallet. They shared between them the care of the sufferer, and while Claude Musny went about here and there offering his services to the vine-dressers, and the monks of the convent, Beildech remained in attendance on his master. Occasionally, at rare intervals, a monk of Erbach, expert in the art of healing, crossed the water, at the earnest entreaty of Claude, to visit the infirm old man, whose ordinary physician was a shepherd of the neighbourhood, who, by means of potions and prayers, vainly endeavoured to restore vitality to an existence already worn out.

96

On one of the last evenings of the autumn of this same year, Beildech and the young Frenchman sat by Gutenberg's couch watching his restless and feverish sleep. Outside, the night was dark and gloomy; the waters of the Rhine, swollen by the rain, beat against the walls of the hut, and a sharp wind which blew down in squalls from the hills shook the framework of the miserable dwelling. The sick man had been suffering all day; he complained of a burning heat in his head, especially in his eyes, and Beildech had observed with uneasiness his uncertain and hesitating hold of the porringer when put into his hand. Claude sat silent at the foot of the bed, and every time that Gutenberg moved or moaned the shepherd began muttering unintelligible prayers. Beildech stood at the window listening to the noise of the river and the wailing of the wind.

97

The hut when Gutenberg awoke was in profound darkness. In a faint voice he asked for a light. Beildech went out and lighted a resinous torch, which he placed in an iron ring in the wall, fastened there for the purpose, and close to Gutenberg's bed. The latter hearing the door creak on its hinges lifted himself up. "A light—light!" said he; then again, after a short pause, he added in an impatient tone, "Is there then no one here who will condescend to grant the favour of a light to an old man, to while away the tedious hours of darkness?"

98

Beildech, trembling from head to foot, drew the young Frenchman quickly to the other side of the bed. "Beloved Master," he said, "be so good as to turn and to open your eyes, the torch is in its usual place."

"I tell thee thou liest," said Gutenberg angrily, "is not everything here as dark as in a tomb? Claude, my son, answer me—where art thou?"

He whom he called was close to his master's head, he shuddered as he bent down towards him. "Here I am," he said, in a low voice, taking hold affectionately of his master's hand; but the latter pushed him away, and stretching out his arm towards the torch he laid hold of it, and brought it close to his eyes. He could no longer see it!

With a cry of despair, and burying in his hands those eyes from which the light was for ever shut out, Gutenberg threw himself back on his pallet. "I understand you," he said to his two companions, who were sobbing aloud, "but I cannot see you. I smell the odour of the resin, but its flame no longer penetrates the darkness which envelopes me. O miserable man that I am! Alas, I am afflicted like Tobias, but Tobias without a son!"

99

After the first burst of despair, silence once more reigned in the hut. The shepherd, who, in this respect, much resembled the doctors of our own days, when he was at a loss what more to do, slunk noiselessly away. The young Frenchman, quite overcome with grief, was on his knees by the side of the bed, while Beildech, the torch in his hand, held it close to the eyes of the old man, as if he sought by this means to restore the light which was quenched for ever.

100

Such was the picture presented by the interior of the hut, when the sound of an approaching horse came suddenly to relieve the solitude of our poor sufferers. Beildech was just opening the window to listen, when the fisherman ushered in a horseman wet to the skin, and covered with mud. "Here," said the boatman, "behold him of whom you are in search."

The horseman bent his tall figure as he entered the low door of the dwelling. "He whom I seek," said he to Beildech, who advanced gloomily, "is called John Gutenberg, and he is from Maïence."

The old man, hearing his name pronounced by a stranger, sat up to listen, and motioned to his attendant to be silent. His pride revolted at the idea of being discovered in such an abode; turning towards the door from whence the voice proceeded, he said rather roughly to the horseman, "And who told you to come and seek that noble gentleman here in this wretched hut? Pass on, my friend, and leave honest people to rest in peace."

101

"That is a pity," said the cavalier, casting a doubtful look at the sick man, "yes, it is a great pity that such good news should meet with so rude a reception. He to whom my message is addressed will doubtless receive me with more politeness."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"I think so at least," said he, drawing from under his doublet a roll of parchment. "Here is what I bring from our worthy Lord Archbishop—a letter which could not fail to rejoice the old gentleman if I could only put it into his hands. I have been for weeks on his track, and only yesterday the reverend fathers of Erbach sent me here."

102

At these words Lawrence and Claude, in whose face a sanguine curiosity was clearly legible, approached the cavalier. "If you could make up your mind," said Lawrence, pointing silently to his master, "to leave your message with us, I will answer for it, on my head, that it could not fall into better hands, for the retreat of the noble John Gutenberg is perfectly well known to us." "Well then," replied the horseman, who was not slow to understand, "I agree to that readily," and he placed the scroll in the old man's hands. "For my part I am glad to be at last released from my troublesome commission, and if the boatman will take me across the river to-night, I can at any rate reach Eltvil, where my most gracious master, the Archbishop Adolfe, whom God preserve, has fixed his residence."

103

The spurs of the horseman were still resounding on the threshold when Claude seized the scroll out of Gutenberg's hands, and hastily approaching the resinous torch, he took a rapid survey of the missive from which hung, in a case, the great seal of wax of the Archbishop.

"Master," cried he, falling on his knees, with a joyous exclamation, "it is when our distress is at its height that our Lord is nearest to us!" And his tears, which were no longer of sorrow but of joy, and his kisses, covered the old man's hands.

"Peace, peace, young scatter-brain!" said Gutenberg, who could, however, with difficulty control his own emotion. "What can this missive contain capable of thus exciting our little Frenchman?"

"Deliverance for you, O my Master!" repeated Claude, in a tone of jubilee, and he gave the parchment back to Gutenberg, whose trembling fingers wandered over the ribbon and the seal. Claude had forgotten that the old man was no longer able to read it; Beildech was obliged to recall the fact to him. Claude then retook the scroll, and began deciphering with some difficulty, and many interruptions from the sobs of Lawrence, this document, a precious relic, which we here re-produce in the simple language of those times.

104

"*We Adolphe the elected Lord and installed Archbishop of Maïence, do recognize by this present, that we have accepted, as useful and agreeable to our person, the services rendered to us by our dear and faithful John Gutenberg, that is why, excited to this act by the especial grace of God, we have chosen and elected him for our servant, worthy of forming one of our court. Not permitting ourselves, nor wishing for the term of his life, to deny him our good offices; hoping that for our service he may recover himself, we grant him each year, when we clothe our community, vestments after the fashion of our gentlemen; and shall cause to be given to him the dress of our court, and every year twenty bushels of wheat, and two tuns of wine, for the use of his household; and for that the said Gutenberg shall have no temptation to sell or to give these away, the aforesaid bushels of wheat and tuns of wine shall have free entrance, and exemption from duty, in this our city of Maïence, for as many years as the said Gutenberg shall live, and so long as he shall remain our servant. In testimony whereof we despatch him this present.*"

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106

The scroll of parchment fell from the hands of the reader, and it was a touching sight to see the old Lawrence pressing the right hand of his beloved master, while, with uplifted face towards heaven, he murmured, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!"

As for Gutenberg, pale and motionless on his pallet, a few stray tears wandered down his cheeks on to his grizzled beard, but not a muscle of his face, or a movement of his body, denoted that life still existed within him; but when his two faithful companions tried each to lay hold of one of his hands, he put them gently aside, sobs escaped him, and he said, shaking his head, "It is too late, these eyes can no longer see anything, they can only weep!"

We who have come into the world four centuries later, and who, according to a pompous inscription, *aere per totam Europam collato*, which signifies, by means of subscriptions raised throughout all Europe, let monuments be erected upon monuments, at Maïence, at Strasburg, at Gernsheim, at Haarlem, and Heaven knows where else, in honour of the art and its inventor, why do we not rather enclose in the pedestal of the statue a fragment of the parchment bearing the old document? And thou, fair Reader, whose only thought is rapture at the intellect diffused throughout the album of Gutenberg, and you, successors and disciples of the great Master, who build palaces for your printing-works, and lastly, you spectators who think that 10,000 crowns spent upon a festival ought not to weigh too heavily in the budget of a town, recollect him who was the originator, and is still the hero; he owed it to the bounty of a generous prince that he received annually twenty bushels of wheat and two tuns of wine!

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But here let us be silent, for, Reader, you doubtless recollect a certain old proverb which says,

CHAPTER VI.

Death of John Gutenberg. Reader, pray for the repose of his soul: his poor remains sleep in an unknown tomb.



ISTORY, in transmitting to us the decree of Adolfe of Nassau, has provided us with a proof of the liberality of this Prince of the Church, but she remains silent when we inquire by what services Gutenberg could have drawn upon himself such favours. Some authors pretend that the old man, being a secret partisan of Nassau, had assisted in the surprise of his native town; the solitude in which Gutenberg lived, and his distaste for all political affairs, do not allow us, for a moment, to entertain such a supposition. For our part we would rather conclude that the Archbishop, after having taken violent possession of the capital, bethought him of this one of its children. Accident had doubtless brought back to the memory of the prince the poor houseless inventor of an art which at that time was making much noise. Why should we seek an explanation for that which unaccounted for appears to me far nobler and more humane?

109

The Archbishop held his court at Eltvil. That town must have been more thickly inhabited, and of more importance than it is at present. The great castle of Eltvil had not yet been the victim of the flames of France, and the Archbishop Adolfe, not placing as yet entire confidence in the hearts and fidelity of the sheep of his flock, had hesitated to establish his residence in Maience itself. It was then towards Eltvil that John Gutenberg directed his steps, supported by his faithful Claude, and accompanied by Lawrence Beildech. He was no longer a wandering Belisarius; but he was not the less a poor blind old man, whom the liberality of his prince had sought out too late, and whose existence could not be re-animated by the tardy favours of a court. Reader, spare me the recital of that scene where the sightless old man entered the archiepiscopal residence to render his thanks in person to his powerful patron. At the sight of that tall figure, so cruelly bent with age and infirmities, the prelates, full to repletion and florid with health, asked each other in low tones, "Is that then the man who teaches the art of printing?" We do not consider that these words convey any very lively or deep sympathy with the great discoverer of so immense a work on the part of the wearers of stoles and of armour. After so many trials and misfortunes, Heaven only granted a few short years to the old man, wherein to enjoy his modest competency. He appeared—forgive me, Reader, for the comparison, I allow it is somewhat stale—like the setting sun bursting through a veil of clouds before him, in order to disappear, a moment afterwards, in solitary grandeur and majesty behind the distant hills. Gutenberg could no longer see this fine sun rising and setting on the Rheingau, but now and then, nevertheless, he wandered, guided by his two faithful companions, to the banks of the great river, and sat down to listen to its gentle undulation as it flowed. Few words now escaped his lips; those lips, alas! which had been so steeped in bitterness that they could scarcely taste the honey of his latter days, and under the impression of great sorrow remained incessantly sealed.

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111

112

It was thus that the year 1466 passed away to our three friends, who still remained faithful to their retreat; the season of Spring had begun to revive the earth with its first warm breath. Gutenberg, then seventy years of age, was standing one morning at the window of the hut while his young companion trained the vine-branches which covered the wall of the humble abode like tapestry. Scraps of songs and ballads followed each other merrily from the lips of the lively Parisian. Gutenberg, probably, understood them but little; Claude's clear voice, however, pleased him.

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At this juncture the young man heard himself called violently by his master. He hastily put down his pruning-knife, and ran to the door of the hut, where he found Gutenberg, who, by the help of his stick, was trying to come to him. "Thy song," said he, in a trembling voice, "thy last song, repeat it to me." Claude looked at his master with surprise, and began to sing afresh—

*"Soir et matin, filles, n'allez follettes
"Quierre és gazons derraines violettes."*

Gutenberg hardly gave the singer time to pronounce these few words when he drew him violently towards him, and pressed him to his heart. "Young man," said he, "from whom hast thou learnt that song?" "My mother taught it to me," replied Claude, "in my childhood, while I played with small quoits on the Place de Grève." Here the old man remained for a moment in deep thought; presently he said, "Seest thou, Claude, thou art an honest lad, and by thy fidelity thou hast merited my confidence. This song touched my heart, because it brought back to me the last word, the last sound of the voice of one whom I loved, dearly loved; since then how many years

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have passed away! I shall never hear that voice again, alas! never as in days gone by!"

Gutenberg, overcome by his emotion, was silent, and it was as well, perhaps, that he did not see the agitation in which his words had thrown the young man. "Now, Claude," said he, after a pause, "go, return to thy vine, but thou must sing that song to me once every evening, dost thou hear? Give me thy hand, child." Claude held it out. "Thou tremblest; tell me, what ails thee?" asked Gutenberg, in a tone of mistrust, not uncommon to the blind. "Nothing, Master." "But I will know the reason of thy agitation; thy hand burns." "Well, because you tell me that you have confidence in me, and at the same time you hide from me the cause of your grief!"

115

Claude had uttered these last words with anguish, almost in the tone of a suppliant who hastens to seize the favourable moment. Gutenberg turned away, and after a somewhat prolonged silence, he said, in a low voice, to the young Frenchman—"Claude, a countrywoman of thine once sang that song to me in bidding me adieu—a good girl, who had a noble heart—her name was the same as thy mother's; thou sayest thy mother's name is Gisquette." The old man hid his face in his hands, while Claude, falling at Gutenberg's feet, embraced his knees, murmuring, "My father, my father! Do you not guess? She who sang that song was my mother!"

116

A cry escaped from Gutenberg; his stick fell from his hand; the sightless eyes seemed to seek the face of the young man at his knees. "It is false," he said; "have pity on me—O tell me not an untruth!"

"By the quenched light of those eyes, which I love, by the heart of Gisquette, I speak the truth. I am thy son, and she was my mother!" Claude uttered these words with all the vivacity of a Frenchman. Gutenberg answered not, his bosom heaved painfully—one could see the struggle between mistrust and the wish to believe. "But why—" asked he. "Father," replied Claude, who perceived at once what was passing in Gutenberg's mind, "dost thou not yet understand the nature of my mission, why I presented myself to thee, why I followed thee, how it is that I have ended by loving thee as I do, even to adoration? And dost thou not guess how I was bound by my mother, by a solemn oath, never to utter a single word that could recall her to thy memory, until thou thyself hadst in some manner named her?—'Be, if it must be so, his most humble attendant, for he is thy father; and if thou findest Gutenberg in prosperity, which I pray Heaven he may be, and he has forgotten the days at Aix-la-Chapelle, oh, do not invoke the shade of poor Gisquette to place it between him and happiness! But if he is in trouble he will of himself think of me; then fall at his feet, kiss the ground he treads on, and say to him, Be comforted, it is *she* who sends thy son to thee!"

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"Enough, enough, by the Holy Saviour, enough!" cried Gutenberg, straining in his arms the young man who still knelt before him. "Yes, it is she herself! I recognize her in those words, my son! my child!"

A thunderbolt would not have separated those two men clasped together. The old man, although unable to look upon the son who had been given to him, uttered no complaint; his lips, his hands, his arms, were as so many eyes to him. "Before I knew," said Gutenberg, "the treasure I possessed in thee, I recollect tracing in the frank and amiable expression of thy face something of my Gisquette."

When they had recovered themselves a little from their first emotion, Gutenberg became sufficiently calm to speak to Claude of his mother. He could not see the eyes of the young man raised to heaven, but, in the outburst of grief with which he threw himself into his father's arms—"I understand," he said; "she awaits me there—above!"

119

Lawrence Beildech, on his return from the fields, found the old man and Claude still sitting happily side by side. "Lawrence," cried Gutenberg, whose step he had recognized, "Lawrence, I have found a son!"

Beildech received this information with much surprise, and Claude, less to justify his allegations than to furnish a tangible proof to the old servant, drew from his trunk a little polished metal mirror, ornamented on one side with a figure sculptured on the border. "Tell the master, Beildech, what figure it is you see behind this mirror." "A Holy Virgin, her heart pierced with three swords, carrying in her arms the infant Jesus, crucified." "And is there not engraved underneath," said Gutenberg, eagerly, "*Ecce mulier filium tuum?* O give, give me that mirror, it was my gift to Gisquette the first time I saw her, in the square of the cathedral at Aix-la-Chapelle," and Gutenberg, seizing this relic of happier days, pressed it to his lips.

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The very hour when he placed this mirror in a beloved hand, the whole of that period of his life came before Gutenberg at this moment; it was a ray of sunshine lighting up for an instant the snow of the glacier. A little later the old man related to his newly found son as follows:—"It was in the year 1440, at the time when all Christian Europe made a pilgrimage to the ancient and celebrated city of Aix-la-Chapelle, a holy visit as it was called which was paid every seven years to the wonderful relics of the cathedral, that I lived at Strasburg in the Rue St. Arbogaste, my mind fully occupied with my art, but not having yet succeeded in accomplishing anything worth speaking of. At that time thou knowest, Lawrence, I lived somewhat poorly. For a long while I had received no help from Maïence, and the heritage of my forefathers was all exhausted in the various experiments which I had made, and which I had hoped would turn to good account and place me in a position to carry out my one idea. I was just in the meridian of life, and it became

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necessary that I should follow a more lucrative trade. I began polishing mirrors and stones; I engraved images and ornaments on wood; and I associated myself with those Strasburgers who afterwards treated me so ill, André Dritzehn, Heilmann, and others.

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“A year or so might have elapsed since we commenced business together; they furnished the funds, I supplied the implements, and taught the trade to my partners to the best of my power. We promised ourselves a rich harvest from our pilgrimage to Aix-la-Chapelle, where people were arriving from all parts of the world.

“The French braggart with his page behind him smartly equipped, the proud Spaniard, the beautiful veiled Venetian women, and others from all parts of Italy. We naturally hoped to make much profit by our merchandize. Another reason contributed to detach me from Strasburg. I had been for some time betrothed to a young Alsatian named *Enel of the iron gate*. I thought seriously of carrying her with me to my native town, enamoured as I was of her black eyes and fine elastic figure; Providence and the parents of Enel decided otherwise. I like to suppose that she was innocent of the transaction, for she was an honest girl, who loved me with all her heart, only, said malicious tongues, she was somewhat frivolous in character, and more attached to the things of this world than was quite consistent in a Christian, especially in a German. Enel’s parents had nothing to say against my mode of life, except that they could have wished my energies to be bestowed upon some profession more worthy in their eyes, and they could not console themselves when they saw me incessantly tied to my beloved workshop, bending over my books, and only thinking of my experiments. The father considered my tastes very vulgar, and said that, unless I altered for the better, he, for his part, should not have much pleasure in giving his daughter to an idle fellow, a dreamer like me. He was a rich man, well-born, and much respected in Strasburg. It may easily be supposed that from that day I never crossed his threshold. I had attained my fortieth year in all honour and respectability, and I had no wish to exchange my profession for that of a clerk, scratching for ever, like a cat, with a pen in my hand. No, no, let others who like it undertake that sort of trade!

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“I felt some regret in renouncing the young girl, although time very soon taught me that in fact she had never possessed a deep hold on my affections; so this journey to Aix-la-Chapelle during the pilgrimage seemed to me to happen very *à propos*. In the month of June, Dritzehn, Heilmann, Voigt, Niffe, and I, started, accompanied with two strong beasts of burden laden with our stones, our mirrors, and our images of the saints. We were full of joyful anticipation and had only one fear, that our horses were not in sufficient condition to carry back the large stock of money which we calculated upon making at Aix-la-Chapelle; we declined taking the route by water as we hoped to exhibit a good deal of our merchandize along the road.

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“Do not ask me to describe the crowd, the floating masses which we found extending even beyond the walls of the holy city. My memory cannot recall the scenes, which my eyes, now closed to the light, witnessed in those days. Every street, every square, was crammed with pilgrims, natives of the country or foreigners, nobles, and plebeians, the healthy and the infirm. At night they encamped before the gates, in little wooden huts, or under canvas ornamented with branches of pine, from which gleamed thousands of lighted tapers. Early in the morning, as soon as the saintly processions began to move, you should have seen them pressing towards the doors of the Cathedral, to touch with quivering lips the revered shrine, or to offer to the Virgin Mother of God, the one a taper, the other a chalice, others only their tears, and their silent prayers. When the bells had ceased ringing the shops and the booths opened on all sides, then Jews and Christians vied with each other in their cries. Quacks, ballad singers, foot-soldiers, might be seen elbowing silken doublets, Cardinals’ hats, and the cloaks of princes; the sick plunged their aching limbs into the hot springs; those who thought themselves cured offered a silver heart, or a leg of wax to the Virgin; fops walked in the crowd with their mistresses, soldiers played with dice on their drums, monks, carrying the crucifix and the banner, accompanied funeral processions, and here and there might be seen an occasional mask. My head becomes bewildered even in thinking of those things, and I seem to have again in my ears the incessant uproar of that immense crowd. I was then in the full vigour of my manhood, nothing discomposed me; on the contrary, I was ever seeking fresh excitement. In the same manner in which a fish swims in sparkling running water, so I rushed into the middle of this human stream, looking into everything, shouting with those who shouted, and those who obliged me to take my rapier in my hand were soon convinced that the descendant of the nobles of Maïence was not making his first essay in arms.

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“I did not understand much about commerce, so at least said my comrades; at night when we shared our profits it often appeared to me that they had taken a tithe out of mine. I mentioned my suspicions, for in fact it was necessary that I should get something out of the purse, to enable me to live, and I had plenty of time to meditate on my prospects, and to give myself up to work.

“I had been three days at Aix-la-Chapelle. As I stood one morning at the booth where André Dritzehn exposed his mirrors”—(here, Reader, as he stretched out his hands to touch Claude’s head, you might have seen a faint colour reddening the cheeks of the old man,)—“among the curious who surrounded us, admiring our mirrors polished like steel, was a young girl, who, being suddenly pushed back rudely by the crowd, had only time to cast one rapid glance at our treasures. Her eyes pleased me so much that I said, ‘Try to come forward, little one.’ She did not seem to know that I was addressing her. I repeated my invitation; she did not yet understand me; I tried to take her hand; she drew it quickly away. ‘I am not a German,’ said she, blushing, ‘I am French, from the Faubourg St. Antoine, Paris; if you happen ever to have been there.’ I was obliged to confess, laughing, that I had not. Although I did not understand much of the language

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spoken by the young girl, I gathered sufficient to be able to answer her. 'Pretty child,' I said, 'wilt thou not buy one of our mirrors?' 'Alas! no, sir.' 'Thou art in the wrong there, when one has a pretty face like thine, one ought to possess such a piece of furniture.' Talking in this manner, I placed my hand under her chin, and obliged her to lift up her exquisite face, which till now had been held downwards. She looked at me with her large eyes half supplicating, half reproachfully, then she tried to disengage herself. I held her fast, and placing one of our best mirrors before her, that very one now in your hand—'Well,' I said, 'look then at yourself, little unbeliever.' A cry of surprise escaped her finely-cut mouth when she saw her blushing face reflected in the polished metal; never before probably had the view been so complete; her beauty seemed to strike her for the first time. I pressed her to buy the mirror, she hesitated; one saw how much she wished to possess it; but all at once she put it quickly down on the bench, 'I will not,' she said, and suddenly disappeared in the crowd. I followed her. Our stall was in the square of the Cathedral; I rejoined the fugitive close to the church. 'Why wilt thou not have it?' 'Sir—' 'Speak to me without fear.' 'Because I have no money to pay for your mirror. Look! here is a denier, the only one left; it is destined for the purchase of two ivory hands, which my mother presents to the Virgin full of grace, as a thank-offering for her cure.'

"The filial love of the young girl, which spoke even more eloquently in her eyes than in her words, touched me deeply. I questioned her about her mother, her country, and her name. She told me with simplicity that her name was Gisquette, and that she came from the Faubourg St. Antoine, in the great city of Paris, where I should certainly not have gone in search of this little pure unspotted flower. She added that a vow taken by her mother had brought them to Aix-la-Chapelle, with her brother James, in order to present an offering to the Virgin, in acknowledgment of her old mother's wonderful cure.

"How dost thou expect to reach home?' I then asked her; 'how wilt thou make the long journey, thou who art only a poor girl without means, for in that denier which thou hast shown me consists thy whole fortune?' 'Sir,' replied she, with the careless gaiety of her nation, 'I shall go back as I came. Brother James is very clever; he can relate stories on the road, he will sing tales of the Trouvères, and I shall accompany him on my lute. In this manner we enter the convents, and the houses of hospitality, of which, thank God and his saints, there is no want. Brother James,' said she, with a sister's pride, 'has already sung here in Aix-la-Chapelle before great lords and princes, at home he is well known in all the neighbourhood. Once when a grand mystery was performed in the large Hall he acted the part of Mercury, and had on his shoulders two large wings of gauze, which I made for him myself. I assure you he looked very handsome, and recited his fine verses beautifully.'

"Need I tell you, O my dear companions, how immediately my heart felt attracted towards this young girl? I led her back to our booth, and giving her the mirror which a moment before she had so coveted.—'Take it, my child,' I said, 'and keep it in remembrance of this hour, as well as of the friend thou hast gained by thy filial piety.' For some time she refused to accept it, and as André, who kept the stall that day, began reproaching me for giving away our goods, instead of selling them, she returned me the mirror, saying, 'Thank you, my kind sir! it shall never be said that you were brought into trouble by the vanity of a poor girl.'

"If the avaricious speech and sentiment of Heilmann had sent the colour to my cheeks, this sad refusal on the part of Gisquette put the climax to my irritation. Unloosing my purse angrily from my waistband, I threw down on the bench the value of the mirror, which I laid hold of with one hand, while with the other I forced my way through the crowd with the young girl, and drew her to some distance from the place.

"Claude, we spent seven days together, Gisquette and I, in Aix-la-Chapelle, seven whole days, days of happiness, which will never be effaced from my memory. I followed Gisquette like her shadow; she, poor child, out of her pure simple heart vowed to me, unworthy as I was, her first love. At the end of that time we parted ... never to meet again ... and to-day...."

John Gutenberg was silent. Again he pressed to his heart the son of Gisquette, that son whom he had just found. Claude had but little to add to complete his father's story. He told him of the sorrowful life led by Gisquette, of her unbroken faith to him, and how on her death-bed it had been her consolation to bequeath Claude as a last pledge of affection to her absent friend.

When the young man had ceased speaking, there was a solemn silence in the hut. The faithful Beildech feasted his looks on them both. The old man, his eyes struck with blindness, his hair falling in white curls, his long venerable beard resting on that bosom, oppressed by the memory of the past, and agitated by the emotion of the present.... Ah! whoever had seen Gutenberg at this moment could not have failed to liken him to Œdipus in the arms of Antigone; he was bent, infirm, and weakened by age; it was, nevertheless, the head of a king and the heart of a father.

"I tell you in truth," it was thus that Gutenberg spoke, with trembling lips, "yes, I tell you truly, death, which is now approaching, will be for me a haven full of blessedness. Love is guiding me here below, it will also receive me on the other side; it is of the best works that it is written, they shall not forsake the just, but shall follow them. The arts and sciences which we pursue without relaxation, the fame and glory which shall carry our names to posterity, are but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals in comparison with the words of love, pure, divine, and human love. Yes, I think that my life will not have been entirely useless to others, that the seed which I have sown will bear fruit and become a tree, under whose branches the generations to come may find

rest and shelter. My endeavour has been to give freedom to thought, to give wings to words; the one and the other, thanks to my discovery, will one day overrun the metamorphosed earth; full of independence and of liberty they will immortalize my name. But, nevertheless, I should have gone down to the tomb without consolation, and without peace, if I had possessed only the light of reason to enlighten my darkened way.* A son has been given to me, and I shall no more wander through desert paths solitary and alone. Man will ever remain man. His heart cannot feed eternally on glory and on hope. Love will always be the best part of his being, and that is why I would have given the labour of my whole life in exchange for thee, Claude, who art even more to me than my invention; thou art my son, the messenger sent by Gisquette, who speaks to me from eternal blessedness!"

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* I will not, says the author of the Death of Gutenberg, let the authority for the blindness of my hero rest on fiction alone. My readers will permit me to cite the testimony of a man who was contemporary with Gutenberg, Wimphelin of Schlestadt, who at the age of fifteen came to Strasburg, in the year 1465. He says distinctly, in speaking of Gutenberg, in his catalogue of the Bishops of Strasburg written in 1508: "ductu cujusdam Johannis Gensfleisch, ex senio cæci."

Gutenberg died neglected and in destitution. His death excited no interest among his careless and ungrateful contemporaries. It is only on the faith of a dusty old parchment, which does not even make direct mention of the inventor of printing, that we learn that John Gutenberg must have been gathered to his fathers about the 24th of February, 1468. In what place? That remains uncertain, and even to this day we should be ignorant on that point had not an inscription written in his honour by Adam Gelthuss, a relation of the printer, fallen accidentally into our hands. It is in Latin, and says that the bones of Gutenberg repose in the Church of St. François at Maïence.

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So much for history. As for us, it is with a sensation of pain, and a blush on our forehead, that we close this page of our book, in which we have narrated the acts and discourses worthy of admiration, and the death of him who discovered the most remarkable, the most wonderful of all the arts, that which is destined to re-model the world.

Poetry in composing a picture, of which the plot has been gathered thread by thread from the dark abyss of archives, has taken upon herself to throw a ray of light on the last days of the great inventor, to cast on his tomb a palm-branch of peace and of hope. Was that not her right? And has she any occasion to justify herself? In our opinion the noblest duty of intelligence, as well as its most glorious appanage, is to enlighten, to reconcile, to restore to light, especially when life has only left behind it a few vague shadows, and an unknown tomb!

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Transcriber's Note:

Punctuation and the "long s" have been modernised; spelling has been retained as it appears in the original publication.

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